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PROPOSED LAW WOULD FORCE CHURCHES TO HOST GAY WEDDINGS

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Apr 23, 2012

By Todd Starnes

Religious liberty groups are blasting a proposed ordinance that would force churches in Hutchinson, Kan. to rent their facilities for gay weddings and gay parties.

The Hutchinson City Council will consider adding sexual orientation and gender identity to the protected classes in the city's human relations code. They are expected to vote on the changes next month.

According to the Hutchinson Human Relations Commission, churches that rent out their buildings to the general public would not be allowed to discriminate "against a gay couple who want to rent the building for a party."

Meryl Dye, a spokesperson for the Human Relations Commission confirmed to Fox News that churches would be subjected to portions of the proposed law.

"They would not be able to discriminate against gay and lesbian or transgender individuals," Dye said. "That type of protection parallels to what you find in race discrimination. If a church provides lodging or rents a facility they could not discriminate based on race. It's along that kind of thinking."

Matthew Staver, chairman of the Liberty Counsel Action, told Fox News the proposed law is "un-American."

"It is a collision course between religious freedom and the LGBT agenda," Staver said. "This proposed legislation will ultimately override the religious freedom that is protected under the First Amendment."

He argued that churches cannot be forced by the government to set aside their religious convictions and their mission. And, he warned, some churches could even be forced to rent their buildings for drag parties.

"What we are ultimately going to see is churches forced to confront this law, forced to do things and allow their facilities to be used by people and for events that diametrically undercut the mission of the church," he said.

Robert Noland, of the Kansas Family Policy Council, said the law would extend well beyond allowing access for gay weddings.

"They (churches) could not deny renting space to a gay couple if they want to have a party," he told Fox News. "This is just another example of government creating a law imposing upon the freedom of religion and basically telling churches what they can and can't do."

So what could happen to churches in Hutchinson that refuse to accommodate gay parties or weddings?

"Unless the city council includes an exemption for churches, it would generate a discrimination complaint for the gay couple and it would be investigated," Dye told Fox News. She said any churches found guilty of violating the law could be subjected to fines or other penalties.

Gary Ridge, an associate pastor of Westside Baptist Church, told Fox News their congregation would not comply with the proposed law should it pass. He said their church would refuse to host either gay weddings or parties — even if it meant a possible investigation or fines.

"We apply the Bible to our lives," he said. "When there is a contradiction between what the city council asks and what the Bible says, we are going to follow the Bible."

“This is an opportunity for the LGBT community to cram their belief system down on our community,” Ridge said. “It may look like a small step, but it’s not the end. Before you know it they will be able to shut down churches for preaching Romans 1:26-27. We’ll be sued for refusing to have homosexual weddings.”

Ridge said Hutchinson is a conservative city, a part of the Bible Belt – and he blamed the controversy on outsiders. “This is part of a bigger desire to have their lifestyle condoned and accepted,” he said. “We don’t condone their activity.”

The Hutchinson measure would also have a major impact on private businesses and landlords. Restaurants, bars and retail shops would be required to provide special bathrooms for individuals who may have male body parts but identify as a female.

According to a FAQ sheet provided by the city, employers would also be forced to allow workers to dress based on their gender identity. Read the entire FAQ sheet by clicking [here](#).

“Dress codes would not be precluded as long as an employer allows an employee to appear, groom and dress consistent with the employee’s gender identity and gender expression,” the FAQ stated.

As far as bathrooms, the city FAQ stated, “A transgender person must be allowed to use restrooms appropriate to their gender identity rather than their assigned gender at birth without being harassed or questioned.”

The city’s revised ordinance would also require transgender individuals to use the locker room and shower facilities of their choosing.

Another issue for Hutchinson’s Christian community involves workplace discrimination. The policy dictates that business owners or landlords are not allowed to discriminate based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

That’s a problem for Michael Brockman, pastor of Christ Lutheran Church.

“I know a couple who owned a bed and breakfast in Kansas City,” he said. “They decided to shut down because they could see that they were going to be forced to make decisions that might have legal effects upon them. They might be sued if they didn’t rent their facility out to a gay couple who might want to use it.”

Staver said it’s unfair that Christian business owners might have to make decisions about their future.

“You shouldn’t have to choose between participating in the marketplace, running a business or operating a church on the one hand and accepting the LGBT agenda on the other,” Staver said. “This is a battle that is coming. This is a culture divide I think we will see play out across the country.”