

## **Kansas Informational Hearing**

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Barronelle Stutzman and I own a little floral shop in Richland, Washington called Arlene's Flowers. It is my privilege to tell my story about the importance of religious freedom.

Our Constitution gives us the freedom of religion, yet the government is increasingly trying to take it away and force us to violate our convictions.

I have been in the floral business for over 47 years. We have served and employed all types of people regardless of race, religion, or sexual orientation. I love my job because I get to create and make unique floral arrangements for customers that communicate what words sometimes can't say. Being a part of my customers' lives to celebrate their joys and share in their sorrow is what makes my job so special.

One of my favorite customers was Rob Ingersoll. I waited on Rob for over 10 years. We thoroughly enjoyed working together. He had a creative mind, and loved to pick special containers out and let me use my artistic skills to make him something special and unique, whether it was for birthday, anniversaries, or just a special party. I knew Rob was gay and that did not ever enter into our friendship.

Soon after Washington state re-defined marriage, Rob came in to talk to me about his wedding. As much as I enjoyed creating arrangements for Rob, to design custom flowers for this event would violate my faith and belief that marriage is between a man and a woman and symbolizes Christ and his church.

Telling Rob I could not celebrate this particular event with him was very difficult. I love Rob, and just as my relationship with Christ leads me to love him, it also compels me to follow my conscience regarding marriage.

But Rob told me he understood, and asked me for recommendations of other florists, so I gave him 3 names of florists I knew would do him a great job. We hugged each other and he left.

I was stunned when within a week I was sued by the State Attorney General, and then the ACLU representing Rob and Curt. I was sued not only personally but

corporately. I was sued for simply declining to participate in one event after having done countless other floral designs for Rob over the years.

I did not turn down Rob, I turned down an event. If Rob walked into my store today, I would serve him for another 10 years. I miss him.

But the government is trying to force me to create expression that violates my religious beliefs.

Since the lawsuits, I have had death threats, bombing threats, picketing threats, had to put in a security system, notify the police, and change the way I go to work and be on guard for unknown customers entering the shop. I have been yelled at, cussed at, and called names that I could not repeat they were so vile.

If we lose the lawsuit, I will not just lose my flower shop, we would likely lose our home, our retirement, our life savings, our employees would be without a job, our wholesalers would lose our business, the city would lose revenue, and we would not be able to serve the hundreds of customers that we treasure.

In a free country, where we all have different ideas, we should respect one another to have those ideas. This is what makes us a great nation, to be able to work and live according to our convictions and beliefs.

Yet I have been told that I must think and act according to the government's opinions, or the government will punish me if I do not go along with their agenda. and What the Government is doing isn't just a threat to my beliefs and livelihood, this should scare us all, that government can tell us what we must say, do, or create or be made an example of and be destroyed if we don't. Governments all over the world offer the "freedom to believe." What makes America unique is the freedom to peacefully live out those beliefs and the Constitution protects that freedom for all of us.

Rob and his partner have the freedom to live and act consistent with their belief about marriage, I am simply asking for the same freedom.

At the end of the day, the government should protect all of us. It should not force those who believe that marriage is the union of a man and a woman to choose between their livelihoods and their beliefs—beliefs that millions of Americans and major religions still hold.

I am here to share my story, so that you will see the importance of laws that protect religious freedom. No one in Kansas, or any state, should be forced by the government to create expression or participate in an event that violates their core convictions. No one should have to choose between following their conscience or living in fear of a government trying to destroy you.

Thank you so much for allowing me to tell my story. I sincerely hope that you will enact laws that ensure every Kansan can exercise their precious constitutional freedoms.