

Tri-City Herald

43 congressmen, 17 states support Richland florist's fight against gay couple and state AG

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Forty-three members of Congress and 17 other states are supporting a Richland flower shop owner's fight against a gay couple and the Washington state attorney general.

Barronelle Stutzman cited religious freedom last month when she asked the U.S. Supreme Court to review the discrimination cases against her.

Her store, Arlene's Flowers, was sued in 2013 after Stutzman refused to design arrangements for the same-sex wedding of longtime customer Robert Ingersoll and his now-husband Curt Freed.

The Washington state Supreme Court twice agreed with a Benton County Superior Court judge's finding that Stutzman violated the state's anti-discrimination law and the Consumer Protection Act by declining to provide services based on sexual orientation.

A Southern Baptist, she has argued that arranging flowers is artistic expression protected under the First Amendment.

The nonprofit legal organization representing Stutzman recently announced that numerous amicus — or friend-of-the-court — briefs have been filed with the country's highest court on Stutzman's behalf.

Alliance Defending Freedom said the support has come from legal experts, religious groups and conservative organizations.

Idaho Sen. James E. Risch is the closest geographically of the 43 members of Congress who are throwing their weight behind Stutzman. The list also includes Sens. Ted Cruz of Texas and Marco Rubio of Florida.

No Washington members of Congress were among them.

The 17 states include Idaho, Montana and Alaska.

Among the groups that filed friend-of-the-court briefs were the Cato Institute, Reason Foundation and Individual Rights Foundation, the Center for Religious Expression, Concerned Women for America and the Foundation for Moral Law.

Alliance Defending Freedom says there are many important legal issues left unanswered after Masterpiece Cakeshop, a case involving Colorado cake artist Jack Phillips.

The U.S. Supreme Court can reaffirm that the First Amendment protects the freedom of Americans to hold different views about topics as fundamental as marriage, the legal organization states.

“Barronelle serves and hires people from all walks of life. What she can’t do is take part in — or create custom floral arrangements celebrating — sacred events that violate her religious beliefs,” said Kristen Waggoner, a senior vice president in the organization.

The lawyer has said that the Washington court’s ruling threatens Stutzman, a 74-year-old great-grandmother, “with personal and professional ruin.”

The U.S. Supreme Court has not yet decided whether to accept Stutzman’s case.

If the high court agrees to review the lower court’s decision, friend-of-the-court briefs also are likely to be filed in support of the couple denied service by the floral shop.