

Judge Slams Christian Florist with Personal Liability

Home, life savings at risk for asserting constitutional religious freedom

by Bob Unruh
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A judge in Washington state has slammed the grandmother who owns and operates Arlene's Flowers with personal liability should she lose any of the lawsuits pending against her for adhering to her religious convictions and declining to celebrate and decorate for same-sex ceremonies.

The case against Barronelle Stutzman began when Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson sued the Richland, Washington, grandmother for operating her business according to the dictates of her Christian faith.

The issue is that in Washington, officials believe the state's statutory protections for homosexuals trump the Constitution's protection of religious liberty.

After Ferguson sued on behalf of the state, the ACLU also joined in the case against Stutzman, filing an additional lawsuit on behalf of several customers. Both suits target not only the business's assets but Stutzman's personal property, savings and assets.

According to a new [report from the Family Policy Institute of Washington](#), Benton County Superior Court Judge Alex Ackstrom ruled on Thursday that her personal assets can be targeted.

"As a result of this decision, the government can go after both the business assets of Arlene's Flowers and personal assets of Barronelle Stutzman to collect attorney's fees should their lawsuits prevail," the institute reported.

Kristen Waggoner, a lawyer with the [Alliance Defending Freedom](#), which has been representing the longtime florist, expressed horror.

"In America, the government is supposed to protect freedom, not intimidate citizens into speaking and acting contrary to their faith under threat of severe punishment," she said. "The government is sending a clear message to Barronelle and the people of Washington: Dare to disagree with the government, and you put your home, your family business, and your life savings at risk."

Trial in the case is scheduled for March 23.

The family institute said the "narrow question of personal liability in a specific lawsuit is not itself a conspiracy against conscience rights and religious freedom."

"However, there is little doubt that the government's ability to go after the personal assets of business owners...

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