

Guest column: LGBT people in Jacksonville do not need a Human Rights Ordinance

By Jacksonville native and lawyer
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In 2012, before he became a consultant for the national LGBT movement, the Rev. R.L. Gundy warned about Jacksonville's proposed LGBT "nondiscrimination" law: "They have no idea how much harm this would do."

This warning is still true.

Wherever LGBT "rights" laws are passed, discrimination against people of faith follows: Photographer Elaine Huguenin. Florist Baronelle Stutzman. cake artist Jack Phillips. T-shirt printer Blaine Adamson.

These are real, law-abiding people who were sued, fined, harassed, threatened — even put out of business — not for mistreating anyone but for refusing to endorse and promote someone else's same-sex wedding.

The proposed law would grant the Jacksonville Human Rights Commission enormous coercive power to investigate complaints against real, law-abiding citizens of Jacksonville, subpoena their documents, impose fines and attorneys' fees, sue them in court and refer their cases to the state attorney for criminal prosecution.

Any church that opens its doors to non-members is a "public accommodation" and not exempt. Organizations with a religious mission to feed the homeless or arrange adoptions are exposed to liability for professing their beliefs.

The law would redefine "male" and "female" for all nurseries and preschools, even church schools providing Florida's VPK program.

Sober and rational concerns for modesty, privacy and safety will be recategorized as discrimination under the new and far-from-settled concept of "gender identity." Boys will be allowed to enter

girls' dressing and shower areas, to expose themselves and to view girls in all stages of undress. Domestic abuse shelters must allow biological men who present a female "identity" to sleep in the women's dormitories.

Most insidiously, male predators will use the legal cover of female "identity" to gain unchallenged access to women-only bathrooms and dressing rooms. The ordinance would thwart the foremost moral obligation of parents: To ensure the safety of their children.

Individual business and property owners will be subjected to more lawsuits and increasing government intrusion into their decisions, forced to comply with infinitely subjective standards and to accommodate every unusual, offensive and constantly shifting behavior, language and attire presented as "gender identity or expression."

A large majority of Duval County believes in the historical definition of marriage — unchanged worldwide for millennia — the union of a man and a woman. But anyone who dares express this traditional belief in a consensual conversation with a coworker or customer is guilty if "discrimination" is perceived by someone overhearing it. There would certainly be no room for the time-honored belief that wherever possible children deserve to have both a mother and a father.

For all this harm inflicted, the law is entirely unnecessary.

LGBT people know Jacksonville's fairness and choose to live here at a greater rate than any other Florida city and more than cities like Atlanta, Philadelphia and New York.

The only objective local research, the 2009 JCCI study, confirms that incidents that might be addressed by a new ordinance are very rare: LGBT people averaged only one such event per person every 20.4 years. And the 2009 study date is critical — no LGBT law was anticipated, so participants had no incentive to embellish discrimination claims to justify it.

Nor will passing an unneeded law increase Jacksonville's LGBT population or improve its economy.

“There's little or no evidence that same-sex couples consider LGBT laws in deciding where to move”, writes Gary Gates, foremost LGBT demographer, adding “States reporting the biggest increases in same-sex couples in the last decade . . . are among the most socially conservative states in the nation.”

And Jacksonville's economy is thriving, discrediting claims that commerce suffers when LGBT laws are absent. To the contrary, one year after its rejection of the 2012 LGBT law, Jacksonville saw “the greatest economic improvement in the entire country, boasts one of the top 20 economies,” and became “the strongest economy in Florida,” reported the Jacksonville Business Journal, citing federal data. Jacksonville is an exceptional and fair city where every individual should feel welcome. For many that is the intent of the proposed law. But alienating the large majority of Jacksonville residents who believe in traditional values is having the opposite effect.

The result is Jacksonville churches, families and businesses feel less welcome in their hometown, bracing for punishment for affirming their beliefs or simply expressing their opinions.

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