



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on August 24, 2014

Coalition Battles Houston Pro-Homosexual “Discrimination” Ordinance

A coalition of pastors, congregations, and concerned residents in Houston, Texas, has dug in for a fight against the pro-homosexual “non-discrimination” ordinance passed earlier this year by the Houston city council through the heavy-handed efforts of openly lesbian mayor Annise Parker.



While the stated purpose of the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance is to protect residents and others from discrimination in public accommodations, employment, and housing on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, age, and disability (all elements present in existing state and federal law), the effect of the law is to provide special rights to homosexuals and “transgendered” individuals — those who dress, act, and “identify” as the opposite sex.

Opponents of the ordinance point out that, as has happened in other cities that have passed similar measures, the net result of the “non-discrimination” ordinance, if allowed to stand, will be to saddle the city with a prohibition on discrimination against homosexuals and “transgendered” individuals — a consequence that would open business owners and individuals to fines and criminal prosecution if their religious and moral convictions lead them to decline to serve homosexuals.

Before passage of the ordinance Parker [reluctantly dropped a provision](#) that would have required all businesses and public places to allow transvestites and other self-identified “transgendered” individuals to use opposite-sex restroom facilities.

In early July, several weeks after passage and implementation of the ordinance, a group opposing the law, calling itself the [No Unequal Rights Coalition](#), delivered some 50,000 signatures on a petition to City Hall — more than 30,000 above the 17,269 required — calling for a voter referendum to repeal the measure.

But on August 4, reported the [Houston Chronicle](#), City Attorney David Feldman and Mayor Parker [announced with a flourish](#) that the petition drive had fallen 2,000 signatures short of the threshold after they ruled that many of the petition pages contained mistakes that invalidated the entire page of signatures.

But charging that Feldman and Parker had overstepped their authority in throwing out what by all appearances are more than enough valid signatures, the No Unequal Rights Coalition filed suit to stop enforcement of the law and to move ahead with the referendum. On August 7 the coalition won a temporary restraining order that put the ordinance on hold while a judge considered the merits of the lawsuit.



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“City Attorney David Feldman did not have the legal authority to intervene with the validation and acted as judge, jury, and executioner by declaring 2,750 entire petitions invalid due to his claim of technical problems,” [said Dave Welch](#), executive director of the Houston Area Pastor Council, which is part of the coalition to stop the equal rights ordinance.

Several days later, on August 15, Judge Robert Schaffer of the state’s 152nd District Court called for a January 19 civil trial in the case that will determine whether or not the signatures will stand and the referendum can move forward.

[Baptist Press News](#) reported that thus far the legal challenge has pitted at least a dozen city attorneys, led by Feldman, against one lone lawyer, Andy Taylor, representing the No Unequal Rights Coalition.

In pressing for the lawsuit Taylor argued that the city, through the actions of Feldman and Parker, violated the city charter in disqualifying more than half of the petitions that were submitted to city secretary Anna Russell. “The charter is very specific,” said Taylor in pressing Schaffer for the lawsuit. “Our legal case is that we did all those things, and Anna Russell so found we did.”

Taylor noted that organizers of the referendum petition drive had gathered 55,000 signatures within 30 days of kicking off the campaign, and by July 31 had pre-verified 31,000 of those signatures. Before Feldman’s office threw out petition pages from consideration due to alleged problems, “Russell’s office had validated 17,846 out of 19,177 signatures, a 93 percent validation rate and more than enough to call for a vote on the ordinance,” reported BP News. “Feldman’s office, however, reviewed all 5,199 petition pages for proper submission criteria and found ‘irregularities’ with 2,750 pages,” leaving only around 15,000 signatures for validation, 2,000 shy of the required number for a called referendum.

While Russell initially validated sufficient signatures for the referendum, she later insisted in a letter to Houston’s city council that there were not enough signatures to move ahead with a November 2014 referendum.

The lawsuit argues that Feldman did not have the authority to dismiss the petition pages in question and that Russell’s initial validation of signatures should stand. “Taylor told the judge he had evidence showing the criteria Feldman used to dismiss some pages were not drawn from the city charter and were inconsistently applied,” reported BP News.

Following consultation with both sides in the case, Judge Schaffer announced that the lawsuit would move forward with the January 19 trial. A decision in favor of the No Unequal Rights Coalition would most likely place the referendum to overturn the law on the Houston ballot in November 2015.

For her part, Mayor Parker insisted that the measure was “not a narrowly focused, special-interest ordinance. This is something that the business and civic community of Houston was firmly behind.”

That statement contradicted her declaration, made before passage of the law, that the ordinance “is about me” and other homosexuals and “transgender” individuals in the community who somehow need extra protection from discrimination.

Parker predicted that Houston voters would “soundly defeat any challenge to the ordinance.”

By contrast, Jonathan Saenz of the pro-family group [Texas Values](#) noted that before passage over 110,000 people had sent e-mail messages to the city council opposing the ordinance. “That’s more than the 98,000 votes that the mayor got in her last election,” Saenz said. “And so the onslaught of opposition and just the sheer numbers of people who are now informed of what’s happening in the city of Houston is going to turn in the favor of people of faith, I believe.”



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Saenz noted that since the delivery of the petition signatures, pro-homosexual forces in Houston have launched a campaign of intimidation, posting online the names of 31,000 individuals who signed the referendum petition. "It seems to me very clear they want folks to go on there and, as they said, 'find out if your neighbor signed it,'" said Saenz. He said that the tactic is similar to one homosexual activists have used to "out" individuals who have stood against the legalization of same-sex "marriage."

He said that with the suspension of the ordinance and the lawsuit that will be heard at trial in January, "our side continues to gain momentum," and through their collective voice the people of Houston are "making a difference."

David Welch of the Houston Area Pastor Council agreed. "The fact that a very diverse pastor-led coalition, in only 30 days ... produced over 55,000 signatures in this historic effort makes it crystal clear that Houston citizens do not want ... our fundamental right of conscience stolen," he said. "We will win this battle. This is not an Alamo moment. It is a [San Jacinto](#) moment in protecting our families and freedom against liberal tyranny."



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