



Rookie Cop Pressured to Resign Over Religious Beliefs

Everything was going swimmingly for rookie police officer Jacob Kersey during the first seven months working for the Port Wentworth Police Department in Georgia. At age 19, Kersey had been blogging about his faith in Christ for seven years.

On January 2 his blog about the institution of marriage caused someone from the LGBT community to complain. Here is Kersey's offensive statement:

God designed marriage. Marriage refers to Christ and the church. That's why there is no such thing as homosexual marriage.

That single complaint [upended Kersey's budding career](#) and has set in motion the potential for legal action against the department by First Liberty, a public-interest law firm specializing in such cases.

Kersey was asked to take down the "offensive" post. He refused. The situation escalated. Kersey wouldn't back down. The department sent him a "a letter of notification" that its investigation into the complaint revealed nothing that violated any department regulation. But it warned:

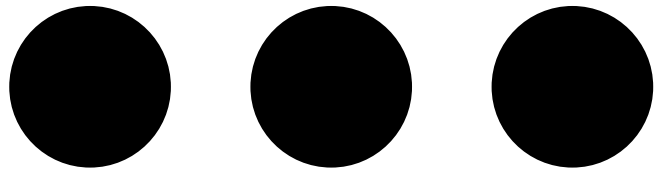
However, the posts, podcasts, and so forth found and considered in our investigation [are] likely offensive to protected classes and could raise reasonable concerns regarding your objectivity in performance of your duties when a member ... of the LGBTQ+ community is involved.

And then came the threat:

If any post on your social media platforms, or any other statement or action, renders you unable to perform, and to be seen as [un]able to perform your job in a fair and equitable manner, you could be terminated...

Officer Kersey, the intent of this notification and warning is to educate you on what will and will not be tolerated as an employee of this city.

Kersey resigned, leaving behind a trail of angst and disappointment. He told The Daily Signal, "Even though I resigned, it was made clear to me in the meetings by my command staff that if I was to go back



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to work, they could fire me at any time for any reason.... The only way that was possible is if I compromise my values, morals, and deeply held religious beliefs.”

In a podcast interview at The Daily Signal, Kersey expanded on his decision to resign rather than compromise:

I was growing a lot as I was learning [as a police officer] what it meant to serve. But at the end of the day, I realized that a job title isn't everything to me.

And my religious beliefs, my Savior, Jesus Christ ... I mean, my values are at the core of who I am. And I'm not willing to compromise those in order to keep a job title....

At the end of the day, I knew what I had to do. And I believe part of that was the Holy Spirit coming in and letting me know: “Hey, you have to do this.”

In that podcast at The Daily Signal, Kersey expressed surprise and disappointment over his situation. After all, one of the top people in the department declared himself also to be a Christian. He said:

I thought that's why we left England in the first place. We need to go back to our roots and really discover, what kind of people do we want to be. It's one thing to champion these documents, but it's another thing to actually say, “Hey, you know what? I personally, as a citizen of this nation, believe in the reason for our founding. And I'm going to stand for it and I'm going to uphold it in my own life.” And that's what we absolutely have to do.

And so, I certainly hope that the ... city of Port Wentworth and the Port Wentworth Police Department will come forward now and say, “Look, we apologize that this ever happened.” And that, “We're going to ensure that this never happens to one of our officers again.”

First Liberty entered the picture earlier this week, sending a letter to both the mayor and the assistant police chief (the chief of police having suddenly resigned a few days earlier, but that's another story):

This letter concerns the Department unconstitutionally forcing Mr. Kersey out of his job because of his deeply held religious beliefs....

Mr. Kersey realized that he faced a choice between compromising his deeply held religious beliefs or continuing as a police officer with the Department.

Forced to choose between his private religious speech [rights] and the job he loved, Mr. Kersey had no choice but to resign.

First Liberty quoted from numerous court decisions supporting the rights of others in similar situations, including this one: “If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable.”

And then came the gentle nudge toward reasonableness in order for the city and its police department to avoid a lawsuit:

The Department violated the First Amendment's Free Exercise and Free Speech Clauses when it prohibited Mr. Kersey from expressing his sincere religious beliefs on his private



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social media accounts.

Putting Mr. Kersey to the choice of censoring his private religious speech or remaining employed as a police officer is an unconstitutional choice. (See *Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia, Inc. v. Comer*)

Requiring Mr. Kersey to censor his private, off-duty religious speech to remain employed as a police officer is an unconstitutional violation of Mr. Kersey's rights under the Free Exercise and Free Speech Clauses of the First Amendment.

The City of Port Wentworth and the Port Wentworth Police Department should issue a public statement committing to respect the First Amendment rights of its police officers and announce an official change of policy.

When asked where he goes from here, Kersey said:

My integrity and Christian beliefs are at the core of who I am, and I will not abandon them....

I [don't] want to be the man who sits passively by as the whole world, and my fellow countrymen, are deceived by the lies ... happening in the culture.

Employers seeking to hire a fine young man can learn more about him and his beliefs at "The Jacob Kersey Program."



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