

Oregon: Portland Bakery Violated Gay Couple's Rights

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — A suburban Portland bakery violated the civil rights of a same-sex couple by refusing to bake a cake for the women's wedding, the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries said Friday.

Investigators found substantial evidence that Sweet Cakes by Melissa unlawfully discriminated against the couple based on their sexual orientation, agency spokesman Charlie Burr said.

The state will oversee a conciliation process to see if the parties can reach a settlement, [The Oregonian](#) [1] reported. If not, the labor bureau may pursue charges before an administrative law judge.

Oregon law bans discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in jobs and in places that serve the public, such as restaurants and bakeries.

The 2007 law provides an exemption for religious organizations and parochial schools but does not allow private business owners to discriminate based on sexual orientation.

Rachel Cryer and Laurel Bowman of Portland say they were denied a wedding cake last January by the bakery's owners, Aaron and Melissa Klein. The women filed a complaint with the state.

Cryer said she went to the Gresham bakery on Jan. 17, 2013, and met with Aaron Klein, who asked for the date and names of the bride and groom.

"I told him, 'There are two brides and our names are Rachel and Laurel,'" her complaint said.

Klein responded that he and his wife didn't serve same-sex weddings and "cited a religious belief for (the) refusal to make cakes for same-sex couples planning to marry," the complaint said.

Herbert Grey, the Kleins' lawyer, said his clients will participate in the conciliation process but maintain their original stance. The Kleins have said they weren't discriminating against the couple, who were customers in the past. Instead, they said they were practicing their constitutional right to religious freedom. They have said baking a cake for a same-sex wedding would violate their Christian beliefs.

"They're being punished by the state of Oregon for refusing to participate in an event that the state of Oregon does not recognize," Grey said.

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Oregon voters decided in 2004 to amend the state constitution to define marriage as a union between one man and one woman. An initiative to overturn the ban is expected to be on the 2014 ballot. Oregon officials have said the state will recognize same-sex marriages of couples who wed in other states or countries.

Paul Thompson, a lawyer for Cryer and Bowman, told the newspaper that the women consider the investigation's findings bittersweet. They are about as pleased as they can be, given that the investigation ultimately determined they experienced discrimination, he said.

Since the case began, the Kleins have moved their business to their home, the newspaper said.

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Information from: The Oregonian, <http://www.oregonlive.com> [2]

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