

TEXAS PASTOR PROTECTION LAW

Learn about the new law and help protect Texas pastors and churches.

The Pastor Protection Law, SB 2065, passed the Texas Legislature with bipartisan support and was signed into law by Gov. Greg Abbott on June 11, 2015. This new law protects Texas pastors, clergy, churches, religious organizations, and their employees from being forced to solemnize, perform, or celebrate a marriage that violates their religious beliefs. Nor can they be forced to provide services, accommodations, facilities, goods, or privileges for a purpose related to the solemnization, formation, or celebration of any marriage if the action would cause the organization or individual to violate their religious beliefs. Please join our effort to spread the word about the new Pastor Protection Law to ensure Texas pastors and churches can continue to proclaim the truth about marriage.

Pastor Protection Law Overview:

- » Pastors, clergy, churches, and religious organizations cannot be forced to solemnize, form, or celebrate a marriage that violates their religious beliefs.
- » Property, facilities, goods, and services of churches and religious organizations are also protected under this law, including church related buildings, religious hospitals, and campgrounds.
- » Employees of religious organizations and churches are also protected under this law.
- » No civil or criminal action by this state or local government can be used to penalize or withhold benefits or privileges, including tax exemptions, in response to religious-based marriage decisions by the protected groups and individuals.

Attacks on Pastors and Churches:

- » Pastors in Houston had their sermons subpoenaed by the Mayor of Houston for discussing marriage and sexuality related topics from a Biblical perspective from their church pulpit.
- » A top federal government lawyer suggested that the tax-exempt status of some religious entities could be in question if they support marriage between one man and one woman.
- » The ACLU has now withdrawn its support from religious freedom laws in our country because of their support for same-sex 'marriage,' and the Texas ACLU opposed the Pastor Protection law.
- » Numerous pastors and individuals in Texas have experienced an increase in calls and requests to perform and/or be involved in same-sex 'marriages' that violate their religious beliefs.

What impact does the U.S. Supreme Court *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling on same-sex 'marriage' have on this law?

The Supreme Court ruling has no impact on the Pastor Protection Law. The law will operate the same. If anything, the law will prove even more helpful by specifically protecting the rights of pastors and others to hold differing viewpoints about marriages the same as they are able to do today, despite court-imposed changes in the definition of marriage.

Does the Pastor Protection Law only protect pastors?

No. The Pastor Protection Law protects all clergy, ministers, and all employees of churches or religious organizations "while acting in the scope of that employment."

Can my church follow the Biblical definition of marriage between one man and one woman in decisions related to formation, solemnization, and celebration of marriage?

Yes. The Pastor Protection Law guarantees that the First Amendment free exercise of religion is specifically protected in state law on marriage decisions, without fear of punishment or litigation. This includes the right to refuse to perform a same-sex 'marriage' that violates your beliefs.

A pastor can't be forced to perform a same-sex 'marriage,' but could a pastor, church, or religious organization have benefits and privileges withheld for holding to our beliefs?

No. The Pastor Protection Law specifically makes it clear that the state or local government cannot "withhold benefits or privileges, including tax exemptions or governmental contracts, grants, or licenses, from any protected organization or individual."

Does this law ban churches and pastors from performing a same-sex 'marriage'?

No. The Pastor Protection protects churches and individuals from being punished by the government for following their faith on formation, celebration or solemnization of a marriage.