

THE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM RESTORATION ACT



RFRA & Blaine Adamson, owner of *Hands on Originals*

BLAINE ADAMSON'S professional interests suit people to a “tee.” Or, more specifically, to a t-shirt. He has a gift and an enthusiasm for helping others convey messages on shirts, hats, bags, and other things. Working alongside his employees, Hands On Originals, Inc., has become one of the most successful promotional printing companies in Lexington, Kentucky.

Yet not every message is the kind Blaine wants to put on his merchandise. Periodically, he has to tell folks that the message they had in mind is not something his company will print or design. But Blaine always refers them to another local business.

But in March 2012, the Gay and Lesbian Services Organization (GLSO) refused to take “no, thank you” for an answer. The group asked Hands On to print shirts promoting the local “Pride Festival.” When Blaine respectfully declined, he offered to refer the GLSO to another business that would do the shirts for the same price. The GLSO eventually got their shirts done for free, but this didn’t keep them from pursuing legal action against Hands On.



The GLSO filed a complaint with the city’s Human Rights Commission, alleging that Blaine illegally “discriminated.” But there’s nothing in Blaine’s life to support this charge. He has regularly printed, and will continue to print, materials for customers who identify as gay or lesbian. And over the years, he has hired—and developed great relationships with—a number of



employees who identify as gay or lesbian. Yet Blaine hasn’t received that same kind of tolerance from everyone.

After the GLSO filed its complaint, it publicized the situation, and others encouraged a boycott of Blaine’s business. Unfortunately, the campaign of intolerance caused Hands On to lose a number of longtime clients.

After two-and-a-half years of litigation, a hearing examiner declared that Blaine’s actions were illegal and ordered him to attend “diversity training.” Even though dozens of other printers were willing to create the GLSO’s shirts, and the GLSO ended up getting the shirts done for free, the hearing examiner concluded that the government should be able to force Blaine to print shirts that conflict with his religious conscience. Blaine is appealing this decision.

In 2013, Kentucky enacted a RFRA. This means that courts must fairly balance the interests of the government against Blaine’s interests in not violating his deeply held religious beliefs. Kentucky’s RFRA does not dictate the outcome of Blaine’s case. But it does ensure that Blaine gets a fair day in court—something every American deserves.