



Founding Freedoms
LAW CENTER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Abi Bell
(804) 517-6165
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Press Release

Founding Freedoms Law Center Files Lawsuit Challenging Counseling Censorship

RICHMOND- Today, the Founding Freedoms Law Center (the legal division of The Family Foundation) filed a lawsuit on behalf of licensed professional counselors John and Janet Raymond to challenge the constitutionality of Virginia’s so-called “conversion therapy” ban. The law (Va. Code § 54.1-2409.5), which went into effect July 1, 2020 on the same day our Law Center launched, censors licensed counselors from speaking certain messages based in biological reality that run contrary to the new orthodoxy of the LGBTQ revolution. Presently, under the law any licensed counselor in Virginia who simply has a conversation with a minor for the purpose of helping him or her embrace their God-given sexuality instead of pursuing homosexuality or transgenderism can lose their license.

“By this lawsuit,” said Victoria Cobb, President of The Family Foundation, “we hope to have this law be declared unconstitutional so that counselors in Virginia can be free again to speak the truth about sexuality, and so that parents can finally find the help they and their child are seeking that is consistent with their family’s faith and values. No one should ever be prevented by law from engaging in voluntary conversations about what is true, especially when those conversations are motivated by a person’s religious faith.”

Our clients, Dr. John and Janet Raymond, own and operate Associate Counseling Center in Northern Virginia, which offers counseling for marriages, families, men, and women from a Christian worldview. Prior to this law taking effect, the Raymonds regularly counseled minors on a wide variety of issues, but because of the chilling effect of this law, the Raymonds stopped seeing minors as clients almost entirely. By this litigation, the Raymonds seek to continue counseling children, including the increasing number of those who are experiencing confusion about their sexual identity in a chaotic culture.

According to Dr. John Raymond, “We believe that the power of God through Jesus Christ can and does set people free from the struggles that burden them, and that there is no challenge that He cannot help a person with, but this law denies that reality and prevents counselors like us

from sharing the truth of God’s word that brings life and healing.” He further said: “People can and often do have different goals for their counseling outcomes, and we respect that, but everyone should be free to speak and to pursue faith-based objectives without fear of retribution from their government.”

The lawsuit was filed in Henrico County Circuit Court and names as defendants the Virginia Department of Health Professions, its Director Arne Owens, and the Virginia Board of Counseling – the state entities charged with enforcing the law and regulations at issue. The Complaint asserts several state law claims, alleging that the counseling censorship law violates Virginia Constitutional provisions concerning free speech, religious freedom, and equal protection, as well as violating Virginia’s Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

According to Josh Hetzler, Legal Counsel for FFLC: “We are honored to stand beside John and Janet Raymond as they display immense courage in challenging this unjust law not just for themselves, but for the many other professionals, parents, and children who are harmed by it every day. Virginia’s legal protections for speech and religious freedom are particularly strong, even as compared to other state and federal laws, so we look forward to getting into court to vindicate these fundamental rights for the Raymonds and countless other Virginians.”

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FOUNDING FREEDOMS LAW CENTER
707 E. Franklin St. Richmond, VA 23219
Tel: ((804) 971-5509
www.foundingfreedomslaw.org