

## **HUDSON HICKMAN, MOTION PICTURE PRODUCER**

Mississippi HB 1523 is bad legislation. It is overly broad in its possible interpretations and it singles out a class of people for discrimination and exclusion. Yes, that's my opinion and it's also the opinion of a number of Constitutional scholars from prestigious law schools around the country, including professors from Ole Miss and Mississippi College Schools of Law. You can read their arguments at this link:

[https://web.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/microsites/gender-sexuality/files/memo\\_regarding\\_ms\\_hb1523.pdf](https://web.law.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/microsites/gender-sexuality/files/memo_regarding_ms_hb1523.pdf).

Someone has called HB 1523 a "solution in search of a problem" and I agree. There was no need whatsoever for this bill. In my opinion, the legislative process that led to the passage of this bill was political grandstanding and pandering to the extreme.

The proponents of the bill say that it grants religious freedom protections to pastors and churches. That already existed BEFORE HB 1523. Churches have long had self-determination – they could already hire and fire whomever they wish, they could marry or refuse to marry whomever they wish, based on their existing 'sincerely held religious beliefs'. In that regard HB 1523 was not necessary.

The proponents of HB1523 say that businesses can refuse services based on 'sincerely held religious beliefs'. THAT option already existed BEFORE 1523 in Mississippi. Businesses may serve whomever they wish – certainly, you've seen in business establishments the placard, "We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone."! In addition, I don't believe in Mississippi there are any anti-discrimination statutes that include sexual orientation. So Mississippi businesses were already able to abide by their 'sincerely held religious beliefs' as justification for denying service. However, Federal Statutes might have a different opinion about some of those discriminatory practices.

And finally, with regard to the issuance of marriage licenses, IF there were evidence of a problem and I haven't heard that there is, I imagine, in the short term, an intra-state memo from the Attorney General could outline procedures for acting on matters of conscience. In the longer term, in matters of conscience, Circuit Clerks who wish not to abide by their oath of office should probably resign, or not run in the first place.

Laughably, the bill is overly broad. There are so many possible interpretations of the text in this bill. If you haven't read it, do yourself a favor. You can read the full text of HB 1523, which our governor has signed into law, at this link:

<http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2016/html/HB/1500-1599/HB1523SG.htm>

Mississippi has very effectively found a way to call negative attention to itself. Numerous companies, organizations, and individuals have come out against HB 1523. You can see a few of the opponents here: <http://www.sunherald.com/latest-news/article70244872.html>

Numerous personalities around the country have made derisive comments about HB 1523 and about the State we love. It hurts and it makes me ashamed of our leadership. If you want to see

just one of the derisive comments directed toward the State we love, check out this Funny or Die video. They hijacked Mississippi's Tourism video by re-recording the voiceover. You can see it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqASSN5S2CI>

Ellen Degeneres, who is always classy, went on record about HB 1523 in this very moving monologue on her show. Check it out here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WIuIxLylCtk>

I love Mississippi and I always have. That's why my wife and I moved here a year and a half ago. We wanted to be a part of the bright future that we believe Mississippi can have. HB 1523 is terribly regressive. In politics, as in much of life, perception is reality. Now, with the passage of HB 1523, the perception of Mississippi across the country is that we're a state that is bigoted and hateful toward the LGBT population. That is not the Mississippi I know and love. But until HB 1523 is repealed, the Mississippi Development Authority's efforts to recruit industry and jobs to the State will be hampered, if not futile. The recently burgeoning film industry in Mississippi (which is a source of delight for me, as a film professional) will be severely curtailed, as every major studio and network will boycott the State. And the list goes on.

Some may say none of the adverse comments from individuals and companies take precedence over my faith. You'll find no argument from me there. My faith is number one, front and center in my life: the Apostles' Creed, and the admonition to 'love God first', 'love your neighbor as yourself', and 'feed my sheep' are its hallmarks. I believe God makes His Love available to all in equal measure and I believe I am called to act accordingly. I can't support any legislation, which leaves open the door for anything less.