



State Sen. Lee Bright

S.C. Bill Would Let Officials Refuse Same-Sex Marriage Licenses

By Trudy Ring

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A South Carolina state senator is introducing a bill that would allow judges and other public officials to refuse to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples without facing punishment.

Sen. Lee Bright, a Republican, prefiled the legislation last week, ahead of the legislative session that begins in January, Columbia TV station WLTX reports. “The bill would protect people employed in probate or clerk or court offices from liability or punishments if they object to granting same-sex marriage licenses based on a sincere religious belief,” the station notes. In South Carolina, probate judges’ offices issue marriage licenses.

“At the end of the day I want to know I did all I could, and I think it’s something we need to do to protect these judges so they can serve in these honorable positions without feeling like they betrayed their faith,” Bright told WLTX.

Marriage equality came to South Carolina in November, after a federal judge struck down the state’s ban on same-sex marriage and higher courts refused to extend the brief stay he placed on his ruling.

In neighboring North Carolina, which also became a marriage equality state this fall, Republican legislative leaders have said they will back legislation allowing public employees to opt out of participating in same-sex marriages. At least six county magistrates have resigned rather than perform such ceremonies.

Bright has also prefiled bills that would relax some of South Carolina’s gun laws and prevent the enforcement of the Affordable Care Act in the state.

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