

My life changed forever on June 6, 2014. Overnight, I was thrust into the crossfire of a debate over LGBT rights and religious liberties.

That evening, as I listened to news reports that a Salt Lake City police officer had been suspended for refusing to work security and traffic during the 2014 Utah Pride Parade, I sat in disbelief. They were talking about me, but I had never refused to work the parade, and certainly never refused to provide security and traffic control. As a police officer, I'm sworn to protect and serve. But I never believed that my oath required me to give up all of my First Amendment rights.

So when I, due to my personal beliefs and conscience, did not feel right about performing choreographed motorcycle maneuvers at the front of the Utah Pride Parade, I asked another officer to swap assignments with me. Swaps are a common practice, and reasonable accommodations have, in my experience, always been made for officers requesting a trade. We agreed that I would cover his security and traffic post, and he would do the maneuvers in the parade.

When my superiors refused to let me swap assignments and called me intolerant, I told them that I would perform the maneuvers. I didn't want to lose my job or stability for my family. I thought I would have the choice to be a part of the Motor Squad, or go back to patrol. But the police department suspended me, took away my gun and badge, and told me that I would be investigated for discrimination. Two days later, a police spokesperson gave interviews to the media, and the news reported that I refused to work a security and traffic assignment at the parade. I was immediately branded a bigot.

I recently read about a court case where a florist in Washington didn't want to be a part of a gay wedding. The court's ruling said, "[The florist] cannot comply with both the law and her faith if she continues to provide flowers for weddings as part of her duly-licensed business." This case is one of the reasons why I am speaking up now.

The Utah Legislature is working to develop balanced legislation that protects religious liberty and safeguards LGBT people from discrimination in employment and housing. I do support leg-

isolation that provides fairness for all. No one should be afraid to be who they are in their employment. And no one should have to choose between their job and their conscience.

In balancing fairness for all Utahns, I ask legislators to consider what happened to me:

I became a Salt Lake City police officer in 2007, and in the summer of 2013, I joined the department's Motorcycle Squad, a group of approximately 30 well-trained motorcycle riders who are responsible for traffic enforcement throughout the city. Upon request, the squad also provides its services to a variety of special events, including parades, funerals, sporting events, marathons, and more. For these events, the squad provides security and traffic control. On limited occasions, officers are known to perform choreographed maneuvers for crowd entertainment and celebration. These maneuvers include, for example, officers driving their motorcycles in tight circles around one another. Typically, the most junior motorcycle officers are tasked with performing these choreographed maneuvers, and last June, I was one of those junior officers.

When I thought about performing in the parade, my conscience did not feel right. I felt that by being an actual participant in the parade, I would be perceived to be supporting certain messages that were contrary to who I am. Had I been allowed to make the swap, it would have been my duty to protect pedestrians at the parade from vehicle traffic.

But the Salt Lake City Police Department did not allow me to swap assignments. In an email, I made it clear that I had "no uneasy feelings working any other assignment on this day at the event [including] security, parade post, traffic, etc." I explained that I took issue with doing maneuvers as part of the parade because it would look like I was in support of the parade. I also asked specifically: "Please allow me the choice for someone to trade me for whatever reason, if at all possible." But my request was denied, and I began to worry about jeopardizing my job, so I informed my superior officers, "I will be there for practice and be there for the event to do my assigned position." Several days later, on June 4, the Salt Lake City Police Department placed me on paid administrative leave and informed me that the department was opening an internal affairs investigation for discrimination. As part of my suspension, they took all my issued equipment and told me I could not act as a law enforcement officer. On June 6, a police department spokesperson discussed my suspension with the media. Nobody in the department that I

know of, including myself, had been officially asked questions in an internal affairs investigation.

That night, I watched the news and learned that a Salt Lake City police officer—*me*—had refused to work at the Utah Pride Parade. I was devastated. And I have not been the same since. Branded as an LGBT bigot, I have found my relationships are not the same. Phone calls have not been returned by some of my closest friends.

The first article I saw was done by *The Salt Lake Tribune*; then the story caught fire. The *Deseret News* reported, “A Salt Lake Police Officer has been placed on leave for refusing an assignment at this weekend’s Gay Pride Parade. . . . He had been given a traffic control and public safety assignment.” KSL 5 Television reported, “The Salt Lake City Police Department confirms that one of their officers refused to work his assigned duties at the Utah Pride Festival this weekend, citing personal convictions.” KSL 5 also showed video clips of an interview with a police spokesperson who said that the chief of police, “wants to make clear that bias and bigotry will not be tolerated.” Fox 13 Television showed video clips of the same spokesperson, who said, “The vast majority of officers understand: When they put their badge on and come to work, they leave their personal beliefs at home, and we provide service to the community.”

The same story was in the news across America and even in Australia. Two days later, during the pride parade, news outlets quoted the Salt Lake District Attorney as saying, “If [the officer] wants to make that statement then maybe he should be in a different profession than this one. . . . We cannot qualify the delivery of that service, that we promise to a community based on individuals who say, ‘Well I’m going to pick and choose which call to respond to, which fire to put out or which person to serve.’” The public verdict was swift, severe, and certain: the officer was unquestionably an LGBT bigot. They were all talking about me. But that is not what I did, and that is not who I am.

I have never refused to protect or serve any member of our community. I would never refuse to protect or serve LGBT individuals, whether at a pride parade, or anywhere else.

In my duties as a police officer, I have been called upon to protect events I disagree with, including several LGBT rallies. I never felt that my personal or religious beliefs “exempted” me from serving or protecting anyone’s First Amendment rights or safety. I love and respect them as fellow children of God; however, I should never be forced to personally celebrate any messages. That is my right.

It is unquestionably my duty as a police officer to protect everyone’s right to hold a parade or other event, but is it also my duty to celebrate everyone’s parade?

What if a group held a “Traditional Marriage Pride Parade” and asked a Utah police department to provide security and traffic control for the parade? What if that police department also supported the parade’s message and ordered some of its motorcycle officers to perform in that parade? If an LGBT officer were to ask for a reassignment, so that he or she could protect the parade-goers rather than perform in the parade, would anyone challenge his or her right to make such a request? Would their request make headlines?

I was told the parade organizers paid the sum of \$900 for the department to do the motorcycle maneuvers and we would have to do it for anyone who paid. So, if this event is now in the name of customer service, would we also have to perform maneuvers for the Westboro Baptist Church or the KKK if they paid the \$900? If so, what if a cop who lost a family member in the war in Iraq or Afghanistan in the first instance, or an African American officer in the other, didn’t want to be a part of the perceived celebration? Should we force those officers to perform maneuvers in the name of “service”? The idea is preposterous. To be clear, I do not equate the LGBT community with either of these hateful groups, rather I use the example to question forcing law enforcement officers to do any more than protect and serve.

Law enforcement officers are not pawns to be used according to the political whims of the agencies that employ us; rather, we are servants who are proud to live in a country where fundamental constitutional rights are universally applied.

In an email to my superiors I brought up some of these points and explained that it looks as though we as a police department, a governmental entity, were in support of the messages of the

Pride Days parade organizers, when I believed we should simply be neutral for service and protection. The superior over the event then replied in an email, “As far as ‘supporting’ the Event; unless I am sadly mistaken, our Department does support equality and understanding of the LGBT community, as well as that of diversity and that of being open-minded towards others who share differing preferences in their lives. In fact, we have several fellow Officers and Civilian employees who are homosexual whom you should not have issue with on that basis alone either; as you should not with any of the entrants or patrons of the upcoming Pride Day Parade.”

This response by my superior, in my opinion, attempts to validate everyone else’s First Amendment rights at the expense of mine and those of similar officers – those with conservative beliefs that are rooted in religion, and worse, it ignores the fact that my relationships and interactions with homosexual employees were never strained or borne out of anything but mutual respect, as far as I was concerned.

What I was being told, essentially, was to leave my religious beliefs at home when I put on the uniform, and worse, to ignore those convictions in circumstances where my employer is forcing me to participate in someone else’s protected speech. This is constitutionally deficient. We do not lose our rights as police officers or first responders, or public officials of any stripe, merely by choosing to work in public service. Since when does our duty to protect and serve include subjugating our core beliefs to those who we serve through circumstances where we are forced to adopt the “speech” of others - thereby participating in a statement that we would not otherwise make?

I am sharing my experience to unite, not to divide. I want to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. **I ask that the Utah Legislature act now to balance protections for religious liberty with safeguards for LGBT people, unifying these important interests to the end that all are protected from discrimination in employment and housing.** Through this experience, I have gained greater compassion and empathy for anyone who has lost their job because of who they are. No one should be forced to choose between their job and their conscience.

Some have said that I should leave my beliefs at home when I go to work. I couldn’t imagine this thought. I fear I then would not be equipped to be the best I can be to protect and serve the com-

munity that I have proudly served for seven years. In the first half of my life I did not take seriously my relationship with God, but I do now, and He is my life. We are all sinners, and fall short from time to time. How we manage this reality and organize ourselves morally is a uniquely personal and constitutionally protected privilege.

My prayers steady my nerves on dangerous calls, in a profession where a fraction of a second could mean the difference between someone's life or death. As a cop, I'm not always popular, so I have a lot of opportunities to practice the commandment, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you." I strive to follow this commandment – it's not always easy. I'm still working on this.

Prior to the Motors Squad, as a bicycle officer on Salt Lake City's streets I tried working with the homeless almost every day. Many of them were afraid of police officers. I offered them a smile, helped them find the charitable services they needed, and did my best to be their friend. My religion taught me not to dwell on anything they possibly had done, but to see in them what they could become. To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable in others, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in me; and as far as all the people who have called me a bigot, I forgive you. I love you and pray for you. From time to time, I also strongly disagree with you. Most certainly, I am not a bigot. I want you to know that. These experiences teach me that we are all children of God and can somehow unite under the principle of love.

Finally, I also want you to know that if I really did have to leave my beliefs at home, I do not know if I could show up for work. If I must choose between my religion and my job, my faith comes first. I hope and pray that lawmakers and policy-makers can find a way to ensure that no one will have to make that choice in the future. Nobody in the United States of America should have to. I believe that we can wholeheartedly disagree with each other on even fundamental levels, but somehow also reach across that divide and love each other through this human experience. We should have laws that reflect that. Thank you.