

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF MISSISSIPPI
Jackson Division

NYKOLAS ALFORD and STEPHEN THOMAS; and ACLU OF MISSISSIPPI,)

Plaintiffs,)

v.)

JUDY MOULDER, in her official capacity as MISSISSIPPI STATE REGRISTRAR OF VITAL RECORDS,)

Defendant.)

Civil No. 3:16cv350DAJ-FKB

DECLARATION OF STEPHEN THOMAS

1. I am the plaintiff in the above-captioned action. I have actual knowledge of the matters stated in this declaration.

2. My name is Stephen Thomas.

3. I am 25 years old.

4. I was born in Mississippi, and I currently live in Lauderdale County

5. I have been in a long-term committed relationship with my fiancé, Nykolas Alford, for three and a half years.

6. Nykolas and I both grew up in very Christian homes, and we have very similar values and morals. Family is very important to both of us, even though we have both had a difficult road with our parents because we are gay. They did not approve of our relationship at first, and when Stephen and I moved in together, we were effectively each others' family. Stephen and I continue build each other up and support each other all of the time.

7. Nykolas and I got engaged in December 2014. It was one of the happiest decisions I have ever made. Our families, in large part, have come to accept who we are, and

most have become true supporters of our relationship. Last Christmas, Nykolas and I hosted our families for the holiday, which was very meaningful for us both.

8. Nyoklas and I plan to marry within the next three years, after we both complete our undergraduate education. I already completed several college credits when I was younger, but it was not possible at that time for me to continue my education while supporting myself. I will be returning to college in August 2016 to obtain a bachelor's degree with a major in music. Nykolas has an associate's degree in broadcast communications, and he will be returning to college in January 2017 for a bachelor's degree in communications with a minor in theater. We plan to marry within the next three years even if one of us is unable to finish our undergraduate education by then as a result of some unforeseen circumstance.

9. When marriage came to Mississippi, we were completely thrilled. But when HB 1523 passed in Mississippi, it was a slap in the face. Nykolas and I had already spent much of our early lives carrying the weight of the burden of other peoples' homophobia. When marriage was made legal, it felt like the road was finally becoming more level—like Nykolas and me and other gay couples like us would one day be truly equal members of our community in Mississippi. But HB 1523 seems to put an end to that future.

10. Every other couple seeking to legally marry can obtain a marriage license from any employee at the county clerk's office responsible for issuing marriage license. But as a result of HB 1523, government officials can "recuse" themselves from issuing us a marriage license solely because they disapprove of our relationship.

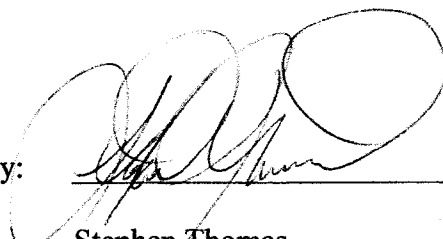
11. This discrimination is even more demeaning because it is just one example of the ways that HB 1523 gives people a right to treat our marriage differently than the marriages of

everyone else. When Nykolas and I plan our wedding, we won't be able to even go to a bakery for a wedding cake without worrying that we might be turned away.

12. Nykolas and I have been each other's' family, and we are proud and excited to marry each other before God and our friends and family. When we marry each other, we deserve to have the same legal treatment as any other marriage—no more and no less.

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746, I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on May 3, 2016.

By: 

Stephen Thomas