

REBUTTING THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER'S FALSE AND DEFAMATORY "HATE GROUP" LABEL

The Southern Poverty Law Center grossly misrepresents and maligns Liberty Counsel by labeling Liberty Counsel, a Christian legal ministry, as a "hate group." And it reaches that spurious conclusion without offering any evidence of hate, whatsoever. Instead, the SPLC elevates disagreement with the LGBT agenda into proof of hate. But disagreement is not hate.

Liberty Counsel hates no one. We believe every person is created in the image of God and should be treated with dignity and respect. We believe that discourse should be civil and respectful. We condemn violence and do not support any person or group that advocates or promotes violence.

But the Southern Poverty Law Center, which disagrees with the religious and moral values of Liberty Counsel, has falsely called Liberty Counsel a so-called "hate group." This is not only false, it is defamatory and dangerous. Liberty Counsel is not a "hate group" and does not support or advocate "hate" of any kind.

The responses below correspond to the SPLC's malicious and false misrepresentations. Each section begins with a false allegation of the SPLC followed by the actual facts.

1. The Liberty Counsel, a virulently anti-LGBT group...

FACT: This is false. Neither our methods nor our motives are "virulent" or hateful to any person or group. Liberty Counsel engages in peaceful, civil discourse. Our disagreement with the SPLC over marriage or certain aspects of the LGBT agenda (not LGBT people) is civil, and rooted in historic Judeo-Christian values and science. Our disagreement does not equate to hate.

2. [Mat Staver, Founder and Chairman of Liberty Counsel] even went so far as to call for a new revolutionary war as marriage equality advanced.

FACT: Staver never advocated war or violence. As stated by some of the U.S. Supreme Court Justices who dissented in the Court's 2015 marriage opinion, taking the matter of marriage away from the democratic process will not end the debate. This decision, like the abortion decision in 1973, is a huge cultural shift that has and will continue to cause conflicts in law and the culture.

3. Staver likened "the homosexual lobby" to terrorists.

FACT: Staver did not compare and LGBT person to terrorists. Staver distinguishes the individual from the political agenda advanced by some who have little or no interest in rational dialogue, compromise, or accommodation.

4. He has also supported the criminalization of homosexuality both in the U.S. and in other countries

FACT: Staver has never supported the criminalization of homosexuality. Years ago on a radio program without referring to any specific laws, Staver expressed opposition to the Obama administration using State Department funding to force foreign countries to change their laws on abortion or marriage.

5. The Liberty Counsel went on to say that statistical evidence “demonstrates, however, that those who engage in homosexual conduct are at increased risk for numerous diseases as compared to heterosexuals.”

FACT: Scientific studies on the health risks of men who have sex with men ([MSM](#)) are widely known and published by the [Centers for Disease Control](#), the nation’s leading public health institute and a federal agency under the Department of Health and Human Services. A simple internet search using the words “Centers for Disease Control MSM” will bring up many [scientific articles](#). The [National Institute for Health](#) also publishes scientific research on the [increased health risk and diseases](#) of men who have sex with me. The [Gay Lesbian Medical Association also reports](#) that men who have sex with men “are at an increased risk of HIV infection,” “an increased risk of sexually transmitted infection with the viruses that cause . . . hepatitis,” “use substances [amyl nitrate, marijuana, Ecstasy, and amphetamines] at a higher rate than the general population,” appear to be affected by depression and anxiety “at a higher rate than in the general population,” contract sexually transmitted diseases “at a high rate,” and “use tobacco at much higher rates than straight men.” HIV, itself, is contracted at a dramatically higher rate by homosexual men. HIV expert Professor Kevin Fenton, the National Director of Health and Wellbeing at Public Health England, warns of a [“global epidemic”](#) of HIV among MSM, stating, “It is estimated that the HIV rate in MSM is eight times that of the general population in low-income countries, and 23 times the general-population rate in high-income countries.” These scientific studies are not “hate” and the medical institutes, including the nation’s leading health institute, that do research and publish regarding the increased health risk are not “haters” or “hate groups.” Liberty Counsel is not a “hate group” because it has occasionally referred to these scientific publications.

6. In 2004, Staver published *Same-Sex Marriage: Putting Every Household at Risk*, an anti-LGBT screed about the perceived threat of homosexuality that includes numerous false claims about LGBT people, including that they’re promiscuous, that homosexuality is caused by a “longing to fill emotional deficits,” and that the goal of the “homosexual agenda” (an anti-LGBT conspiracy theory) is to move from simply being tolerated by heterosexuals to dominating them.

FACT: Contrary to the SPLC’s invidious characterization, the 2004 book, provides a well-documented analysis and warning about certain health risks and the societal implications associated with a political agenda. Just calling a claim “false,” as SPLC does, without evidence, does not make it false or “hate.” The studies and sources referred to in the book come from scientific studies or from LGBT organizations or leaders, which have frequently commented on high promiscuity rates among men who have sex with men.

Finally, it's no longer theoretical—and it wasn't in 2004 when *Same-Sex Marriage* was published—to say “the goal of the homosexual agenda [is to move] from merely being tolerated by heterosexuals to dominating them.” Two months after the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage, Liberty Counsel client Kim Davis sat in jail for the crime of upholding her Christian conscience. And she's not alone in losing her liberty to the demands of the homosexual agenda (not a “conspiracy theory,” but a reality). Florists, bakers, and wedding photographers have all been forced to service same-sex ceremonies or pay draconian fines, be subjected to public ridicule, even undergo state-ordered sensitivity training. Likewise, gay activists in California and New Jersey have succeeded in banning counseling to help people with unwanted same-sex attractions—a clear violation of the First Amendment rights of clients seeking help and professionals offering a service.

7. Staver cited the work of Paul Cameron, a discredited psychologist, and painted LGBT adults as a threat to children.

FACT: *Same-Sex Marriage* cited one article written by Dr. Cameron and his son, Dr. Kirk Cameron, in the journal, *Adolescence*, along with other research, when addressing the issue of children raised in a single sex (heterosexual or homosexual) household without the benefit of a father and a mother. Citing research in a published journal article is not hate.

8. Liberty Counsel promotes conversion therapy and often files lawsuits against its bans so much that in 2013, Staver received the “Ex-Gay Freedom Award”

FACT: The term “conversion therapy” is not a term used by those who offer counseling to individuals who have stressors in their life and seek counsel for unwanted same-sex attractions, behavior, or identity. The essence of counseling is client autonomy, meaning that clients have the right to seek counsel of their choice to achieve the objective of their choice. Government has no business telling counselors what they may say or clients what they may hear. When laws interfere with the counselor-client or doctor-patient relationship by placing a blanket prohibition on what can be said or heard everyone should be concerned. Liberty Counsel has represented counseling organizations and individual clients challenging such restrictions. The choice of the counsel and the counselor should be up to the client or patient, not the government.

9. Liberty Counsel has had its share of controversies, but perhaps none of have been so prominent as its involvement in the ordeal of kidnapped child in 2009.

FACT: The SPLC, which is backing a lawsuit in *Jenkins v. Miller*, commits a grotesque misrepresentation of the facts by suggesting Liberty Counsel was involved in Lisa Miller removing her child from the court's jurisdiction and disappearing. From 2004 to 2009, Liberty Counsel represented Lisa Miller in a case involving the interplay of the laws between Vermont and Virginia. In 2009, with no warning or notice, Miller disappeared and Liberty Counsel was unable to contact her. Liberty Counsel informed the court and requested to withdraw from the case.

10. In 2015, Staver and the Counsel took a leading role in defending Rowan County, Ky., clerk Kim Davis who refused to grant same-sex couples marriage licenses after the U.S. Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in June 2015.

FACT: Liberty Counsel represented Kim Davis who ceased distributing any marriage license for same or opposite sex couples while she sought clarification of the law and a religious accommodation. From the beginning of the case until its conclusion, the issue centered around a religious accommodation under state and federal law. In December 2015, the newly elected Governor Matt Bevin issued an executive order to accommodate the conscience of Kim and other Kentucky county clerks. In 2016, Democrats and Republicans in the state legislature unanimously passed a law providing for the requested religious accommodation.

11. The Liberty Counsel also signed on to defend longtime vitriolic anti-LGBT activist and crusader Scott Lively in 2012, who was sued for human rights violations under the alien tort statute (ATS) by Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), an LGBT rights group in Uganda and the U.S.-based Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR).

FACT: Pastor Scott Lively is a Christian minister who was sued by SMUG using the Alien Tort Statute in which SMUG sought to use a vague and undefined concept in international law to censor speech by any U.S. citizen who speaks in a foreign country on abortion or LGBT. After several years of litigation, a District Court ruled in favor of Lively and dismissed the case. First, the case was dismissed. Second, Lively never advocated hate. Third, just because an attorney represents a client is no cause to impute everything the client has said or done to the attorney. The ACLU represented the KKK in Skokie, Illinois seeking a parade permit, and represented the Neo-Nazis and white supremacists who sought the permit to protest in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017. The ACLU's representation of such people or groups does not make the attorneys or the organization a "hate group."

12. Earlier, in April 2017, Liberty Counsel targeted a lesbian math teacher at a Florida high school and sent a five-page complaint to the high school accusing the teacher of intentionally violating or denying students' legal rights, along with other ethical and moral violations.

FACT: Far from targeting a lesbian math teacher, Liberty Counsel sent a letter to the school district on behalf of parents and students in response to a request for help from students whose rights were violated by a teacher who prohibited Christian jewelry, engaged in bullying against students, and punished those who did not share her beliefs, which she openly expressed and displayed on her desk and on the walls of the classroom.

CONCLUSION: Liberty Counsel is not a hate group and hates no one. Liberty Counsel is a peaceful, law-abiding, nonviolent organization. We believe discourse should be civil and respectful. We believe every person is created in the image of God and should be treated with respect and dignity.

The “hate group” label by the SPLC is false, defamatory, and dangerous. Rather than helping to stop real hate and hate groups, the SPLC’s false label does the opposite and discredits the organization. The SPLC’s false “hate group” label motivated Floyd Corkins II to attempt mass murder on August 15, 2012, at the Washington, DC office of Family Research Council (FRC). Corkins is now serving a 25-year federal sentence for domestic terrorism after he walked into FRC’s headquarters with the intent to gun down staffers and rub Chick-fil-A sandwiches in the faces of the dead corpses. A brave and alert security guard stopped him in the building lobby but not before 28-year-old Corkins declared words to the effect, “I don’t like your politics,” and then shot and seriously wounded the guard. The shooter’s backpack contained almost 100 rounds of ammunition. Corkins targeted FRC because of its position on marriage and picked the pro-family group, [he told the FBI](#), using the SPLC’s online hate listing: “It was a, uh, Southern Poverty Law, lists, uh, anti-gay groups. I found them online. I did a little bit of research, went to the website, stuff like that.”

In early 2014, the FBI deleted the SPLC as a resource listed on its Hate Crime web page. It acted after 15 pro-family groups, including Liberty Counsel, notified Attorney General Eric Holder and FBI Director James Comey of the SPLC’s role in facilitating an act of domestic terrorism and urged them to distance the FBI from the group.

In 2016, the Disciplinary Counsel in the Office of the General Counsel of the U.S. Department of Justice, under President Obama, sharply rebuked and reprimanded attorneys representing the SPLC and its allies for employing the SPLC’s “hate group” label to denigrate a conservative advocacy group. A letter from the Justice Department’s Office of General Counsel concluded that employing the label against groups with which it disagrees “[overstepped the bounds of zealous advocacy and was unprofessional](#).” It continued that such behavior is “uncivil” and “constitutes frivolous behavior and does not aid the administration of justice.”