

Houston voters reject gay rights ordinance

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HOUSTON (BNG)—Voters overwhelmingly rejected [Houston's Equal Rights Ordinance](#), designed to expand the rights of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender citizens.

The Nov. 3 referendum failed 61 percent to 39 percent to add sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes in laws that prohibit discrimination in housing, employment, city contracting and business services.

Annise ParkerThe vote followed a yearlong court battle marked by a religious liberty controversy after city officials sought to subpoena sermons of pastors who spoke out against the ordinance.

Ed Young, pastor of [Houston's Second Baptist Church](#), declared the referendum a moral issue—not a vote about discrimination—at a watch party for the Campaign for Houston, which opposed the ordinance.

“Everybody’s interpreted this as a political thing, and that’s not the perspective from which I come,” Young said, according to the *Texas Tribune*. “This is beyond politics. Someone asked earlier if Houston would be perceived by the national press, and other cities, as a place that discriminates. You know this great city. That’s not who we are.”

At [First Baptist Church in Houston](#), Pastor Greg Matte used the church website to urge church members to vote against the measure.

“This proposition isn’t about equalization,” Matte said. “It’s about normalization of something that goes against God’s design.”

'Bathroom bill'

Supporters—including Mayor Annise Parker—accused the campaign against the proposed ordinance of using scare tactics like calling it the “bathroom bill” that would permit sexual predators to enter women’s restrooms and locker rooms by pretending to be transsexual.

Last year, religious liberty advocates registered concern about subpoenas ordering five Houston pastors to turn over sermons as evidence in a lawsuit seeking repeal of the non-discrimination ordinance originally adopted by the City Council.

Parker later withdrew the subpoenas after meetings with local and national clergy. The Texas Supreme Court ruled in July city officials either must repeal the measure or put it on the ballot for voters to decide.

Mayor pledges to continue fight

After voters defeated the ordinance, Parker—who is a lesbian—pledged to continue fighting against LGBT discrimination.

“No one’s rights should be subject to a popular vote,” she said in a concession speech. “It is insulting, it is demeaning, and it is just wrong.”

The mayor called the opposition effort “a campaign of fear mongering and deliberate lies.”

“They just kept spewing an ugly wad of lies from our TV screens and from pulpits,” she said. “This was a calculated campaign by a very small but determined group of right-wing ideologues and the religious right, and they know only how to destroy, not how to build up.”