

## ACLU asks to defend Henderson in suit over gay-rights ordinance

Associated Press

HENDERSON, Ky. — A civil-rights group said yesterday it will help defend another Kentucky city against a challenge to an ordinance that extends legal protections for gays.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky asked a state court to allow it to help defend Henderson against a lawsuit challenging the city's ordinance protecting gays from discrimination.

The ACLU has already intervened in similar lawsuits against such ordinances in Louisville and Jefferson County.

Jeff Vessels, executive director for the state ACLU, said the lawsuits put Kentucky at "ground zero" in the national debate over religious freedom and civil-rights laws to protect homosexuals. Eleven states have similar laws extending protections based on sexual orientation, the ACLU said.

The ACLU also is involved in a court battle over posting the Ten Commandments in some Kentucky schools and government buildings. A federal judge ordered the counties to remove the documents while the suit is pending.

Henderson passed an ordinance in

September prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation in housing, employment and public accommodations.

Earlier this year a lawsuit was filed in Henderson Circuit Court by Rick and Connie Hile, Henderson landlords who claim the ordinance forces them to violate their religious beliefs by "facilitating or supporting such a sinful lifestyle."

The Hiles said in court documents that they rely on the three rental properties for their livelihood and that the ordinance could damage their traditional family image.

The Hiles are represented by Pat Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice, a conservative legal-advocacy group that is also representing a plaintiff in a similar challenge to ordinances in Louisville and Jefferson County.

Dr. J. Barrett Hyman, a gynecologist and obstetrician, filed lawsuits in federal court alleging he would be forced against his religious beliefs to hire a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered job applicant.

Frank Manion, senior regional council for the center, said the ordinances tram-

ple on the religious freedoms of Christians.

"It is our position that the ordinance — which extends protected status in employment, housing and public accommodation to the categories of 'sexual orientation' — is a clear example of government attempting to legislate its own view of morality at the expense of the fundamental rights of its citizens," Manion said yesterday.

Vessels said the ordinances do not violate the religious freedom of those who have brought suit.

"Our laws and the Constitution rightly protect religious groups, but they simply do not allow people to use personal religious beliefs as an excuse to deny someone a job or a home," Vessels said.

The Jefferson County ordinance covers discrimination based on sexual preference in employment, housing and public accommodations. The Louisville ordinance, passed in January, offers gays protection from discrimination only in employment.

A hearing on the ACLU request to enter the suit is set for Monday, the ACLU said.