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Michigan governor names anti-LGBTQ activist to state Civil Rights Commission

Ira Combs' history of anti-LGBTQ activism spans back almost two decades

By John Riley on February 3, 2018

[[Photo](#): Ira Combs, Jr.]



Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder is standing by his decision to name an anti-LGBTQ pastor to the state Civil Rights Commission, reports Michigan's PBS affiliate [WKAR](#).

The Civil Rights Commission hears and adjudicates claims of housing or employment discrimination. In recent years, there's been debate over whether LGBTQ people should be able to bring complaints of discrimination before the commission, even though Michigan lacks LGBTQ-inclusive civil rights laws.

But Snyder seems to have sent a message with his selection of Ira Combs, Jr., of the Greater Bible Way Temple in Jackson, Mich. Combs has made a name for himself as one of Michigan's most prominent anti-LGBTQ activists. In 2000, he marshaled a group of citizens

to oppose the formation of a Gay-Straight Alliance at a local high school. He opposed same-sex marriage, supporting efforts to ban it via constitutional amendment, and later supported the state's efforts to keep the ban in place. He also opposed a nondiscrimination ordinance that was passed in Jackson last year.

"It's hard to find somebody in the state of Michigan who spends more time fighting against gay rights than Ira Combs," Stephanie White, the executive director of Equality Michigan, told WKAR.

White also noted that Combs has frequently relied on discredited pseudoscience and deliberate misrepresentations about LGBTQ people, their families, and their lives when preaching his anti-LGBTQ rhetoric.

Next week, Gov. Snyder is expected to send one of his staff members to meet with civil rights groups objecting to Combs' presence on the commission. However, it seems he is largely unswayed by the criticism he's received for the appointment.

Rebecca Isaacs, the executive director of Equality Federation, blasted the appointment.

"People who come before a Civil Rights Commission because they have faced discrimination should be able to expect a fair hearing," she said in a statement. "Ira Combs's lengthy record of opposing equality stands in contrast to the vast majority of Michiganders who believe in fairness and equality for all, and he cannot be trusted.

"States that welcome and celebrate the diversity of all our families benefit culturally and economically," Isaacs continued. "If Governor Snyder wants to make Michigan a place where everyone feels welcome to visit, live, and do business, he should reconsider this decision."

Snyder is expected to run a commercial during the Super Bowl touting his record and major accomplishments as governor. But Kary Moss, the executive director of the ACLU of Michigan, said the Combs appointment is a negative as far as Snyder's record is concerned.

"At a time when our nation is so divided, the Governor's appointment to the commission of someone who has blatantly opposed the rights of the LGBTQ community is a huge disappointment," Moss said. "We expect more from our elected officials who are charged with protecting and representing all people in this state."

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