

The Honorable David G. Estudillo

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON
AT TACOMA**

PAUL D. ETIENNE, et al.,

Plaintiffs,

v.

ROBERT W. FERGUSON, et al.,

Defendants.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Plaintiff-Intervenor,

v.

STATE OF WASHINGTON,

Defendant.

NO. 3:25-cv-05461-DGE

STIPULATED MOTION TO
ENTER PERMANENT
INJUNCTION AND FINAL
JUDGMENT

AND

[PROPOSED] ORDER

NOTE ON MOTION CALENDAR:
Friday, October 10, 2025

I. STIPULATION

Plaintiffs Paul D. Etienne, Joseph J. Tyson, Thomas A. Daly, Frank R. Schuster, Eusebio L. Elizondo, Gary F. Lazzeroni, Gary M. Zender, Robert Pearson, Lutakome Nsubuga, Jesús Mariscal, Michael Kelly (Plaintiffs); Intervenor-Plaintiff United States of America; Defendants Robert W. Ferguson and Nicholas W. Brown (State Defendants); and Defendants Leesa Manion, Preston McCollam, Joseph Brusic, Randy Flyckt, Curt Liedkie, Eric Eisinger, Robert Sealby, Mark Nichols, Tony Golik, Dale Slack, Ryan Jurvakainen, Sean Lewis, Michael Golden, Shawn

1 Sant, Mathew Newberg, Kevin McRae, Norma Tillotson, Gregory Banks, James Kennedy, Chad
 2 Enright, Gregory Zempel, David Quesnel, Jonathan Meyer, Ty Albertson, Michael Dorcy, Albert
 3 Lin, Michael Rothman, Dolly Hunt, Mary Robnett, Amy Vira, Rich Weyrich, Adam Kick, Jason
 4 Cummings, Erika George, Jon Tunheim, Dan Bigelow, Gabe Acosta, Eric Richey, and Denis
 5 Tracy, in their official capacities (County Prosecutor Defendants), jointly move the Court,
 6 pursuant to Local Rule 7(d)(1) and Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 54 and 65(d), to enter a
 7 Permanent Injunction and Final Judgment, subject to the parties' agreement to be bound by the
 8 terms of this Stipulation and Proposed Order, including Exhibit A attached hereto.¹

9 On May 29, 2025, Plaintiffs filed a Complaint (Dkt. # 1) against the State Defendants
 10 and the County Prosecutor Defendants. The Complaint alleges that Section 26.44.030(1)(a) and
 11 (b) of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW), as amended by Senate Bill 5375 (2025), violates
 12 the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, as well as Article I, Section 11
 13 of the Washington Constitution. On June 5, 2025, Plaintiffs filed a Motion for Preliminary
 14 Injunction against all defendants (Dkt. # 65) seeking to preliminarily "block the investigation
 15 and enforcement of RCW § 26.44.030, as amended by Senate Bill 5375, to the extent it applies
 16 to information learned by Catholic clergy through the Sacrament of Confession." Dkt. # 65 at
 17 23.

18 On July 15, 2025, the Court entered a stipulated order subjecting the County Prosecutor
 19 Defendants to a preliminary injunction and staying proceedings against the County Prosecutor
 20 Defendants until entry of a final judgment (Dkt. # 224). As part of that stipulated order, the
 21 County Prosecutor Defendants agreed to "consent to the Court's final judgment against the
 22 remaining defendants and . . . not appeal any such judgment." Dkt. # 224 at 7.

23 On July 18, 2025, the Court entered a preliminary injunction against the State Defendants
 24 (Dkt. # 227), concluding that Plaintiffs are likely to succeed on the merits of their Free Exercise
 25

26 ¹ Since the complaint was filed, Dale Slack has been replaced by Jennine Christensen as Columbia County
 Prosecutor, and Kevin McCrae has been replaced by Brandon Guernsey as Grant County Prosecutor.

1 Clause challenge, that “there are serious questions going to the merits” of their Church
 2 Autonomy Doctrine and Establishment Clause claims, and that Plaintiffs otherwise met the
 3 requirements for the issuance of a preliminary injunction. Accordingly, the Court enjoined the
 4 State Defendants “from enforcing SB 5375 as to the Sacrament of Confession against the
 5 Plaintiffs in this action and all Roman Catholic priests in Washington who fall directly under the
 6 administration of Plaintiffs Etienne, Daly, and Tyson.” Dkt. # 227 at 25.

7 Intervenor-Plaintiff United States also filed a Motion for Preliminary Injunction
 8 (Dkt. # 138). In its papers in Opposition to the Preliminary Injunction, State Defendants
 9 represented to the Court that if Plaintiffs’ preliminary injunction was granted, the State would
 10 not seek to enforce RCW § 26.44.030 (2025) to information disclosed in the Catholic Sacrament
 11 of Confession or sacred confidences shared with any clergy while that order remains in force.
 12 Dkt. # 226. Because of those representations specifically, the United States later withdrew its
 13 Motion for Preliminary Injunction (Dkt. # 229).

14 The stipulating parties seek to avoid the costs and burdens of further litigation and
 15 conclusively resolve this matter, including by making permanent the Court’s Preliminary
 16 Injunction order (Dkt. # 227). Accordingly, the parties agree as follows:

17 1. Plaintiffs, the United States, the State Defendants, and the County Prosecutor
 18 Defendants stipulate to entry of the proposed Permanent Injunction attached hereto, enjoining
 19 all Defendants from enforcing RCW § 26.44.030 (2025), as to the Catholic Sacrament of
 20 Confession and/or any other privileged communication under RCW § 5.60.060(3).

21 2. State Defendants and County Prosecutor Defendants agree not to appeal the
 22 Preliminary Injunction order (Dkt. # 227), or to appeal from or otherwise challenge the
 23 enforceability or validity of this Stipulated Permanent Injunction Order and Final Judgment, or
 24 any other rulings entered to date in this matter by this Court, in this or any other proceeding.
 25
 26

3. State Defendants and County Prosecutor Defendants agree that the Court's Stipulated Permanent Injunction Order and Final Judgment in this matter has the same force and precedential effect as if it had been entered following a dispositive motion or trial on the merits.

4. All stipulating parties agree that they will not seek costs and attorneys' fees against any other stipulating party.

IT IS SO STIPULATED by and between the Parties.

I certify that this memorandum contains 818 words, in compliance with the Local Civil Rules.

DATED this 10th day of October 2025.

NICHOLAS W. BROWN
Attorney General

WILMER CUTLER PICKERING HALE
AND DORR LLP

/s/ Emma Grunberg

ALICIA O. YOUNG, WSBA #35553
KELLY A. PARADIS, WSBA #47175
EMMA GRUNBERG, WSBA #54659
Deputy Solicitors General
1125 Washington Street SE
PO Box 40100
Olympia, WA 98504-0100
360-753-6200
Alicia.Young@atg.wa.gov
Kelly.Paradis@atg.wa.gov
Emma.Grunberg@atg.wa.gov

*Attorneys for Defendants Robert W. Ferguson
and Nicholas W. Brown*

JASON CUMMINGS
Snohomish County Prosecuting Attorney

/s/ Geoffrey A. Enns

GEOFFREY A. ENNS, WSBA #40682
Deputy Prosecuting Attorney
3000 Rockefeller Ave. M/S 504
Everett, WA 98201
425-388-6330
Geoff.Enns@co.snohomish.wa.us

*Attorney for Defendants Preston McCollam,
Joseph Brusic, Randy Flyckt, Eric Eisinger,*

/s/ Siddharth Velamoor

MATTHEW T. MARTENS*
SIDDHARTH VELAMOOR, WSBA
#40965
DONNA FARAG*
2100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20037
202-663-6000
matthew.martens@wilmerhale.com
siddharth.velamoor@wilmerhale.com
donna.farag@wilmerhale.com

LEAH M. FUGERE*
350 South Grand Avenue, Suite 2400
Los Angeles, CA 90071
213-443-5300
leah.fugere@wilmerhale.com

ROBERT KINGSLEY SMITH*
60 State Street
Boston, MA 02109
617-526-6000
robert.smith@wilmerhale.com

CROWLEY LAW OFFICES, P.S.

Robert Sealby, Mark Nichols, Ryan Jurvakainen, Sean Lewis, Michael Golden, Shawn Sant, Norma Tillotson, Gregory Banks, Gregory Zempel, David Quesnel, Jonathan Meyer, Michael Dorcy, Albert Lin, Michael Rothman, Dolly Hunt, Mary Robnett, Amy Vira, Jason Cummings, Jon Tunheim, Dan Bigelow, Gabe Acosta, and Eric Richey

CHAD M. ENRIGHT
Kitsap County Prosecuting Attorney

/s/ Anna K. Aruiza

ANNA K. ARUIZA, WSBA #39663
Senior Deputy Prosecuting Attorney
614 Division St. MS-35A
Port Orchard, WA 98366-4676
360-337-4992
aaruiza@kitsap.gov

Attorney for Defendant Chad Enright

LEESA MANION
King County Prosecuting Attorney

/s/ Heidi Jacobsen-Watts

HEIDI JACOBSEN-WATTS, WSBA #35549
Senior Deputy Prosecuting Attorney
701 Fifth Ave., Suite 600
Seattle, WA 98104
206-477-1120
heidi.jacobsen-watts@kingcounty.gov

Attorney for Defendant Leesa Manion

JAMES KENNEDY
Jefferson County Prosecuting Attorney

/s/ Philip C. Hunsucker

PHILIP C. HUNSUCKER, WSBA #48692
Chief Civil Deputy Prosecuting Attorney
1820 Jefferson Street/P.O. Box 1220
Port Townsend, WA 98368
360-385-9180
PHunsucker@co.jefferson.wa.us

Attorney for Defendant James Kennedy

WILLIAM J. CROWLEY
600 University Street, Suite 1708
Seattle, WA 98101
206-224-7069
will@crowleylawoffices.com

BECKET FUND FOR RELIGIOUS
LIBERTY

MARK L. RIENZI*
ERIC C. RASSBACH*
WILLIAM J. HAUN*
LAURA WOLK SLAVIS*
1919 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20006
202-955-0095
mrienzi@becketfund.org
erassbach@becketfund.org
whaun@becketfund.org
lslavis@becketfund.org

FIRST LIBERTY INSTITUTE

HIRAM S. SASSER, III*
JEREMY DYS*
CHRIS MOTZ*
2001 W. Plano Pkwy., Ste. 1600
Plano, Texas 75075
972-941-4444
hsasser@firstliberty.org
jdys@firstliberty.org
cmotz@firstliberty.org

Attorneys for Plaintiffs

* Designates counsel admitted *pro hac vice*

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
JUSTICE
Housing and Civil Enforcement Section
Civil Rights Division

/s/ Michael E. Gates

HARMEET K. DHILLON

TONY GOLIK
Clark County Prosecuting Attorney

/s/ Amanda Migchelbrink
AMANDA MIGCHELBRINK, WSBA
#34223
Senior Deputy Prosecuting Attorney
1300 Franklin St., Suite 380
Vancouver, WA 98666-5000
564-397-2478
Amanda.Migchelbrink@clark.wa.gov

Attorney for Defendant Tony Golik

RICHARD E. WEYRICH
Skagit County Prosecuting Attorney

/s/ Frederick A. Haist
FREDERICK A. HAIST, WSBA #48937
Deputy Prosecuting Attorney
700 S. 2nd Street, Ste. 300
Mount Vernon, WA 98273
360-416-1600
fhaist@co.skagit.wa.us

Attorney for Defendant Richard Weyrich

EVANS, CRAVEN & LACKIE, P.S.

/s/ Rachel K. Stanley
RACHEL K. STANLEY, WSBA #58280
818 Riverside, Suite 250
Spokane, WA 99201-0910
509-455-5200
rstanley@ecl-law.com

*Attorney for Defendants Curt Liedike, Jennine
Christensen, Mathew Newburg, Brandon
Guernsey, Ty Albertson, Adam Kick, Erika
George, and Denis Tracy*

Assistant Attorney General
MICHAEL E. GATES
Deputy Assistant Attorney General
CARRIE PAGNUCCO
Chief
AMIE S. MURPHY
Deputy Chief
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW—4CON
Washington, DC 20530
202-305-5003
Amie.Murphy2@usdoj.gov

*Attorneys for Plaintiff-Intervenor United
States of America*

[PROPOSED] ORDER

PURSUANT TO THE FOREGOING STIPULATION, IT IS SO ORDERED:

This matter is before the Court on the Stipulated Motion to Enter Permanent Injunction and Final Judgment. Having reviewed the Motion, the docket and all related material, and good cause appearing therefrom, the Court ORDERS as follows:

1. The Court finds that: (i) Plaintiffs have pre-enforcement standing and their claims satisfy the constitutional component of ripeness; (ii) Plaintiffs' claims are prudentially ripe; (iii) RCW § 26.44.030 (2025) infringes Plaintiffs' free exercise of religion in violation of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution as applied to the Catholic Sacrament of Confession and/or any other privileged communication under RCW § 5.60.060(3); and (iv) there are serious questions going to the merits of whether RCW § 26.44.030 (2025) infringes Plaintiffs' rights under the U.S. Constitution's Establishment Clause and the Church Autonomy Doctrine.

2. In light of the findings and legal conclusions set out in paragraph 1 above, State Defendants and County Prosecutor Defendants are hereby subject to and bound by Exhibit A to this Order.

3. Plaintiffs, the United States, State Defendants, and County Prosecutor Defendants agree not to appeal the Court's ruling on Plaintiffs' Motion for Preliminary Injunction (Dkt. # 65) and agree not to appeal from or otherwise challenge the enforceability or validity of the Court's Stipulated Permanent Injunction Order and Final Judgment, or any other rulings entered to date in this matter by this Court, in this or any other proceeding.

4. This Stipulated Permanent Injunction Order and Final Judgment has the same force and precedential effect as if it had been entered following a dispositive motion or trial on the merits.

5. All parties are responsible for their own attorneys' fees and costs, and shall not be entitled to attorneys' fees and/or costs from any other party.

6. This order constitutes the Court's final judgment in this matter.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

DATED this ___ day of October 2025.

Hon. David G. Estudillo
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

Presented by:

NICHOLAS W. BROWN
Attorney General

WILMER CUTLER PICKERING HALE
AND DORR LLP

/s/ Emma Grunberg

ALICIA O. YOUNG, WSBA #35553
KELLY A. PARADIS, WSBA #47175
EMMA GRUNBERG, WSBA #54659
Deputy Solicitors General
1125 Washington Street SE
PO Box 40100
Olympia, WA 98504-0100
360-753-6200
Alicia.Young@atg.wa.gov
Kelly.Paradis@atg.wa.gov
Emma.Grunberg@atg.wa.gov

/s/ Siddharth Velamoor

MATTHEW T. MARTENS*
SIDDHARTH VELAMOOR, WSBA
#40965
DONNA FARAG*
2100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20037
202-663-6000
matthew.martens@wilmerhale.com
siddharth.velamoor@wilmerhale.com
donna.farag@wilmerhale.com

*Attorneys for Defendants Robert W. Ferguson
and Nicholas W. Brown*

LEAH M. FUGERE*
350 South Grand Avenue, Suite 2400
Los Angeles, CA 90071
213-443-5300
leah.fugere@wilmerhale.com

JASON CUMMINGS
Snohomish County Prosecuting Attorney

/s/ Geoffrey A. Enns

GEOFFREY A. ENNS, WSBA #40682
Deputy Prosecuting Attorney
3000 Rockefeller Ave. M/S 504
Everett, WA 98201
425-388-6330
Geoff.Enns@co.snohomish.wa.us

ROBERT KINGSLEY SMITH*
60 State Street
Boston, MA 02109
617-526-6000
robert.smith@wilmerhale.com

*Attorney for Defendants Preston McCollam,
Joseph Brusic, Randy Flyckt, Eric Eisinger,
Robert Sealby, Mark Nichols, Ryan
Jurvakainen, Sean Lewis, Michael Golden,
Shawn Sant, Norma Tillotson, Gregory
Banks, Gregory Zempel, David Quesnel,
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CROWLEY LAW OFFICES, P.S.

WILLIAM J. CROWLEY
600 University Street, Suite 1708
Seattle, WA 98101
206-224-7069
will@crowleylawoffices.com

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CHAD M. ENRIGHT
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MARK L. RIENZI*
ERIC C. RASSBACH*
WILLIAM J. HAUN*
LAURA WOLK SLAVIS*
1919 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20006
202-955-0095
mrienzi@becketfund.org
erassbach@becketfund.org
whaun@becketfund.org
lslavis@becketfund.org

/s/ Anna K. Aruiza

ANNA K. ARUIZA, WSBA #39663
Senior Deputy Prosecuting Attorney
614 Division St. MS-35A
Port Orchard, WA 98366-4676
360-337-4992
aaruiza@kitsap.gov

Attorney for Defendant Chad Enright

LEESA MANION
King County Prosecuting Attorney

FIRST LIBERTY INSTITUTE

/s/ Heidi Jacobsen-Watts

HEIDI JACOBSEN-WATTS, WSBA #35549
Senior Deputy Prosecuting Attorney
701 Fifth Ave., Suite 600
Seattle, WA 98104
206-477-1120
heidi.jacobsen-watts@kingcounty.gov

Attorney for Defendant Leesa Manion

HIRAM S. SASSER, III*
JEREMY DYS*
CHRIS MOTZ*
2001 W. Plano Pkwy., Ste. 1600
Plano, Texas 75075
972-941-4444
hsasser@firstliberty.org
jdys@firstliberty.org
cmotz@firstliberty.org

JAMES KENNEDY
Jefferson County Prosecuting Attorney

Attorneys for Plaintiffs

* Designates counsel admitted *pro hac vice*

/s/ Philip C. Hunsucker

PHILIP C. HUNSUCKER, WSBA #48692
Chief Civil Deputy Prosecuting Attorney
1820 Jefferson Street/P.O. Box 1220
Port Townsend, WA 98368
360-385-9180
PHunsucker@co.jefferson.wa.us

Attorney for Defendant James Kennedy

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
JUSTICE
Housing and Civil Enforcement Section
Civil Rights Division

/s/ Michael E. Gates

HARMEET K. DHILLON
Assistant Attorney General
MICHAEL E. GATES
Deputy Assistant Attorney General
CARRIE PAGNUCCO
Chief
AMIE S. MURPHY

TONY GOLIK
Clark County Prosecuting Attorney

/s/ Amanda Migchelbrink

1 AMANDA MIGCHELBRINK, WSBA
#34223
2 Senior Deputy Prosecuting Attorney
1300 Franklin St., Suite 380
3 Vancouver, WA 98666-5000
564-397-2478
4 Amanda.Migchelbrink@clark.wa.gov

5 *Attorney for Defendant Tony Golik*

6
7 RICHARD E. WEYRICH
Skagit County Prosecuting Attorney

8 /s/ Frederick A. Haist

9 FREDERICK A. HAIST, WSBA #48937
Deputy Prosecuting Attorney
700 S. 2nd Street, Ste. 300
10 Mount Vernon, WA 98273
360-416-1600
11 fhaist@co.skagit.wa.us

12 *Attorney for Defendant Richard Weyrich*

13
14 EVANS, CRAVEN & LACKIE, P.S.

15 /s/ Rachel K. Stanley

16 RACHEL K. STANLEY, WSBA #58280
818 Riverside, Suite 250
17 Spokane, WA 99201-0910
509-455-5200
rstanley@ecl-law.com

18 *Attorney for Defendants Curt Liedike, Jennine*
19 *Christensen, Mathew Newburg, Brandon*
20 *Guernsey, Ty Albertson, Adam Kick, Erika*
21 *George, and Denis Tracy*
22
23
24
25
26

Deputy Chief
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW—4CON
Washington, DC 20530
202-305-5003
Amie.Murphy2@usdoj.gov

*Attorneys for Plaintiff-Intervenor United
States of America*

EXHIBIT A

Pursuant to the Stipulated Motion of all Plaintiffs, Plaintiff-Intervenor, and all Defendants, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that Defendants and their agents, servants, employees, attorneys, and successors, are permanently enjoined, pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 65, from enforcing or attempting to enforce RCW § 26.44.030 (2025) as applied to information disclosed solely in the Catholic Sacrament of Confession and/or any other privileged communication under RCW § 5.60.060(3).

It is further hereby ordered that Defendants and their agents, servants, employees, attorneys, and successors, are permanently enjoined, pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 65, from enforcing RCW § 26.44.030(1)(b) (2025) to deny members of the clergy the benefit of any privileged communication exception provided in RCW § 5.60.060 that RCW § 26.44.030(1)(b) allows for other reporters.