

Litigator of the Week: City of Houston's HERO

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Geoffrey Harrison

When the city of Houston tapped Geoffrey Harrison to represent it, the municipality scored a valuable and victorious bargain.

Harrison, a partner in Susman Godfrey, defended the city against a lawsuit filed by the proponents of repealing a recently passed Houston Equal Rights Ordinance, HERO, which grants equal protections to LGBT individuals.

Harrison provided his legal services pro bono to the city, and also represented its mayor and city secretary, who were also named as defendants in the lawsuit. If his clients had paid for the representation, the price tag would have been nearly \$1 million. As significantly, Harrison helped the city and its officials secure on April 17 a final judgment, which found the plaintiffs' referendum petition unenforceable.

"The jury's verdict and the judge's ruling are a powerful smack-down against the forces of discrimination and intolerance," Harrison wrote in an emailed response to questions for this story. The plaintiffs, including Jared Woodfill, a former Harris County Republican Party chairman and a Houston plaintiffs lawyer, filed the lawsuit after the city rejected their referendum petition because of alleged irregularities with the voters' signatures required to get it on a ballot.

Andy Taylor of Andy Taylor & Associates of Brenham, who represents the plaintiffs, did not return a call. But in a reply brief filed one day before the court issued the final judgment, the plaintiffs alleged that Harrison's clients had wrongly argued that the petition signing and voters' addresses had to be consistent on all parts of the documents.

Harrison expects the plaintiffs to appeal, but he still relishes his clients' win. "Winning the HERO case is more than extremely satisfying—it is an important victory for equal rights. We are on the right side of history, and the right side of now," he wrote.