



## Isn't Religious Freedom a good thing?

Freedom of religion is one of our most fundamental rights as Americans. This is why it is already protected in the very First Amendment in the U.S. Constitution. However, Religious Exemption protections are being discussed as a needed part of the Equality Act. Freedom of religion is not about allowing an individual to use their religious beliefs to discriminate against others by denying them goods and services.

## How will these expanded Religious Exemptions in the Equality Act affect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) people and families?

The extent of how Religious Exemptions will affect the Equality Act has not been made clear, but one thing is clear, the lives of LGBTQIA+ people and their families will be greatly affected. Giving permission for an individual to have the right based on a personally deeply held religious belief to refuse service, accommodations, goods and protections to LGBTQIA+ people is dangerous.

## Will these laws affect only LGBTQIA+ people?

No. As this harmful discrimination makes its way into states and federal policies it would allow individuals to claim that any number of laws – including, but not limited to domestic violence and nondiscrimination laws – don't apply to them.

- A hotel owner who objects to cohabitation outside of marriage could refuse to provide a room to any unmarried couple.
- A landlord who believes a man should be the head of a household could refuse to rent an apartment to a single mother.
- A guidance counselor could refuse to help a gay teenager by saying it goes against their religious belief.
- An abusive spouse could claim that domestic violence laws do not apply to them because their religion teaches that a spouse has the right to discipline their family (their spouse and children) as they see fit.

Religious Exemption laws are written with language that is too broad, poorly written, and with loopholes that open the door for dangerously harmful, unintended consequences for people in states across the country.

## As a Christian what can I do to help pass the Equality Act?

The single most important action you can take towards ensuring all Americans remain free from discrimination is to start a conversation with the people you know about why caring for individuals, families, and communities is important to you. Think about who you can talk with.

- Schedule a meeting your State Representative or write them an email to share how your faith teaches that discrimination is wrong.
- Write a letter to your editor. Letters to the editor are one of the most read sections of your paper. Be public in your support against discrimination.
- Talk with your pastor about why the Equality Act matters and encourage them to make a public statement in your church newsletter, Facebook page or blog. Ask them to talk about it in one of their sermons.
- Let people know your faith teaches you. . .
  - *to love God and love my neighbor*
  - *that it is not my place to judge others*
  - *to treat others as they would want to be treated*