

March 30, 2015

Dear Governor Mike Pence, House Speaker Brian Bosma, and President of the Senate David Long:

We write to you today as leaders of organizations representing tens-of-thousands of Hoosiers and millions of Americans who are committed to advancing equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people to urge you to support the Fairness for All Hoosiers Act, the legislation put forward today by local Indiana advocates to address the so-called Religious Freedom Restoration Act (SB 101) that was signed into law last week.

At a press conference featuring legislative leaders this morning, it was said several times that it was never the intent, design or effect of Senate Bill 101 to discriminate against any class of people in Indiana and that you will work together to find a way to make that clear legislatively.

We share the desire stated at the press conference to ensure that nobody in Indiana is discriminated against, which is why we call on you to support the Fairness for All Hoosiers Act, which will extend current nondiscrimination protections on the books in Indiana to ensure LGBT people in Indiana are not discriminated against.

Indiana is already on the verge of losing billions of dollars and thousands of jobs because of this dangerous law. Major organizations have announced they are cancelling conferences and companies are pulling business from Indiana to protect their employees and customers from discrimination.

We want Indiana to be the thriving state that it can and should be, but that will never happen with state-sanctioned discrimination against LGBT people on the books. That is why we are calling on you to fix this damaging law by supporting the changes laid out in the Fairness for All Hoosiers Act. In addition to ensuring all LGBT Hoosiers are protected, the proposed bill also includes provisions to ensure that state and local laws against discrimination are not eroded by SB 101.

The fact is that SB 101—like similar religious refusal bills that have been introduced in other states—allows government employees to claim a right to refuse services to LGBT people. An on-duty police officer could say that refusing to help a gay person – or any other Hoosier– goes against his or her religious beliefs. Government officials who have sworn an oath to serve the public should not be allowed to pick and choose who they're going to serve based on their religious beliefs.

SB 101 also allows individual restaurants, hotels, and other businesses and corporations to claim a right to refuse to serve visitors and citizens of Indiana simply because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, even in localities where such discrimination is unlawful. This is not the Indiana you spoke about on national television earlier today, and it's not what Indiana should be known for. We can all agree that Hoosiers from all walks of life deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

During debate on SB 101 there were repeated calls for amendments to ensure that the Indiana RFRA could not be used to allow discrimination. These amendments were rejected, leaving the inescapable impression that the proponents of this law did indeed intend to authorize discrimination against LGBT people.

Freedom of religion is one of our most cherished and fundamental rights as Americans. That's why it is protected in the Indiana and United States constitutions. However, that freedom does not give any of us the right to harm or discriminate against others.

Over the weekend, James Danko, president of Butler University, released a statement denouncing SB 101, stating: “I strongly encourage our state leaders to take immediate action to address the damage done by this legislation and to reaffirm the fact that Indiana is a place that welcomes, supports, respects, and values all people.”

We concur. You can prove that you agree by supporting the legislation put forward this morning by leaders in your state to ensure that all LGBT Hoosiers are protected from discrimination.

It’s time to show the rest of the nation that Indiana is open for business – for everyone.



NATIONAL CENTER FOR LESBIAN RIGHTS

making the case for equality

