

ACLU Comment on Indiana Gov. Mike Pence Signing Discriminatory 'Religious Freedom' Bill into Law

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INDIANAPOLIS -- Gov. Mike Pence today signed a bill into law that would allow anyone to use their religious beliefs to claim that they have a right to refuse to follow anti-discrimination protections and other laws.

SB 101 is a Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) bill modeled off Arizona's SB 1062 that Gov. Jan Brewer vetoed last year following strong opposition from the local and national business communities. In response to Gov. Pence's public support of the bill, widespread discontent was voiced by business and faith communities: the GenCon convention, Indianapolis Colts player Pat McAfee, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and the first openly gay NBA player, Jason Collins.

"The timing of this legislation is important to understanding its intent:

The bill was introduced as a backlash reaction to achieving marriage equality for same-sex couples in Indiana," said Jane Henegar, executive director of the ACLU of Indiana. "We are deeply disappointed that the governor and state lawmakers have been tone-deaf to the cries of legions of Hoosiers -- including businesses, convention leaders, faith communities, and more than 10,000 people who signed petitions against the bill -- who say they don't want this harmful legislation to impair the reputation of our state and harm our ability to attract the best and brightest to Indiana."

The ACLU and other groups took a stand against the bill by petitioning Gov. Pence to veto. It is the first state to pass a RFRA this legislative session and is closely trailed by bills in Georgia and Arkansas that would have similar consequences.

"While we are disappointed by the outcome in Indiana, we remain heartened by the thousands of Americans across the country who, regardless of their faith or political persuasion, spoke out against this misguided legislation," said Eunice Rho, advocacy and policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union.

"Unfortunately, the fight continues, with states like Arkansas and Georgia dangerously close to passing similar legislation. We hope leaders in those states are paying attention to the public outcry in their states and seeing the economic backlash in Indiana and elsewhere. Religious freedom is a core American value, one that the ACLU has been defending since its founding. However, we will continue to oppose any attempts to use religion to discriminate."

The Indiana RFRA is one of 24 introduced in 15 states this year that could allow someone to use their religious beliefs to discriminate. Numerous other bills specifically single out the LGBT community for unequal treatment.

State-by-state bill tracking information is available on the ACLU website here: <https://www.aclu.org/lgbt-rights/anti-lgbt-religious-refusals-legislation-across-country>.