

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 • MADISON, WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • WWW.FFRF.ORG

February 9 , 2022

SUBMITTED ONLINE

The Hon. Julian B. Garrett, Chair
The Hon. Rob Hogg
The Hon. Craig Steven Williams
Senate Local Government Subcommittee

Re: Testimony in strong opposition to S.F. 2170

Dear Senator Garrett and Local Government Committee members:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) and our Iowa membership to urge the subcommittee not to advance S.F. 2170, a state “Religious Freedom Restoration Act” (RFRA). FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 37,000 members across the country, including more than 200 members in Iowa. FFRF protects the constitutional separation between state and church and educates about nontheism.

The federal RFRA law is directly responsible for the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Hobby Lobby* debacle, allowing religious business owners to avoid following laws that they say conflict with their religious beliefs. State RFRA’s, based on the federal version, embolden corporations and business owners to discriminate against LGBTQ people, religious minorities, the nonreligious and any other group their religion declares inferior.

FFRF has been warning against the dangers of RFRA’s since before the *Hobby Lobby* case was decided.¹ While some of RFRA’s initial advocates intended the law to protect minority religious rights, the reality has been that the law allows evangelical Christians and members of other major religions to discriminate against already marginalized minorities by citing a religious justification. This not only hurts LGBTQ people, but also directly harms religious minorities. This ironically hinders religious freedom, revealing the bill’s name as a misnomer.

¹ See FFRF *amicus curiae* brief to the U.S. Supreme Court (Jan. 27, 2014), available at ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/19996-ffrf-other-advocates-file-brief-against-hobby-lobby.

Americans are no longer ignorant to the harm caused by these bills. Other states that have passed RFRA's have reeled from the economic blowback as major companies and grassroots organizers alike have pushed for statewide boycotts based on the discriminatory rule. This was perhaps most memorably seen in Indiana, when then-governor Mike Pence signed the bill into law and the backlash was so severe that he scrambled to "fix" the bill, leaving discriminatory evangelicals feeling betrayed.² Indiana would have been far better off if it had never passed the bill.

Non-religious Americans are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population by religious identification — 35 percent of Americans are non-Christians, and this includes the more than one in four Americans who now identify as religiously unaffiliated.³ A recent survey found that 21 percent of Americans born after 1999 are atheist or agnostic.⁴

This bill would allow discrimination under the guise of protecting religious freedom. Please oppose S.F. 2170. Thank you for your time.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker
Co-presidents
ALG/DB:rdj

² See, e.g., Dwight Adams, *RFRA: Why the 'religious freedom law' signed by Mike Pence was so controversial*, IndyStar (Apr. 25, 2018).

³ Pew Research Center, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," (Oct. 17, 2019) at <https://pewrsr.ch/2VPiES7>.

⁴ *Atheism Doubles Among Generation Z*, The Barna Group (Jan. 24, 2018), <https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/>.