

Bill to Protect Counselors' Freedom of Conscience Reaches This Governor's Desk

Tennessee state Sen. Mark Green (R-Ashland City), a physician, says he routinely refers patients who want birth control to another doctor.

He believes that's a right other medical professionals should be afforded. That's why he was a vocal supporter of House Bill 1840, which provides that no counselor or therapist should be required to provide services related to a client's goals, outcomes, or behaviors that are in conflict with sincerely held religious beliefs.

"I am allowed to refer that patient to another provider and not prescribe the morning-after pill based on my religious beliefs," he said last week during debate of the bill, which eventually passed by a 68-22 vote. "This amendment allows another medical profession—therapists and psychologists and psychiatrists—to do the same thing."

Turns out making the Bible the state's "official book" wasn't the most contentious piece of legislation the Tennessee legislature would tackle this year.

The American Counseling Association lashed out at the proposal, calling it a "hate bill." The legislation would allow counselors and therapists in the state to violate ACA's Code of Ethics.

"Hate Bill 1840 is nothing but a way for hateful legislators to codify their prejudicial beliefs," ACA Director of Government Affairs Art Terrazas said. "The fact that they chose to change the bill from permitting counselors to deny services based on their own 'strongly held religious beliefs'

to permitting counselors to deny services based on their own 'strongly held personal beliefs,' proves that they want to allow for even greater levels of discrimination."

ACA is urging Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam to veto the bill. He has yet to act on the bill, but has made comments publicly that indicate he has reservations about the legislation's overall impact.

GLAAD has jumped on the bandwagon, as well, calling upon the music industry headquartered in Nashville to put pressure on Haslam and the legislature. The group is also outraged over House Bill 2414, a "bathroom bill" meant to ensure people use the bathrooms that correspond with the sexes identified on their birth certificates.

"There is no doubt that these anti-LGBT bills will jeopardize this state's economy," GLAAD President & CEO Sarah Kate Ellis said during a press conference this week in Nashville. "Nashville is America's music capital, and the companies, artists, and allied businesses here alone contribute more than \$9.7 billion dollars to this state's economy. I am here today to call on the country music industry to stand with us, alongside television networks and film studios who stood with us in Georgia, in a united front against discrimination."