

Energy Department to Monitor Data on Religious Exemptions

Senator James Lankford (R-OK) warned that the Department of Energy policy requiring the agency to collect and store religious exemption requests may violate the First Amendment.

The policy aims to “collect, maintain, and disseminate records on employees and applicants for employment who seek and receive medical and non-medical accommodations.”

Those whose information will be maintained in the system include “federal employees or applicants for employment requesting accommodation based on a ‘sincerely held’ religious belief, practice, or observance under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act,” such as requests for a medical or religious accommodation.

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Information pertaining to the requestor’s “religious or spiritual leader’s name, email address, and phone number; name, email address, and phone number of third parties involved in assisting the requestor with making the request, such as a friend, health professional, or family member,” must also be provided.

In a letter obtained by The Washington Stand, Lankford expressed to DOE official Ann Dunkin his “strong opposition to the Department of Energy’s recent notice regarding the establishment of a new system of records...”

The senator warned that the policy “represents a grave violation of religious liberty as protected under the First Amendment and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.” He added that “collecting detailed records on an individual’s sincerely

held religious beliefs and practices – alongside other personal and sensitive information – poses a significant threat to the privacy and religious freedoms of federal employees.”

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“The federal government has an obligation to protect religious liberty, ensuring that individuals are not subject to unnecessary scrutiny or invasive data collection that could deter them from exercising their constitutionally protected rights,” he noted.

Lankford further stated that the DOE policy “risks creating an environment in which employees may feel compelled to disclose private details about their faith or religious practices in order to justify their accommodation requests,” which may lead to “potential religious discrimination or bias in the workplace.” He then asked the agency to “consider alternative ways to ensure reasonable accommodations are granted without compromising the privacy and religious liberties of federal employees.”

I’m deeply concerned about the Department of Energy’s new system to track religious accommodation requests. Federal employees shouldn’t have to disclose details about their faith to justify their rights. Religious liberty must be protected, not violated. I’m urging DOE to...

– Sen. James Lankford (@SenatorLankford) October 30, 2024

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