

Tennessee Governor Signs Freedom of Conscience Bill Into Law

Wednesday, Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam signed Senate Bill 1556, which provides for “freedom of conscience” protections for counselors and therapists, into law.

The bill had been blasted by the American Counseling Association, as well as a number of LGBT “rights” groups. But Haslam said in an official statement after signing SB 1556 into law that he felt it offered key protections that weren’t being reported by the media.

“Although Senate Bill 1556 has received attention for its perceived focus, my job is to look at the actual substance of the legislation,” he said. “After considerable thought and discussion with counselors both for and against the bill, I have decided to sign Senate Bill 1556.

“There are two key provisions of this legislation that addressed concerns I had about clients not receiving care. First, the bill clearly states that it ‘shall not apply to a counselor or therapist when an individual seeking or undergoing counseling is in imminent danger of harming themselves or others.’ Secondly, the bill requires that any counselor or therapist who feels they cannot serve a client due to the counselor’s sincerely held principles must coordinate a referral of the client to another counselor or therapist who will provide the counseling or therapy.

“The substance of this bill doesn’t address a group, issue or belief system. Rather, it allows counselors—just as we allow other professionals like doctors and lawyers—to refer a client to another counselor when the goals or behaviors would violate a sincerely held principle. I believe it is reasonable to

allow these professionals to determine if and when an individual would be better served by another counselor better suited to meet his or her needs."