

Florida Bill Would Ban LGBT 'Discrimination'

Known as the "Anti Discrimination Bill," Jacksonville City Council Bill 2012-296 is finding plenty opposition among people of faith.

That's because some lawmakers want to add the words "sexual orientation, gender identity or expression" to current discrimination laws in the Florida city.

Florida Family Policy Council President and General Counsel John Stemberger is standing with former Jacksonville City Council President Ginger Soud, legal expert Roger Gannam, attorney Joey Vaughn and other leaders to highlight major concerns with the city's proposed nondiscrimination ordinance. Some Jacksonville councilmen have reportedly received well over 2,000 calls and emails in opposition to ordinance 296.

"A vote for this sexual orientation ordinance is a vote against Florida law defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman. If this body enacts this bill it will further undermine the long-term stability of Florida's Marriage Protection Amendment," Stemberger says, referring to the state constitutional amendment adopted in 2008 by 62 percent of Florida's voters, including 69 percent of Jacksonville voters.

Such precedents are being used as arguments against similar marriage protections in California, Iowa, New Hampshire, Washington, D.C, Vermont and elsewhere.

"This bill will create more discrimination than it will prevent," says Soud, pointing to forced multi-gender restrooms, suppressed free speech in the workplace and complicated religious exemptions as just the beginning of the issues it raises. "The citizens of Jacksonville should be alarmed by this legislation."

As opponents see it, the ordinance would be bad for businesses that would be forced to expend funds on gender-neutral facilities and questionable legal challenges. It would also suppress free speech, especially in the workplace; and freedom of religion, particularly at hospitals and health-care facilities.

“Ordinance 296 is probably the most radical and open-ended ordinance ever to be thrust upon the city of Jacksonville by organized outside forces,” says Gannam. “It allows government intrusion into private business decisions, will trample on people’s right to free speech and freedom of religion, and will assault the privacy and modesty of individuals and families.”

Raymond Johnson, founder and president of Biblical Concepts Ministries, is working to educate and activate pastors and congregations to contact council members and attend meetings to help defeat this bill.

“We oppose this bill for multiple reasons. First, fundamental evangelical Christians with a biblical worldview agree homosexuality is an abominable sin according to Romans 1:22-32, and anyone supporting this bill may be in danger of having a ‘reprobate mind,’ according to verse 28,” Johnson says. “Therefore we are refuting the small group of local pastors supporting this bill as they do not represent the majority of mainstream Christianity.”

Currently, a vote on the bill has been tabled until next month.