

Indiana Republicans Meet With LGBT Groups Seeking to Fix Religious Freedom Law

Republican lawmakers in Indiana were meeting with gay and lesbian groups on Wednesday as they rushed to re-craft a potentially discriminatory Religious Freedom Restoration Act that sparked national outrage.

The rewritten law could be ready as early as Thursday, said Tory Flynn, spokeswoman for Indiana House Speaker Brian Bosma.

Indiana's Republican Governor Mike Pence pledged on Tuesday to rewrite the law he rushed through last week after Wal-Mart Stores Inc., Apple Inc. and other major businesses said it sent a message that the state was intolerant.

Wal-Mart, the world's biggest retailer, and other companies also piled pressure on Arkansas' Republican Governor Asa Hutchinson, asking him to veto a similar law that was sent to his desk on Tuesday by the state legislature.

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Wal-Mart, based in Bentonville, Arkansas, issued a statement from Chief Executive Doug McMillon asking Hutchinson to veto the legislation, saying the bill threatened to undermine "the spirit of inclusion" in the state.

Hutchinson was due to speak on the bill at 10:30 a.m. central (1530 GMT).

Twenty U.S. states have Religious Freedom Restoration Act laws, known as RFRAs, that allow individuals to sue the government if they feel their First Amendment religious rights have been violated.

But Indiana and Arkansas's RFRA's have been criticized for going further, allowing lawsuits between private parties. That raised the possibility that businesses such as photographers or florists could use the law to refuse to provide services for same-sex weddings.

Bosma was rushing to get a rewritten law on Pence's desk this week, after the governor recognized on Tuesday he had to "fix" the law and make sure it did not open the door to discrimination.

Bosma's spokeswoman said he was meeting with LGBT groups and other officials, adding: "He's not operating in a silo, he's making sure that this is language that will at least quell some of the people's concerns."

"It is our intent to do it this week, and potentially as early as tomorrow," Flynn said.

Arkansas and Indiana are the first states that have passed RFRA legislation since same-sex marriage became legal in many states last year.

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