

Passage of Respect for Marriage Act 'Silences Those Who May Disagree'

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The Respect for Marriage Act passed with bi-partisan support in the U.S. Senate Tuesday with a vote of 61 to 36.

While it doesn't force churches to perform or host same-sex ceremonies, religious freedom advocates say it will target faith-based organizations and individuals who refuse to serve gay couples due to their religious convictions.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) hailed it as a victory for equality. "No matter who you are or who you love, you too deserve dignity and equal treatment under the law," Schumer said.

The legislation gives federal protection to same-sex marriage, ensuring that government officials must recognize those performed in other states.

Twelve Republicans voted for the bill, though most opposed it on religious freedom grounds.

"What it really does is silences any individual who may disagree and discourages any faith-based entity from cooperating with government, to be able to say, if you want to partner with the state in any area, you probably aren't welcome because you don't share the same beliefs," said Sen. James Lankford (R-OK).

While the bill is supposed to protect non-profits from losing their tax-exempt status, some senators wanted stronger language.

The Senate rejected three Republican amendments from Senators Mike Lee, Marco Rubio and Lankford.

Lankford also highlighted concerns for protecting Christians in the marketplace, like baker Jack Phillips, who has been sued several times for declining to bake cakes for same-sex weddings and transgender reveal parties.

“So, their choice would be either not to provide those services or to abandon their faith,” added Lankford.

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