

This Religious Freedom Bill Could Protect Christian Business Owners From Gay Rights Backlash

A controversial Indiana bill that could protect business owners who don't want to provide services for same-sex couples moved closer to law on Monday, after passage by the state's House.

Senate Bill 101, known as the "Religious Freedom Restoration Act," was approved by the Republican-controlled House by 63-31. A version was previously passed by the Republican-controlled Senate, and Republican Governor Mike Pence said he will sign it.

"The legislation, SB 101, is about respecting and reassuring Hoosiers that their religious freedoms are intact," Pence said in a statement. The bill will now go back to the Senate and if that chamber concurs with the House version, it will go to Pence for being signed into law.

Supporters of the law say it will keep government entities from forcing business owners – such as bakeries and florists who don't want to provide services to gay couples – from acting in ways contrary to strongly held religious beliefs. Gay marriage became legal in Indiana last year following an appellate court ruling.

Supporter Micah Clark, executive director of the American Family Association of Indiana, tweeted after its passage in the House on Monday that the bill was a "good, tested, protective shield for all faiths."

Opponents called it a "religious discrimination bill" which

would allow private businesses, individuals and organizations to discriminate against gays and others on religious grounds.

Social conservatives have pushed for such laws following court rulings legalizing same-sex marriage, and in anticipation of a U.S. Supreme Court ruling this year on whether states can ban same-sex marriage.

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