



GILES COUNTY BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

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Senator Marsha Blackburn
357 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Senator Bill Hagerty
B11 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senators,

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Giles County Baptist Association, an organization consisting of 22 autonomous and individual churches joined by a common faith in Jesus Christ, in opposition to a bill coming before the United States Senate known as the Equality Act. As we understand it, this bill would add "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" as protected classes under federal civil rights law. In effect, it is our understanding that this bill:

- ◇ Could designate school, churches, and healthcare organizations as "public accommodations," meaning that these organizations could be forced to accept beliefs and mandates that run contrary to our deeply held religious convictions.
- ◇ Could legislate an allowance of boys in girls' sports, boys in girls' locker rooms, men in women's shelters, and men in women's prisons.
- ◇ Could use the force of law to strip Christians, as well as other religious faiths, of their right to hire people of a shared faith and belief system to pursue their deeply held religious undertakings.
- ◇ Could be a government tool used to deny or threaten accreditation to religious colleges and universities if they do not apply sexual orientation and gender identity to dorms sports, places of privacy, and even teachings.

Human dignity is central to what we believe because every person is made in the image of God and should be treated with respect and compassion. The Equality Act claims to protect people experiencing same-sex attraction or gender confusion from discrimination. But instead, the bill represents the imposition by Congress of new and divisive beliefs regarding 'gender' that are in conflict with and hinder the free exercise of our long held religious convictions. We feel this is a violation of our First Amendment Constitutional right regarding our ability to freely exercise our religious beliefs.

We believe in the God of the Bible. We believe that God is loving, just, and holy: so loving and just that He sent His Son to die to pay the punishment for every person's sin that would accept the Gospel (good news) of Jesus; so just that He gave us His Holy Word to provide guidance for living righteous lives in accordance with His righteous standards, to His everlasting glory; and so Holy that He does not conform to the values of this world, rather, He long ago established His Holy standard and has communicated it to us through His Word, the Bible. The Bible also calls Christians to be holy (distinct or set apart from worldly values):

1 Peter 1:14-16 (NASB)

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

In effect, the Equality Act creates a situation where Christians may be compelled to decide who they will serve: God or the United States government. This should not be so.

A federal sexual orientation and gender identity law could force any church to open up private facilities—including sex-specific bathrooms, showers, and sleeping areas—to members of the opposite sex.

The Equality Act could totally eliminate or negatively impact countless charitable and benevolent organizations that serve numerous communities in our country that are in need.

The Equality Act actually furthers inequality, especially for women and girls, by punishing anyone who does not agree with a single viewpoint of marriage and biological sex.

A federal sexual orientation and gender identity law would empower the government to interfere in how regular everyday Americans think, speak, and act at home, at school, at work and at play. Any bill promoting such authoritarianism presents a clear and significant danger to our freedoms.

I have telephoned both of your offices in Washington D.C. and it is my understanding that you are in opposition to this bill as well. I'm writing this letter to clearly state our association's position and offer our support and encouragement in your endeavors to defeat this bill and to call upon you to use all the resources at your disposal to protect our religious freedoms. Thank you.

Rick Bilyeu
Steering Committee Chairman
Giles County Baptist Association

CC: President Joe Biden
Governor Bill Lee
Mayor Pat Ford
Steve Holt, Association Liaison, TBMB
Giles County Baptist Association Pastors
Pulaski Citizen Newspaper