

April 21, 2015

Mr. Jason Chaffetz
Chairman
House Oversight & Government Reform
Committee
2236 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Mr. Elijah Cummings
Ranking Member
House Oversight & Government Reform
Committee
2230 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Oppose Attempts to Curtail D.C. Civil Rights

Dear Chairman Chaffetz and Ranking Member Cummings:

The undersigned religious, interfaith, and civil liberties organizations that advocate for freedom of religion and belief write to urge you to reject any and all congressional efforts, including resolutions of disapproval, that would prevent two D.C. civil rights bills from taking effect. The D.C. Council unanimously passed both the Reproductive Health Non-Discrimination Amendment Act of 2014 (RHNDAA) and the Human Rights Amendment Act of 2014 (HRAA) to support one basic underlying principle: fairness. The bills help ensure that others are treated fairly—as we all would like to be treated. These bills do not violate religious freedom, but instead protect freedom of conscience of and ensure equal treatment for all students and employees.

We urge you to oppose H J. Res. 43, which seeks to overturn the RHNDAA. The RHNDAA strengthens the District's existing nondiscrimination protections so that employees in D.C. and their dependents do not face employment discrimination because of their personal reproductive health care decisions.

The RHNDAA would ensure that employees and their families can make their own private health decisions, based on their own consciences and in consultation with their own physicians, without fear of losing their job. Business owners are absolutely entitled to their personal religious beliefs—but they cannot use their beliefs to justify discrimination against their employees.

Similarly, we urge you to oppose H. J. Res. 44, which would repeal the HRAA. The HRAA ensures that all educational institutions in D.C. provide access to school facilities and services for all student clubs equally. Contrary to opponents' claims, the HRAA does not require religiously affiliated schools to provide LGBT student groups with funding or official recognition. The HRAA simply upholds students' freedom of conscience by repealing a congressionally imposed exemption to D.C. law that allows religiously affiliated educational institutions to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation.

Despite opponents' claims, neither bill violates the religious freedom protections found in the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment or the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). The two bills are neutral and generally applicable because they have the effect of applying nondiscrimination protections to all employers and all educational institutions in the District; neither single out a faith group or religious practice. Moreover, neither bill requires a religious organization to endorse any action

that conflicts with its religious teachings. Finally, each bill furthers the government's compelling interest in eradicating discrimination in the District.

Religious freedom is a fundamental American value. It guarantees us the freedom to hold any belief we choose without government interference. It cannot, however, be used to trump others' civil rights, and it should not justify striking down laws that ensure people are treated fairly. We should strive to expand civil rights protections, not curtail them.

We urge you to oppose any attempts to curtail civil rights in the District of Columbia, including H. J. Res. 43 and H. J. Res. 44.

Sincerely,

Americans United for Separation of Church and State
Anti-Defamation League
Catholics for Choice
Center for Inquiry
Disciples for Choice
Disciples Justice Action Network
Equal Justice Task Force of African American Ministers In Action
Equal Partners in Faith
Hindu American Foundation
Institute for Science and Human Values, Inc.
Interfaith Alliance
Methodist Federation for Social Action
Metropolitan Community Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Secular Coalition for America
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)
Union for Reform Judaism
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society

cc: Members of the Committee