

An Open Letter: Why NC Needs the Religious Freedom Restoration Act

Dear Elected Officials:

We respectfully write to request your support for the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). RFRA is about preserving freedom, fairness, equality, tolerance, and diversity in our great State.

As a bedrock principle, enshrined in the Constitution of the United States, religious freedom is of paramount importance. However, current discussions about protecting religious freedom have become regrettably clouded. Accusatory language, claiming that protecting religious freedom somehow promotes intolerance, ironically seeks to impose on people of good faith practices which are anything but tolerant. We call all people of goodwill to promote consistently the inherent dignity of every human person.

We support assurances that the birthright of every person to religious freedom be available to each North Carolinian, as our State is in the minority in our country where people of religious faith are not given fundamental legal protection. Twenty eight other states have RFRA legislation, or RFRA-like protections provided by court decisions, which have helped:

- A church from being discriminated against by the government when it was denied equal access to public school facilities for services and charitable efforts.
- A Native American kindergartener who was told to cut his hair to comply with a school grooming policy.
- A ministry from being prohibited by the city from distributing free food to the homeless in the same park that the city permitted the outdoor sale of food.

Some have claimed that RFRA allows business owners to deny service based solely on an identifying characteristic, such as sexual orientation. If this were true, we would not support this legislation. In the 22 years that RFRA laws have existed in our country, there has not been a single case where RFRA has been used successfully to defend such an action.

What RFRA in fact provides is a legal framework to address disputes that arise, thus ensuring that religious organizations and individuals can have equal rights and protections. As such, RFRA may protect people from speaking certain messages or participating in events if doing so would violate their religious convictions or conscience. RFRA simply provides the necessary legal test so that both sides of any given dispute can be properly considered—giving everyone a fair day in court.

We ask that you support RFRA because it best serves the people of our State by extending the tolerance and legal protections that reflect the rights and freedom on which our great State and nation were founded.

Sincerely,

Lt. Governor Dan Forest

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Bishop, Diocese of Charlotte

Most Rev. Michael F. Burbidge
Bishop, Diocese of Raleigh

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The NC Baptist State Convention

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