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### Equality Act is Moving Forward in House

As predicted by many, the Equality Act, a bill designed to include sexual orientation and gender identity in all federal anti-discrimination laws, has been introduced in both the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. The House version of the Bill, HR-5, is sponsored by Representative David Cicilline (R-RI) and the identical Senate version of the bill has been introduced as S-877 by Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR). We wrote about this bill in the [February Column](#) expressing some concerns. Now that the actual bill has been introduced, we can provide more detail.

You can read the [full text of HR-5](#), or here is the bill summary produced by the Congressional Research Service:

*“This bill prohibits discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity in areas including public accommodations and facilities, education, federal funding, employment, housing, credit, and the jury system. Specifically, the bill defines and includes sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity among the prohibited categories of discrimination or segregation.*

*The bill expands the definition of public accommodations to include places or establishments that provide (1) exhibitions, recreation, exercise, amusement, gatherings, or displays; (2) goods, services, or programs; and (3) transportation services.*

*The bill allows the Department of Justice to intervene in equal protection actions in federal court on account of sexual orientation or gender identity.*

*The bill prohibits an individual from being denied access to a shared facility, including a restroom, a locker room, and a dressing room, that is in accordance with the individual's gender identity.”*

There is significant support for the Equality Act. [The U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#) is fully supportive as well as a [large coalition of over 160 major business groups](#) including Amazon.com, American Airlines, Apple, Bank of America, Best Buy, Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola, Food Lion, Google, General Mills, General Motors, IBM, Intel, Microsoft, Nike, Proctor and Gamble, Target, Under Armor and UPS.

Opposition to the bill by Christian leaders is starting to emerge as evidenced by the 84 Christian leaders who signed this [letter to the House Judiciary Committee](#) where HR-5 had its first hearing.

One might wonder why there is such broad business community support for the bill while being opposed by many Christians. The answer to this is that the bill will have two effects.

The first effect is to prohibit discrimination in providing services and employment to those who are LGBT or support the LGBT lifestyle. This is something that both the business community and Christians can support. The business community embraces this because they do not want to alienate any potential customers, and Christians, who take to heart Jesus' example of loving sinners while hating sin, also reject discrimination against the LGBT community.

Clearly organizations whose core mission is to promote certain systems of belief such as advocacy organizations, churches, and private schools must be able to set standards for membership and employment that comport with their particular beliefs. The bill fails to provide such guarantees and has also raised concern among many strong supporters of women's rights and even gay and lesbian activists who are concerned about inclusion of transgender rights in the Equality Act. Parents who have been forced to allow their children to undergo transgender procedures are also concerned. This [article](#) and [compelling panel discussion](#), both from the Heritage Foundation, address some of the serious problems that non-Christians and some on the political left have with the bill.

However, the second effect of the Equality Act is of more concern to Christians and is not related to these issues. Andrew Walker, of the Southern Baptist Convention Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission [writes](#), "The bill represents the most invasive threat to religious liberty ever proposed in America," and goes on to explain,

*It [The Equality Act] communicates that Christian beliefs about what it means to be male and female, and how marriage ought to be defined, are incompatible with what U.S. law considers to be decent, reasonable, goodwill convictions. The Equality Act fails to make meaningful status/conduct distinctions. It treats the Christian baker who objects to using her creative talent to design a same-sex wedding cake the same as an individual who would stupidly, and bigotedly, deny an LGBT person a booth at a restaurant. **In short, the Equality Act equates Christian ethics with hatred and bigotry.** [emphasis added]*

For Christian public school teachers this second impact would be devastating. It would very likely place us in a position where by federal law we would be compelled to affirm gay marriage and transgender choices by students that are contrary to our religious convictions. And, if we are members of a church that does not conduct gay marriage ceremonies, or teaches that going through sex change procedures is sinful, we might also expect to be castigated by school officials and perhaps fired, just as a teacher who joins racist or anti-Semitic organizations might rightly expect to be terminated for explicit bias.

In Congress there is significant support for the legislation.

On the House side [HR-5 cosponsors](#) include all of the Democrats, except Representative Dan Lipinski (D-Illinois), plus 2 Republicans, Representatives Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and John Katko (R-NY). This represents more than enough support to pass the House.

In the Senate, [S-877 was co-signed by 46 Senators](#). Senate supporters include all the Democrats except Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV), the two Independent Senators, and one Republican Senator, Susan Collins of Maine. While this is short of the 50 senators it would take to pass the Senate, and far short of the 60 Senators it would take to close debate and force a vote on the bill, there is still reason for concern. With the incredible pressure from the business community there may be some wavering Senators who might be convinced by a minor amendment that would address some of the obvious flaws with the measure, but still leave you as a public school employee to be held accountable for your religious conviction on these matters.

If it were to pass both houses of Congress, a presidential veto is likely, though President Trump has not yet spoken out on the matter.

Of course, we should not become anxious or upset about the possibility of the Equality Act passing because we know that the Lord controls the outcome of all events. However, we also know that we are called to pray for all our leaders all the time (1Timothy 2:1-2). This [article by Franklin Graham](#) may provide you with some

inspiration to do this. And, if you have strong feelings about the Equality Act this might be a good occasion to provide your personal witness to your Representative and Senators regarding your convictions on the issue.

If you feel compelled to write to your Representative and Senators on this important issue, or any others, you can find their phone numbers and addresses at [contactingcongress.org](http://contactingcongress.org). If you are more comfortable emailing them, you will need to use the contact forms that are on their individual websites. You can find some good tips on writing your Senators and Representatives [here](#).

Please share your thoughts on this column that you would like other readers to see by entering them in the form below. Personal comments can be sent to [JMitchell@ceai.org](mailto:JMitchell@ceai.org). John Mitchell is the Washington, DC Area Director for the Christian Educators Association.

Here are additional resources for educators looking to learn more about the transgender issue:

- [ADF Sends Policy Protecting Student Privacy to School Districts Nationwide](#). Download the ADF model [Physical Privacy Policy](#) for school districts
- [Gender Ideology Harms Children](#) from the American College of Pediatricians
- Video: [Transgender-Gender Identity-Gender Dysphoria Issues](#): Pediatrician Dr. Michelle Cretella
- [Pressure to Conform](#) and [Suffer the Children](#) from *World Magazine*
- [LGBTQ Dilemma](#), *Teachers of Vision*, Christian Educators Association International (PDF)
- [Gender Dysphoria in Children: Understanding the Science and Medicine](#), Heritage Foundation (Panel Discussion)