



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

MEDIA RELEASE

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WISCONSIN BISHOPS WARN OF HARM TO FIRST AMENDMENT FREEDOMS UNDER EQUALITY ACT

Wisconsin's Catholic bishops have issued a letter urging the faithful to actively oppose H.R. 5, a federal bill that if signed into law would dramatically limit First Amendment freedoms, especially the free exercise of religion. Known as the Equality Act, H.R. 5 would alter provisions of the federal Civil Rights Act, adding "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" as categories of people protected from discrimination.

The Catholic bishops of Wisconsin affirmed that "every person is made in the image of God and must be treated with respect and compassion. Individuals have a right to live free of discrimination or harassment."

Nevertheless, the bishops explain that the Equality Act actually fosters inequity and intolerance. "As Catholics, we are called to shield individuals from discrimination, accompany the vulnerable, and be a voice for the voiceless. However, the Equality Act would require religious entities to abandon the very principles of faith that undergird their ministry and service. Under the Equality Act, ministries would not be able to acknowledge the biological reality of male and female."

The impact on religious providers would be dramatic. "Faith-based shelters would be punished for limiting access to women's sleeping quarters. Religious charities that offer adoption services would be forced to deny children the right to a mother and a father. Even worship facilities, schools, and other religious institutions would be forced to deny their core beliefs or cease operation."

The letter also warned that the Equality Act would explicitly remove existing legal protections for religious expression provided under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). This federal law, passed with bipartisan support, was enacted under President Bill Clinton to limit unnecessary government-imposed burdens on the practice of faith.

The bishops quoted Cardinal Timothy Dolan and Pope Francis, noting that such a drastic change in federal law has far-reaching implications, even for those who may not agree with the Church's teaching.

"We recognize that not all will agree with our Catholic views of marriage, family, and human sexuality, some of which are shared with other faith traditions. However, the First Amendment protects free speech and the free exercise of religion thereby ensuring that different views about

these fundamental realities may be openly expressed and lived. The Equality Act would suppress these liberties, which are essential to a free and open society.”

The U.S. House of Representatives has passed the Equality Act and it is currently under consideration in the U.S. Senate. Catholics are encouraged to contact their Senators and urge them to oppose it.

Further information and an action alert to help individuals connect with their Senators are available through the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) website at <https://www.usccb.org/equality-act>. The Wisconsin bishops statement is available at www.wisconsinatholic.org.

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For more information, contact Kim Vercauteren at 608-257-0004. A copy of the [bishops letter](#) is attached.