



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3000

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG • FAX 202-541-3339

February 23, 2021

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative/Senator:

As chairmen of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Religious Liberty, Pro-Life, Marriage, Catholic Education, and Domestic Justice committees, we write to share our support for laws that protect the dignity and ensure the respect that is due all people, as well as our grave concerns with the Equality Act of 2021 (H.R. 5).

Human dignity is central to what Catholics believe because every person is made in the image of God and should be treated accordingly, with respect and compassion. This commitment is reflected in the Church's charitable service to all people, without regard to race, religion, or any other characteristic. It means we need to honor every person's right to gainful employment free of unjust discrimination or harassment, and to the basic goods that they need to live and thrive. It also means that people of differing beliefs should be respected. In this, we whole-heartedly support nondiscrimination principles to ensure that everyone's rights are protected.

The Equality Act purports to protect people experiencing same-sex attraction or gender discordance from discrimination. But instead, the bill represents the imposition by Congress of novel and divisive viewpoints regarding "gender" on individuals and organizations. This includes dismissing sexual difference and falsely presenting "gender" as only a social construct. As Pope Francis has reflected, however, "biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated." ... It is one thing to be understanding of human weakness and the complexities of life, and another to accept ideologies that attempt to sunder what are inseparable aspects of reality."¹ Tragically, this Act can also be construed to include an abortion mandate, a violation of precious rights to life and conscience.²

Rather than affirm human dignity in ways that meaningfully exceed existing practical protections, the Equality Act would discriminate against people of faith. It would also inflict numerous legal and social harms on Americans of any faith or none. If passed, this legislation would:

- punish faith-based charities such as shelters and foster care agencies, and in turn their thousands of beneficiaries, simply because of their beliefs on marriage and sexuality (§§ 3, 6);
- force both people and organizations in many everyday life and work settings to speak or act in support of "gender transitions," including health care workers and licensed counselors, even when it's against their professional judgment (§§ 3, 6, 7);
- risk mandating taxpayers to pay for abortions, and health care workers with conscience objections to perform them, ultimately ending more human lives (§§ 3, 6, 9);

¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 56 (2016).

² See USCCB Fact Sheet, "[The Equality Act: Its Impact on Government Funding of Abortion.](#)"

- force girls and women to compete against boys and men for limited opportunities in school sports, and to share locker rooms and shower spaces with biological males who claim to identify as women (§§ 6, 9);
- expand the government’s definition of public places into numerous settings, even forcing religiously operated spaces, such as some church halls and equivalent facilities owned by synagogues or mosques, to either host functions that violate their beliefs or close their doors to their broader communities (§ 3);
- exclude people from the careers and livelihoods that they love, just for maintaining the truth of their beliefs on marriage and sexuality (§ 3); and
- discriminate against individuals and religious organizations based on their different beliefs by partially repealing the bipartisan Religious Freedom Restoration Act, an unprecedented departure from that law and one of America’s founding principles (§ 9).

Each year the Catholic Church, as the largest non-governmental provider of human services in the United States, helps millions of people in need through its parishes, schools, hospitals, shelters, legal clinics, food banks, and other charities. The same core beliefs about the human person--made with inherent dignity and in the image of God--motivate both our positions on life, marriage, and sexuality, and also our call to serve the most vulnerable and the common good. We oppose this legislation.

Sincerely,



Most Rev. Michael C. Barber, S.J.
Bishop of Oakland
Chairman, Committee on Catholic Education



Most Rev. Paul S. Coakley
Archbishop of Oklahoma City
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



His Eminence Timothy Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop of New York
Chairman, Committee for Religious Liberty



Most. Rev. David A. Konderla
Bishop of Tulsa
Chairman, Subcommittee for the Promotion
and Defense of Marriage



Most Rev. Joseph F. Naumann
Archbishop of Kansas City, KS
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities