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Idaho lawmaker introduces Marriage and Religious Freedom Act in House

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A bill introduced in the U.S. House to keep the federal government from discriminating against churches, religious groups and businesses that uphold marriage as being between one man and one woman is "of fundamental importance," two U.S. Catholic bishops said Friday.

A day earlier, Rep. Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, introduced the Marriage and Religious Freedom Act, known as H.R. 3133.

Dozens of lawmakers have co-sponsored the measure, including Reps. Chris Smith, R-N.J.; Steve Scalise, R-La.; Mike McIntyre, D-N.C.; Diane Black, R-Tenn.; Dan Lipinski, D-Ill.; and Ann Wagner, R-Mo.

San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage, called the measure significant, noting that individuals and organizations that uphold traditional marriage are increasingly being targeted for discrimination by state governments. He said this must not spread to the federal government.

An example of discrimination at the state level cited in background materials released by the U.S. bishops' conference pointed to a New Mexico Supreme Court ruling that said a husband and wife who own and operate a photography studio "must act against their religious beliefs" and take photographs of a same-sex commitment ceremony "if they want to do business in the state."

Baltimore Archbishop William Lori, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, also expressed strong support for the Marriage and Religious Freedom Act.

"In a growing climate of intolerance against individuals and organizations who believe that marriage is the union of one man and one woman, this act is an important step in preserving their religious liberties at the federal level," he said.

The archbishop said among other protections, the bill would prevent the U.S. government from denying individuals and organizations a grant, contract or employment "because their belief that marriage is the union of one man and one woman is informed by their religious faith."

Labrador said in a statement that "regardless of your ideology, we can all agree about the importance of religious liberty in America."

"Our bill will protect freedom of conscience for those who believe marriage is the union of one man and one woman," he said. "This is not a Republican or Democrat issue. As President (Barack) Obama said, 'Americans hold a wide range of views' on marriage and 'maintaining our nation's commitment to religious freedom' is 'vital.' We agree."

The USCCB said the Marriage and Religious Freedom Act "would protect a wide array of persons, including individuals and organizations -- both for-profits and nonprofits -- regardless of whether or not they are religiously affiliated. ... Business owners as well as churches would be protected."

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