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# U.S. bishops say employment bill goes beyond barring discrimination

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In a letter to the U.S. senators, the chairmen of three U.S. bishops' committees outlined their opposition to the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, emphasizing the bill to protect gay and lesbian workers goes beyond the scope of prohibiting unjust discrimination and "poses several problems."

The bishops stressed that "all people are created in the image and likeness of God" and have "human dignity that must be acknowledged and respected by other persons and by law."

They also noted that "the Catholic Church has consistently stood with workers in this country and continues to oppose unjust discrimination in the workplace. No one should be an object of scorn, hatred, or violence for any reason, including his or her sexual inclinations."

They said that although the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops continues to "promote the dignity of both work and marriage and to oppose unjust discrimination on any grounds," they "cannot support a bill, like ENDA, that does not justly advance the dignity of all workers and authentic non-discrimination."

The letter, dated Oct. 31 and released Monday, was signed by Bishop Stephen Blaire of Stockton, Calif., chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development; San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, chairman of the Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage; and Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore, chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty.

The bishops said the bill lacked an exception for a "bona fide occupational qualification," which they said exists for every other category of discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, except for race. The legislation also "elevates 'sexual orientation' discrimination" to the same level as race discrimination, they said. It also does not make a distinction between homosexual inclination and conduct, which they said legally affirms and protects that conduct.

The bishops' letter also said the bill supports the redefinition of marriage and would likely be "invoked by courts" to support the constitutional argument that same-sex marriage must be legal, and at the same time rejects the biological basis of gender by defining "gender identity" as something people may choose at variance with their biological sex.

They also said the bill "threatens religious liberty by punishing as discrimination the religious or moral disapproval of same-sex sexual conduct, while protecting only some religious employers."

Religious entities that are exempt are all houses of worship churches and religious-sponsored hospitals and charities.

The full Senate is expected to vote on it in early November, and it is expected to pass. Whether the House will take up the measure was unclear because House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, opposes it.

The nondiscrimination bill has been introduced in every Congress since 1994 except the 109th. In 1996, its chief

sponsor that year, the late Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass, brought it to the floor but it was one vote shy of passage.

In 2009, then-Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass, introduced a version of ENDA. He introduced it again in 2011, and Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., introduced it in the Senate, but it languished in both chambers of Congress. In April of this year, Merkley re-introduced it in the Senate.

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