

easy fast free  
you got this  
start your free IRS return now!

**TaxACT**  
Start Now

Get A Digital Subscription  
**HoustonChronicle.com**

Subscribe to the Houston Chronicle | Shopping | Classifieds | Obits | Place an Ad | La Voz

Like 147k

Register | Sign In

Sunday April 12, 2015



72°F Mostly Cloudy | Houston Weather

Search

Chron.com Local Directory

Home Local US & World Sports Business Entertainment Lifestyle Jobs Cars Real Estate



Opinion > Editorials

# Editorial: Free to be free

Texas doesn't need a new religious freedom law. We already have one, and it works.  
Copyright 2015: Houston Chronicle | April 10, 2015 | Updated: April 11, 2015 2:28pm

Comments E-mail Print Tweet 3 G+ 0 0

SMARTPAK  
HAVE YOU HEARD?

## SmartPak Riding Breeches

smartpakequine.com

Shop For Equine Breeches Today at SmartPak. Free Shipping Over \$75



Photo By Eric Gay/STF

Texas does not need a new religious freedom law. Although used sparingly, the Texas law apparently has worked well. (AP Photo)

Yes, Texans, we know it's hard to believe, but there really was a time in the not-so-distant past when a bipartisan group of lawmakers approved a Texas religious freedom law. The year was 1999, and its sponsors included state Sens. **David Sibley**, a Waco Republican; **Florence Shapiro**, a Dallas Republican, and Royce West, a Dallas Democrat. The House sponsor was **Scott Hochberg**, a Houston Democrat. Supporters of their bill included the Texas Baptists' **Christian Life Commission**, the **Texas Association of Business** and the **American Civil Liberties Union**. Mirroring a 1993 federal law, the Texas Religious Freedom and Restoration Act was signed into law by Gov. **George W.**

### You Might Also Like



Man Finds Secret Room In Office -- Where It Led Was Astounding (Viral Nova)



The Eruption of Mt. St. Helens Revealed America's Gemstone (Luxury Secrets Revealed)



Forget Googling them, this site reveals all. Simply enter a name and state of... (Instant Checkmate)



The 25 Most Expensive Private High Schools in America (TheStreet)

**Bush.**

The Texas law, although used sparingly, apparently has worked well. It comes to mind, because a cadre of hardliners in the Legislature this session aren't satisfied. As **Lauren McGaughey** of the Chronicle reported recently, they want to "enhance" it. That's the word they use, but what they want, in essence, is a law that gives people the right to discriminate against gays and lesbians in the name of religious belief. As in Indiana and Arkansas recently, their efforts have prompted opposition that we suspect surprised them.

State Rep. **Molly White**, R-Belton, the hardest of the hardliners in the House, is sponsoring **House Bill 2553**,

legislation that would allow anyone to "refuse to provide goods or services to any person based on a sincerely held religious belief or on conscientious grounds." Her hardline Senate counterpart, **New Braunfels Republican Donna Campbell**, is sponsoring Senate Joint Resolution 10, legislation that would enshrine the 15-year-old Texas law into the state Constitution - without the key civil rights and local control protections that helped attract bipartisan support when it passed in 1999. State Rep. **Matt Krause**, R-Fort Worth, has proposed an identical bill in the House.

One way to understand the difference between the 1999 Texas law and current proposals is to picture a shield and a sword. The original laws, both state and federal, give a religious person a way to defend himself - a shield, so to speak - against government requirements that would unreasonably impinge on the person's religious beliefs. The proposals by White and her conservative cohorts offer them a sword to fend off those they find objectionable, mainly gays, lesbians and transgender Texans. No doubt many are sincere in their beliefs, but the powers that would be granted by the proposed legislation come cringingly close to images from the past - images that involve lunch counters or **Lester Maddox** wielding ax handles against would-be customers at his Atlanta chicken restaurant.

Fortunately, unlikely critics of the Texas proposals, including **Bill Hammond**, chief executive of the Texas Association of Business, are warning of unintended consequences. "These amendments are bad for business," Hammond said at a Capitol news conference last week. "They would devastate economic development, tourism and the convention business. One has to look no further than Indiana to realize what a detriment this would be and how hard it would make it to sell Texas to the rest of our country."

Hammond also warned that the proposed legislation would endanger local nondiscrimination ordinances like those in Houston and San Antonio.

State Sen. **Rodney Ellis**, D-Houston, characterized the bills as license to discriminate. "There's absolutely no doubt that passing these amendments would bring the same uproar and condemnation to Texas, and I would help it," he said.

What we can hope is that committee chairs and other legislative honchos are listening. State Rep. **Byron Cook**, a Corsicana Republican who chairs the **House State Affairs Committee**, told the Chronicle the House must be "very thoughtful" about bringing the Krause bill up for a vote. Cook's Senate counterpart, **Joan Huffman**, R-Houston, said there were no plans for now to hear the legislation.

With education, transportation, water, health care, taxes and a budget on their plate, serious lawmakers need to remind Campbell, White and friends that they have enough to worry about during the remaining days of the session. They don't need to plunge into the thorny weeds of religion.

**Top Videos****Join the Conversation****Follow Us on Social Media****Editorial Cartoons**

**Nick Anderson**  
*Opinion*  
Target Practice

**Today's Opinion**

- **Editorial: Free to be free**
- **Editorial: Astrodome's 50th**
- **Pitts: Walter Scott, another 'isolated incident'?**
- **Marcus: Extending rights to transgender people**
- **Dutton: Communities need more tools to turn around failing schools**
- **O'Connor: What does watching people die on TV do to us?**
- **Anthony: School takeover proposals have pitfalls that should concern Texans**
- **Sunday letters: Don't hinder counties' role**

**Most Read**

- **Kevin Sumlin: Speedy Noil 'has some things to complete' away from A&M**
- **Latinos who don't speak Spanish**
- **John McClain's 2015 NFL mock draft, version 2.0**
- **Photos: 2015 Houston Texans cheerleader squad chosen**
- **What we learned from the Rockets' second loss in three nights to Spurs**
- **Astros drop second game in Rangers series 6-2**
- **Wattniacki? J.J. Watt and Caroline Wozniacki set Twitter abuzz**

- **A letter from the Houston Chronicle**
- **Bus driver struggles to support 9 children**
- **Family dreams of having their own home again**
- **Rockets bring smiles to the needy**
- **Healthy kids is Goodfellows mom's sole wish**

Comments | E-mail | Print | Tweet 3 | G+ 0 | 0

Copyright 2015: Houston Chronicle

AdChoices

From Around the Web

- **How Millennials Are Skipping The Grocery Store.** (Real Simple)
- **Do You Know the Signs of Dementia? 9 Surprising Facts** (AARP)
- **Top 7 Signs Of A Trustworthy Alcohol Rehab** (Behavioral Health of the Palm Beaches | Alcohol and Drug Recovery Starts Here)
- **10 Actors Who Killed People In Real Life** (Answers.com)
- **Skin Cancer: Don't Ignore the Signs** (AARP)
- **75 Rare Historical Photos That Will Leave You Speechless** (Daily Sanctuary)
- **This Dinner Hack Has Millennials Ditching Delivery** (NY Post)

We Recommend

- **Former Houston executive gets 10 years in prison in sex case**
- **Houston man's naughty license plate could get the ax**
- **Dallas teacher showed nude photo of herself to class**
- **Number of slaves found on Indonesian island at almost 550**
- **Two Houston neighborhoods called most dangerous in U.S.**
- **Alabama teacher, recently married, allegedly had sex with 18-year-old...**
- **Texas man ticketed for riding horse to Taco Bell**

Recommended by

All Digital Access - only \$1/week

Stay connected with Houston's best local news source!

**HoustonChronicle.com**  
Get the inside scoop with exclusive local stories every Houstonian should read.

**iPad®**  
Read Houston's top stories anytime, anywhere.

**Email**  
Get the most important stories sent straight to your inbox!

**Daily eNewspaper**  
The pleasure of reading a newspaper online.

CLICK HERE TO SUBSCRIBE

Chron | Local | US & World | Sports | Business | Entertainment | Lifestyle | Jobs | Cars | Real Estate



Advertise With Us

Purchase ads for web, social media, and print via Hearst Media Services ▶

Place a classified ad in the paper or online ▶

Place a targeted ad in a specialty

About Us

- About the Houston Chronicle
- Executive Team
- Local Sales Teams
- Careers
- Community
- Legal Notices
- Contests
- Find&Save Local Shopping

Editions & Apps

- iPad
- iPhone
- Android
- Blackberry
- Mobile Site
- HoustonChronicle.com
- eEdition Demo | Today's eEdition
- Chronicle in Education

section such as a weekly or neighborhood publication ▶

[Ad Choices](#)  
[Corporate Home](#)

[Chron.com Site Index](#)

### Subscriber Services

---

Get home delivery, manage your subscription, pay your bill with EZ Pay, and set a vacation hold for the paper ▶

[Local Business Directory](#) ▶

### Contact Us

[Customer Service](#)  
[Newsroom Contacts](#)

### Follow Chron

-  [Facebook](#)
-  [Twitter](#)
-  [LinkedIn](#)
-  [Newsletters](#)
-  [RSS](#)
- [Social Media](#)

[Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Your California Privacy Rights](#) | [Ad Choices](#)  
Houston Chronicle | P.O. Box 4260 Houston, Texas 77210-4260

© Copyright 2015 Hearst Newspapers, LLC