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# Released emails highlight controversy over Indiana's RFRA law

HRC points to emails as evidence of failure of anti-gay animus and calls for greater LGBT protections

By [John Riley](#) on September 19, 2015 @[JohnAndresRiley](#)

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Mike Pence - Credit: Gage Skidmore/flickr

Indiana's decision to pass a strengthened Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) earlier this year may have hurt its image among business leaders, according to emails released by the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) this week.

According to an [investigation](#) by Indianapolis-area NBC affiliate WTHR (Channel 13), the IEDC emails paint a picture of how the RFRA law affected various businesses, and some of the tensions between the Hoosier State's business community and its political class.

One email from the batch released by IEDC came from a representative (whose name and company were redacted in the released emails) from a company seeking to leave California and relocate to Indiana. The representative said she was having trouble retaining some of the company's employees, who worried about moving to the state in the wake of Gov. Mike Pence choosing to [sign the RFRA law into effect](#).

"It is a bit frustrating to be putting significant time, energy and resources into bringing jobs into the state only to have the state pass something like this," the representative wrote. "We employ a very diverse base of employees and had already received some pushback regarding the lack of diversity here. Unfortunately this bill just adds fuel to the fire."



Other employers cited the controversy that followed the approval of the RFRA bill as a cause of problems with some of their long-term business relationships. Other emails reveal that some companies delayed jobs announcements in order to avoid offending the LGBT and allied communities, who they feared would see any actions as an endorsement of Indiana's passage of the RFRA law. And other emails came from companies threatening to pull their businesses out of the state completely. While some did not follow through on threats, others did.

The RFRA law was later **amended** to clarify the intent behind it, and to assuage fears that it would be used to blatantly discriminate against LGBT people. According to a statement from the IEDC, Indiana's current employment numbers, job creation numbers and investment are at historic highs, implying that IEDC believes the controversy over the law, particularly following the passage of the amended language, is over. Pence's office has adopted a similar view. Meanwhile, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce notes that the state and some businesses "clearly suffered damage" from the controversy, but are now recovering.

But Kevin Brinegar, the president of the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, also told WTHR that while people are not concerned as much about the effects of the RFRA law, some business owners have raised the topic of whether the Indiana General Assembly will be considering passing expanded civil rights protections for LGBT people. It remains to be seen whether such a pro-LGBT bill could even come close to passing the Republican-dominated legislature, despite lingering concerns about whether the state is still viewed as anti-gay.

The Human Rights Campaign seized upon the released emails as a warning that there are consequences for promoting anti-LGBT legislation. The organization also pointed to polling, commissioned just after the conflict over the RFRA law, which showed that Pence's popularity had taken a hit, and that a majority of Hoosiers supported a law that would add protections for LGBT individuals.

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"These emails are further proof of the deeply toxic impact Mike Pence's abhorrent anti-LGBT law had on Indiana's economic climate and the immense opposition it stirred within the business community," said Olivia Dalton, HRC's senior vice president of communications and marketing. "Politicians considering similar bills across the nation should take note of the tremendous damage such laws bring to their business communities. ... If the leadership of Indiana is serious about undoing the damage inflicted by the deeply unfortunate and avoidable RFRA fight, they should work together to pass a new bill that ensures protections from discrimination for LGBT Hoosiers."



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