

Rep. Wesco added as House sponsor of controversial religious freedom act after Senate approval



Tim Vandenack
Posted at 1:26 p.m.

Indiana Rep. Tim Wesco will lead efforts in the House to pass a controversial Senate measure that proponents say aims to protect the public's religious liberties.

Wesco, an Osceola Republican who represents southern Elkhart, was named House sponsor of Senate Bill 101, the [religious freedom restoration act](#), Tuesday, Feb. 24, after the Indiana Senate approved it 40-10 on third reading. As such, he'll spearhead efforts to pass it through the House, and he said he's already received a "very positive response" from House members he's polled.

"I think it would be generally recognized our society is becoming more secular and that there's less respect for religious beliefs then there was at one time," Wesco said Tuesday in a phone interview from Indianapolis. S.B. 101 aims to address that.

S.B. 101 has drawn fire from some who say it would permit discrimination against same-sex couples, among others. The critics say such a measure could be used by business operators to deny service to same-sex couples based on their religious opposition to such unions.

Wesco, who authored a [parallel measure in the House](#), has said such measures have a broader aim — [asserting the right of those to abide by their religious beliefs](#), free of government interference. S.B. 101 says state or local government may not "substantially burden" someone's religious rights barring a "compelling governmental interest," among other factors.

S.B. 101 passed 40-10 along party lines, with GOPers backing it and Democrats opposing it, according to a tweet from Indiana Senate Democrats. Locally, Sen. Joe Zakas, R-Osceola, voted for the measure [when in committee](#) and Sen. Carlin Yoder, R-Middlebury, signed on as co-author of the measure.

Zakas, speaking by phone Tuesday from Indianapolis, said the measure "underscores the importance of making reasonable accommodations for expression of religious faith." He noted that the federal version of the measure, approved in 1993, received the backing of many Democrats and he downplayed the potential fallout to same-sex couples.

"It goes way beyond that kind of thing. It's a much bigger issue than that," Zakas said.

Wesco noted that 19 other states have similar legislation.

"I disagree with the sentiment that the bill allows or justifies in any way discrimination," he said. "It's not targeted at any particular religious belief or lifestyle out there."

Follow reporter Tim Vandenack on Twitter at [@timvandenack](#) or visit him on [Facebook](#).



Indiana Rep. Tim Wesco, R-Osceola.
(Jennifer Shephard/The Elkhart Truth)



Indiana State Sen. Joe Zakas, R-Granger
(AP)

Copyright © Truth Publishing Co., All Rights Reserved