

## COMMENTARY

# Texas must not foist religious beliefs on others

By Kelly S. Allen and Samuel M. Stahl, For the Express-News | March 21, 2015

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Kelly S. Allen: There is no assault occurring on religion in Texas.

Some would have us believe that religious freedom is under assault in Texas and that government must do something about it. We question whether this is true. But even if it is, the proposed solution would undermine freedom rather than protect it.

As clergy of two different religious traditions, we are offended every day.

We encounter people who think our beliefs and rituals are trite or irrelevant. We see advertisers celebrating greed and movies flaunting promiscuous sex and violence. Such is the nature of living as religious people in a pluralistic culture.

Our practices are different. Our theologies are not the same. But as sacred as our respective convictions are to us, we must never foist them on people who do not accept or embrace them.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is the best protection of religion the world has ever seen. Because of its focus on the “free exercise of religion,” it keeps government from championing a single kind of religious belief or practice. As a result, the United States is one of the most diverse and religiously vibrant nations on Earth.

Our founders realized that to call on government to defend or establish one particular religious tradition necessarily means inhibiting the religious practice of another.

The state of Texas already has in place the Texas Religious Freedom Restoration Act, a robust law barring measures that “substantially burden” the free exercise of religion. Individuals and institutions who find themselves hampered in carrying out their constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion have a champion in this law. It was passed in 1999 with broad-based support from diverse religious and non-religious bodies all across the state.

This law needs to stay in place in order for all of us who take our religion seriously to have true freedom. No other law is necessary.

Unfortunately, bills introduced by state Sen. [Donna Campbell](#), R-New Braunfels, and state Rep. [Matt Krause](#), R-Fort Worth, would turn the idea of “freedom of religion” on its head. Rather than protecting freedom, these proposed bills would allow individuals and businesses to use religion to harm others and return us to the shameful days of legal discrimination.

SJR 10 by Sen. Campbell and HJR 125 by Rep. Krause are sparsely worded constitutional amendments that could allow anyone who feels religiously “burdened” by almost any state or local law or regulation to be released from obeying it. This is simply a way to give people the right, based on a religious argument, to refuse to serve or employ any person or group that does not meet their standard of doctrinal acceptability.

If I'm allowed to use my belief or others' lack of belief to determine whether they can share any kind of public space with me, this is not "free exercise of religion." It is imposing a religious requirement on someone else.

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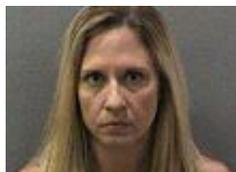


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