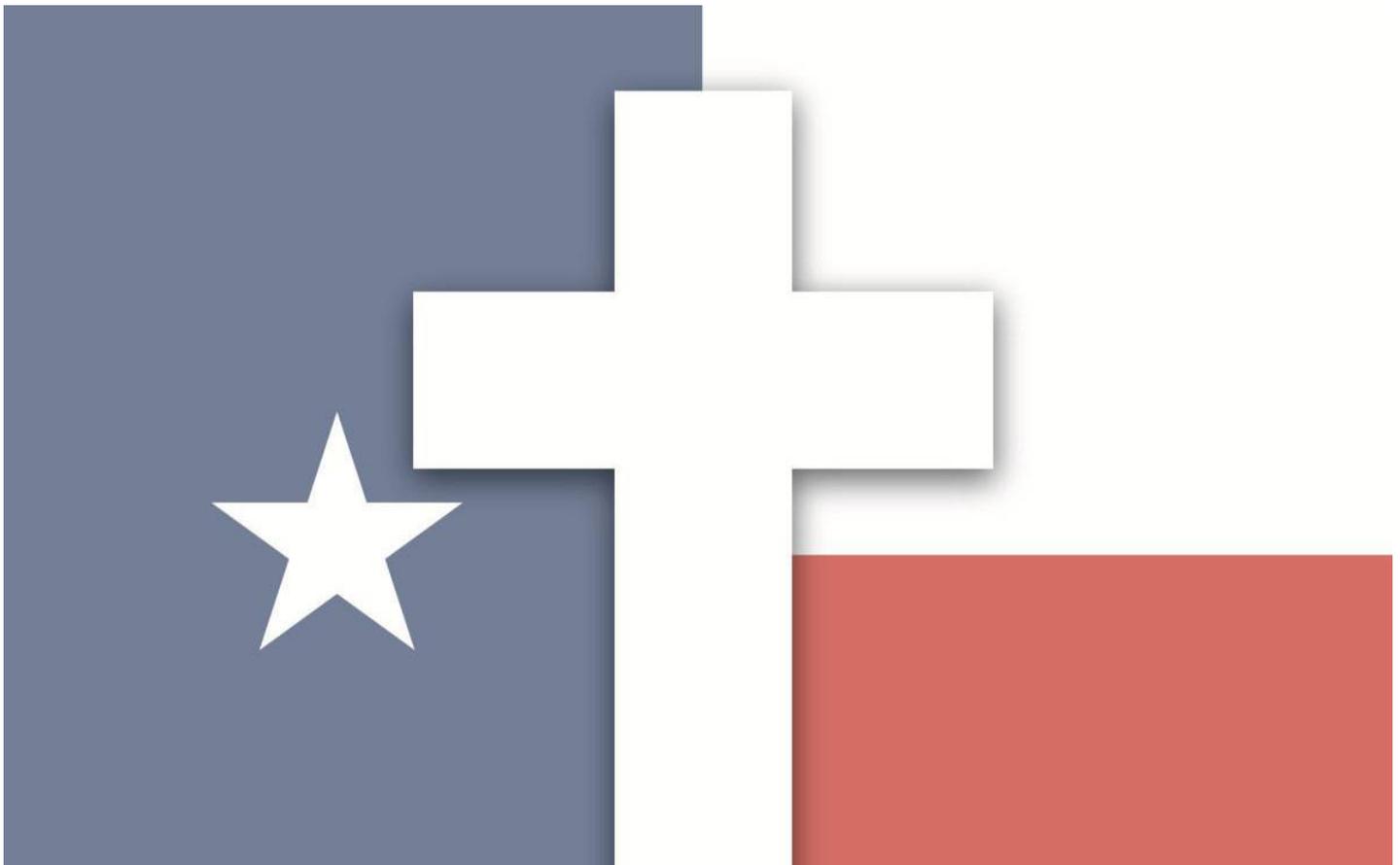


VICTORIA ADVOCATE

Pro-Con: Should Texas strengthen its religious freedom laws?

By Natassia Bonyanpour
April 19, 2015 at 11:45 p.m.
Updated April 20, 2015 at 9 a.m.



POLL

Should Texas strengthen its religious freedom laws? Click [here to vote.](#)

Two proposed bills are under revision in the State Affairs Committee to amend the Texas Constitution and strengthen Religious Freedom laws.

Rep. Matt Krause, R-Fort Worth, proposed HJR 125, originally submitted as HJR 55 by Rep. Jason Villalba, R-Dallas.

The bill would not allow Texas to burden, in any way, a person's free exercise of religion unless it is necessary to further a compelling governmental interest.

The amendment goes on to apply to homeowners' association on the same criteria.

Another bill, SJR 10, filed by Sen. Donna Campbell, R-New Braunfels, states the government will not burden an individual's or religious organization's freedom of religion or right to act or refuse to act if motivated by a sincerely held religious belief.

In 1999, the state passed the Texas' Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which allowed Texas residents to sue the government if they felt it was burdening their religious beliefs or practices.

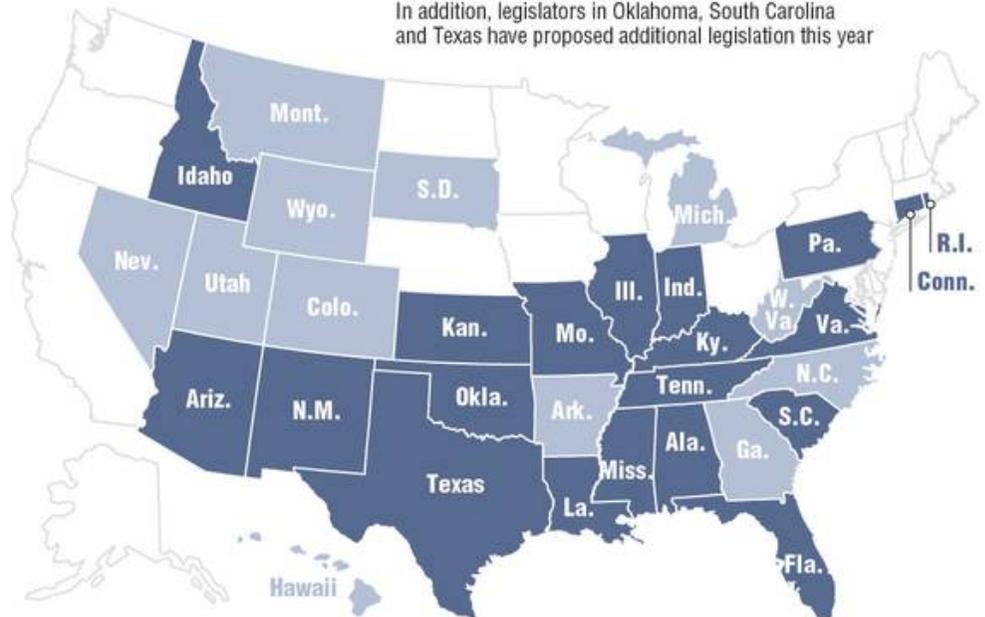
Some say the current legislation is enough to suffice while others feel more stringent religious freedom laws are necessary to ensure protection of religious beliefs.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM LAWS

Enacted religious freedom legislation

Proposed religious freedom legislation in 2015

In addition, legislators in Oklahoma, South Carolina and Texas have proposed additional legislation this year



SOURCE: National Conference of State Legislatures

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

Pro: New law would protect people's rights to practice their faith

The proposed amendment strengthens the Texas Constitution, said Clayton Knippa, chief of staff for state Rep. Matt Krause.

"HJR 125 has almost the same language as what we've had in Texas' books," he said. "No one has put up their arms in protest of this law (1999 Texas' Restoration of Religious Freedom Act), and it has not been abused."

Krause is taking current legislation and giving it a constitutional backing to make it stronger, Knippa said.

Opponents of the amendment say it would cause discrimination, but Knippa said that is not the case.

"Some people may think it will be all these hypotheticals," he said. "This would not give license to discriminate."

Under current law, people can go to court if they are not allowed their freedom of religion.

That would not change, Knippa said.

In a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in September 2014, 47 percent of American adults said wedding-related businesses should be allowed to refuse services to same-sex couples.

Victoria resident Paul Tasin agreed.

"If two women want to get married, come in and my business is a catering service, I have the right to not do business with them," Tasin said. "It's not right in the eyes of God."

Religious freedom is an American right, Tasin said, and business owners should be allowed to choose who they want to serve.

In Walkerton, Ind., a small pizza restaurant owner, said the business would not serve same-sex couples when interviewed by an ABC affiliate, WBND-TV.

After experiencing backlash and threats, the business closed.

A GoFundMe account was launched for the family to relieve them of financial burden and, in the course of 15 days, more than \$800,000 was accumulated by people across the country.

Tasin said this illustrates the large percentage of Americans who hold true to their faith and values.

If federal law does not approve of same-sex marriage, Tasin said, neither should businesses.

"Marriage is only between a man and woman," Tasin said. "Most of the population are trying to live their decent lives. It is a small population that is living against God."

Real estate agent Russell Cain said all Americans encompass the right to practice their religious freedom, but he would never use it as a means to discriminate.

"I think everyone should have the right to worship God in their own way," he said. "The problem with America today is the family unit is broken. People don't live like Jesus did."

Con: Change could lead to discrimination against gays

With recent religious freedom laws passed in Indiana and Arkansas, Gino Tozzi a University of Houston-Victoria lecturer of political science said, Texas lawmakers also want to jump on board.

"It's a flavor-of-the-week type deal," Tozzi said. "They want to bring something back to their constituents, and this is what's popular."

Both Indiana and Arkansas have received backlash from opponents, who say the legislation discriminates against gays and lesbians.

The bills proposed by two Texas legislators are relatively more detailed, Tozzi said, but are essentially the same as the 1999 Freedom of Restoration Act.

"It might invite litigation, but I don't see what they would have to gain in the long haul," he said. "It's really not needed. It's already in the constitution."

Flora Hernandez, president of a Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Queer and Questioning group in Victoria, said the bills are regressive and reflect an era of segregation.

"It's an old way of thinking," she said. "When a white woman would be with a black man, they would say the same thing - that it was against God."

With a large - and growing - gay population in Texas, Hernandez said, the backlash in the state, compared with Indiana and Arkansas, would be immense.

Often traveling across the state for gay pride festivals, Hernandez said communities are growing in support of gay relationships.

"There are gay pride festivals in all of the major cities," she said. "I just went to one in Houston and even the mayor was involved. They (legislators) need to realize the community in Texas is a big one."

Many businesses in the Crossroads said they would never deny service because of personal religious beliefs.

Mumphord's Place Restaurant co-owner Ricky Mumphord said, while he is religious, he separates his faith from business.

"Everyone at the restaurant heard about what was happening in Indiana, and we just think (the law) is silly," he said. "Who are we to judge?"

As long as customers respect his restaurant, Mumphord said, he and his staff have no problem serving anyone, regardless of religious preference or sexual orientation.

"I would not turn anyone down," he said. "Our goal is to serve everyone."

Tozzi said he feels the bills could pass the Legislature in the near future.

While immediate backlash may surface, Tozzi said, it would probably not extend to elections.

"They want to show they did something while in office to constituents," he said. "I could see Gov. Abbott signing it."

SHARE

Comments

9 comments

[Add a comment](#)



Wiley Saichek · New York, New York

Stronger laws are not needed. As a whole Christians are not being persecuted in the US, and they should be grateful and realize how lucky they are. Not being able to force your Christian views on everyone, and losing ground on certain legal/social issues because courts are not allowing one religion to dictate laws, is not persecution.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 7 · [Follow Post](#) · 9 hours ago



William Michael Green · [Follow](#) · Top Commenter · Project Manager at Green Land and Cattle

It's a Trojan horse to allow people to discriminate. Fortune 500 companies and others will boycott Texas if this bill is passed. Texas will be ridiculed by the nation as Indiana and Arkansas have been.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 5 · [Follow Post](#) · 11 hours ago



Dan Martin · [Follow](#) · Top Commenter · Semi-God with kitchen duty. at Retired

This a very slippery slope. The 1st Amendment is the law of the land. At what point do you dictate that your religious beliefs trumps the beliefs of others? There has been a lot of discussion regarding "Sharia" law and this is creeping closer to a theocratic state. There is one Texas Republican Representative that is promoting teaching the Bible in public schools. Time to dial down the "My cross is bigger and better than yours".

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 4 · [Follow Post](#) · 10 hours ago



John Schlembach · [Follow](#) · Top Commenter

"People don't live like Jesus did."

Jesus was single, never married, no children, no job, homeless, hung out with sinners, fed and healed people for free, and his closest followers were all men.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 4 · [Follow Post](#) · 7 hours ago



Jim Prince · Top Commenter

A person or Company should not have to go against their religious beliefs to pacify anyone.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 3 · [Follow Post](#) · 8 hours ago



John Schlembach · [Follow](#) · Top Commenter

Corporations do not have religious beliefs. Further, all



Corporations do not have religious beliefs. Further, all that is desired is that they abide by the same rules and regulations imposed on everyone else.

No special privileges.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 7 hours ago



Wiley Saichek · New York, New York

If someone is open for business to the general public then the owner should expect to deal with people of different beliefs and backgrounds. Otherwise, call your business a speciality business and say you are a Christian bakery or Christian bookstore, etc.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 3 · 7 hours ago



John Schlembach · [Follow](#) · Top Commenter

Utterly needless. Nothing but pandering.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · 2 · [Follow Post](#) · 9 hours ago



Denise Wood · Co Owner at GenFit

Which sins are covered? Can Chick-fil-a refuse to serve overweight people so they're not contributing to their sin of gluttony?

From Around the Web

Sponsored Links by Taboola

Drivers Feel Stupid For Not Knowing This Ne...

Provide-Savings Insurance

Quotes

Anti-Drinking Ad Shows How Children...

Professor.BUZZ

Kate Middleton's Decision to Leave Kensington Palace Ca...

Stirring Daily

Forget The iPhone 6. Next Apple Sensation...

The Motley Fool

© Victoria Advocate Publishing Co., All Rights Reserved.
311 E. Constitution St. Victoria, Texas 77901 - Phone: 361-575-1451
Newsroom: 361-574-1222 - Customer Care: 361-574-1200

Powered By ADVOCATE DIGITAL MEDIA