

Purdue's University Senate calls for RFRA repeal

Dave Bangert, dbangert@jconline.com 5:28 p.m. EDT April 20, 2015



(Photo: Journal & Courier)

Leaders of Purdue University's faculty on Monday one-upped the president's office and called on the Indiana General Assembly to repeal a religious freedom bill that has been criticized as a front for anti-gay discrimination.

The resolution, approved on a 52-4 vote by the University Senate, argues that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act "will harm (the university's) ability to recruit and retain students, staff and faculty."

"I can tell you we've had applicants who questioned if it's safe to come here," said Evelyn Blackwood, an anthropology professor and a member of the University Senate. "(This law) has serious impact on Purdue as

well as Indiana."

The General Assembly and Gov. Mike Pence came under fire in late March after approving Senate Bill 101. The governor and Republicans in the House and Senate argued that SB 101 offered protection for people from being compelled by the government to do something that went against their religious convictions.

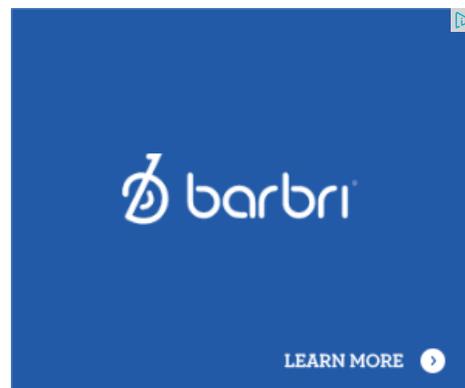
But the state came under heavy criticism, leading to boycotts, for the perception that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act was a thinly veiled response to the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2014. The General Assembly later wrote a disclaimer to the bill, saying it was not intended to discriminate. Still, last week, Pence announced that the state would spend \$2 million or more on a New York City-based public relations firm to counter how the backlash hurt the state's welcoming image.

As the controversy unfurled, presidents at Indiana University, Butler University, Wabash College, Ball State and other schools spoke out against the RFRA. Purdue President Mitch Daniels did not take a stance for the university on RFRA. His office instead issued a statement that reaffirmed the university's nondiscrimination policy.

Bonnie Blankenship, a health and kinesiology professor and a University Senate member, said she thought the university's statement was enough and that her support for SB 101 didn't mean she was in favor of discrimination. Other Senate members, though, said colleagues from across the country were watching how Purdue was reacting to the religious freedom law. Several said the faculty couldn't stand by and say nothing.

On April 1, the Purdue Student Government discussed a resolution that would have called on the General Assembly to repeal the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Student leaders were not able to agree on that. Instead Purdue Student Government issued a resolution titled, "PSG Opposes Discrimination."

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