

Testimony of Rev. Emily E. Ewing, in Support of HB 469

Employment Discrimination - Exceptions - Religious Activities of Religious Employers

Maryland House Economic Matters Committee

14 February 2024

Chair Wilson, Vice-Chair Crosby, and the Members of the House Economic Matters Committee,

As a Christian pastor, I support HB 469. Returning our state's non-discrimination laws to alignment with the federal constitution is a common sense adjustment and supports congregations and smaller communities of faith. When non-discrimination policy is unclear, congregations and small nonprofits have to figure out how to make their own non-discrimination policies clear with bylaws and adjustments to their constitutions, which takes significant time and a level of knowledge that not every congregation or non-profit has easily available. Without the protections for employment, religious nonprofits will miss out on the best people in technology, development, administration, and custodial work, among others. Potential employees would go elsewhere, unwilling to risk the discrimination that a segment of religious organizations would enact. As a pastor, I want and need to be able to hire the best administrative professionals and janitorial staff without having to write a bylaw, since they could work anywhere else without having to worry about discrimination. This is undue burden on religious communities is the government's responsibility.

The freedom of religion that the first amendment grants is a freedom to practice our faith, not a freedom to discriminate. This is especially true when it comes to organizations who receive federal funding. Those of us who follow our scriptural calls for justice, those of us who are both LGBTQIA2S+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Two Spirit, and more), disabled, and/or pregnant, and people of faith deserve protections in our lives instead of suffering unequal treatment under the law. Allowing the broad discrimination, as is currently the law of Maryland after last year's *Doe v. CRS* ruling, in every aspect of employment for religious nonprofits prioritizes one part of one denomination at the expense of the full religious diversity of Maryland's religious communities. Those of us whose faith compels us to hold to justice and God's call to abundant love should not be penalized or forced to do extra work just to be in line with what already exists for secular organizations. Maryland needs to decide if it protects freedom of religion for all people of faith in Maryland or provides preferential treatment for a select few denominations and organizations who use their faith to discriminate.

May the wisdom of our Creator journey with you as we together create a more just world.

Submitted respectfully,

Rev. Emily E. Ewing

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