



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

March 25, 2021

STATEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF WISCONSIN ON THE EQUALITY ACT OF 2021 (H.R. 5)

Wisconsin's Catholic bishops join with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in opposing the Equality Act of 2021 (H.R. 5). While all people must be treated with dignity and respect, efforts to prevent discrimination cannot foster inequality and intolerance of religion and people of faith. The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution specifically protects free speech and the free exercise of faith, as both are essential for a free and open society.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We stand in solidarity with [the letter issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops \(USCCB\) raising grave concerns with the Equality Act of 2021](#) (H.R. 5). As the letter rightly proclaims, every person is made in the image of God and must be treated with respect and compassion. Individuals have a right to live free of discrimination or harassment. However, the federal Equality Act of 2021 (H.R. 5), which aims to prevent discrimination by making "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" protected categories under the Civil Rights Act, would instead foster inequality and intolerance.

As Catholics, we are called to shield individuals from discrimination, accompany the vulnerable, and be a voice for the voiceless. However, the Equality Act would require religious entities to abandon the very principles of faith that undergird their ministry and service. Under the Equality Act, ministries would not be able to acknowledge the biological reality of male and female. Faith-based shelters would be punished for limiting access to women's sleeping quarters. Religious charities that offer adoption services would be forced to deny children the right to a mother and a father. Even worship facilities, schools, and other religious institutions would be forced to deny their core beliefs or cease operation.

The Equality Act not only fails to provide any accommodation or exemption for religious expression, it actually removes current protections under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), a bipartisan law designed to limit unnecessary government-imposed burdens on the practice of faith. Enacted into law under President Bill Clinton, RFRA ensures an appropriate balance between religious liberty and government action.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, recently stated "The Equality Act goes far beyond the noble desire to protect vulnerable people. It burdens consciences, severely curtails the rights of people to practice their faith, smuggles in an abortion mandate, and explicitly exempts itself from respecting religious freedom."¹

Pope Francis acknowledged that throughout the world there are "...various forms of an ideology of gender that 'denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family.'"² We recognize

¹ "Stand Against Unjust Discrimination: Oppose the Equality Act," Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York (March 16, 2021), <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2021/03/74791/>.

² *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love), no. 56, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis (March 19, 2016), http://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf.

that not all will agree with our Catholic views of marriage, family, and human sexuality, some of which are shared with other faith traditions. However, the First Amendment protects free speech and the free exercise of religion thereby ensuring that different views about these fundamental realities may be openly expressed and lived. The Equality Act would suppress these liberties, which are essential to a free and open society.

The U.S. House of Representatives has already passed the Equality Act and it is being debated in the U.S. Senate. We urge Senators, especially our Wisconsin Senators, to oppose it. For further information on the impact of the Equality Act, visit <https://www.usccb.org/equality-act>.

Let us pray during this Lenten Season, that God will bring us ever closer to a greater understanding of our Creator and lead us to repent for all the sins of prejudice and intolerance that continue to plague our nation.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend Jerome E. Listecki
Archbishop of Milwaukee

The Most Reverend Donald J. Hying
Bishop of Madison

The Most Reverend David L. Ricken
Bishop of Green Bay

The Most Reverend William P. Callahan
Bishop of La Crosse

The Most Reverend James P. Powers
Bishop of Superior