AAA Condemns Indiana RFRA Bill

March 30, 2015

The American Anthropological Association (AAA) joins a long list of corporations and citizens throughout the country outraged over the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) recently signed into law by Indiana Governor Mike Pence. In the AAA’s view, RFRA institutionalizes discrimination and is in violation of the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. The act legalizes religiously inspired bigotry and is clearly aimed at getting around the overwhelming shift towards support of marriage equality in the U.S. It is a step in the wrong direction for Indiana and the country as a whole.

AAA has long stood on its research-based record that LGBT discrimination flies in the face of widely accepted family and household arrangements. Throughout history, this type of state interference has been a means of oppression and stigmatization of disfavored groups, serving to degrade a broad community of U.S. citizens by depriving them of the full ability to exercise a fundamental right. This discrimination has been shown to have severe social and psychological impacts. Using personal religious beliefs to single anyone out as an ineligible consumer invites the public to discriminate against them as well. It also imposes adverse effects on their children which is unconscionable.

Pence’s insistence that the law is about “religious liberty” and not discrimination against LGBT doesn’t wash with many — including Indiana’s Chamber of Commerce, which has said the law will bring unwanted attention to the state, and Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard, who believes the bill sends the "wrong signal." They’re right. AAA is joining the ranks of many high-profile companies and entities that host major events in the state starting to reconsider their business, including the NCAA, Yelp, Gen Con, and Eli Lilly.

The outcry across the U.S. is encouraging. In an ironic twist, RFRA may actually end up not only enlightening the country on the importance of tolerance and understanding, but also why democracy and freedom depend on that understanding.

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