106TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION  
H. R. 1691  

To protect religious liberty.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  

MAY 5, 1999  
Mr. CANADY of Florida (for himself, Mr. EDWARDS, Mr. HYDE, Mr. WEINER, Mr. SENSENBRENNER, Mr. HUTCHINSON, Mr. GREEN of Texas, Mr. SMITH of Texas, Mr. ROGAN, Mr. PETERSON of Minnesota, and Mr. CANNON) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

A BILL  
To protect religious liberty.

1 Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

2 SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

3 This Act may be cited as the “Religious Liberty Protection Act of 1999”.

4 SEC. 2. PROTECTION OF RELIGIOUS EXERCISE.

5 (a) GENERAL RULE.—Except as provided in subsection (b), a government shall not substantially burden a person’s religious exercise—
(1) in a program or activity, operated by a govern-
ment, that receives Federal financial assistance;
or
(2) in any case in which the substantial burden
on the person's religious exercise affects, or in which
a removal of that substantial burden would affect,
commerce with foreign nations, among the several
States, or with Indian tribes;
even if the burden results from a rule of general applica-
bility.

(b) EXCEPTION.—A government may substantially
burden a person's religious exercise if the government
demonstrates that application of the burden to the
person—
(1) is in furtherance of a compelling govern-
mental interest; and
(2) is the least restrictive means of furthering
that compelling governmental interest.

(c) REMEDIES OF THE UNITED STATES.—Nothing in
this section shall be construed to authorize the United
States to deny or withhold Federal financial assistance as
a remedy for a violation of this Act. However, nothing in
this subsection shall be construed to deny, impair, or oth-
erwise affect any right or authority of the Attorney Gen-
eral or the United States or any agency, officer, or em-

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ployee thereof under other law, including section 4(d) of this Act, to institute or intervene in any action or proceeding.

SEC. 3. ENFORCEMENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS.

(a) Procedure.—If a claimant produces prima facie evidence to support a claim alleging a violation of the Free Exercise Clause or a violation of a provision of this Act enforcing that clause, the government shall bear the burden of persuasion on any element of the claim; however, the claimant shall bear the burden of persuasion on whether the challenged government practice, law, or regulation burdens or substantially burdens the claimant’s exercise of religion.

(b) Land Use Regulation.—

(1) Limitation on Land Use Regulation.—

(A) Where, in applying or implementing any land use regulation or exemption, or system of land use regulations or exemptions, a government has the authority to make individualized assessments of the proposed uses to which real property would be put, the government may not impose a substantial burden on a person’s religious exercise, unless the government demonstrates that application of the burden to the person is in furtherance of a compelling govern-
mental interest and is the least restrictive means of furthering that compelling governmental interest.

(B) No government shall impose or implement a land use regulation in a manner that does not treat religious assemblies or institutions on equal terms with nonreligious assemblies or institutions.

(C) No government shall impose or implement a land use regulation that discriminates against any assembly or institution on the basis of religion or religious denomination.

(D) No government with zoning authority shall unreasonably exclude from the jurisdiction over which it has authority, or unreasonably limit within that jurisdiction, assemblies or institutions principally devoted to religious exercise.

(2) FULL FAITH AND CREDIT.—Adjudication of a claim of a violation of the Free Exercise Clause or this subsection in a non-Federal forum shall be entitled to full faith and credit in a Federal court only if the claimant had a full and fair adjudication of that claim in the non-Federal forum.
(3) NONPREEMPTION.—Nothing in this sub-
section shall preempt State law that is equally or
more protective of religious exercise.

SEC. 4. JUDICIAL RELIEF.

(a) CAUSE OF ACTION.—A person may assert a viola-
tion of this Act as a claim or defense in a judicial pro-
ceeding and obtain appropriate relief against a govern-
ment. Standing to assert a claim or defense under this
section shall be governed by the general rules of standing
under article III of the Constitution.

(b) ATTORNEYS' FEES.—Section 722(b) of the Re-
vised Statutes (42 U.S.C. 1988(b)) is amended—

(1) by inserting “the Religious Liberty Protec-
tion Act of 1998,” after “Religious Freedom Res-
toration Act of 1993,”; and

(2) by striking the comma that follows a comma.

(c) PRISONERS.—Any litigation under this Act in
which the claimant is a prisoner shall be subject to the
Prison Litigation Reform Act of 1995 (including provi-
sions of law amended by that Act).

(d) AUTHORITY OF UNITED STATES TO ENFORCE
THIS ACT.—The United States may sue for injunctive or
declaratory relief to enforce compliance with this Act.
SEC. 5. RULES OF CONSTRUCTION.

(a) RELIGIOUS BELIEF UNAFFECTED.—Nothing in this Act shall be construed to authorize any government to burden any religious belief.

(b) RELIGIOUS EXERCISE NOT REGULATED.—Nothing in this Act shall create any basis for restricting or burdening religious exercise or for claims against a religious organization, including any religiously affiliated school or university, not acting under color of law.

(c) CLAIMS TO FUNDING UNAFFECTED.—Nothing in this Act shall create or preclude a right of any religious organization to receive funding or other assistance from a government, or of any person to receive government funding for a religious activity, but this Act may require government to incur expenses in its own operations to avoid imposing a burden or a substantial burden on religious exercise.

(d) OTHER AUTHORITY TO IMPOSE CONDITIONS ON FUNDING UNAFFECTED.—Nothing in this Act shall—

(1) authorize a government to regulate or affect, directly or indirectly, the activities or policies of a person other than a government as a condition of receiving funding or other assistance; or

(2) restrict any authority that may exist under other law to so regulate or affect, except as provided in this Act.
(e) GOVERNMENTAL DISCRETION IN ALLEVIATING
BURDENS ON RELIGIOUS EXERCISE.—A government may
avoid the preemptive force of any provision of this Act by
changing the policy that results in the substantial burden
on religious exercise, by retaining the policy and exempt-
ing the burdened religious exercise, by providing exemp-
tions from the policy for applications that substantially
burden religious exercise, or by any other means that
eliminates the substantial burden.

(f) EFFECT ON OTHER LAW.—In a claim under sec-
tion 2(a)(2) of this Act, proof that a substantial burden
on a person’s religious exercise, or removal of that burden,
affects or would affect commerce, shall not establish any
inference or presumption that Congress intends that any
religious exercise is, or is not, subject to any other law.

(g) BROAD CONSTRUCTION.—This Act should be con-
strued in favor of a broad protection of religious exercise,
to the maximum extent permitted by its terms and the
Constitution.

(h) SEVERABILITY.—If any provision of this Act or
of an amendment made by this Act, or any application
of such provision to any person or circumstance, is held
to be unconstitutional, the remainder of this Act, the
amendments made by this Act, and the application of the
provision to any other person or circumstance shall not be affected.

SEC. 6. ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE UNAFFECTED.

Nothing in this Act shall be construed to affect, interpret, or in any way address that portion of the first amendment to the Constitution prohibiting laws respecting an establishment of religion (referred to in this section as the "Establishment Clause"). Granting government funding, benefits, or exemptions, to the extent permissible under the Establishment Clause, shall not constitute a violation of this Act. As used in this section, the term "granting", used with respect to government funding, benefits, or exemptions, does not include the denial of government funding, benefits, or exemptions.

SEC. 7. AMENDMENTS TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM RESTORATION ACT.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—Section 5 of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (42 U.S.C. 2000bb–2) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (1), by striking "a State, or subdivision of a State" and inserting "a covered entity or a subdivision of such an entity";

(2) in paragraph (2), by striking "term" and all that follows through "includes" and inserting "term ‘covered entity’ means’; and
(3) in paragraph (4), by striking all after “means,” and inserting “conduct that constitutes
the exercise of religion under the first amendment to
the Constitution; however, such conduct need not be
compelled by, or central to, a system of religious be-
lief; the use, building, or converting of real property
for religious exercise shall itself be considered reli-
gious exercise of the person or entities that use or
intend to use the property for religious exercise.”.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section 6(a) of the
2000bb–3(a)) is amended by striking “and State”.

SEC. 8. DEFINITIONS.

As used in this Act—

(1) the term “religious exercise” means conduct
that constitutes the exercise of religion under the
first amendment to the Constitution; however, such
conduct need not be compelled by, or central to, a
system of religious belief; the use, building, or con-
verting of real property for religious exercise shall
itself be considered religious exercise of the person
or entities that use or intend to use the property for
religious exercise;

(2) the term “Free Exercise Clause” means
that portion of the first amendment to the Constitu-
tion that proscribes laws prohibiting the free exercise of religion and includes the application of that proscription under the 14th amendment to the Constitution;

(3) the term "land use regulation" means a law or decision by a government that limits or restricts a private person's uses or development of land, or of structures affixed to land, where the law or decision applies to one or more particular parcels of land or to land within one or more designated geographical zones, and where the private person has an ownership, leasehold, easement, servitude, or other property interest in the regulated land, or a contract or option to acquire such an interest;

(4) the term "program or activity" means a program or activity as defined in paragraph (1) or (2) of section 606 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000d-4a);

(5) the term "demonstrates" means meets the burdens of going forward with the evidence and of persuasion; and

(6) the term "government"—

(A) means—
(i) a State, county, municipality, or other governmental entity created under the authority of a State;

(ii) any branch, department, agency, instrumentality, subdivision, or official of an entity listed in clause (i); and

(iii) any other person acting under color of State law; and

(B) for the purposes of sections 3(a) and 5, includes the United States, a branch, department, agency, instrumentality or official of the United States, and any person acting under color of Federal law.