



July 26, 2022

Dear Senators,

I am writing to you today as the Acting President of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC). Our organization serves as the public policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the nation's largest Protestant denomination with over 50,000 churches and congregations and nearly 14 million members.

The purpose of this message is to convey my profound concerns about H.R. 8404, the "Respect for Marriage Act." The ERLC stands firmly opposed to this legislation, and I urge you to vote against its passage should it be scheduled for a vote.

Marriage is an institution created by God, not by man. No individual or government has the authority or ability to supersede its design. Marriage requires the specific union of a man and a woman for life (Gen. 2:24). Attempts to misapply or expand the term beyond these distinct parameters go against God's purpose and will lead people astray from what was meant for our flourishing.

Given the significant role marriage plays in faith, the "Respect for Marriage Act" raises serious religious liberty concerns for individuals and organizations who maintain this view of marriage and are in contract with, funded by, or working jointly with the government. Since the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision in 2015, questions have been raised and litigated surrounding rights of conscience and religious freedom. For example, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that a Colorado cake baker can serve others according to his sincerely held religious belief. Similarly, the court has sided with a Philadelphia Catholic foster care and adoption agency saying it could continue serving children and families according to their convictions.



It also is unclear whether the “Respect for Marriage Act” would codify federal recognition to civil marriages that go beyond the scope of two individuals in states that allow it. As an example, several cities in Massachusetts have legally recognized polygamous relationships. Given that there’s no limiting principle in this bill, it could potentially include other marriage definitions that a state chooses to adopt.

Given these concerns, it should be clear this issue transcends electoral politics. For our churches, this is about human flourishing and love for our neighbors. Underlying the SBC’s commitment to this is a verse from the first book in Scripture: “God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27). We hold fast to this understanding of God’s design of marriage as being between one man and one woman for life because this biblical framework undergirds a healthy society.

In light of these concerns, I urge you to oppose the “Respect for Marriage Act” and vote against its passage. Thank you for your attention to these important matters.

Respectfully,

Brent Leatherwood  
Acting President  
Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission