



ERLC Opposes the Respect for Marriage Act

Southern Baptists affirm that 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.

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. Should the Respect for Marriage Act become law, we may rightly assume that rights of conscience and religious freedom will find themselves under threat yet again.

Proposed amendments do not provide adequate protections for religious liberty. Though the Lee amendment does provide significant protections from federal discrimination, the Baldwin-Collins-Tillis substitute amendment does not provide meaningful protection for those that maintain a traditional view of marriage. This amendment invites further confusion and litigation without offering sufficient security for the many faith-based organizations serving their communities outside of "solemnizing or celebrating marriages."

This issue transcends electoral politics. For our churches, this is about human flourishing and love for our neighbors. Underlying the SBC's commitment to biblical marriage 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). Aside from the multitude of religious liberty challenges this bill poses, we ultimately oppose it because we hold fast to this understanding of God's design of marriage as being between one man and one woman for life, and we know that this biblical framework undergirds a healthy society and promotes human flourishing.

The ERLC strongly opposes the Respect for Marriage Act and urges Congress to work against the passage of this harmful bill.