

Arkansas Gov. Rejects Indiana Copycat Bill, Signs New, Flawed RFRA into Law

New Law Falls Short of Ensuring Religion Cannot be Used to Harm Others

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LITTLE ROCK, Ark. – Gov. Asa Hutchinson today signed SB 975 into law, a revised bill that sought to improve upon Religious Freedom Restoration Act HB 1228, which closely resembled Indiana’s controversial RFRA.

In doing so, he rejected the earlier HB 1228, which, like Indiana’s divisive law, allowed anyone to use their religious beliefs to claim that they have a right to refuse to follow virtually any law, including nondiscrimination laws.

The revised version was proposed following Gov. Hutchinson’s acknowledgement yesterday of HB 1228’s significant flaws, yet it falls short in protecting against the use of religion to avoid following laws that protect Arkansans from harm. The new RFRA still can be invoked to justify discrimination against gay and transgender people, people of color, minority faiths, women, and other Arkansans at risk.

The following quote may be attributed to Rita Sklar, executive director of the ACLU of Arkansas:

“We are grateful that Gov. Hutchinson and members of the General Assembly have listened to the loud outcry in opposition to HB 1228 and have enacted a new proposal. But this new law fails to protect against the use of religion to discriminate against and harm others. Religious liberty is a fundamental value that the ACLU of Arkansas has been working to uphold since 1969. We will be vigilant and ensure that the shield of religious freedom doesn't become a sword used to harm others in the State of Arkansas.”

[Link to Rita Sklar’s testimony before the House Judiciary Committee April 2, 2015](#)