

Dear Senators Collins and Baldwin,

The Center for Public Justice, and our Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance, thank you for your dedication to safeguarding religious freedom in the context of the statutory protection of same-sex marriage. We applaud Senators committed to bring forward for discussion the Respect for Marriage Act so the full chamber may discuss the proposed amendment that we believe strongly protects religious freedom.

The proposed amended Respect for Marriage Act establishes that Congress agrees with the U. S. Supreme Court's decision authorizing same-sex marriage that reasonable and sincere people can hold other convictions about marriage due to their religious or philosophical convictions. Among other strong religious freedom protections we commend, we stress our thanks for the bill's language specifically protecting the tax-exemption of faith-based nonprofits and houses of worship.

As a Christian organization, we believe in the historic biblical understandings of marriage and human sexuality. Many in our society hold a different view, and in Obergefell, the Supreme Court mandated that same-sex unions be legally recognized as marriages. Significantly, in that same opinion, the Court acknowledged that reasonable and sincere people can have decent and honorable religious or philosophical reasons to maintain their traditional convictions about marriage. We believe that it will be of great legal and cultural significance if Congress enacts an amended Respect for Marriage Act that adds to the U.S. Code a statement of congressional agreement with the Court's positive view about the supporters of traditional marriage.

The amended Respect for Marriage Act contains other significant language embodying a congressional commitment to protecting religious freedom in the context of affirming LGBTQ rights. We regard adoption of the Act as the best opportunity since the passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (1993) and the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (2000) for Congress to safeguard religious freedom with Democratic support. The amended Respect for Marriage Act codifies what is already the law of the land because of Obergefell while adding to the U.S. Code new protections for religious freedom in the context of marriage equality.

As a Christian public policy organization we are committed to policies that respect the dignity of all people. In our society with its many diverse communities of belief, justice requires creative pluralist policies. The religious freedom protections designed into the amended Respect for Marriage Act embody this pluralist approach. We commend you and your colleagues for your commitment to protecting religious freedom in our changing culture.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Summers, CEO, Center for Public Justice
Stanley Carlson-Thies, Founder, Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance

