



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. BOX 8952 • MADISON, WI 53708

April 14, 2015

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Rep. Zamarripa (608) 267-7669
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Zamarripa, Spreitzer Call on Walker to Oppose So-Called “Religious Freedom” Legislation

Madison – In a letter delivered to Governor Walker’s office this morning, State Representatives JoCasta Zamarripa (D-Milwaukee) and Mark Spreitzer (D- Beloit) called on the governor to take a clear and unequivocal stand against any form of so-called “religious freedom” legislation being enacted in Wisconsin. Both representatives released statements regarding the letter.

Rep. Zamarripa stated, “I am seriously concerned that Governor Walker’s public statements regarding this issue do not match his true policy goals. A month removed from a contentious and unnecessary debate regarding right-to-work legislation, a bill Governor Walker assured voters would never reach his desk, I remain wary that the governor’s out-of-state ambitions may trump sound public policy for the people of Wisconsin. I am calling on the governor to take a clear, concise stand against any form of similar legislation in Wisconsin that would allow for discrimination under the guise of religious protection.”

Rep. Spreitzer stated, “Judged by his broken promises on so-called ‘right to work,’ I find it hard to trust the Governor when he hints that Wisconsin will not pass a ‘religious’ freedom-to-discriminate law. Governor Walker must publicly promise that he will discourage both the introduction, and passage, of any legislation attempting to legalize people’s ability to discriminate based on their religious beliefs, and he must promise to veto such a bill should it come to his desk. By doing so, the governor can make a strong and sincere statement to the LGBT community that the well-being of Wisconsin’s residents is more important than securing another state’s presidential primary votes.”

A copy of the letter sent to the governor’s office can be found below.



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Governor Scott Walker
115 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Governor Walker:

We write to express concern about recent statements you have made to the media. When asked about Indiana's "Religious Freedom Restoration Act," which legalizes the ability to discriminate against Americans who happen to be Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT), you stated that "it's really not something we're going to be involved with here."¹ When asked whether similar legislation would be introduced in Wisconsin, you noted that "[RFRA is] not anything that's been debated in the past at any great length...I don't anticipate that coming to my desk."²

Our concern, and the concern of many Wisconsinites, is that your public statements cannot be trusted to adhere to your true policy goals. Namely, we fear a repeat of the contradictions between your actions and similar statements you made during the recent "right-to-work" debate here in Wisconsin. You championed and signed into law legislation that will slash workers' wages. However, when asked beforehand whether you were pushing for such legislation, you repeatedly said you had, "no interest in pursuing right-to-work legislation in this state,"³ even calling it a "distraction."⁴ When discussing "right to work" legislation more directly, you said, "I'm going to do everything in my power to make sure it isn't there because my focal point (is) private sector unions have overwhelmingly come to the table to be my partner in economic development."⁵ You also said that "My point is I'm not pushing for it. I'm not supporting it in this session."⁶ Unfortunately, none of these statements turned out to be true.

¹ "Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker doesn't anticipate controversial Indiana law in Wisconsin", Mar 31, 2015, *Milwaukee Business Journal*, <http://www.bizjournals.com/milwaukee/news/2015/03/31/wisconsin-gov-scott-walker-doesnt-anticipate>

² Id.

³ Patrick Marley, "Walker says he will do 'everything in my power' to prevent right-to-work bill" *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, May 11, 2012;

⁴ Patrick Marley, "Walker says right-to-work bill would be a distraction" *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Dec. 4, 2014

⁵ Patrick Marley, "Walker says he will do 'everything in my power' to prevent right-to-work bill" *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, May 11, 2012;

⁶ Patrick Marley, "Walker says right-to-work bill would be a distraction" *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Dec. 4, 2014



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Understandably, your history of broken promises about your intentions concerns those of us who fight against discrimination, particularly discrimination against the LGBT community. In addition, the Republican Party you lead in Wisconsin has staked out a strong, anti-LGBT policy as recently as last year.⁷

Furthermore, on June 12, 2013, 20 Republican Representatives and five Senators introduced Assembly Joint Resolution 43 and Senate Joint Resolution 38. This proposed constitutional amendment sought to add the following language to Wisconsin's Constitution:

The right of conscience, which includes the right to engage in activity or refrain from activity based on a sincerely held religious belief, shall not be burdened unless the state proves it has a compelling interest in infringing upon the specific action or refusal to act, and the burden is the least-restrictive alternative to the state's action. A burden to the right of conscience includes indirect burdens, such as withholding benefits, assessing penalties, or exclusion from programs or access to facilities.

This language provides legal cover for people to discriminate against others in every area of public and private life, merely by asserting that their discrimination is based on personal religious beliefs. As you are aware, this would eliminate virtually all anti-discrimination protections in our state, and would empower government and the courts to determine the validity of an individual's religious beliefs.

Based on the evidence outlined above, we would like a direct answer to this question: Will you promise to discourage the introduction of, and promise to veto, any legislation which would legalize the ability for any person or entity to discriminate based on one's religious belief?

Thank you for your time and attention, and we look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,

JoCasta Zamarripa
State Representative
8th Assembly District

Mark Spreitzer
State Representative
45th Assembly District

⁷Republican Party of Wisconsin Resolutions as Approved at 2014 State Convention, <http://www.wisgop.org/2014-republican-party-of-wisconsin-resolutions/>