

# RELIGIOUS LIBERTY JEOPARDIZED BY LANSING, MICHIGAN BILL

The Catholic League has formally opposed a gay rights bill in Lansing, Michigan on the grounds that it affords inadequate protection for the religious freedom rights of individuals. Amendments to the Lansing Code of Ordinances, commonly referred to as the Civil Rights Ordinance, would grant protected class status to persons based on sexual orientation.

Although the Civil Rights Ordinance includes exemptions for religious organizations, it is silent regarding the religious freedom rights of individuals. Because the courts have difficulty in making determinations regarding the application of exemptions to religious organizations, such exemptions are often inadequate to protect the autonomy of religious institutions.

To offer a practical example, the bill would not protect a Catholic couple who wants to refuse to rent a room to a gay couple. As such, the bill would force them to do something that in conscience they cannot countenance.

A few years ago the league was involved in such a case and was able, fortunately, to resolve it without going to court. It involved a couple who had advertised in a local newspaper for a trained person to live in their home so as to service their mentally disabled son. When an openly gay applicant was refused the job, he threatened to sue, claiming discrimination. The parents of the patient did not want a gay person attending to their son after the experience he endured while being hospitalized: he was raped by a male staffer.

If the Lansing bill were to include a provision to protect the religious rights of individuals, the league would not oppose it. The league has notified all members of the Lansing City

Council about its objections. We made it clear that the religiously informed conscience of individuals must remain free from the governmental interference exemplified by the sexual orientation provisions of the proposed Civil Rights Ordinance.