

UNJUST CALIFORNIA BILL REVISED

A California bill that would have essentially gutted the heart and soul of religious colleges and universities was revised by its sponsor, deleting its most controversial provisions, in the face of strong opposition from Catholic and other Christian leaders. We were happy to add our voice to this effort.

As first introduced, SB 1146, sponsored by California state Senator Ricardo Lara, would have denied important exemptions to religious schools that have long been honored by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. And it would have exposed those schools to lawsuits simply for conducting themselves according to the tenets of their faith.

The so-called “Equity in Higher Education Act” would have forced religious schools that receive state funds, or whose students receive state aid, to adopt practices that conflict with their beliefs and teachings. The legislation would have mandated that religious schools provide bathrooms based on “gender identity” rather than male-female. It would have required that married dorms be opened up to same-sex couples. It had the government deciding what “religious practices” and “rules for moral conduct” would be acceptable. It could have restricted a school’s ability to teach its religious faith or require student attendance at worship services, and it could have been used to require that gay and lesbian clubs and activities be allowed on campus.

In short, the original bill went way beyond the issue of gay and lesbian rights. It was clearly an effort to use that agenda to attack and weaken the moral foundations of Christianity.

The measure would have especially hurt low-income and minority families, millions of whom, throughout California, utilize faith-based colleges and universities and depend on financial assistance to be able to do so.

It would also have gravely weakened faith-based institutions financially. It would have forced them to either compromise their moral principles or incur costly litigation to fight the bill's anti-religion mandates. And it would have made it easier for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students at religious colleges to sue for discrimination if they are penalized for violating church doctrine.

The revised bill removes that provision, insulating these religious institutions from lawsuits that challenge their teachings on sexual ethics.

Sen. Lara is still seeking to make religious colleges comply with a provision requiring them to notify a state agency each time a student is expelled for violating the school's moral code of conduct. This is classic state overreach and a flagrant violation of the First Amendment. As such, it should be eliminated.

No one wants to see any students denied basic civil liberties, but when cross-dressing men claim victim status for not being allowed to shower with women—in a college that respects the biological distinctions provided by nature and nature's God—then such appeals must be rejected. To do otherwise is to counsel state control of religious entities, as well as to indulge in a political fiction.

There is a huge difference between advancing human rights and using the club of discrimination to force religious institutions to abandon their autonomy. Separation of church and state is not being disrespected by the faithful, but it is being trampled upon by militant secularists.

Kudos to Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez, Bishop Charles

Blake of the Church of God in Christ, and the many activist organizations that protested the bill and pushed for the revisions.