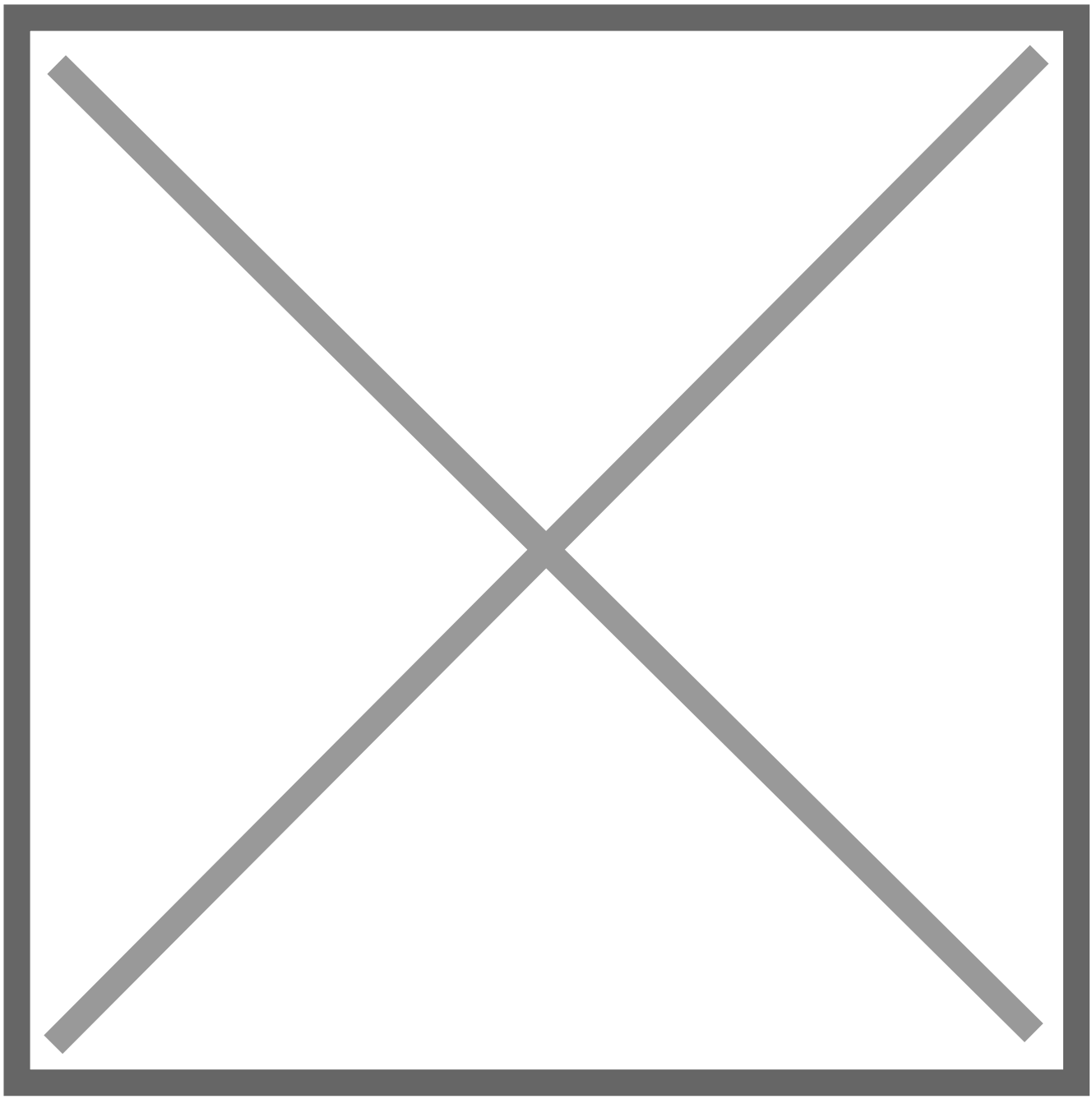
News



Five committee chairmen of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in a Feb. 23, 2021, letter to members of Congress oppose the reintroduced Equality Act. The chairmen are Bishop David A. Konderla of Tulsa, Okla., Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage; Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development; Bishop Michael C. Barber of Oakland, Calif., Committee on Catholic Education; Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City, Kan., Committee on Pro-Life Activities; and Cardinal Timothy M.

Dolan of New York, Committee for Religious Liberty. (CNS composite; photos by Paul Haring, Gregory A. Shemitz, Brendan McDermid of Reuters)



by Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Washington — February 24, 2021
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

If the House of Representatives passes the Equality Act, its mandates will "discriminate against people of faith" by adversely affecting charities and their beneficiaries, conscience rights, women’s sports, "and sex-specific facilities," said the chairmen of five U.S. bishops' committees.

The bill, known as H.R. 5 and recently reintroduced in the House, also will provide for taxpayer funding of abortion and limit freedom of speech, the chairmen said in a Feb. 23 letter to all members of Congress.

H.R. 5 would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing, public accommodations, public education, federal funding, the credit system and jury duty. The House was expected to vote on the measure before Feb. 26.

"Human dignity is central to what Catholics believe because every person is made in the image of God and should be treated accordingly, with respect and compassion," they said, "This commitment is reflected in the church’s charitable service to all people, without regard to race, religion or any other characteristic."

"It means we need to honor every person's right to gainful employment free of unjust discrimination or harassment, and to the basic goods that they need to live and thrive," they continued. "It also means that people of differing beliefs should be

respected. In this, we wholeheartedly support nondiscrimination principles to ensure that everyone's rights are protected."

H.R. 5 "purports to protect people experiencing same-sex attraction or gender discordance from discrimination. But instead, the bill represents the imposition by Congress of novel and divisive viewpoints regarding 'gender' on individuals and organizations," they said.

"This includes dismissing sexual difference and falsely presenting 'gender' as only a social construct," they said. "As Pope Francis has reflected, however, 'biological sex and the sociocultural role of sex — gender — can be distinguished but not separated.'"

Signing the letter were: Bishop Michael C. Barber of Oakland, California, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Catholic Education; Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman of the USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development; Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York, chairman of the USCCB Committee for Religious Liberty; Bishop David A. Konderla of Tulsa, Oklahoma, chairman of the USCCB Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage; and Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, chairman of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

Advertisement

"It is one thing to be understanding of human weakness and the complexities of life, and another to accept ideologies that attempt to sunder what are inseparable aspects of reality," the bishops said, further quoting Pope Francis.

"Tragically, this act can also be construed to include an abortion mandate, a violation of precious rights to life and conscience," the committee chairmen added.

"Rather than affirm human dignity in ways that meaningfully exceed existing practical protections, the Equality Act would discriminate against people of faith," they said. "It would also inflict numerous legal and social harms on Americans of any faith or none."

The measure first passed the House May 17, 2019, in a bipartisan 236–173 vote, but the Senate did not act on the bill after receiving it. President Donald Trump had

threatened to veto the measure if it ever reached his desk.

House leadership pledged to see it reintroduced in the 117th Congress. On Feb. 18, Rep. David Cicilline, D-Rhode Island, reintroduced it. Democratic Sens. Jeff Merkley of Oregon, Cory Booker of New Jersey and Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin are expected to reintroduce a Senate version soon.