

Bishops push back on gay couples in housing

Daniel Burke Religion News Service | Mar. 29, 2011

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Catholic bishops are urging federal housing officials not to adopt proposed rules that would bar groups that receive federal funds from discriminating against gays, lesbians or transgender persons in housing programs.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development said the new rules, proposed on Jan. 24, would "ensure equal access" to programs that help the elderly, sick, and impoverished find stable housing.

Citing recent studies, HUD said gays and lesbians face discrimination in the private housing market, and one in five transgender persons reports homelessness due to bias.

"In considering the mounting evidence of violence and discrimination against LGBT persons, the department is concerned that its own programs may not be fully open to LGBT individuals and families," HUD said in January.

Lawyers for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops say the new rules would force some religious groups to compromise their beliefs or quit HUD housing programs.

"Faith-based and other organizations should retain the freedom they have always had to make housing placements in a manner consistent with their religious beliefs, including when it concerns a cohabiting couple, be it an unmarried heterosexual couple or a homosexual couple," said Anthony Picarello and Michael Moses, lawyers for the bishops conference.

The lawyers' remarks came in a letter to HUD as part of a public comment period that ended Friday (March 25). A spokeswoman for HUD could not be reached immediately for comment about when the new policy would take effect.

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