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## Bishops state 'great concern' over executive order on LGBT discrimination

by Joshua J. McElwee

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**Washington** — Archbishop-chairmen of several U.S. bishops' committees issued a statement Friday citing "great concern" over news that President Barack Obama is planning to issue an executive order banning discrimination against LGBT persons by federal contractors.

Key to their concerns, say the bishops, is how the new order will define the terms "sexual orientation" and "gender identity."

"Because we do not know how the executive order will define these critically important terms, or if it will provide sufficient (or any) religious freedom protection, we cannot provide substantive comment on the order," state the bishops.

"On the other hand, when the U.S. Senate recently passed legislation on the same topic, we raised detailed objections to that legislation," they continue, asking those interested to review their previous comments on the Senate legislation.

The bishops were writing Friday regarding news earlier this week that the Obama administration is beginning consultations in preparation for issuing the executive order, which would reportedly only effect groups that contract with the federal government and not those who receive grants, like faith-based charity agencies.

"The enduring commitment of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to uphold the dignity of each and every human person impels us to oppose unjust discrimination, to proclaim the truth about marriage, and to protect religious freedom," state the bishops.

"We intend to review the details of the executive order carefully once it is available, in order to assess whether it serves the dignity of the human person and the common good.?"

The bishops' statement refers to passage in the Senate last year of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), which prohibits employers with companies of more than 15 people from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Three Bishop-chairmen wrote to senators last July, stating that while the U.S. bishops "oppose 'unjust discrimination' against people with a homosexual inclination" they "cannot support a bill ... that would legally affirm and specially protect any sexual conduct outside of marriage."

While ENDA passed the Senate 64-32 in November, it is yet to be considered in the House of Representatives this Congress.

Friday's statement was signed by four U.S. bishops' committee chairmen: San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, chairman of the bishops' subcommittee for the promotion and defense of marriage; Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski, chairman of their domestic policy committee; Baltimore Archbishop William Lori, chairman of their ad hoc committee for religious liberty; and St. Paul-Minneapolis Archbishop John Nienstedt, chair of their committee on doctrine.

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[Joshua J. McElwee is *NCR* national correspondent. His email address is [jmcelwee@ncronline.org](mailto:jmcelwee@ncronline.org).

Follow him on Twitter: @joshjmac.]

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