

Mississippi creates law aimed at religious liberty, Georgia bill gets veto

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As several southern states weighed bills on religious liberty, Mississippi governor Phil Bryant signed one that allows businesses to refuse service to LGBT customers based on religious convictions, while Georgia governor Nathan Deal vetoed a similar bill, saying the measure proposed to fix a problem that didn't exist.

After signing the bill on April 5, Gov. Bryant stated, "This bill merely reinforces the rights which currently exist to the exercise of religious freedom as stated in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution."

The law also gives government employees the right to refuse services based on their religious beliefs.

Georgia's bill aimed to broadly protect people acting on their beliefs, refusing to cater a same-sex wedding, for example. It also named protections for clergy who refuse to perform same-sex marriages and people who won't attend a wedding for religious reasons.

Gov. Deal of Georgia said in remarks posted on his website about his March 28 veto that he was not aware of examples of situations in the state requiring such protections.

"I do not think that we have to discriminate against anyone to protect the faith-based community in Georgia," he said.

After the legislation was passed, the National Football League hinted at skipping Atlanta for a future Super Bowl, and a host of Hollywood studios, stars, and filmmakers threatened to pull their \$1 billion business from the city known as "Hollywood South."

"Some of those in the religious community who support this bill have resorted to insults that question my moral convictions and my character," Deal said. "Some

within the business community who oppose this bill have resorted to threats of withdrawing jobs from our state.”

Deal said the nation’s founders thought it unnecessary to enumerate in statute or constitution the definition of religious liberty.

“We should heed the ‘hands-off’ admonition of the First Amendment to our Constitution,” he said. “When legislative bodies attempt to do otherwise, the inclusions and omissions in their statutes can lead to discrimination, even though it may be unintentional.”

Meanwhile, Virginia governor Terry McAuliffe had similar reasons for vetoing a bill on March 30 related to religious liberty and services to LGBT people.

And North Carolina will have to defend a bill barring cities and counties from developing their own measures to protect LGBT people. The law was signed by Gov. Pat McCrory in late March.

The American Civil Liberties Union and state LGBT organizations filed a lawsuit in federal court challenging the law as unconstitutional. It requires people to use public restrooms for the sex assigned to them at birth and took away certain legal protections from LGBT people.

“This is about more than bathrooms,” said plaintiff Joaquín Carcaño. “This is about my job, my community, and my ability to get safely through my day and be productive like everyone else in North Carolina.”

The ACLU was also weighing legal action in Mississippi. —*USA Today*; the Associated Press; *The Christian Science Monitor*