

Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance of Washington, DC
P.O. Box 75265
Washington, D.C. 20013
www.glaa.org

For Release:

July 8, 2014

Contact: Rick Rosendall

(202) 328-6278

GLAA opposes ENDA over sweeping religious exemptions

The Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance of Washington, D.C. (GLAA) voted at its monthly meeting on July 8 to adopt the following statement. It may be attributed to GLAA President Rick Rosendall.

GLAA joins the growing list of LGBT rights organizations that oppose the present version of the federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). In its current form, sweeping religious exemptions in ENDA could enshrine anti-LGBT discrimination into law by allowing far more organizations to bypass civil rights protections than are permitted under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Furthermore, provisions added by Senator Rob Portman through amendment seek, in his words, "to ensure that government cannot penalize a religious employer because it qualifies as exempt from the non-discrimination requirements of ENDA." These assurances could weaken existing state and city non-discrimination protections resulting in a step backwards in protecting the LGBT community.

Many of us as well as people in the larger, national organizations have put a great deal of effort in trying to get ENDA passed in its 40-plus year history, and it is with great reluctance that we abandon it now. However, the ENDA we see now is very different than what many of us are fighting for. Whether looking at the process of gaining full civil rights for LGBT people holistically or incrementally, the broad religious exemptions outlined in the present bill come up short. To achieve full federal rights, we call on members of Congress, including our own representative, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, to withhold support of ENDA until these extra religious exemptions are removed, and we call on President Obama to sign an executive order protecting employees of federal contractors without these exemptions.

We note that in the fall of 2009, during consideration of DC's marriage equality bill, GLAA successfully opposed similarly broad religious exemptions demanded by the Archdiocese of Washington. The Archdiocese responded by ordering Catholic Charities to terminate their contract with the District government to provide adoption services -- a tacit admission that they had been violating DC's Human Rights Act all along by discriminating against same-sex couples. The adoption services were continued under another religious contractor that was prepared to obey the law.

As was true of D.C.'s local legislation, so it should be with federal legislation: we must not undercut anti-discrimination protections with excessive religious exemptions. Religious organizations are already protected. Those who want to impose their faith-based intolerance upon their fellow citizens under color of the civil law should be disappointed.

Founded in 1971, the Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance of Washington (GLAA) is an all-volunteer, non-partisan, non-profit political organization that defends the civil rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the Nation's Capital. GLAA lobbies the D.C. Council, monitors government agencies, educates and rates local candidates, and works in coalitions to defend the safety, health, and equal rights of LGBT families. GLAA remains the nation's oldest continuously active gay and lesbian civil rights organization.

###