

Resolution affirming Franklin County as an open and welcoming County for all residents and visitors, urging the Ohio General Assembly to refrain from introducing a far-reaching, so-called "Religious Freedom Restoration Act", and encouraging the Ohio General Assembly to amend the Ohio Revised Code to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. (Commissioners)

WHEREAS, Franklin County is an open and welcoming County for all of our residents and visitors; and

WHEREAS, the Franklin County Board of Commissioners has long been an advocate for all in our community, as evidenced by the Board's Non-Discrimination Policy to not make employment decisions in a discriminatory manner based on "race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability that can be reasonably accommodated, or veteran status;" and

WHEREAS, in 2008 the Board adopted Resolution 286-08 establishing a policy against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, in 2009 the Board endorsed House Bill 176 in the Ohio General Assembly, which would have amended the Ohio Revised Code to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity and expression (it was not adopted by the Ohio General Assembly), and the Board continues its ongoing effort to ensure that the County's collective bargaining agreements prohibit discrimination based upon sexual orientation and gender identity, and that County contracts prohibit discrimination based upon sexual orientation and gender identity; and

WHEREAS, the recent actions in Indiana, which initially passed a far-reaching, so-called "Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA)," and similar actions taken in other states such as Arkansas and Mississippi, are troubling to this Board, and go far beyond the efforts of the original RFRA bills that were intended to protect religious freedom; and

WHEREAS, Indiana's original RFRA was designed to allow businesses, organizations, and individuals to discriminate against anyone on religious grounds, and would have allowed religious beliefs to be raised as a defense in legal proceedings brought by customers, workers or tenants who suffered discrimination in a business transaction; and

WHEREAS, the implementation of such a bill could have far-reaching implications for those who would seek to use the RFRA to allow their religious beliefs to discriminate against someone based on their

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sexual orientation or gender identity, race, gender, or other characteristics that run afoul of someone's religious beliefs, with potentially far-reaching implications in everyone's daily lives, whether one is shopping in a store, eating at a restaurant, seeking treatment in a doctor's office, or trying to find housing, to name just a few instances in which this could come into play; and

WHEREAS, the Board stands firmly committed to dignity and equality for all people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, age, disability, or other characteristics that some may try to target in a discriminatory manner, and furthermore, the Board recognizes that religion is a protected class and as such, there is no need to "restore" religious freedom – it is protected; and

WHEREAS, the Board supports religious freedom, but cannot be silent while others attempt to use religion and so-called "religious freedom" as a weapon and as a way to discriminate against others, and the Board views such attempts as a perversion of 1st Amendment Religious Freedom, having an almost certain opposite effect; and

WHEREAS, the Board applauds the efforts of so many individuals, advocates, and businesses across the United States that raised their voices to ensure that all people are treated with dignity and respect; and

WHEREAS, the Board is heartened by the initial steps in a positive direction that states like Indiana and Arkansas took in reaction to the concerns of so many, but recognizes that there remains work to be done to ensure that our communities are open and welcoming to all; and

WHEREAS, in the 2013-2014 session of the Ohio General Assembly, a so-called "Religious Freedom Restoration Act" bill was introduced, but after concerns were raised, the bill did not pass; now, therefore,

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BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS, FRANKLIN COUNTY, OHIO:

1. That the Franklin County Board of Commissioners reaffirms its commitment to ensuring that Franklin County is open and welcoming to all of our residents and visitors.
2. That the Board applauds the advocacy of voices throughout the nation to work toward a more perfect union.
3. That the Board supports religious freedom, but does not support the attempt to use religion and so-called "religious freedom" as a way to discriminate against others, be it based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, age, disability, or other characteristics that some may try to target in a discriminatory manner.
4. That the Board urges the Ohio General Assembly to refrain from introducing a far-reaching, so-called "Religious Freedom Restoration Act" in Ohio.
5. That the Board further encourages, just as this Board advocated in 2009, that the Ohio General Assembly amend the Ohio Revised Code to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity – Franklin County, and the State of Ohio, need to be open and welcoming to all residents and visitors.
6. That the Clerk to the Board of Commissioners is directed to deliver a copy of this Resolution to the Governor, Speaker of the House, President of the Senate, and to the Franklin County legislative delegation.