

April 4, 2022

Dear Governor Youngkin:

The purpose of this letter to urge you to sign House Bill 1063, which helpfully defines the term “religion” as it appears in various anti-discrimination laws. The undersigned are organizations dedicated to the defense and advancement of religious liberty.

Virginia law forbids discrimination on the basis of religion in multiple contexts, including state employment, private sector employment, places of public accommodation, and housing. *See* Va. Code Ann. §§ 2.2-2901.1, 2.2-3904, 2.2-3905, 15.2-1604, 22.1-295.2, and 55.1-1310. Virginia law also authorizes local jurisdictions to adopt ordinances forbidding religious discrimination in various contexts. *See* Va. Code Ann. §§ 15.2-853, 15.2-965.

Generally speaking, these statutes do not define the term “religion.” H.B. 1063 fills that void by defining “religion” in 11 locations in the Virginia Code as follows:

“Religion” includes any outward expression of religious faith, including adherence to religious dressing and grooming practices and the carrying or display of religious items or symbols. H.B. 1063, § 1.

Committee hearing witnesses from across the ideological, religious, and political spectrum expressed support for H.B. 1063. The bill passed the House of Delegates unanimously on February 15, and the Senate unanimously on February 28. As you know, the enrolled bill was communicated to you on March 11, and your action deadline is April 11.

The bill correctly and helpfully clarifies that “religion” includes not just belief, but expression and action as well.

The General Assembly’s proposed definition of “religion” is conceptually similar to those found in other jurisdictions’ laws. For example, federal Title VII defines “religion” as “all aspects of religious observance and practice, as well as belief.” 42 U.S.C. § 2000e(j). *See also* Md. Code Ann. State Gov’t § 20-601(j) (West 2019)(“‘religion’ includes all aspects of religious observances, practice, and belief”).

H.B. 1063 thus resolves a potential ambiguity and brings Virginia law into line with other jurisdictions’ laws. We believe that your signature on H.B. 1063 would enhance the legal protection of all Virginians’ religious exercise, and we respectfully encourage you to sign the bill into law.

Very truly yours,

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Jamison Coppola  
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