



# REPORT from the Capital

## EEOC details employer rules as religious worker complaints rise

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued new, detailed guidelines for employers March 6 as the number of complaints and million-dollar settlements for cases of religious workplace discrimination neared record levels in 2013.

An EEOC spokesperson, Justine Lisser, said that the 20-year trend shows “a persistent uptick in religious discrimination charges that continues unabated.” Complaints have more than doubled since 1997. Lisser also said that representatives of religious groups have asked for more EEOC outreach in this area.

There have been guidelines in the past but the EEOC spelled out workplace rights and responsibilities in a new question-and-answer guide and accompanying fact sheet.

The new guidelines detail how businesses with more than 15 employees must accommodate workers with “sincerely” held religious beliefs — and unbelievers who “sincerely” refuse religious garb or insignia. Businesses cannot refuse to interview a Sikh with a turban or a Christian wearing a cross. Neither can they limit where employees work because of their religious dress.

Workers must be accommodated for refusing to wear certain garments, such as an Orthodox Jewish woman declining to wear a short skirt. And more than clothing is at issue: Employers must allow Rastafarians, for example, to wear their hair in dreadlocks.

It is not relevant if a belief or practice is newly adopted by an employee who suddenly grows a beard or seeks leave for holiday worship.

Title VII, which is enforced by the EEOC, “defines religion very broadly to include not only traditional, organized religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, but also religious beliefs that are new, uncommon, not part of a formal church or sect, only subscribed to by a small number of people, or may seem illogical or unreasonable to others.”

The rules apply to the sincerely unreligi-



gious as well, as long as these views relate to “what is right or wrong that are sincerely held with the strength of traditional religious views.”

The only exceptions are whether the clothing or grooming practice is unsafe or places “undue hardship to the operation of an employer’s business.”

The guidelines cited multiple examples, including three settled in 2013:

- An Albuquerque, N.M., hotel that would not allow a woman to work in housekeeping unless she removed her Muslim headscarf.
- A Newark, N.J., auto dealership that refused to hire a Sikh salesman unless he shaved his beard to suit the dealership dress code.
- A fast-food outlet in Laurinburg, N.C., that sought to force a Pentecostal Christian food service employee to wear uniform pants even when her faith teaches women should only wear skirts.

Employers can’t stash people out of sight because of their garb or grooming, and they can’t allow any harassment by fellow employees.

According to the EEOC, in fiscal year 2013, the commission received 3,721 charges alleging religious discrimination, more than double the 1,709 charges received in fiscal year 1997.

The costs are rising as well. In 2013, monetary settlements for workplace religious discrimination reached \$11.2 million, ranking just below the record of \$14.1 million in 2001 and \$12.6 million in 2011.

—Cathy Lynn Grossman,  
*Religion News Service*

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# Fired Tenn. pharmacist sues Walgreens alleging religious bias

A Tennessee pharmacist who lost his job after an ongoing dispute over selling Plan B contraception has sued his former bosses, claiming he was fired because of his religious beliefs.

Lawyers for Philip M. Hall of Jamestown, Tenn., filed suit against the Walgreens drugstore chain in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee on Feb. 11, claiming it discriminated against Hall's religious beliefs.

Hall, who is also a deacon at Allardt First Baptist Church, was fired in August after working six years for Walgreens. He believes Plan B contraceptives cause abortions and refused to dispense them. Plan B is a form of birth control that can prevent pregnancy if taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex. Many medical experts say it does not cause a miscarriage or abortion and won't work if the fertilized egg is already implanted.

For several years, Walgreens worked out a compromise with Hall. If a customer came into the store with a prescription for Plan B, Hall would refer them to

another staff member.

Things changed in the summer of 2013, when the FDA approved Plan B as an over-the-counter medication.

Hall said in the complaint that his boss informed the staff that pharmacists were expected to stock and sell Plan B. Hall told his bosses that he still did not want to sell the drug. He also contacted the main headquarters of Walgreens in suburban Chicago, to express his concerns about selling the drug.

Things came to a head in mid-July, according to the complaint. Hall claims six boxes of Plan B were delivered to the store but were mislabeled as behind-the-counter drugs. He bought all six boxes for \$328.43 and threw them away.

When his boss learned what happened, Hall was initially accused of stealing the drugs. After he showed the receipt, he was then asked if he would sell Plan B.

Hall said he would not, and was fired, according to the complaint.

"He doesn't object to Walgreens selling

Plan B," said Jocelyn Floyd, a lawyer at the Thomas More Society, a nonprofit Christian legal group representing Hall. "He's just asking that they accommodate his religious beliefs."

Floyd said Hall got rid of the Plan B medication because it was mislabeled. She said it didn't matter what he did with the medication.

Jim Graham, a spokesman for Walgreens, would not comment on the specifics of Hall's suit. He did say in an email that the company respects the religious beliefs of employees.

"While we cannot comment on pending litigation, we can tell you that Walgreens company policy allows pharmacists and other employees to step away from completing a transaction to which they have a moral objection," he said in an email.

"Our policy also requires the employee to refer the transaction to another employee or manager on duty who will complete the customer's request."

—Bob Smietana, Religion News Service

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## Citing threats, North Carolina student reverses course on secular club

A North Carolina high school student who sought to establish a school club for nonbelievers has decided not to move forward with her plans after what she and her family have described as harassment and threats.

Last October, Kalei Wilson, 15, and her brother, Ben, 17, asked to launch a chapter of Secular Student Alliance, a national organization of college and high school students, at Pisgah High School in Canton, N.C.

Documents sent in February by the Freedom from Religion Foundation and the American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina on behalf of the students claim the brother and sister made multiple requests that were ignored and not dealt with in a timely manner by the school. They warned administrators that ignoring the students' requests placed the school in violation of the Equal Access Act.

Several days later, Kalei Wilson announced she had been granted permission to start a club. Ben Wilson no longer attends Pisgah High School.

"To me it means change and improvement in the school," she said at the time. "I hope to teach them more about equality and the separation between church and state."

But within a week, her fundraising page announced that she would not be continuing with the group, saying she and her family had been threatened and harassed. They declined

to comment for this story, citing concerns for their safety.

Pat Smathers, an attorney for the Haywood County Schools, which includes Pisgah High School, disputes Kalei and Ben Wilson's claims in a letter written on behalf of school administrators and sent to the foundation and the ACLU-NC and obtained by Religion News Service. He says he undertook an investigation of the matter and has several "concerns," including the alleged criminal past of Cash Wilson, Kalei and Ben Wilson's father.

"It is my opinion your allegations on behalf of Kalei Wilson and Ben Wilson ... are without merit and baseless," Smathers' letter states.

The Freedom from Religion Foundation said in a statement that it was standing by its original assessment, calling the students' complaints "credible" and describing the school's investigation as "retaliatory."

"We are troubled by the report, which contains many factual errors and focuses on matters that are irrelevant to forming a student club," the statement reads. "Persons or organizations who may have been defamed and/or retaliated against by the school system might need to consider legal recourse."

The ACLU of North Carolina also stands by its original assessment of Kalei and Ben Wilson's claims.

—Kimberly Winston, Religion News Service with BJC Staff Reports

# REFLECTIONS

## A new primer on a 'touchy subject'

Okay — time for some shameless self-promotion.

My friend Johnny Pierce and the good folks at Nurturing Faith (NurturingFaith.net) in Macon, Ga., have published the 8th Annual Shurden Lectures that I delivered last year at my law school alma mater, Stetson University in DeLand, Fla.

Baptist Joint Committee supporters and the readers of this column know that the annual lectureship funded by the generous endowment established by Buddy and Kay Shurden is one of the BJC's mainstay efforts to educate college students and others in university communities about religious liberty and the separation of church and state. With this new publication, titled *What a Touchy Subject! Religious Liberty and Church-State Separation*, I hope to reach students in many schools, colleges and seminaries, as well as Baptists and others in churches everywhere.

In these lectures, I did not attempt to break new ground in church-state law or to discuss cutting-edge esoterica. Rather, the three hour-long lectures and discussion — now in 35 pages — provide a basic, practical primer on understanding the relevant antecedents to today's religious liberty landscape, how that liberty is protected by constitutional constructs (mostly the First Amendment), and why the separation of church and state does not foreclose religion and religious ethics from influencing public policy or ban talking about it in the public square and in electoral campaigns.

In the lecture titled "First Principles: God-Given, But Government Protected," I explore theological and historical underpinnings to the topic. I talk about scriptural passages, generative ideas in our Baptist heritage and events in American history that serve to inform our understanding of religious liberty, as well as the critical importance of the institutional and functional separation between church and state to ensure that freedom.

In the next lecture, titled "First Freedom:

Accommodate Religion, But Don't Advance It," I move beyond that underlayment to talk about constitutional matters. Having discussed first principles, I talk about the first freedom — that is, the First Amendment's two religion clauses. They protect religious liberty and are also "first" because they are listed in the first 16 words, ahead of the protections for freedom of speech, press, petition and assembly. I emphasize the importance of having a strong Free Exercise Clause and a strong Establishment Clause, the limits to accommodation of religion by government, and then some current issues we face at the Baptist Joint Committee and across our nation.

With the final lecture, titled "Religion and Politics: How Did We Do in 2012?" I shift focus from the religion clauses in the First Amendment to Article VI of the Constitution itself and its ban on any religious test for public office. I describe how to go about both upholding the separation of church and state and affirming the relevance of religion to public life, while seeking to honor the letter and spirit of the ban on religious tests. Then, I reflect on how we measured up in the 2012

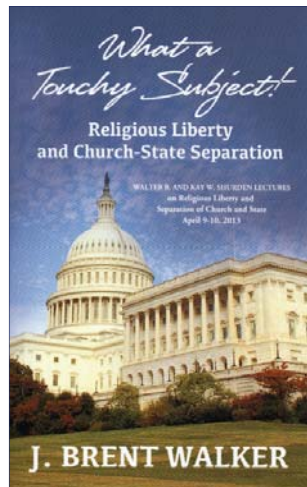
election cycle.

In addition to the three lectures, the book concludes with a 24-page appendix of information about the BJC, the Shurden Lectures series itself and materials about religion and political campaigns.

You can pick up a copy of *What a Touchy Subject! Religious Liberty and Church-State Separation* as an electronic book or as a printed publication. Visit [www.NurturingFaith.net](http://www.NurturingFaith.net) for a link to purchase an e-book, or order a printed copy from [BarnesandNoble.com](http://BarnesandNoble.com) or [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) by visiting those sites and searching for "J. Brent Walker." Whether you are new to the BJC or have been advocating for religious freedom for a lifetime, this book is meant to provide a baseline understanding of the issues we face every day at the Baptist Joint Committee. I hope you enjoy it!



J. Brent Walker  
Executive Director



*What a Touchy Subject! Religious Liberty and Church-State Separation* is available to purchase as an e-book at [NurturingFaith.net](http://NurturingFaith.net) and as a printed publication at [BarnesandNoble.com](http://BarnesandNoble.com) and [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).

# Religious monument proposals struck down in California, Florida

Religious displays have been the focus of recent court cases and disputes across the country, including two vastly different proposals struck down in California and Florida.

On Feb. 27, a California federal judge rejected a proposed Christian memorial at a publicly owned baseball stadium as a violation of both federal and state laws.

U.S. District Judge Stephen V. Wilson of California's Central District ruled that a granite monument depicting a soldier kneeling in prayer before a cross lacked "a secular purpose" and has "the unconstitutional effect" of endorsing religion over nonreligion.

The decision came nine months after a lawsuit was filed by the American Humanist Association, a national organization of nonbelievers. The memorial was planned for city property in Lake Elsinore, Calif., a community of about 53,000 people in Southern California's Riverside County.

The monument was designed in 2012 by a 22-member committee appointed by Lake Elsinore's City Council and included its mayor, members of a local veterans group and a representative of the city's minor league baseball team, the Storm.

When the design was presented to the City Council for review, some residents objected to the memorial's religious nature. Members of the City Council spoke in support of it, specifically citing its Christian nature as suitable for public property.

Councilwoman Melissa Melendez, a veteran, cited America as "a Christian nation" and proposed the city go ahead with the memorial to test its legality.

"I think at some point you have to take a stand," she said, according to court documents. Melendez is no longer on the council.

David Niose, director of AHA's Appignani Humanist Legal Center, supported the judge's decision, which is open to appeal.

"I hope that if members of the city council still want to honor veterans, they will move forward with a monument design that represents everyone who fought for our freedoms," he said in a statement.

In Florida, atheists are battling to establish a monument where another religious-related tribute sits, but their proposal has been denied.

On Feb. 7, Commissioners in Levy County, along the Gulf Coast of Florida, rejected an application filed by local atheists for the placement of a

1,500-pound granite bench adorned with quotes on the courthouse lawn in Bronson.

A Ten Commandments monument is already in place, erected by a local group with county approval. The proposed atheist monument is identical to one placed last year at another courthouse in Starke, Fla., after it, too, was initially rejected.

In this case, county commissioners rejected the monument because its engraved quotes — from Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and American Atheists founder Madalyn Murray O'Hair, were "incomplete," according to the commission's report.

"None of the texts on the proposed monument appear to be a reproduction of the entire text of any document or person, as required in the (county) guidelines," the report states.

Charles Ray Sparrow, a member of Williston Atheists, a group of about a dozen nonbelievers that applied for the monument in January, said such objections were not raised for the Ten Commandments monument.

"It is just an excuse," he said. "We will not give up."

Sparrow said his group, established a few months ago, has contacted the national office of American Atheists to help plan their next step.

Fred Moody, Levy County coordinator, did not respond to requests for comment.

American Atheists erected the first monument to atheism on public land last June outside the Bradford County Courthouse, about 50 miles northeast of Bronson. The New Jersey-based organization has funding in place, raised from private donors, to erect additional monuments as their applications are approved.

Since the erection of the Bradford County monument, other religious minorities have sought monuments attesting to their beliefs on public land. In December, the New York-based Satanic Temple proposed a statue of a horned god on the Oklahoma State Capitol grounds. Additionally, a group of Hindus proposed a statue of the monkey god Hanuman. Neither has been approved.

But American Atheists President David Silverman is optimistic about the eventual placement of an atheist monument in Levy County.

"It will be up to Levy County whether they want to go to court, spend hundreds of thousands of dollars, lose, and get an atheist monument anyway," he said.

—Religion News Service with BJC Staff Reports



# Court hears challenge to Ground Zero Cross

**A**theists are challenging plans to include a 17-foot, cross-shaped beam that became a famous symbol of Ground Zero after 9/11 in a display at the national memorial museum that is scheduled to open this spring.

In arguments before the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on March 6, American Atheists' lawyer Edwin Kagin said the cross should go back to St. Peter's Catholic Church, where it spent some time on display, not in a museum built with a mix of public and private funds.

Last year, a lower court rejected a lawsuit filed in 2011 by the New Jersey-based American Atheists that said the cross was an unconstitutional establishment of

said the artifacts all come from the days surrounding 9/11.

"The museum is a display of history," Alcott said after the hearing. "Religion was a very important part of it, in this case."

In his argument for American Atheists, Kagin suggested that the cross became a form of worship for many. American Atheists President David Silverman has previously called it a "working Christian shrine."

"We're worried about the alienation of atheists," he said. "We're deeply concerned this cross gives one story, and that's for Christians."

The judges asked whether a religious artifact in a museum would cause confusion about its current state. "Why can't an objective observer see it as a religious artifact that was transferred to a secular environment?" Judge Reena Raggi asked.

Raggi also asked Alcott why an object couldn't be added for atheists. "There's no constitutional requirement the cross has to be balanced by something else," Alcott responded. "The museum is not a proponent or opponent of religion."

In February, the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty filed an *amicus* brief in defense

of the museum's right to display religious objects in its private exhibit and challenging American Atheists' right to sue in the first place.

Construction worker Frank Silecchia discovered the beam in the smoldering wreckage of the World Trade Center towers. Silecchia told the "Today" show that the cross comforted him, and it soon became a rallying point for first responders. "I was already working 12 hours. I was quite weary and the cross comforted me," Silecchia said.

"I never stood here before any media and said it's about religion," Silecchia said. "But I say it's about faith — the faith that was crushed on 9/11."

A decision from the Court of Appeals could take several months.

— Sarah Pulliam Bailey, Religion News Service

Photo by John Munson/The Star-Ledger



A cross formed from a fallen steel I-beam at the former World Trade Center towers was placed outside St. Peter's Catholic Church in Lower Manhattan, where the Rev. Kevin Madigan kept watch over it until its pending move to the National September 11 Memorial & Museum.

religion.

In his appeal, Kagin said his organization is seeking a similar object to be displayed at the museum, something like a plaque that would say "atheists died here, too."

"We're arguing for equal treatment in some way, whatever that might be," Kagin said after the hearing.

Questions raised by the three-judge panel included whether similar treatment would be needed in a place like the Holocaust Museum, a museum that includes Jewish artifacts but would not be considered an endorsement of Judaism.

The beam was found by rescue workers two days after the terrorist attacks, and it is scheduled to be displayed among 1,000 artifacts in a 100,000-square-foot underground museum. Mark Alcott, a lawyer representing the National September 11 Memorial & Museum,



K. Hollyn Hollman  
General Counsel

# Hollman REPORT

## Concerns about discrimination doom Arizona legislation

How did Arizona legislation that looked pretty similar to many other religious freedom statutes grab the national spotlight and get characterized by some as a license to discriminate? Several factors led to the highly publicized veto of legislation known as SB1062, many of which will continue to challenge the popularity and public understanding of religious freedom claims.

A little background is needed to put the story in proper context. The federal government and 18 states have laws known as Religious Freedom Restoration Acts (RFRA). Another dozen states interpret their state constitutions to provide similar protections. The driving principle behind these laws is that religious practice based upon sincere religious belief should be protected, even from governmental acts that are not aimed at religion but have an incidental impact. The most common articulation of this legal standard requires the government to prove that it has a compelling reason before placing a substantial burden on religion and that it has used the least restrictive means to accomplish its purpose. In other words, the government must show that the burden on religion is necessary to achieve the government's important interest. These laws do not mean that every religious claim will be successful, but they assume that courts are competent to weigh the claims of religious adherents against other governmental interests.

So what happened in Arizona? First, Arizona already had a RFRA. The recently proposed legislation would have strengthened the existing law to ensure a broader application than some courts have found under similar statutes. The proposed changes would make clear that the statute could be invoked by any business and in cases between private parties. The proponents of the Arizona measure, however, did not seem prepared or able to show why the amendments were necessary.

Second, the bill was advocated in an environment focused on a claim that one's religious practice includes refusal of certain business services to customers who are gay. In neighboring New Mexico, which has some legal protections based upon sexual orientation, a wedding photographer asserted (unsuccessfully) the state's RFRA as a defense for refusing to serve a gay couple who sued under the state public accom-

modations law. Though the business owners in the Elane Photography case lost in the state's highest court, they are continuing to pursue their case, seeking review by the U.S. Supreme Court. Recently in Kansas, a state that also already has a strong religious freedom protection statute, a bill was proposed that explicitly allowed business owners to refuse services to same-sex couples. That bill is one example of a legislative strategy launched by opponents of same-sex marriage to enact laws in response to the rapidly increasing number of states that are recognizing marriage rights for same-sex couples.

Third, unlike most religious freedom claims, the few RFRA cases that have recently received wide media attention deal with religious claims that affect the rights of others, leading some to question whether RFRA goes too far in general. In addition to the Elane Photography case, the U.S. Supreme Court is considering a religious freedom claim by Hobby Lobby, a large, for-profit arts-and-crafts company that, if successful, could affect the rights of its employees to receive certain health care benefits. The lower courts have split on the issue of whether the federal RFRA covers such claims.

Underlying this story is the fact that religious freedom in the bold American constitutional tradition means religious freedom for the broadest range of religious claims, including ones that are not well-understood or well-liked. Religious freedom is popular in general — most Americans take pride in it as a distinctive feature of our Constitution. It is more difficult, however, to understand and empathize with the incredible diversity of claims and contexts in which religious conflicts arise and RFRA can be invoked.

Contrary to some reports, the Arizona legislation did not mention discrimination or any minority group. But, a growing concern for the rights of the LGBT community made even the possible future usage to discriminate more than Arizona could stand. For most people, it is difficult to see how one's religious beliefs can legally justify discrimination against a customer based upon some minority status. The idea that such a claim could be made, regardless of the specific context (related to weddings or other religious services) was enough to taint the Arizona leg-

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“Religious freedom is popular in general — most Americans take pride in it as a distinctive feature of our Constitution. It is more difficult, however, to understand and empathize with the incredible diversity of claims and contexts in which religious conflicts arise and RFRA can be invoked.”

## Melissa Rogers to speak at Religious Liberty Council Luncheon

Melissa Rogers, special assistant to the president and executive director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, will be the featured speaker at this year's Religious Liberty Council Luncheon on June 27 in Atlanta, Ga.

Rogers, who was appointed to her current position in 2013, was the BJC's associate general counsel from 1994-1999 and general counsel from 1999-2000. She also served as director of the Center for Religion and Public Affairs at Wake Forest University Divinity School and a nonresident senior fellow at The Brookings Institution. In 2008, she co-authored a book published by Baylor University Press titled *Religious Freedom and the Supreme Court*.

The luncheon is open to the public, but you must have a ticket to attend. More information will be announced in the coming weeks. Visit [BJCOnline.org/luncheon](http://BJCOnline.org/luncheon) for the latest.



Rogers

## Supreme Court to hear RLUIPA case

The U.S. Supreme Court announced March 3 that it will hear a case regarding whether a prison grooming policy requiring inmates to shave violates their religious freedom rights under the federal Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA).

The case involves Gregory H. Holt, a practicing Muslim serving a life sentence in Arkansas. Holt says he has a religious obligation to maintain a one-half-inch beard, but the Arkansas Department of Corrections has a policy prohibiting facial hair other than neatly trimmed mustaches. According to the petitioner, the department already has an exception for inmates with certain dermatological conditions to maintain one-quarter-inch beards.

The state said the purpose of the policy is "to provide for the health and hygiene" of prisoners, while also minimizing opportunities for disguise and the ability to "transport contraband and weapons."

The 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled the policy is permissible to meet the compelling security interests of the state. In November, the Supreme Court issued an injunction barring the enforcement of the policy pending appeal.

The Supreme Court will hear *Holt v. Hobbs* in its next term, which begins in October.

—BJC Staff Reports

## German home-schooling family can stay in U.S., Court won't hear case

On March 3, the Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal from a family seeking asylum in the United States because home schooling is not allowed in their native Germany, but the family will be allowed to stay in the United States.

The case involves Uwe and Hannelore Romeike, Christians who believe German schools would have a bad influ-

ence on their six children.

As is their custom, the justices on the High Court declined to give a reason for not hearing the case.

The day after the Court declined to hear the appeal, the Home School Legal Defense Association — the Christian organization providing the family's legal support — announced that the family will be allowed to stay. "Today, a Supervisor with the Department of Homeland Security called a member of our legal team to inform us that the Romeike family has been granted 'indefinite deferred status.' This means that the Romeikes can stay in the United States permanently (unless they are convicted of a crime, etc.)," according to the HSLDA's Facebook page.

Before the announcement, Michael Farris, chairman of the HSLDA, said the group would pursue legislation in Congress to allow the family to stay. They were expected to face deportation.

HSLDA helped the Romeikes leave Germany in 2008 after they were threatened with jail time and losing custody of their children. The Romeikes are evangelical Christians, and say they should be allowed to keep their children home to teach them Christian values.

"In Germany there is basically religious freedom, but it ends at least with teaching the children," Uwe Romeike said in a video produced by the HSLDA.

An immigration judge in Tennessee granted the Romeikes' bid in 2010, but the Board of Immigration Appeals overturned the ruling in 2012, arguing that religious home-schoolers don't face any special threats.

The family lost their appeal in federal court in May 2013. The U.S. grants safe haven to people who have a well-founded fear of persecution, but not necessarily to those under governments with laws that differ from those in the U.S., Judge Jeffrey Sutton wrote in the court's decision.

—Sarah Pulliam Bailey, *Religion News Service*  
with BJC Staff Reports

## ARIZONA CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

isolation. Likewise, the idea that an employer's religious belief could determine the cost or access to health care benefits of employees who do not share their beliefs is troublesome.

The Arizona episode is noteworthy for the intensity of the media attention, the misinformation conveyed and the current political climate in which proponents of legal protections based on sexual orientation and identity clash with religious objectors. RFRAs are designed to provide a uniform standard for all claims, and it should be expected that asserted claims will reflect wide religious diversity and encompass unpopular beliefs. It seems, however, that claims that threaten to harm the rights of others have tainted the popularity and public understanding of religious freedom. As we await a Supreme Court decision interpreting RFRA and witness state legislative debates focused on particular claims instead of broad standards, it is an inopportune time for legislation that is likely to perpetuate misunderstanding and harm broad support for universal religious liberty principles.



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- Seventh Day Baptist General Conference

## REPORT

from the Capital

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## WHY WE GIVE

### By Cathy and John Baskin Springfield, Va.

**W**e first learned about the Baptist Joint Committee through Ravensworth Baptist Church. Being in the Washington, D.C. area, we also have the unique opportunity of having enduring relationships with some of the BJC staff. James Dunn and Brent Walker shared interim preaching duties at Ravensworth in the '90s. We have been blessed with four inspirational youth leaders who were affiliated with the BJC, and several other staff members have been part of our congregational life. As a result, our family had the opportunity to better understand and become more deeply committed to the work and mission of the BJC.



The BJC continues to be the embodiment of the best of traditional Baptist values: religious liberty for all people and soul freedom for each person. Into the 21st century, the BJC has advocated for First Amendment freedoms in an increasingly pluralistic culture. They have held true to the Founders' vision of a society where all citizens, whatever their religious identity, are regarded with equal standing by our government and civic institutions. They have done so out of a theological perspective that embraces the diversity of all God's children while re-

maining true to their distinctively Baptist Christian voice.

Raising a family in the D.C. area is enriching but financially challenging. While we have given sporadically to the BJC in years past, we wanted to make a stronger commitment, but our resources are limited. The great benefit of giving monthly is that one can give a manageable amount, but the accumulation over a year's time transforms it into a more substantial gift. Even a small donation, given regularly, can make a difference.

We hope you will join us and make the commitment to sustaining the work of the BJC on a monthly basis. By making use of the automatic donation option, we only had to take action once, instead of fretting with the details repeatedly. Give as you are able, joyfully and consistently. Whatever the amount, it will only increase the witness of this amazing organization that is Baptist in the strongest, truest sense of the word. It is up to you to give what you can; it is up to God to bless your gift and do things with it beyond what you can imagine!

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