

Oppose HR 567 – The “Faith-based” Amendment

Oppose an amendment to the Georgia constitutional that governs religious freedom. Georgia has had a state provision guaranteeing that religion is protected from government interference since 1777, when it was written and promoted by a Baptist minister named Silas Mercer. The principle of religious freedom has served us well for 228 years. **We should not abandon the protections that have allowed all religious faiths to flourish in Georgia for all of these years.**

The amendment should be rejected because

- The amendment actually **REPEALS** our current constitutional provision. **It abdicates all of the State’s power to define religious liberty to the federal courts.**
- The amendment would **open the door to SCHOOL VOUCHERS** because it would allow state money to go to religious schools.
- Religious houses of worship that would provide these taxpayer-funded services **must be accountable** to the public – are they willing to open their books to government audits if they receive taxpayer funding?
- **The amendment is unnecessary.** The Georgia Supreme Court said in its January 17, 2006, decision in *Taetle vs. Atlanta Independent School System* that the state may not fund *religious* activities, but “...that is not to say that a political subdivision of the state cannot enter into an arms-length, commercial agreement with a sectarian institution to accomplish a non-sectarian purpose.”
- Religious organizations are exempt in their private hiring from portions of the civil rights act and thus can hire and fire based upon a person's religious beliefs. Disturbingly, there are many **who advocate that religious organizations can engage in discrimination while using taxpayer dollars.** Georgia's current constitution protects against this.
- Taxpayer funding is a **disincentive for private giving** and **strikes at the core American value of individual contributions** for religious activities and the autonomy of houses of worship.
- **The provision in the Georgia Constitution has no connection to anti-Catholic animus.** Our religious freedom protections are traced back to 1777, one hundred-plus years before the so-called Blaine amendments were passed. Furthermore, the current language of our provision differs from the language of the Blaine amendments.
- Funding of pervasively sectarian programs is **unworkable.** Who will decide which religion is better than the others? How will Georgia afford to provide the constitutionally required secular alternative services to each religious service? Will the state discriminate against or fund minority religions such as Scientology, Islam, and Wicca?