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Senate Bill 397 Fact Sheet – Religion is Essential Act

SUMMARY

SB 397 will deem religious services as an essential activity during a declared state of emergency and ensure that the government does not impose any discriminatory actions against religious organizations.

BACKGROUND

The First Amendment of the US Constitution ensures freedom of religion and the right to peacefully assemble. However, since Governor Newsom first declared a state of emergency due to COVID-19, he has regularly issued Executive Orders that prohibit conducting religious services, contrary to the right of religious freedom. He chose to completely close churches, mosques, shrines, synagogues, and temples, rather than allowing reasonable public health accommodations such as the ones awarded to many other businesses and essential services throughout the state.

PROBLEM

While all Americans hold a right to freely exercise their religious beliefs, during the COVID-19 pandemic, more stringent restrictions were placed on religious services than on other industries that have been deemed essential. This restriction took away individuals' rights to freedom of religion. The Governor made the decision that religion was not essential to Californians' lives.

SOLUTION

SB 397 deems religious services to be essential services. This bill also prohibits government from taking discriminatory action against a religious organization by requiring religious services to be allowed, at the very least, to the same extent other essential services are permitted to operate. Furthermore, SB 397 requires any burden placed on religious organizations by the government to be the least restrictive means in order to further the compelling government interest of public health and safety.

This bill ensures that religious organizations are treated fairly and allowed to operate under only the same restrictions of other essential services, while still allowing room for government to set safety parameters in the interest of public health needs.

SUPPORT

California Family Council (Cosponsor)
Capitol Resource Institute (Cosponsor)
Judeo-Christian Caucus (Cosponsor)
Real Impact (Cosponsor)
Alliance Defending Freedom
Calvary Chapel Chino Hills
The Salt & Light Council

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