

MILLSAPS COLLEGE



April 6, 2014

Tougaloo College and Millsaps College have historically worked together for the human rights of citizens whom the State and others in society have refused to protect and treat as equal. In light of the passage of SB2681, members of the Tougaloo and Millsaps communities now join together again to call for the equal legal and civil protection of the rights of all, including LGBTQ persons.

An Open Letter Regarding Religious Freedom in Mississippi and SB2681 From Concerned Educators and Administrators of Tougaloo and Millsaps Colleges

WHEREAS the original federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act had the laudable purpose of supporting the most free and vibrant exercise of religion by persons of all religious outlooks compatible with the compelling public interest in assuring justice for all Americans; and

WHEREAS interest has been expressed in a Mississippi RFRA not only from the perspective of supporting free exercise of religion by anyone but also from the perspective of supporting discriminatory behavior in the public sphere on grounds of religious conscience; and

WHEREAS the language of the RFRA bill passed this term by the Mississippi House of Representatives and Senate has been adjusted to remove encouragement of discrimination on religious grounds; but

WHEREAS it is still at the present time a reasonable fear that the bill, if it becomes law, may be interpreted by citizens or courts in Mississippi as supporting discrimination on religious grounds, given statements by some state leaders that persons should be denied rights on the basis of their sexual orientation;

WE, educators and administrators of Tougaloo and Millsaps who seek equality for all, concerned as we are to maintain the fairest possible view of religion, urge our fellow citizens to join us in opposing the use of this "religious freedom" bill, or any other legal method, to deny rights to anyone. To do so is unjust in itself and also perverts the RFRA's original purpose of protecting religious diversity in our country. *Most importantly, we urge our State lawmakers to show their genuine support for the civil rights of all citizens by passing legislation that explicitly protects LGBTQ persons from discrimination.*

In addition, we urge our fellow citizens to learn more about the history and content of the religious views of those in Mississippi and the wider world. In particular, some of Mississippi's leaders have appealed to Christianity as support for denying rights based on sexual orientation, even though there are many different traditions and values that have been held by Christians throughout the centuries, some of which would unequivocally reject the denial of rights based on sexual orientation. We urge Mississippi's public servants and citizens to educate themselves about the multi-vocal character of Christianity, and to become part of communities of discourse within which religious diversity—both within and across religious traditions—is examined and protected.

Signed,

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