

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-2402**

May 13, 2016

Mark Emmert  
President  
The National Collegiate Athletic Association  
700 W. Washington Street  
P.O. Box 6222  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46206-6222

Dear Mr. Emmert:

On April 5, 2016, Governor Phil Bryant of the State of Mississippi signed into law the so-called "Protecting Freedom of Conscience from Government Discrimination Act." This law purports to protect Mississippians from discrimination by government officials for practicing/observing their religious beliefs. A cursory review of MS House Bill No. 1523, reveals that this bill does no such thing: instead, it gives employers, business owners, and any other person or entity in Mississippi the explicit right to discriminate against anyone with a lifestyle they disagree with in the name of religion. Simply put, this is government-sanctioned discrimination.

Recently, the NCAA Board of Governors adopted guidelines to protect participants and spectators from being discriminated against at NCAA events as a result of a similar, facially-discriminatory bill in the state of North Carolina. These new guidelines will require sites hosting or bidding on NCAA events to demonstrate how they will provide a discrimination-free environment for those participating and spectating. And if they cannot, the institution stands the risk of losing the opportunity to host both predetermined and non-predetermined events. It is my understanding that the Board of Governors has directed the NCAA national office to finalize details related to the implementation of these guidelines.

Mississippi has eleven (11) total institutions that fall under the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) jurisdiction with six (6) institutions in Division I, two (2) institutions in Division II, and three (3) institutions in Division III. These institutions and the sports they play are an important part of our state's culture and provide a great benefit to the state in terms of tourism dollars, community development in the areas around these institutions and a point of pride for all of our citizens.

However, there is no place for discrimination despite what my home state's legislature and governor may think. The NCAA has often affirmed its commitment to operate championships and events that promote an equitable and inclusive atmosphere in which students, fans, coaches, and any others associated with the events can enjoy themselves without being discriminated against. I would like for you to do an immediate review of Mississippi's so-called "religious freedom" law and advise me on the following:

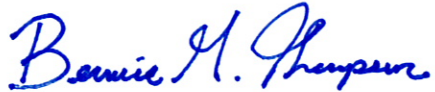
- (1) Implications that Mississippi institutions may face as a result of this law that is tantamount to state-sanctioned discrimination;
- (2) Timeframe for when those possible sanctions may go into place;

- (3) Whether there are any immediate financial implications that these institutions may face; and
- (4) Curative actions that the state of Mississippi can take to avoid these sanctions.

The NCAA has already taken action against the State of Mississippi because of the state flag's confederate imagery and a desire to not have that flag flying above its events and championships. Despite what our governor and legislature may think, Mississippi is not closed for business and is not devolving into a confederate state. Their actions are continuously harming our state, our institutions and our athletes and I implore you to let them know, in your response to me, just what they are putting at stake with their intolerant actions.

A copy of MS House Bill 1523 is enclosed. Again, I strongly urge the NCAA to review this law as soon as possible, and advise of all appropriate actions that may be taken against member institutions in the State of Mississippi. If you have any questions, please contact Trey Baker, Counsel in my Washington, D.C., office at 202-225-5876 or at [trey.baker@mail.house.gov](mailto:trey.baker@mail.house.gov). I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Bennie G. Thompson  
Member of Congress

Enclosures