

The Coalition Against Religious Discrimination

January 30, 2001

Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC

Dear President Bush:

In light of your announcements this week concerning the role of faith-based organizations in government programs, we, the undersigned religious, civil rights, civil liberties, labor, education and health organizations, are writing to express our Constitutional and policy concerns regarding your proposals, and in particular to seek your assurance that you will not tolerate religious employment discrimination in any programs funded with taxpayer dollars.

Specifically, we seek your commitment that your proposals will make clear that religious institutions that receive public funding for the provision of social services may not discriminate when employing people in taxpayer funded positions based on an applicant's religion or the religious beliefs of the employer.

Federally funded religious discrimination is both unconstitutional and morally wrong. While houses of worship and certain religious institutions are granted an exemption to the prohibition on employment discrimination on the basis of religion in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, that exemption cannot – and should not – extend to those hired to provide services in programs funded with taxpayer dollars.

As someone committed to uniting the American people, we hope that you will agree with us and confirm your opposition to government-funded religious discrimination. It would be unconscionable that a want ad for government-supported social services could read, for example, “Catholics and Jews Need Not Apply.”

Honorable George W. Bush
January 30, 2001
Page 2

Your faith-based proposals raise other serious First Amendment Establishment Clause and policy concerns, such as the religious liberty rights of the beneficiaries of government programs, excessive entanglement between religion and government, the overriding of state and local health, education or other professional licensing requirements, and other potential problems. We look forward to working with you to remedy these Constitutional and policy defects.

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union
American Counseling Association
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
American Humanist Association
Americans for Religious Liberty
Americans United for Separation of Church and State
Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs
Catholics for a Free Choice
Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
National Association of School Psychologists
National Council of Jewish Women
National Education Association
People for the American Way
The Interfaith Alliance
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
Unitarian Universalist Association