

March 19, 2015

Mr. William Pate
President and CEO
Ms. Kathleen Bertrand
Sr. Vice President of Community and Governmental Affairs
Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau

Dear Mr. Pate and Ms. Bertrand,

It has come to the attention of a group of associations that plan to hold their professional meetings in Georgia that the Georgia legislature is considering a “Religious Freedom Restoration Act” [SB 129], which would establish a vendor’s right to refuse goods or services to individuals based on their religion, sexual orientation, marital status, or whatever other factors might emanate from religious doctrine or practice. As organizations that are planning to bring thousands of members to Atlanta over the next two years, we share grave concerns about this legislation.

The many scholars and teachers who will make their way to Georgia for our upcoming professional conferences include colleagues who could be excluded from establishments that fall within the purview of this legislation. We are coming to Atlanta, however, in part because when we signed our contracts the city and its businesses claimed to appreciate our members’ purchasing power, which includes over 35,400 room nights and tens of millions of dollars in local revenue. Indeed, when considering the bids of cities that seek to host our respective meetings, we placed an emphasis on places that will welcome all of our attendees, regardless of their religion, race, gender, or sexual orientation. This is such an important issue that we have in our hotel contracts variations on language stipulating that any laws, ordinances, or practices condoning “discrimination on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, religion, national origin, sexual orientation or the enactment by the City of Atlanta or the State of Georgia of any law restricting or limiting the rights of any citizen on any of the above-cited bases . . . may result in the cancellation of this Agreement.” We decry the possibility that some of our members might be subjected to prejudiced scrutiny.

We hope that your legislators will promote the equitable treatment of all Americans and our guests from other countries with the graciousness and hospitality often associated with Georgia and its residents. Rest assured that if our members are not welcome in Georgia’s business establishments, we will not return.

Signed,

American Academy of Religion

Society for Biblical Literature

American Historical Association

Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts

German Studies Association

History of Science Society

Philosophy of Science Association