



DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Office of the Bishop

January 23, 2017

Mayor Lenny Curry
City of Jacksonville
117 West Duval Street, Suite 425
Jacksonville, FL 32202

Dear Mayor Curry,

The spirit of the proposed amendment to the City of Jacksonville's Human Rights Ordinance (HRO) seeks that all persons, regardless of physical or psychological distinctions, should be treated with justice and dignity simply by virtue of the fact that we are all human beings made in the image and likeness of God.

The proposed amendment to the HRO, however, goes well beyond that very admirable objective, and intrudes into the realm of the personal freedom of many of the citizens of Duval County. It would force people to accept – against their consciences – and within their own lives and livelihoods, the actions and behaviors of persons which are deeply offensive and objectionable.

Formed by constitutionally protected religious beliefs which we have held from time immemorial, our consciences – and the consciences of all citizens – have long been held to be sacrosanct in many areas of civic life. Even in the darkest days of World War II, room was made for the consciences of those who objected to war on religious or moral grounds.

The legal enforcement of the HRO as amended is also wrought with peril. It would threaten and put at risk the very life and liberty by which many across the county define their individual happiness as well as that of their marriage and family. It would oppressively intrude into the freedoms and livelihood of parents to raise their families consistent with their faith, and the rights of all to earn a living without requiring that they deny their religious beliefs. As much as this HRO amendment in its language and enforcement seeks to benefit and embrace certain groups and individuals; likewise, it must equally protect the rights to life, liberty, happiness and conscience of all those with deeply-held religious beliefs – beliefs guaranteed them under the U.S. Constitution.

Sincerely yours,

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Most Reverend Felipe J. Estévez, S.T.D.
Bishop of St. Augustine

