



2015 Faith and Family Scorecard Bills Considered

The following is a brief summary of the bills from the 84th Texas Legislative Session that were used to compile the 2015 Faith and Family Scorecard:

SB 2065 – HB 3567 – The Pastor Protection Act. This bill protects Texas pastors, clergy, churches, religious organizations, and their employees from being forced to solemnize, perform, or celebrate a marriage that violates their religious beliefs. HB 3567, the House version of the bill, was authored by Rep. Scott Sanford and was not given a vote in the Texas House. Lt. Gov. Patrick temporality suspended the rules to allow a Senate version, SB 2065, to be authored by Sen. Craig Estes, and it was subsequently voted quickly through the Texas Senate. Two harmful amendments were defeated before the bill passed the Texas Senate. Subsequently, the House then passed SB 2065 after fending off a harmful amendment. The Pastor Protection Law, SB 2065, was signed into law by Gov. Greg Abbott on June 11, 2015.

HB 3994 – The Judicial Bypass Act. The pro-life bill, authored by Rep. Geanie Morrison, was designed to correct a deficiency in current law which allowed minors seeking an abortion to by-pass a parent's consent for an abortion by appealing to a judge. The abortion industry and activist pro-abortion lawyers had been abusing this judicial bypass process, and HB 3994 would help close harmful loopholes and better protect pregnant minors. Sen. Charles Perry sponsored it in the Senate. The bill passed the Texas House and Senate and was signed by Gov. Greg Abbott on June 12, 2015.

SB 575 – Pro-Life Health Insurance Reform. SB 575, authored by Sen. Larry Taylor, would have brought pro-life reform to the Texas insurance market by removing automatic coverage for abortion from health insurance plans to ensure Texans' tax dollars and premiums would not be subsidizing abortion. SB 575 passed the Texas Senate in early May but the bill was weakened in the House and was not placed on the House Calendar by House leadership until the final day for Senate bills to pass, making it easier for Democrats to use stall tactics to run the clock out on the bill.

HB 1 – Budget Amendment 53. Pro-Life Amendment by Rep. Jeff Leach that removes taxpayer funding of the abortion industry by eliminating abortion providers and their affiliates from sex-ed programs either through selling their curricula to schools or teaching their programs.

HB 1 – Budget Amendment 68. Pro-Abstinence Amendment by Rep. Stuart Spitzer that diverted money to abstinence education programs.

HB 1 – Budget Amendment 267. Pro-Life Amendment by Rep. Scott Turner that protected taxpayers from paying for the destruction of human embryos for the purposes of scientific research.

HB 37 – SB 19 Anti-1st Amendment Legislation. HB 37 by Rep. Bryon Cook and the House amended version of SB 19 (also led by Rep. Byron Cook) sought to use IRS-like tactics to silence and intimidate non-profits (like Texas Values Action), and potentially churches, by requiring non-profits that attempt to engage in political speech to expose their donors, among many other unconstitutional provisions. In the last days of the session, a faction of Republicans voted with Democrats to pass SB 19 in the House, effectively gutting an actual ethics reform bill passed by the Senate and turning it into a bill attacking the First Amendment rights of Texans. The bill died when a compromise could not be reached with the Texas Senate after its leaders made it clear they would not attack the First Amendment or chill free speech.

SB 313 – Weaken State Board of Education (SBOE) Legislation. SB 313, authored by Sen. Seliger and Rep. Aycock, would have needlessly targeted the authority of the elected SBOE and could have undercut curriculum battles won at the SBOE to ensure discussion of the Founding Fathers and documents, American Exceptionalism, and America’s rich religious heritage. There were also concerns the bill would have moved Texas standards closer to federal “Common Core” standards. The bill passed both the Texas House and Senate but was ultimately vetoed by Gov. Greg Abbott.

SR 1028 – Marriage Resolution. Non-binding resolution passed in the Texas Senate that affirmed that marriage is the union of one man and one woman under the Texas Constitution.

SJR 10 and HJR 125 – Religious Freedom Amendment to the Texas Constitution. This proposed amendment would have strengthened religious freedom protections in the Texas Constitution. Sen. Donna Campbell authored the Senate bill. Rep. Matt Krause authored the House version after the original House author, Rep. Jason Villalba, withdrew his own bill. State Affairs Committee Chairs in both chambers, Sen. Joan Huffman and Rep. Byron Cook, refused to hold hearings for the bill.

SB 673 - HB 4105 – Preservation of State Sovereignty over Marriage Act. HB 4105, by Rep. Cecil Bell, Jr., would have further protected and defended Art. 1., Sec. 32, of the Texas Constitution by prohibiting the use of state or local funds from being used for licensing same-sex “marriage.” Despite overwhelming support with nearly 90 coauthors indicating the bill would have easily passed, the bill was not given a vote in the Texas House. SB 673, a similar but not identical bill, was filed by Sen. Charles Perry in the Senate. It was referred to Senate State Affairs committee, chaired by Sen. Joan Huffman, and was never given a hearing.

HB 3864 – Religious Freedom Protection for Child Welfare Organizations (or HOME Bill). HB 3864 by Rep. Scott Sanford would have protected the religious liberties and rights of conscience for faith-based child welfare, foster, and adoption agencies. Despite strong support, the bill was never moved out of House Calendars committee, Chaired by Rep. Todd Hunter, effectively killing the bill. Rep. Scott Sanford in the House and leaders in the Texas Senate, including Sen. Donna Campbell, led efforts to amend similar language to HB 3864 onto other bills in the Texas House and Senate, respectively. Unfortunately, anti-religious freedom Democrats were determined to kill entire bills just to stop this religious freedom language from moving forward and tight deadlines played into their favor.

HB 1556 – Protection from Rogue City Ordinances. HB 1556 by Rep. Rick Miller would have ensured the state has consistent non-discrimination policies by prohibiting a county, municipality, or other political subdivision from creating new protected classes of citizens that are not defined by state law, like have recently been seen in Houston, Plano, and San Antonio. Both HB 1556 and a similar bill, SB 1155 authored by Sen. Bob Hall, did not receive a committee hearing.

HB 537 – Gay Birth Certificate Bill. HB 537 by Rep. Rafael Anchia was a priority bill of LGBT advocates to remove “Mother” and “Father” references from birth certificates. The bill passed out of the House State Affairs Committee with public support from Chairman Byron Cook, but never came up for a vote on the House floor.