

# ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

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To: Oregon State Legislative Assembly  
From: Kevin Finney, Public Policy Director  
RE: Support for SB 2 and for the religious exemption language as amended in House Elections, Ethics and Rules Committee.  
Date: April 13, 2007

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) is a statewide association of Christian denominations and interfaith partners, working together to respond to the needs of Oregonians.

**We are writing to express our support for SB 2, and for the religious exemption language contained in the bill, as amended in the House Elections, Ethics and Rules Committee.**

We recognize that the religious exemption has been a hotly debated issue in recent days and have followed the discussion closely. We have also sought and received legal advice from a recognized legal expert in the area of church-state law, as we have reviewed various proposed versions of the religious exemption clause.

In reviewing the religious exemption language, we have sought to balance two legitimate values. The goal has been to strike the right balance between the protection of religious freedom and autonomy of religious practice on the one hand, and protection against discrimination for gay and lesbian Oregonians who we recognize as fully equal members of our community. At Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon we are deeply committed to both principles.

Generally, in reviewing whether an activity is “closely connected with” or “related to” the “primary purposes” of a religious organization, courts have tended to be quite deferential to the claims of a religious organization that an activity is closely connected or related to its primary purposes. Consequently, we supported the original religious exemption language contained in SB 2 as providing adequate protection for churches and religious organizations in the conduct of their religious, educational and other non-commercial activities.

After reviewing it, we now also support the amended religious exemption language that has emerged from the House Committee on Elections, Ethics and Rules. The primary effect of the revised language, we believe, is to clarify and somewhat strengthen the protections offered to churches and other religious organizations, and it does so without undermining the fundamental goals of the legislation you are considering and that we support.

We believe SB 2 has struck the right balance. It preserves religious freedom, while moving forward the principle of equal rights that is essential in a free society. **EMO urges you to pass SB 2 with the current religious exemption language as amended in committee.**

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*Please note: The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Portland releases all public policy statements through the Oregon Catholic Conference.*