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PUBLIC LAW 103-141—NOV. 16, 1993

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM RESTORATION ACT
OF 1993

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Public Law 103-141
103d Congress

An Act

Nov. 16, 1993
[H.R. 1308]

To protect the free exercise of religion.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

Religious
Freedom
Restoration Act
of 1993.
42 USC 2000bb
note.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993”.

42 USC 2000bb.

SEC. 2. CONGRESSIONAL FINDINGS AND DECLARATION OF PURPOSES.

(a) **FINDINGS.**—The Congress finds that—

(1) the framers of the Constitution, recognizing free exercise of religion as an unalienable right, secured its protection in the First Amendment to the Constitution;

(2) laws “neutral” toward religion may burden religious exercise as surely as laws intended to interfere with religious exercise;

(3) governments should not substantially burden religious exercise without compelling justification;

(4) in *Employment Division v. Smith*, 494 U.S. 872 (1990) the Supreme Court virtually eliminated the requirement that the government justify burdens on religious exercise imposed by laws neutral toward religion; and

(5) the compelling interest test as set forth in prior Federal court rulings is a workable test for striking sensible balances between religious liberty and competing prior governmental interests.

(b) **PURPOSES.**—The purposes of this Act are—

(1) to restore the compelling interest test as set forth in *Sherbert v. Verner*, 374 U.S. 398 (1963) and *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205 (1972) and to guarantee its application in all cases where free exercise of religion is substantially burdened; and

(2) to provide a claim or defense to persons whose religious exercise is substantially burdened by government.

42 USC
2000bb-1.

SEC. 3. FREE EXERCISE OF RELIGION PROTECTED.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Government shall not substantially burden a person’s exercise of religion even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability, except as provided in subsection (b).

(b) **EXCEPTION.**—Government may substantially burden a person’s exercise of religion only if it demonstrates that application of the burden to the person—

- (1) is in furtherance of a compelling governmental interest;
and
(2) is the least restrictive means of furthering that compelling governmental interest.

(c) **JUDICIAL RELIEF.**—A person whose religious exercise has been burdened in violation of this section may assert that violation as a claim or defense in a judicial proceeding and obtain appropriate relief against a government. Standing to assert a claim or defense under this section shall be governed by the general rules of standing under article III of the Constitution.

SEC. 4. ATTORNEYS FEES.

(a) **JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS.**—Section 722 of the Revised Statutes (42 U.S.C. 1988) is amended by inserting “the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993,” before “or title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964”.

(b) **ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEEDINGS.**—Section 504(b)(1)(C) of title 5, United States Code, is amended—

- (1) by striking “and” at the end of clause (ii);
- (2) by striking the semicolon at the end of clause (iii) and inserting “, and”; and
- (3) by inserting “(iv) the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993;” after clause (iii).

SEC. 5. DEFINITIONS.

42 USC
2000bb-2.

As used in this Act—

- (1) the term “government” includes a branch, department, agency, instrumentality, and official (or other person acting under color of law) of the United States, a State, or a subdivision of a State;
- (2) the term “State” includes the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and each territory and possession of the United States;
- (3) the term “demonstrates” means meets the burdens of going forward with the evidence and of persuasion; and
- (4) the term “exercise of religion” means the exercise of religion under the First Amendment to the Constitution.

SEC. 6. APPLICABILITY.

42 USC
2000bb-3.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—This Act applies to all Federal and State law, and the implementation of that law, whether statutory or otherwise, and whether adopted before or after the enactment of this Act.

(b) **RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.**—Federal statutory law adopted after the date of the enactment of this Act is subject to this Act unless such law explicitly excludes such application by reference to this Act.

(c) **RELIGIOUS BELIEF UNAFFECTED.**—Nothing in this Act shall be construed to authorize any government to burden any religious belief.

SEC. 7. ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE UNAFFECTED.

42 USC
2000bb-4.

Nothing in this Act shall be construed to affect, interpret, or in any way address that portion of the First Amendment prohibiting laws respecting the establishment of religion (referred to in this section as the “Establishment Clause”). Granting government funding, benefits, or exemptions, to the extent permissible under the Establishment Clause, shall not constitute a violation of this

Act. As used in this section, the term “granting”, used with respect to government funding, benefits, or exemptions, does not include the denial of government funding, benefits, or exemptions.

Approved November 16, 1993.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—H.R. 1308 (S. 578):

HOUSE REPORTS: No. 103-88 (Comm. on the Judiciary).

SENATE REPORTS: No. 103-111 accompanying S. 578 (Comm. on the Judiciary).

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 139 (1993):

May 11, considered and passed House.

Oct. 26, 27, S. 578 considered in Senate; H.R. 1308, amended, passed in lieu.

Nov. 3, House concurred in Senate amendment.

WEEKLY COMPILATION OF PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS, Vol. 29 (1993):

Nov. 16, Presidential remarks.