

March 5, 2018

United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator,

We, the undersigned faith-based organizations, write to share our serious concerns with the ADA Education and Reform Act (H.R. 620) and its injurious impact on people with disabilities.

We are a diverse, non-partisan coalition of national religious organizations whose core spiritual values affirm the rights and dignity of people with disabilities. We hold a wide range of religious beliefs and political opinions, yet share a conviction that government has a responsibility to protect the rights of all people, including those with disabilities.

When President George H.W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act he said, “Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down.” Today, our society is more open and accessible to people with disabilities than ever before, and the ADA has become a global model for disability access and inclusion.

H.R. 620 would frustrate this progress by undermining the ADA. The bill would impose new burdens on plaintiffs before they can file a civil action for an accessibility violation in a public accommodation case and would eliminate any incentive for businesses to proactively follow the law. People with disabilities should not be denied access to public accommodations because of business owners’ failures to comply with the ADA.

Under H.R. 620, an individual with a disability who seeks to challenge a public accommodation violation would have to wait up to 180 days before being able to file a civil action with the U.S. Department of Justice. This would represent a stark departure from the immediate injunctive relief available under the ADA. No other members of a federally protected class have to wait to exercise their legal rights alleging discrimination, just as people with disabilities should not have to wait months to enforce their civil rights under the ADA.

Ensuring people with disabilities have the same access to opportunity, and enjoy the same civil rights protections, as people without disabilities is a moral imperative. We urge you to support the progress we have made under the ADA. Please do not introduce companion legislation to H.R. 620.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Baptists

American Baptist Churches USA

American Baptist Home Mission Societies

American Conference of Cantors

American Muslim Health Professionals

Anti-Defamation League

BPFNA ~ Bautistas por la Paz

Christian Reformed Disability Concerns Ministry

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces

Disciples Center for Public Witness (Disciples of Christ)

Franciscan Action Network

Islamic Society of North America

Lutheran Services in America Disability Network

MHS (Mennonite Health Services)

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Council of Churches

National Council of Jewish Women

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Reformed Church in America Disability Concerns Ministry

Union for Reform Judaism

Unitarian Universalist Association

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society

For questions or further information regarding this effort, contact Curtis Ramey-Lucas, Convener, Interfaith Disability Advocacy Collaborative. Curtis.Ramsey-Lucas@abhms.org – (610) 203-1193.