

April 13, 2016

The Honorable Bill Haslam
Office of the Governor
1st Floor, State Capitol
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Governor Haslam:

On behalf of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), a Washington, DC-based Section 501(c)(6) organization representing more than 21,000 association executives and industry partners from nearly 10,000 tax-exempt organizations, I respectfully request that your office veto legislation that would allow therapists and counselors to turn away clients whose behaviors conflict with their own “sincerely held principles” (House Bill 1840).

Regardless of the bill’s intent, this bill threatens to give rise to state-sanctioned discrimination in Tennessee.

ASAE is equally concerned with a pending anti-LGBT bathroom bill (House Bill 2414) that seeks to marginalize transgender individuals and would put public schools and colleges in Tennessee at clear risk of violating the federal Education Amendments of 1972, also known as Title IX.

ASAE stands strongly in support of diversity and inclusion practices not only within the association sector, but in the various municipalities and states in which associations operate. We are deeply opposed to any laws that permit or even give the appearance of tolerating discrimination. In addition to being regressive, bills like House Bill 2414 and House Bill 1840 damage Tennessee’s image as a welcoming destination for businesses, meeting and convention delegates, and tourists.

Associations plan and host meetings and conventions in destinations all over the country, including throughout Tennessee. ASAE held its own Annual Meeting & Exposition in Nashville in 2014, contributing \$16 million to the Nashville economy over four days and up to \$500 million in future business for the city based on the fact that an estimated 20 percent book a meeting in ASAE’s host city within five years of the ASAE Annual Meeting.

Laws like House Bill 1840 and House Bill 2414 put that type of economic progress in peril. Proponents of these bills may think they are narrowly focused on public school facilities or counseling, but the reality is that they broadcast an unflattering message about the state in general and its treatment of all individuals who reside in or visit the state.

For these reasons, we urge you not to sign these bills and instead work with state lawmakers to affirm the fundamental rights and protections all Tennesseans and visitors to the state deserve.

Sincerely,



John H. Graham IV, FASAE, CAE
President and CEO

cc: Lieutenant Governor and Speaker of the Senate Ron Ramsey, Senate Speaker Pro Tempore Bo Watson, Senate Majority Leader Mark Norris, Senate Minority Leader Lee Harris, Speaker of the House Beth Harwell, House Speaker Pro Tempore Curtis Johnson, House Majority Leader Gerald McCormick, House Minority Leader Craig Fitzhugh