

Colorado Legislative Council Staff Fiscal Note
**STATE, LOCAL, and STATUTORY
 PUBLIC ENTITY FISCAL IMPACT**

Drafting Number: LLS 15-0540
Prime Sponsor(s): Rep. Neville P.; Humphrey
 Sen. Neville T.

Date: February 17, 2015
Bill Status: House SVMA
Fiscal Analyst: Alex Schatz (303-866-4375)

BILL TOPIC: STATE FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE PROTECTION ACT

Fiscal Impact Summary*	FY 2015-2016	FY 2016-2017
State Revenue		
State Expenditures	Minimal workload increase.	
FTE Position Change		
Appropriation Required: None.		

* This summary shows changes from current law under the bill for each fiscal year.

Summary of Legislation

This bill prohibits state and local governments in Colorado from directly or indirectly constraining the exercise of religion, except in cases involving a compelling governmental interest. State and local governments, including individual public officials in their official capacity, must use the least restrictive means of furthering any such compelling governmental interest.

Persons whose exercise of religion is burdened, or likely to be burdened, may assert a violation of the bill as a new claim or as a defense in court. The bill authorizes various remedies, including damages or an injunction, as well as costs and attorney fees.

Background

Colorado free exercise litigation. The state of Colorado is periodically involved in litigation involving the assertion of a right to the free exercise of religion. On this basis, persons have presented claims and defended violations of state law in various contexts. Examples of such cases include failure to pay taxes or adhere to licensing requirements, agricultural regulations, and public accommodation laws. The Attorney General's Office (AGO) in the Department of Law represents state agencies in these cases. Under current law, the AGO typically resolves cases with a motion to dismiss.

State Expenditures

This bill results in a minimal workload increase for trial courts in the Judicial Department and for state agencies involved in litigation in which the free exercise of religion is a material issue.

The bill affects pretrial litigation in these cases. State agencies will generally be required to present additional argument in pleadings. This workload increase, typically involving legal services from the AGO, is not expected to require new appropriations.

State agencies and the trial courts in the Judicial Department will also experience increased workload from additional trials. Under the bill, a trial will be required in some cases to adjudicate the existence of a compelling governmental interest and whether the state has taken the least burdensome course of action. Because the number of free exercise cases is relatively small, any additional resources necessary for this litigation will be addressed in the annual budget process.

Local Government, School District, and Statutory Public Entity Impact

The bill covers governmental actions by cities, towns, counties, special districts, school districts, and statutory public entities. Similar to state agencies, legal workload for these local agencies will increase to address the bill in cases involving a free exercise claim. The bill is also expected to increase workload by a minimal amount in municipal courts, where the bill authorizes an affirmative defense to municipal offenses on the basis of the free exercise of religion.

Effective Date

The bill takes effect upon signature of the Governor, or upon becoming law without his signature, and applies to government action occurring on or after the effective date.

State and Local Government Contacts

Judicial Department
Law
Counties
District Attorneys

Personnel and Administration
Labor and Employment
Regulatory Agencies

Local Affairs
Human Services
Municipalities