

**Representative LaVar Christensen** proposes the following substitute bill:

**RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ACT**

2015 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

**Chief Sponsor: LaVar Christensen**

Senate Sponsor: Alvin B. Jackson

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**LONG TITLE**

**General Description:**

This bill establishes the Religious Liberty Act.

**Highlighted Provisions:**

This bill:

- ▶ adds religious liberty to the list of exceptions in the Governmental Immunity Act of Utah;
- ▶ establishes the Religious Liberty Act;
- ▶ declares that the Act is in furtherance of the rights and protections provided under the United States and Utah constitutions;
- ▶ coordinates the application of the bill to other statutory provisions;
- ▶ establishes that a person's lawful exercise of religious liberty under the Act is a valid defense to claims of others; and
- ▶ permits a person or entity seeking relief under the Act to obtain judicial relief, attorney fees, and costs for violations of that person's religious liberty.

**Money Appropriated in this Bill:**

None

**Other Special Clauses:**

None



26 **Utah Code Sections Affected:**

27 AMENDS:

28 **63G-7-301**, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2014, Chapter 145

29 ENACTS:

30 **63G-19-101**, Utah Code Annotated 1953

31 **63G-19-102**, Utah Code Annotated 1953

32 **63G-19-103**, Utah Code Annotated 1953

33 **63G-19-104**, Utah Code Annotated 1953

34 **63G-19-105**, Utah Code Annotated 1953



36 *Be it enacted by the Legislature of the state of Utah:*

37 Section 1. Section **63G-7-301** is amended to read:

38 **63G-7-301. Waivers of immunity -- Exceptions.**

39 (1) (a) Immunity from suit of each governmental entity is waived as to any contractual  
40 obligation.

41 (b) Actions arising out of contractual rights or obligations are not subject to the  
42 requirements of Sections **63G-7-401**, **63G-7-402**, **63G-7-403**, or **63G-7-601**.

43 (c) The Division of Water Resources is not liable for failure to deliver water from a  
44 reservoir or associated facility authorized by Title 73, Chapter 26, Bear River Development  
45 Act, if the failure to deliver the contractual amount of water is due to drought, other natural  
46 condition, or safety condition that causes a deficiency in the amount of available water.

47 (2) Immunity from suit of each governmental entity is waived:

48 (a) as to any action brought to recover, obtain possession of, or quiet title to real or  
49 personal property;

50 (b) as to any action brought to foreclose mortgages or other liens on real or personal  
51 property, to determine any adverse claim on real or personal property, or to obtain an  
52 adjudication about any mortgage or other lien that the governmental entity may have or claim  
53 on real or personal property;

54 (c) as to any action based on the negligent destruction, damage, or loss of goods,  
55 merchandise, or other property while it is in the possession of any governmental entity or  
56 employee, if the property was seized for the purpose of forfeiture under any provision of state

57 law;

58 (d) subject to Subsection 63G-7-302(1), as to any action brought under the authority of  
59 Article I, Section 22, of the Utah Constitution, for the recovery of compensation from the  
60 governmental entity when the governmental entity has taken or damaged private property for  
61 public uses without just compensation;

62 (e) subject to Subsection 63G-7-302(2), as to any action brought to recover attorney  
63 fees under Sections 63G-2-405 and 63G-2-802;

64 (f) for actual damages under Title 67, Chapter 21, Utah Protection of Public Employees  
65 Act; [or]

66 (g) as to any action brought to obtain relief from a land use regulation that imposes a  
67 substantial burden on the free exercise of religion under Title 63L, Chapter 5, Utah Religious  
68 Land Use Act[-]; or

69 (h) as to any action brought to obtain relief from governmental action under Title 63G,  
70 Chapter 19, Religious Liberty Act.

71 (3) (a) Except as provided in Subsection (3)(b), immunity from suit of each  
72 governmental entity is waived as to any injury caused by:

73 (i) a defective, unsafe, or dangerous condition of any highway, road, street, alley,  
74 crosswalk, sidewalk, culvert, tunnel, bridge, viaduct, or other structure located on them; or

75 (ii) any defective or dangerous condition of a public building, structure, dam, reservoir,  
76 or other public improvement.

77 (b) Immunity from suit of each governmental entity is not waived if the injury arises  
78 out of, in connection with, or results from:

79 (i) a latent dangerous or latent defective condition of any highway, road, street, alley,  
80 crosswalk, sidewalk, culvert, tunnel, bridge, viaduct, or other structure located on them; or

81 (ii) a latent dangerous or latent defective condition of any public building, structure,  
82 dam, reservoir, or other public improvement.

83 (4) Immunity from suit of each governmental entity is waived as to any injury  
84 proximately caused by a negligent act or omission of an employee committed within the scope  
85 of employment.

86 (5) Immunity from suit of each governmental entity is not waived under Subsections  
87 (3) and (4) if the injury arises out of, in connection with, or results from:

- 88 (a) the exercise or performance, or the failure to exercise or perform, a discretionary  
89 function, whether or not the discretion is abused;
- 90 (b) assault, battery, false imprisonment, false arrest, malicious prosecution, intentional  
91 trespass, abuse of process, libel, slander, deceit, interference with contract rights, infliction of  
92 mental anguish, or violation of civil rights;
- 93 (c) the issuance, denial, suspension, or revocation of, or by the failure or refusal to  
94 issue, deny, suspend, or revoke, any permit, license, certificate, approval, order, or similar  
95 authorization;
- 96 (d) a failure to make an inspection or by making an inadequate or negligent inspection;
- 97 (e) the institution or prosecution of any judicial or administrative proceeding, even if  
98 malicious or without probable cause;
- 99 (f) a misrepresentation by an employee whether or not it is negligent or intentional;
- 100 (g) riots, unlawful assemblies, public demonstrations, mob violence, and civil  
101 disturbances;
- 102 (h) the collection of and assessment of taxes;
- 103 (i) the activities of the Utah National Guard;
- 104 (j) the incarceration of any person in any state prison, county or city jail, or other place  
105 of legal confinement;
- 106 (k) any natural condition on publicly owned or controlled lands;
- 107 (l) any condition existing in connection with an abandoned mine or mining operation;
- 108 (m) any activity authorized by the School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration  
109 or the Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands;
- 110 (n) the operation or existence of a pedestrian or equestrian trail that is along a ditch,  
111 canal, stream, or river, regardless of ownership or operation of the ditch, canal, stream, or river,  
112 if:
- 113 (i) the trail is designated under a general plan adopted by a municipality under Section  
114 10-9a-401 or by a county under Section 17-27a-401;
- 115 (ii) the trail right-of-way or the right-of-way where the trail is located is open to public  
116 use as evidenced by a written agreement between the owner or operator of the trail  
117 right-of-way, or of the right-of-way where the trail is located, and the municipality or county  
118 where the trail is located; and

- 119 (iii) the written agreement:
- 120 (A) contains a plan for operation and maintenance of the trail; and
- 121 (B) provides that an owner or operator of the trail right-of-way or of the right-of-way
- 122 where the trail is located has, at minimum, the same level of immunity from suit as the
- 123 governmental entity in connection with or resulting from the use of the trail.
- 124 (o) research or implementation of cloud management or seeding for the clearing of fog;
- 125 (p) the management of flood waters, earthquakes, or natural disasters;
- 126 (q) the construction, repair, or operation of flood or storm systems;
- 127 (r) the operation of an emergency vehicle, while being driven in accordance with the
- 128 requirements of Section 41-6a-212;
- 129 (s) the activities of:
- 130 (i) providing emergency medical assistance;
- 131 (ii) fighting fire;
- 132 (iii) regulating, mitigating, or handling hazardous materials or hazardous wastes;
- 133 (iv) emergency evacuations;
- 134 (v) transporting or removing injured persons to a place where emergency medical
- 135 assistance can be rendered or where the person can be transported by a licensed ambulance
- 136 service; or
- 137 (vi) intervening during dam emergencies;
- 138 (t) the exercise or performance, or the failure to exercise or perform, any function
- 139 pursuant to Title 73, Chapter 10, Board of Water Resources - Division of Water Resources;
- 140 (u) unauthorized access to government records, data, or electronic information systems
- 141 by any person or entity; or
- 142 (v) injury related to the activity of wildlife, as defined in Section 23-13-2, that arises
- 143 during the use of a public or private road.

144 Section 2. Section 63G-19-101 is enacted to read:

145 **CHAPTER 19. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ACT**

146 **63G-19-101. Title.**

147 This chapter is known as the "Religious Liberty Act."

148 Section 3. Section 63G-19-102 is enacted to read:

149 **63G-19-102. Definitions.**

150 As used in this chapter:

151 (1) "Person" means:

152 (a) an individual;

153 (b) a closely held business or entity;

154 (c) a religious institution;

155 (d) a religious institution's wholly or partially owned subsidiary or affiliate;

156 (e) a representative of a religious institution;

157 (f) an entity that is recognized under applicable law as an expressive association; or

158 (g) an independent education institution or association that holds and expresses sincere

159 and honest religious or moral principles and values that are essential to its existence and

160 operation.

161 (2) "Substantial burden on religious liberty" means:

162 (a) infringes upon or violates religious liberty;

163 (b) has the effect of compelling, restraining, or coercing a person to act, significantly

164 modify behavior, or restrain from acting in a way that is contrary to the person's religious

165 liberty; or

166 (c) significantly diminishes, interferes, or threatens a person's civil capacities or goods

167 because of the person's religious liberty.

168 Section 4. Section **63G-19-103** is enacted to read:

169 **63G-19-103. Constitutional religious liberty -- Compelling interest.**

170 (1) Religious liberty is an inherent, inalienable and natural right of mankind. It is

171 expressly recognized and guaranteed in the United States and state constitutions. The state

172 constitution expresses enduring gratitude to Almighty God for life and liberty and secures and

173 perpetuates the principles of free government. Such rights and corresponding duties are owed

174 to the Creator and Supreme Judge of the world as acknowledged and expressed in the nation's

175 founding Declaration of Independence and shall not be substantially burdened by any person or

176 law except as may, under limited circumstances, be approved and necessary according to

177 statute and applicable constitutional standards and requirements.

178 (2) The citizens of the state affirm and seek to preserve the same continuing firm

179 reliance on divine providence as so abundantly marked and accompanied the founding of the

180 nation and the United States Constitution. This includes reasonable and necessary protections

181 that allow all people to freely choose and practice their own faith and religious beliefs or none  
182 at all. The government shall not deny or exclude the rightful and lawful expression and  
183 exercise of religious liberty in private or public life.

184 (3) The rights and protections of religious liberty afforded by this chapter are in  
185 furtherance of those provided under the constitutions of this state and the United States. As  
186 expressly provided since statehood in Utah Constitution, Article III, Section 1, perfect  
187 toleration of religious sentiment is guaranteed as expressly provided in Utah Constitution,  
188 Article I, Section 4, rights of conscience shall never be infringed and in Utah Constitution,  
189 Article IV, Section 1, all citizens of this state shall enjoy equally all civil, political, and  
190 religious rights and privileges. There is a substantial public and government interest in  
191 protecting order and morality.

192 (4) The lawful and proper expression and exercise of religious liberty and rights of  
193 conscience recognized and protected in the constitutions of the state and the United States and  
194 this chapter do not constitute nor shall they be applied in such manner as would result in  
195 wrongful discrimination under other laws and statutory protections including Title 34A,  
196 Chapter 5, Utah Antidiscrimination Act, and Title 57, Chapter 21, Utah Fair Housing Act.

197 Section 5. Section **63G-19-104** is enacted to read:

198 **63G-19-104. Application of chapter to certain provisions.**

199 (1) The state with the greatest respect for all citizens has adopted specific protections  
200 against discrimination as defined and included in Title 34A, Chapter 5, Utah  
201 Antidiscrimination Act, and Title 57, Chapter 21, Utah Fair Housing Act. Such definitions and  
202 protections are for the specific purposes stated in those chapters. They do not create specific or  
203 additional suspect classes for other purposes or applications and do not affect or alter the  
204 constitutional law of the state and the United States. Review and application of laws regarding  
205 race, religion, or national origin, are independently subject to heightened strict scrutiny and  
206 express constitutional protections.

207 (2) The state fully and independently reserves and affirms all rights and powers of state  
208 sovereignty, including the state's rights and powers regarding all domestic relations laws, and  
209 as provided in Section **63G-16-101**, and as are adopted by the Legislature and the citizens of  
210 this state.

211 (3) This chapter is consistent with rights of conscientious objection applied elsewhere

212 in Utah law, including a health care facility or health care provider based on religious or moral  
213 grounds as recognized and provided under Section 76-7-306.

214 (4) Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to prohibit the granting of government  
215 funding, benefits, or exemptions, to the extent permissible under the Establishment Clause of  
216 the United States Constitution or Utah Constitution, Article I, Section 4.

217 (5) Religious beliefs and the lawful exercise thereof are not grounds for retaliation and  
218 does not constitute a wrongful injury to another person.

219 Section 6. Section **63G-19-105** is enacted to read:

220 **63G-19-105. Judicial relief.**

221 (1) The lawful and proper exercise of religious liberty is:

222 (a) a recognized exemption to otherwise generally applicable laws and a valid defense  
223 to claims by others; and

224 (b) a proper basis for legal and equitable relief, claims, remedies, and actions when  
225 necessary to enforce such protections.

226 (2) A person whose religious liberty is substantially burdened in violation of this  
227 chapter may obtain appropriate relief in a judicial proceeding, including recovery of reasonable  
228 attorney fees and costs.