



The Lifting Local Communities Act

Background: By some estimates, faith-based organizations contribute nearly \$1.2 trillion of socio-economic value to the United States economy, with billions directly benefiting low-income families. In many communities, these organizations form the backbone of the local safety net, protecting and providing for families and individuals who have hit hard times or are struggling to make ends meet. Federal policymakers have historically acknowledged the vital role of faith-based organizations in our nation’s antipoverty and community development efforts and taken steps to ensure that they can apply for and administer federally-funded social services. The main rules governing this process, called “charitable choice” or “equal participation” rules, have been laid out via rulemaking, but often change from administration to administration.

Overview: To provide certainty for religious organizations applying for federal programs, encourage participation of new service providers, and better serve Americans in need, the *Lifting Local Communities Act* would codify vital religious protections in the delivery of dollars across federal social service programs, ensuring that these protections are clearly stated and enshrined in federal law rather than subject to the back and forth of rulemaking. The bill would also take new steps to protect religious exercise and empower religious organizations to participate fully in federally-funded social services without fear of reprisal or burdensome restrictions on the basis of their beliefs. Among other things, the bill would:

- Ensure that religious organizations are eligible to apply for, and provide, federal social services on the same basis as non-religious organizations;
- Ensure that religious organizations that receive federal funds maintain their independence and freedom to retain their name, structure, and religious practices;
- Clarify that religious providers will not be prohibited from providing religious services and using religious language at the same time and location as federally-funded services;
- Subject to certain exemptions and accommodations for religious organizations, prohibit discrimination against a program participant on the basis of religion or religious belief, or lack thereof, in the provision of federally-funded social services;
- To preserve beneficiary choice and organizations’ exercise of their faith, require that the federal, state, or local government refer a participant to another provider if the participant has an objection to the nature or character of the private organization providing the service;
- Clarify that religious exemptions in federal law regarding an organization’s hiring decisions and other protections of religious belief and practice continue to apply when a religious organization takes federal money; and
- Create a private right of action for religious organizations to sue if its rights under this bill are violated.