

STATE OF OKLAHOMA

1st Session of the 60th Legislature (2025)

SENATE BILL 499

By: Bergstrom

AS INTRODUCED

An Act relating to the Oklahoma Religious Freedom Act; amending 51 O.S. 2021, Section 253, as last amended by Section 113, Chapter 452, O.S.L. 2024 (51 O.S. Supp. 2024, Section 253), which relates to government burden on religious freedom; providing certain closures be deemed substantial burden; prohibiting certain restriction of access; and providing an effective date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

SECTION 1. AMENDATORY 51 O.S. 2021, Section 253, as last amended by Section 113, Chapter 452, O.S.L. 2024 (51 O.S. Supp. 2024, Section 253), is amended to read as follows:

Section 253. A. Except as provided in subsection B of this section, no governmental entity shall substantially burden a person's free exercise of religion even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability.

B. No governmental entity shall substantially burden a person's free exercise of religion unless it demonstrates that application of the burden to the person is:

1. Essential to further a compelling governmental interest; and

1 2. The least restrictive means of furthering that compelling
2 governmental interest.

3 ~~C. Any order or rule issued by any governmental entity pursuant
4 to an emergency that requires The closure of any place of worship
5 entitled to the religious exemption found in Section 501(c)(3) of
6 Title 26 of the United States Code shall be considered a substantial
7 burden even if the order or rule is one of general applicability.~~

8 ~~D. No governmental entity as defined pursuant to Section 252 of
9 this title shall declare or deem a religious institution and any
10 activity directly related to the institution's discharge of its
11 mission and purpose to be nonessential. No or the designation of a
12 religious institution shall be subject to a closure or restriction
13 for the purposes of health or security that is greater than that
14 imposed upon any private entity facing the same or similar health or
15 security conditions as nonessential by a governmental entity as
16 defined pursuant to Section 252 of this title shall be deemed a
17 substantial burden on the free exercise of religion that is not the
18 least restrictive means of furthering a compelling governmental
19 interest. A government entity shall not restrict access to a
20 religious facility or gathering if such facility or gathering is not
21 engaged in illegal activities.~~

22 ~~E. D.~~ It shall be deemed a substantial burden to exclude any
23 person or entity from participation in or receipt of governmental
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1 funds, benefits, programs, or exemptions based solely on the
2 religious character or affiliation of the person or entity.

3 SECTION 2. This act shall become effective November 1, 2025.

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