

**Testimony for Senate Labor & Industry Committee Hearing
August 30, 2016**

SB 1306

On behalf of Christian camps

The undersigned represent not only our own camp and conference ministries, but we are part of the leadership of a group that represents over 100 organizations across the Commonwealth. Together, we ask that you would oppose SB 1306 as this bill would actually hurt rather than help persons in this Commonwealth.

We understand the broad intentions in the introduction of SB 1306. It is understandable and appropriate to seek an environment where all Pennsylvanians' value and dignity is affirmed. The idea that all laws should be fair to every citizen should unite us on common ground. However, we fear that SB 1306 goes too far, undermines essential freedoms and provokes intolerance towards people and groups like ours.

Currently, as a religious organization, we have the ability to hire employees who share our religious beliefs and who conduct themselves in accordance with those beliefs. It is essential that we, and other Christian camps across Pennsylvania, be able to continue to hire all of our employees on the basis of these shared religious beliefs, which include our religious beliefs about marriage and human sexuality. Indeed, it would undermine our very purpose for existence if the individuals hired to embody these values to campers and co-employees were empowered by state law to contradict those values at every turn.

Every year, we welcome thousands of children and teenagers onto our facilities for an opportunity to grow in their faith, have fun, and make new friends. Campers and employees choose to come here because they expect to be immersed in a camp, work environment and a community that shares and affirms their faith. And parents entrust their children to us based on the mission we have committed ourselves to following. SB 1306 would not only take away our ability to preserve our mission and ensure that children receive the camp experience we have promised, but also subject us to lawsuits and fines for simply seeking to operate according to our mission and core convictions.

SB 1306 should be opposed in order to protect the values and freedom of all citizens, no matter who they are. We operate to bring benefit to the community, and we need the freedom to do so in accordance to our own values and beliefs, specifically in the areas of hiring staff and volunteers who hold to those same values.

Summer camps seek to place employees, as well as campers, in age and sex-specific cabins for their own privacy and safety, as well as for the emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being of the entire group. Just as there are valid justifications for rooming 7 year olds and 17 year olds in different cabins, so too there are valid justifications for not placing a female in a cabin with males. And while SB 1306 only applies to employment, it is going to impact every aspect of our camp. SB 1306 would require us to treat a biological male employee as a female. He would have the legal authority to use all facilities designated for females. That means the male employee would have to be assigned as a counselor for a cabin full of females. He

would have the right to use the same showers and restrooms as the girls under his watch. I can assure you that such an outcome would result in the humiliation and embarrassment of the girls and boys entrusted to our care.

The privacy, dignity, and safety of every employee and every child entrusted to our care during camp is very important to us. Bodily privacy between the sexes is very important for our employees and campers. We respectfully request that you do not pass this bill, or any others, that would label our efforts to follow our mission and maintain privacy between the sexes an illegal act.

Sincerely,

/s/ Michael R. Gehlert

Michael R. Gehlert, Executive Director, Camp Conquest, Denver, PA President-Elect, Mid-Atlantic Section, Christian Camp and Conference Association

/s/ Todd Donaldson

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