

## MORAL MESSAGING TO PREVENT DISCRIMINATION: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Message guidance for conversations, media interviews, and social media. This memo draws on research from the Movement Advancement Project, the ACLU and the Center for American Progress.

### The moment

On November 1, the Trump Administration announced it would not enforce existing Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) regulations that prohibit discrimination in HHS-funded programs based on sexual orientation, gender identity, sex, or religion. This memo lays out a tight message against the proposed new rule, as well as a step-by-step approach to crafting a more extensive message.

### Short core message on the proposed HHS rule change

*If you only have time for one sound byte, this is it*

Religious liberty, freedom from discrimination and caring for our neighbors are core values for people of faith. The Department of Health and Human Services's proposal to stop enforcing rules against discrimination in taxpayer funded programs violates these principles. Our taxpayer dollars should never be used to discriminate or hurt the most vulnerable among us. But that's exactly what this rule would do.

### Message Sequence: Values → Humanize → Problem → Solution → Action

If you have time to flesh out a longer message, use this step-by-step sequence. It connects with audiences, persuades them and motivates them.

#### 1. Lead with values

Begin by emphasizing shared values. **First:** commitment to religious freedom. **Second:** human dignity. **Third:** freedom from discrimination. **For example:** "As a pastor and an American, religious liberty, and freedom from discrimination, and caring for my neighbors are non-negotiable values."

#### 2. Humanize the issue

Next, humanize the issue by describing how programs funded by the Department of Health and Human Services help people in our communities. **For example:** "Programs funded by the Department of Health and Human Services provide critical services for countless families across the country. Our taxpayer dollars fund everything from adoption and foster care services to after-school programs to Meals on Wheels."

#### 3. Pivot to the problem

Next, lay out the problem. **First:** name that the rule is dangerous. **Second:** name that discrimination against LGBTQ people will occur. **Third:** broaden the harms describing additional impacts. **For example:** "This dangerous new rule would put the health and well-being of our neighbors and families at risk. It's intended to enable taxpayer funding of programs to discriminate against LGBTQ people, and it also opens an even bigger can of worms. Under this new rule, agencies and programs that receive taxpayer money could refuse

to provide services based on religion, sex, gender identity or sexual orientation—including to religious minorities, women and children of same-sex parents. And they wouldn't even have to give a reason why they want to discriminate—the Trump administration would simply allow it, no questions asked. That's an attack on religious liberty and vulnerable people, and it's not right."

**NOTE:** See the list of potential harms at the bottom of this document.

#### 4. Lay out the solution

Next, describe the outcome we want -- the healthier and more world, not just the policy change. Remember, laws are the means, not the ends. **For example:** "America is at its best when we practice the values we preach. That means our taxpayer dollars from the Department of Health and Human Services go toward serving people's needs, caring for children and strengthening families, and never discriminate or exclude."

#### 5. Call to action

Close by calling on your audience to act to bring about the change we seek. It should be concrete, simple, and targeted. **For example:** "It's time for people of faith to speak out to defend our neighbors and families from discrimination. The new rule hasn't gone into effect yet, and public comment period is open until December 19th. Now is the time for the faithful to say no to discrimination. **[instructions on how to comment.]**"

#### Do's and Don'ts

Do	Don't
Use your unique voice as a person of faith. Speak from your specific tradition!	Talk like a policy wonk or a lawyer.
Describe 2-3 harms caused by the policy. (See list of harms below.)	Recite a laundry list of all potential harms.
Use shared values to build support.	Use polarizing language and name-calling (e.g., bigot, bigotry, hate, hatred).

#### Potential harms

- People in need of medical care could be turned away from a federally funded community health center because they are LGBTQ.
- An evangelical Christian child placement agency that receives HHS grants could turn away Jewish, Muslim or Catholic families seeking to provide a home to a child. This rule would create a license to discriminate for agencies like Miracle Hill in South Carolina, which has already done exactly this.
- An agency providing foster care services could keep a child in a group home rather than place them with qualified Jewish or LGBTQ parents.
- Children of same-sex parents could be denied enrollment in Head Start and other federally funded childcare facilities.
- Federally funded after-school programs could refuse to serve the children of single mothers or LGBTQ parents—and could also exclude transgender youth.

- A senior services center could continue to receive government funding while ignoring sexual harassment of women it serves.
- Community meal programs designed to support older adults could refuse to deliver food to older Americans who are LGBTQ.