

September 5, 2006

The Honorable F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
Chairman
The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.
Ranking Member
House Committee on the Judiciary
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Sensenbrenner and Representative Conyers:

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) is the umbrella organization for the organized Jewish community. Our membership includes 13 national Jewish agencies and 125 Jewish Community Relations Councils. On behalf of the organized Jewish community, I urge you to oppose the "Public Expression of Religion Act of 2005" (HR 2679). As Jews, members of a religious minority in the United States, we are particularly sensitive to the relationship between religion and state in this nation.

The Public Expression of Religion Act (PERA) prevents judges from awarding attorney's fees in Establishment Clause cases. This restriction severely limits the ability of Americans to bring suit against the government or public officials when their religious liberties have been compromised. Lawsuits are very expensive. The passage of this bill would essentially prohibit all but the very wealthy from protecting their rights. Regardless of economic status, all Americans should have the ability to protect their liberties and challenge unconstitutional actions.

JCPA policy calls for a clear separation between religion and government. "In our increasingly pluralistic society, a clear division between religion and state remains the best way to preserve and promote the religious rights and liberties for all Americans, including the Jewish community." PERA compromises this separation and threatens to infringe on the rights of many Americans by making it prohibitively expensive and thus practically impossible, to challenge an official's or jurisdiction's actions.

I strongly urge you to oppose this legislation and protect the ability of millions of Americans to live in a society that respects religious freedom and liberty.

Sincerely,



Hadar Susskind
Washington Director
Jewish Council for Public Affairs

cc:

Representative Bachus
Representative Berman
Representative Boucher
Representative Cannon
Representative Chabot
Representative Colbe
Representative Delahunt
Representative Feeney
Representative Flake
Representative Forbes
Representative Gallegly
Representative Gohmer
Representative Goodblatte
Representative Green
Representative Hyde
Representative Hostettler
Representative Inglis
Representative Issa
Representative Jackson Lee
Representative Jenkins
Representative Keller
Representative King
Representative Lofgren
Representative Lungren
Representative Meehan
Representative Nadler
Representative Pence
Representative Sanchez
Representative Schiff
Representative Scott
Representative Smith
Representative Van Hollen
Representative Wasserman Schultz
Representative Waters
Representative Watt
Representative Weiner
Representative Wexler