

### § 2000bb. Congressional findings and declaration of purposes

#### (a) Findings

The Congress finds that—

(1) the framers of the Constitution, recognizing free exercise of religion as an unalienable right, secured its protection in the First Amendment to the Constitution;

(2) laws “neutral” toward religion may burden religious exercise as surely as laws intended to interfere with religious exercise;

(3) governments should not substantially burden religious exercise without compelling justification;

(4) in *Employment Division v. Smith*, 494 U.S. 872 (1990) the Supreme Court virtually eliminated the requirement that the government justify burdens on religious exercise imposed by laws neutral toward religion; and

(5) the compelling interest test as set forth in prior Federal court rulings is a workable test for striking sensible balances between religious liberty and competing prior governmental interests.

#### (b) Purposes

The purposes of this chapter are—

(1) to restore the compelling interest test as set forth in *Sherbert v. Verner*, 374 U.S. 398 (1963) and *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205 (1972) and to guarantee its application in all cases where free exercise of religion is substantially burdened; and

(2) to provide a claim or defense to persons whose religious exercise is substantially burdened by government.

(Pub. L. 103–141, §2, Nov. 16, 1993, 107 Stat. 1488.)

#### REFERENCES IN TEXT

This chapter, referred to in subsec. (b), was in the original “this Act”, meaning Pub. L. 103–141, Nov. 16, 1993, 107 Stat. 1488, which is classified principally to this chapter. For complete classification of this Act to the Code, see Short Title note below and Tables.

#### SHORT TITLE

Section 1 of Pub. L. 103–141 provided that: “This Act [enacting this chapter and amending section 1988 of this title and section 504 of Title 5, Government Organization and Employees] may be cited as the ‘Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993’.”

### § 2000bb–1. Free exercise of religion protected

#### (a) In general

Government shall not substantially burden a person’s exercise of religion even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability, except as provided in subsection (b) of this section.

#### (b) Exception

Government may substantially burden a person’s exercise of religion only if it demonstrates that application of the burden to the person—

(1) is in furtherance of a compelling governmental interest; and

(2) is the least restrictive means of furthering that compelling governmental interest.

#### (c) Judicial relief

A person whose religious exercise has been burdened in violation of this section may assert

that violation as a claim or defense in a judicial proceeding and obtain appropriate relief against a government. Standing to assert a claim or defense under this section shall be governed by the general rules of standing under article III of the Constitution.

(Pub. L. 103–141, §3, Nov. 16, 1993, 107 Stat. 1488.)

### § 2000bb–2. Definitions

As used in this chapter—

(1) the term “government” includes a branch, department, agency, instrumentality, and official (or other person acting under color of law) of the United States, or of a covered entity;

(2) the term “covered entity” means the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and each territory and possession of the United States;

(3) the term “demonstrates” means meets the burdens of going forward with the evidence and of persuasion; and

(4) the term “exercise of religion” means religious exercise, as defined in section 2000cc–5 of this title.

(Pub. L. 103–141, §5, Nov. 16, 1993, 107 Stat. 1489; Pub. L. 106–274, §7(a), Sept. 22, 2000, 114 Stat. 806.)

#### REFERENCES IN TEXT

This chapter, referred to in text, was in the original “this Act”, meaning Pub. L. 103–141, Nov. 16, 1993, 107 Stat. 1488, which is classified principally to this chapter. For complete classification of this Act to the Code, see Short Title note set out under section 2000bb of this title and Tables.

#### AMENDMENTS

2000—Par. (1). Pub. L. 106–274, §7(a)(1), substituted “or of a covered entity” for “a State, or a subdivision of a State”.

Par. (2). Pub. L. 106–274, §7(a)(2), substituted “term ‘covered entity’ means” for “term ‘State’ includes”.

Par. (4). Pub. L. 106–274, §7(a)(3), substituted “religious exercise, as defined in section 2000cc–5 of this title” for “the exercise of religion under the First Amendment to the Constitution”.

### § 2000bb–3. Applicability

#### (a) In general

This chapter applies to all Federal law, and the implementation of that law, whether statutory or otherwise, and whether adopted before or after November 16, 1993.

#### (b) Rule of construction

Federal statutory law adopted after November 16, 1993, is subject to this chapter unless such law explicitly excludes such application by reference to this chapter.

#### (c) Religious belief unaffected

Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to authorize any government to burden any religious belief.

(Pub. L. 103–141, §6, Nov. 16, 1993, 107 Stat. 1489; Pub. L. 106–274, §7(b), Sept. 22, 2000, 114 Stat. 806.)

#### REFERENCES IN TEXT

This chapter, referred to in text, was in the original “this Act”, meaning Pub. L. 103–141, Nov. 16, 1993, 107

Stat. 1488, which is classified principally to this chapter. For complete classification of this Act to the Code, see Short Title note set out under section 2000bb of this title and Tables.

#### AMENDMENTS

2000—Subsec. (a). Pub. L. 106–274 struck out “and State” after “Federal”.

#### § 2000bb–4. Establishment clause unaffected

Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to affect, interpret, or in any way address that portion of the First Amendment prohibiting laws respecting the establishment of religion (referred to in this section as the “Establishment Clause”). Granting government funding, benefits, or exemptions, to the extent permissible under the Establishment Clause, shall not constitute a violation of this chapter. As used in this section, the term “granting”, used with respect to government funding, benefits, or exemptions, does not include the denial of government funding, benefits, or exemptions.

(Pub. L. 103–141, §7, Nov. 16, 1993, 107 Stat. 1489.)

#### REFERENCES IN TEXT

This chapter, referred to in text, was in the original “this Act”, meaning Pub. L. 103–141, Nov. 16, 1993, 107 Stat. 1488, which is classified principally to this chapter. For complete classification of this Act to the Code, see Short Title note set out under section 2000bb of this title and Tables.

### CHAPTER 21C—PROTECTION OF RELIGIOUS EXERCISE IN LAND USE AND BY INSTITUTIONALIZED PERSONS

Sec.	
2000cc.	Protection of land use as religious exercise.
2000cc–1.	Protection of religious exercise of institutionalized persons.
2000cc–2.	Judicial relief.
2000cc–3.	Rules of construction.
2000cc–4.	Establishment Clause unaffected.
2000cc–5.	Definitions.

#### § 2000cc. Protection of land use as religious exercise

##### (a) Substantial burdens

###### (1) General rule

No government shall impose or implement a land use regulation in a manner that imposes a substantial burden on the religious exercise of a person, including a religious assembly or institution, unless the government demonstrates that imposition of the burden on that person, assembly, or institution—

(A) is in furtherance of a compelling governmental interest; and

(B) is the least restrictive means of furthering that compelling governmental interest.

###### (2) Scope of application

This subsection applies in any case in which—

(A) the substantial burden is imposed in a program or activity that receives Federal financial assistance, even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability;

(B) the substantial burden affects, or removal of that substantial burden would af-

fect, commerce with foreign nations, among the several States, or with Indian tribes, even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability; or

(C) the substantial burden is imposed in the implementation of a land use regulation or system of land use regulations, under which a government makes, or has in place formal or informal procedures or practices that permit the government to make, individualized assessments of the proposed uses for the property involved.

##### (b) Discrimination and exclusion

###### (1) Equal terms

No government shall impose or implement a land use regulation in a manner that treats a religious assembly or institution on less than equal terms with a nonreligious assembly or institution.

###### (2) Nondiscrimination

No government shall impose or implement a land use regulation that discriminates against any assembly or institution on the basis of religion or religious denomination.

###### (3) Exclusions and limits

No government shall impose or implement a land use regulation that—

(A) totally excludes religious assemblies from a jurisdiction; or

(B) unreasonably limits religious assemblies, institutions, or structures within a jurisdiction.

(Pub. L. 106–274, §2, Sept. 22, 2000, 114 Stat. 803.)

#### SHORT TITLE

Pub. L. 106–274, §1, Sept. 22, 2000, 114 Stat. 803, provided that: “This Act [enacting this chapter and amending sections 1988, 2000bb–2 and 2000bb–3 of this title] may be cited as the ‘Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000’”.

#### § 2000cc–1. Protection of religious exercise of institutionalized persons

##### (a) General rule

No government shall impose a substantial burden on the religious exercise of a person residing in or confined to an institution, as defined in section 1997 of this title, even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability, unless the government demonstrates that imposition of the burden on that person—

(1) is in furtherance of a compelling governmental interest; and

(2) is the least restrictive means of furthering that compelling governmental interest.

##### (b) Scope of application

This section applies in any case in which—

(1) the substantial burden is imposed in a program or activity that receives Federal financial assistance; or

(2) the substantial burden affects, or removal of that substantial burden would affect, commerce with foreign nations, among the several States, or with Indian tribes.

(Pub. L. 106–274, §3, Sept. 22, 2000, 114 Stat. 804.)