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President and CEO

Testimony: HB17 – 1013 Free Exercise of Religion
House State, Veterans, & Military Affairs

January 25, 2017

Good afternoon, Chair Foote, Vice Chair Lontine [LON-TEEN] and members of the committee. Thank you so much for having me today. I'm Kelly Brough, president and CEO of the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce.

The Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce represents about 3000 businesses and their 300,000 employees.

To start, I'm here today to convey our strong opposition to House Bill 1013. But before I tell you more about why, I want to take a minute to talk about the message that continuing to introduce bills like this sends. Though every year some form of this bill has faced overwhelming opposition from all sectors of our community and ultimately failed to move through the legislature, legislators continue to introduce it. And the very dangerous and divisive message that comes with this bill is one of lack of respect for others; it is one of intolerance; it is one of closed doors, rather than open doors; and it is counter to what so many Coloradans believe, which is that people and perspectives and problem solving are more important than politics.

It is incredibly frustrating yet again to have to use our resources – time, staff – to back here defending against this unfair attack on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community... for the third year in a row.

At its core, the premise of this bill is to allow people to use religion as permission to ignore laws they don't want to follow. In this case, it would allow businesses to refuse service to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender customers. That's discrimination. There's no other word for it.

House Bill 1013 legalizes discrimination. It condones injustice as long as it's disguised as religious freedom. That's not ok in Colorado and it frankly shouldn't be ok anywhere else.

There are high stakes with legislation like this. There are economic stakes – we saw what happened to Indiana in 2015 when it passed legislation similar to this. \$60 million in lost tourism revenue and a mass exodus of business leaders who saw that law for what it is – discrimination.

But even more important than the economic impact, is the social impact. What we're saying when we introduce this kind of legislation is *we don't want you, and we don't need you*. That's absolutely not true. And it's absolutely not right.

That's not who we are. It's not how we do business and it's not the message we want to send to the nation and the world about Colorado.

Our state is better than laws designed to discriminate and we will never support legislation that creates an intolerant, anti-business environment.

The bottom line is that Colorado is open for business to all, regardless of who you are, how you worship or who you love. Thank you.