

THE PUBLIC RIGHTS/PRIVATE CONSCIENCE PROJECT
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Press Release:

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From:

Columbia Law School, [The Public Rights/Private Conscience Project \(PRPCP\)](#)

Subject:

Columbia Law School Think Tank Provides Testimony to New York City Council on Gender and Racial Equity Training

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April 27, 2017—On Monday, April 24, Ashe McGovern, Legislative and Policy Director of Columbia Law School’s [Public Rights/Private Conscience Project \(PRPCP\)](#) testified before the New York City Council Committee on Women’s Issues on a bill that would require several city agencies to undergo training on “implicit bias, discrimination, cultural competency and structural inequity, including with respect to gender, race and sexual orientation.”

McGovern’s testimony outlines the merits of the bill, and encourages the council to expand its requirements to all city agencies, as well as to private city contractors. Private organizations that contract with the city receive billions of taxpayer dollars and are the primary source of many city-funded services. Any bill intended to combat discrimination within city programs, therefore, should apply to contractors. In addition, the current bill mandates training for only three city agencies—the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the Administration for Children’s Services and the Department of Social Services/Human Resources Administration—despite the fact that all agencies and their grantees are in need of the proposed training.

The testimony also draws attention to the unique legal concerns and challenges that arise when faith-based organizations—which are exempted from certain provisions of New York City’s human rights law—contract with the city to provide vital services. PRPCP explains that clear training on all contractors’ legal duty to provide comprehensive and nondiscriminatory care is essential to ensuring that the city does not use public funds to subsidize discrimination.

“While this bill is an important step in the right direction, it is vital that all city agencies, and the private organizations they contract with, be subject to cultural competency training and more stringent oversight,” said McGovern. “Last year alone, New York City provided over \$4 billion to private contractors so that they could meet the city’s social and human service’s needs. LGBTQ communities, those seeking reproductive healthcare, and communities of color experience unique vulnerabilities in accessing these vitally important services. The Council should be cognizant of those vulnerabilities and adopt proactive measures to ensure that all agencies and contractors, whether faith-based or secular, do not engage in discriminatory behavior.”

The PRPCP's mission is to address contexts in which religious liberty rights conflict with or undermine fundamental rights to equality and liberty through academic legal analysis. PRPCP approaches the developing law of religion in a manner that respects the importance of religious liberty while recognizing the ways in which broad religious accommodations may violate the First Amendment's Establishment Clause.

Read the full transcript of McGovern's testimony, here: <http://tinyurl.com/McGovern424Testimony>

See the agenda of the April 24 Committee meeting here: <http://tinyurl.com/April24NYCCouncilAgenda>

For more information on the PRPCP, visit the PRPCP's webpage, here: <http://tinyurl.com/PRPCP-Columbia>