

Indiana boycott urged after 'religious freedom' law passes

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Activists have encouraged a boycott of Indiana after the US state enacted a "religious freedom" law, which they say discriminates against gay people.

Supporters say the law prevents the state from forcing people to provide services contrary to their religion.

Similar bills are being considered across the US as court rulings have made gay marriage legal in more states.

Several groups plan to do less business with the state, and celebrities criticised the law on Twitter.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association said it was "**especially concerned**" about how the law would affect its employees and student athletes.

Next week, the NCAA will host the finals of its annual basketball tournament in Indianapolis, the state's capital and its largest city.

On Friday, Arkansas moved closer to passing a similar "religious freedom" measure.

Several large conventions based in Indiana -- including the large gamer gathering **GenCon** -- have threatened to hold their events elsewhere because of the law.

Salesforce, a California company with ties to Indiana, cancelled all employee travel to the state and said it was considering decreasing its investment in Indiana.

Governor Mike Pence said he signed the law to "help protect churches, Christian businesses and individuals from those who want to punish them because of their Biblical beliefs".

Mr Pence, a Republican, said he would not have signed the law if he thought it was discriminatory.

Corporate executives such as Jeremy Stoppelman of Yelp and Tim Cook of Apple have urged other states not to follow Indiana's example.

"These laws set a terrible precedent that will likely harm the broader economic health of the states where they have been adopted, the businesses currently operating in those states and, most importantly, the consumers who could be victimised under these laws." Mr Stoppelman wrote in an **open letter**.

Sponsors of the bill say it is closely modelled on a federal religious freedom law passed in 1993 and that 19 other states already have similar laws.

But Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard, a Republican, said the law sends a "wrong signal" to visitors and could make the state seem unwelcoming.

Star Trek star George Takei, who has a large following on social media, has pushed for a boycott of the state. The term #BoycottIndiana has been a top trending topic on Twitter for more than a day.

"Sad this new Indiana law can happen in America today," Hillary Clinton, a presumptive presidential candidate, wrote on **Twitter** on Thursday. "We shouldn't discriminate against people because of who they love."