

Groups press Obama on religious hiring

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WASHINGTON (RNS) Dozens of religious and civil rights organizations challenged President Obama to fulfill a campaign promise to end religious discrimination in federally funded jobs.

"Mr. President, we have been patiently waiting," said the open letter sent on Monday (Sept. 19). "If you have reversed your policy position on the issue of government-funded religious discrimination, we need to know that."

The coalition of 56 religious, education, civil rights and health organizations expressed "deep concern" about comments Obama made in July that religious organizations have "more leeway" to "hire somebody who is a believer of that particular religious faith."

The letter also confronts Obama with a statement he made in Zanesville, Ohio, in July 2008: "If you get a federal grant, you can't use that grant money to proselytize to the people you help and you can't discriminate against them -- or against the people you hire -- on the basis of their religion."

The coalition also listed several instances when the Obama administration failed to take steps "to overturn or otherwise address the troubling hiring discrimination policies adopted by the previous administration."

For example, they charged, the Obama administration did not respond to a request this summer from 52 organizations that it restore an executive order that bars government contracts from funding positions in which religion is a hiring factor.

The coalition asked for a meeting with White House Counsel Kathryn Ruemmler "to explore these issues further."//

A White House spokesman could not be reached for immediate comment.