

## Michigan Bill Targets Use of “Foreign Laws”

A state lawmaker wants Michigan to join the trend of states banning "foreign laws," but Muslim activists say the effort is a thinly veiled attack on Islam.

Rep. Dave Agema, R-Grandville, is pushing a bill to bar the implementation of foreign laws. It doesn't mention Sharia — Islamic law — but he acknowledged it would be prohibited in courts under the legislation intended to prevent anyone "who tries to shove any foreign law down our throats."

"No foreign law shall supersede federal laws or constitution or state laws or constitution," Agema said. "Our law is our law. I don't like foreign entities telling us what to do."

Agema said his bill would protect the "vast majority" of Muslims, whom he contended "come to this country to get away from Sharia."

The legislation comes at a time of heightened debate about Sharia, a set of religious rules governing personal conduct, family relationships and religious practice for Muslims. Critics fear Sharia could supersede civil law and have an impact on divorce and child custody cases, and similar legislation has been introduced in 25 states.

Some say the bills are unnecessary and pander to anti-Muslim paranoia.

"Agema ... is a reflection of a segment of the GOP that is openly xenophobic and Islamophobic," said Dawud Walid, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations' Michigan chapter.

State Rep. Rashida Tlaib, D-Detroit, plans to speak out about the bill during a press conference Tuesday in Midtown. Victor Begg, a prominent Republican and co-founder of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Michigan, called the bill "appalling."

"Some in our party find it politically opportune to target my faith by sponsoring an innocuous sounding bill, knowing well that their intent is so-called 'creeping Sharia,'" Begg said.

Agema called the criticism "hogwash."

"If anybody has a problem with this that means they don't agree with U.S. laws," he said. "If they don't want it passed then they have an ulterior agenda. It shows the people accusing me of that (bigotry) are guilty of it themselves."

The bill was introduced in June and hasn't made it to a legislative committee, and its fate is unclear.

So far, only Tennessee and Oklahoma have enacted similar laws. A federal judge blocked implementation in Oklahoma while she determines whether it violates the U.S. Constitution's guarantees of religious freedom.

The law was amended in Tennessee after Muslims complained it targeted their religion.

William Raftery, a spokesman for the Virginia-based National Center for State Courts, said legislation is "moving quickly" in some states. Others say the debate is just heating up.

Christine Brim, a spokeswoman for the Center for Security Policy in Washington, D.C., said her group has identified 50 cases that could be influenced by Sharia. Most involved divorce or child custody and one was in Michigan, she said.

"There's a lot of them out there," Brim said. "We think we'll see more with the increased immigration of people from countries that are totalitarian."