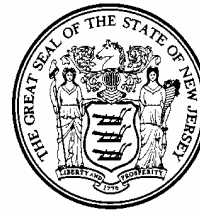


News From NJ Senate Democrats



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SMITH CALLS FOR TURKEY TO RESPECT ALL HUMAN AND RELIGIOUS RIGHTS

TRENTON – A Senate Joint Resolution sponsored by Senator Bob Smith, to urge the Government of Turkey to stop racial and religious discrimination, and immediately recognize the religious authority of the Eastern Orthodox Church, was approved by the Senate State Government Committee today.

Senator Smith explained that in Istanbul the Ecumenical Patriarchate is the spiritual center of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Ecumenical Patriarch is the highest authority of the Church and leads the world's estimated 250 million Orthodox Christians, Senator Smith added.

"Turkey is discriminating against the non-Muslim religious minorities by interfering with the training of clergy and the choosing of religious leaders," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex & Somerset. "The Ecumenical Patriarch deserves proper international recognition, leadership succession and the right to train its clergy. Turkey must understand the importance of respecting both the human rights and the property rights of everyone including of the Ecumenical Patriarchate."

The resolution, SJR-11, would call on the Government of Turkey to uphold and protect the religious and human rights of everyone without compromise. The measure

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also encourages Turkey to continue the advancement any programs that create democracy in its own society.

“The Turkish government has an obligation to protect the security of all people,” said Senator Smith. “The rights of the religious minorities in Turkey internationally protected rights to practice their religion, own and use property, operate religious schools, and associate in religiously affiliated foundations.”

According to Senator Smith, the religious minority in Turkey face numerous restrictions on their activities and attacks on their properties from the Turkish government.

“The Turkish government violates the rights that are guaranteed by treaties that they themselves approved,” said Senator Smith. “The European Commission, the U.S. State Department, and the international human rights community continue to find violations of human rights law in Turkey’s treatment of the religious minorities. As the global community continues to grow, scrutiny of these violations by Turkey is essential.”

The bill now heads to the full Senate for consideration.

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