



CLEVELAND BAPTIST CHURCH

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February 7, 2017

The Honorable Timothy Ginter
77 S. High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Statement for Support of the Pastor's Protection Act

America has had a longstanding tradition of religious freedom. In fact, when the Constitution was being drafted by Thomas Jefferson, the Baptists in Virginia shared with him that they would not support the document unless there was a religious exemption draft added. Mr. Jefferson concurred and promised that the First Amendment to the Constitution would deal with this important matter. We now know this section of additions to the Constitution as the Bill of Rights. This First Amendment guarantees freedom of religion, freedom of the press and freedom of speech.

A person would think that the First Amendment would be enough to protect all citizens of this country from those who want to muzzle or punish faith that they do not agree with. However, it has already been proven by lawsuits filed and convictions obtained, that no one's faith is exempt from being sued or persecuted. When a Christian photographer or baker can be sued simply because he declines to take pictures at a wedding or bake a cake for a reception of a same-sex couple, then there is nothing protecting churches and pastors who refuse to participate as well.

State Representative Nino Vitale has done people of faith a great service by drafting this piece of legislation that protects clergy, religious houses of worship and non-profit religious institutions. The idea that either clergy or churches being forced to participate in a same-sex

wedding ceremony or be sued for punitive damages is unconscionable. These suits would either bankrupt or severely curtail the ministry of the pastor and the church.

I understand that those who endorse same-sex marriage will say that we are practicing discrimination; however, we are not discriminating. We are practicing what we believe the Bible clearly teaches. To violate that firmly held belief would put us at odds with God our Creator and Saviour.

The truth is that in every city there are churches and clergy that do not believe or practice what the Bible teaches. Those churches and clergy will gladly accommodate same-sex marriages. They would make these couples feel most welcome and celebrate this special moment with them. In my opinion, this group desires to punish and make examples out of people of faith—ones who clearly disagree with their lifestyle choices. There is an overt desire to intimidate and shut down anyone or any group that disagrees with their decision to live this way. They are not content to just disagree; they want to be free to do what they desire, and they want to force us to participate.

I sincerely ask that you allow this bill to pass out of committee and to the floor of the state house for a full vote. It is my desire that we be allowed to continue practicing our faith without fear of lawsuits and intimidation.

Thank You,



Rev. Kevin Folger, D.D.
Pastor