

**To:** The Ohio House of Representatives, Attn: Community and Family Advancement Committee

**From:** Rev. Dwight Davidson, Pastor of the United Church of Granville, Granville, Ohio

**Date:** February 15, 2017

**Re:** Opposition to House Bill 36, known as the "Pastor Protection Act"

To Chairman Ginter, Vice Chair Conditt, Ranking Minority Member Boyd, and members of the House Community and Family Advancement Committee, my name is Dwight Davidson. I am the pastor of The United Church of Granville in Granville, Ohio. I write today to reiterate my opposition by offering opponent testimony to the House Bill 36, known as the "Pastor Protection Act." As a Baptist clergyperson serving in our state, I'd like to register my opposition to this bill and to share with you why I feel that this bill is wrong-headed, dangerous, and (frankly) a waste of your valuable time.

This bill clearly does not serve the purpose of extending anyone's rights. It protects no one--including pastors like myself. You are legislators, so I needn't labor at explaining this fact--you already know that faith leaders cannot be forced by the state to officiate any marriage. All pastors *already* have the right to refuse to marry any couple--and we are *already* protected under law should we ever need to explain to a prospective couple that we cannot officiate a marriage (for example, one forbidden by our particular judicatory or denominational book of order). Beyond that, the first amendment of the Constitution *already* protects my right, and the right of any clergyperson in the State of Ohio, not to perform any marriage I find unconscionable on religious grounds.

So obviously, this bill does not serve to extend my rights--or the rights of any other religious leader. The elephant in the room is this: If this bill is legally superfluous (and it clearly *is*), why is it even being considered by this body? Whose purposes does it serve?

In my view, this bill is little more than a piece of public pouting, brought forth by people who disagree with the legality of same-gender marriage. It is a piece of legislative *rhetoric* intended to bully and to intimidate. It's an empty signal--a gasp of protest from a disgruntled segment of the population that wants to use our legislatures as a bullhorn to amplify an exaggerated narrative that America's "Christian culture" is somehow "under attack" and that our churches and clergy need "protection" from the secularist onslaught which intends to strip us all of our religious freedoms. This is a perfect example of a "persecution complex."

Let's be clear--American pastors are *not* currently suffering persecution or bullying from the state. That is farcical, and, in fact, an inversion of reality. The people backing this bill are clearly pitching it from a position of privilege and power--not from a position of discrimination or threat. As the pastoral counselor in me reads this bill, I recall countless conversations I've had with abusive husbands who demand pity from their abused wives, as if to suggest that they--the bullies themselves--were the ones at risk. This is an absurdity.

I personally do not appreciate the drain of time this bill has demanded from my state legislature when so many other important issues--issues that really *do* matter--calling for your careful attention. I urge you all to overwhelmingly reject the deceitfully-named, "Pastor Protection Act," and to save any embarrassment over our legislature being used as pawn in somebody's petty culture war.

Yours respectfully,  
Rev. Dwight Davidson