

I begin today by acknowledging my personal feelings about the bill before you. First, I am surprised that we would be spending valuable time and tax dollars discussing redundant legislation when protections are clearly already in place in both the US and Ohio Constitutions. I am also discouraged or perhaps more appropriately, disappointed, that such conversations are necessary in the State of Ohio where I was born and raised, where my identity and values have been shaped over the course of nearly my entire life. But I am also hopeful, that as civil servants and elected officials you will hear the resounding voice of the people over these last months and head their plea for equality and justice for all people.

Because, this is not about me. This is not about clergy. We don't need this so called protection. We are already protected under Article 1 of our State Constitution which states that, "All men" (let's say people) "have a natural and indefeasible right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own conscience No person shall be compelled to attend, erect, or support any place of worship or maintain any form of worship, against his (or her) consent; and no preference shall be given, by law, to any religious society; nor shall any interference with the rights of conscience be permitted." In this legislation it is clear that you have no more right to tell me I must perform a religious ceremony (wedding or otherwise) than you do to prohibit LGBTQ+ persons from expressing their vows of marriage as part of a religious ceremony in accordance with their own faith. In fact, in our own community of Cuyahoga Falls there are existing churches who both perform same sex weddings and those who deny. Some churches require membership, tithing, classes, or mentorships.

Additional provisions are present in the US Constitution under the 1st Amendment stating, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." I am here today to peaceably petition my government to adhere to our existing laws and deny the passage of redundant and dangerous legislation in HB36.

Not only does it potentially violate the establishment of powers through negligence and vague terminology such as the undefined "religious societies", it blurs the boundaries of church and state by opening the doors for those in civil roles to deny legal right to marriage should they also happen to be an ordained person. While a house of worship is already protected from the right of persecution and threat of force to perform a religious wedding ceremony.

Additionally, Ohio Revised Code 3101.08 clearly provides that An ordained or licensed minister of any religious society or congregation within this state who is licensed to solemnize marriages, a judge of a county court in accordance with section [1907.18](#) of the Revised Code, a judge of a municipal court in accordance with section [1901.14](#) of the Revised Code, a probate judge in accordance with section [2101.27](#) of the Revised Code, the mayor of a municipal corporation in any county in which such municipal corporation wholly or partly lies, the superintendent of the state school for the deaf, or any religious society in conformity with the rules of its church, may join together as husband and wife any persons who are not prohibited by law from being joined in marriage.

The optimum word here, is "may." We "may" join together...not shall or will but may. Legally, as I understand it, this means we reserve the right to provide such services but are under no obligation to do so.

Since the rights of those ordained or licensed to offer such services are not currently in any jeopardy, but are in fact well documented in their establishment and protections on both State and Federal levels, it is clear to me that pursuit or passage of HB36 is in fact a thinly veiled act of aggression and discrimination against the rights of LGBTQ+ people. This legislation instead constitutes outright discrimination of some of those most in need of protection and advocacy on behalf of both the church and state.

As a clergy woman I do not need your protection in my choice as to whom I will and will not marry. As an individual I do need you to protect that right. As an individual who does not fit the heteronormative narrative, as an ally and advocate for the LGBTQAI community, and as a friend of beloved LGBTQ+ persons there are rights I need you to protect. If you want to offer myself and other citizens and constituents protection...protect our rights to housing and employment regardless of orientation or gender identity. If you want to pass legislation that supports and protects the rights of your citizens and constituents then let us partner together that no man, woman, or child need live in fear that they will lose their job or housing because of who they love or how they identify. If you are here to serve and protect then I am with you 100%, but if you are here to pass aggressive and discriminatory policy under the auspices of freedom of religion then I am here to tell you to leave me and my God out of it. On behalf of myself and those I represent here today, I implore you...vote no.