

Thank you Chairman Ginter and Members of the Ohio House Community and Family Advancement Committee for this opportunity to address you today.

I am Pastor Daniel Williams and I represent the congregation of the Arrowbrook Baptist Church in Xenia, Ohio, part of the Southern Baptist Convention.

There are frequent occasions when I have asked my congregation to share things that they are thankful for and there has never been an instance where I posed this question and someone failed to say: "I'm thankful for the freedoms that we enjoy in this country!" They sometimes go on to be a bit more specific. One lady recently shared that she is thankful that we can 'gather for worship without any fear or threat of violence' unlike other persecuted Christians around the world. We have been taught as Americans from the youngest age, to be thankful for these freedoms and to be thankful for the men and women who serve to protect them for us. One of the foremost of these freedoms is the freedom of religion.

The principle freedom is guaranteed to us in our U.S. Constitution along with being guaranteed to us in our own State of Ohio Constitution as stated in Article 1 Section 7 which says:

'All men have a natural and indefensible right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own conscience.'

The very need for House Bill 36 shows that indeed our freedom of worship has come under attack in our nation and in our state, thus necessitating a bill to further clarify and protect our freedom of worship. It seems clear that all clergy, indeed all religious organizations, would benefit from this further method of protection.

I believe that it is of the utmost importance that as things begin to change in our society and culture, that we do not forget the reason for the founding of this great nation which was to provide freedoms that were not granted in England. We must not forget that the desire of our forefathers was to be able to worship God freely without any governmental demands being placed upon them. Members of the Committee: It seems that a governmental demand is precisely

what we are facing today and what our forefathers fought to guarantee would not take place.

Therefore, I wholeheartedly support House Bill 36 for the purpose of clarifying the protection that is granted to us as a religious organization in the First Amendment and for the protection of these same religious organizations from possible government fines, criminal charges and any other ramifications that may come from being forced to participate in any activity that would cause our own consciences to condemn us.

Members of the Committee: Thank you for your work, your time and for this opportunity to be here today. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.