

Chairman Ginter and members of the Community and Family Advancement Committee, thank you for your hard work to serve the people of Ohio. You and all the legislature are prayed for often by churches across our state. Thank you for hearing my testimony today.

Before anything else, I want to make it clear that as a follower of Jesus Christ my desire is to obey His command to love all people, pray for and do good to them. I will defend the liberty of all citizens regardless of religious beliefs, personal practices or sexuality. All people are created in the image of God. I and my church affirm the value of all people and recognize the right same-sex couples have to get married. I support the Pastor Protection Act but also support the rights of same-sex couples to live and worship as they choose.

An unprecedented burden would be placed upon citizens, forced to choose between obeying the law of our land OR obeying the law of their God. The idea that any citizen could be forced to violate their own worship and conscience before God is not only wrong. It is the most un-American thought possible. Indeed it is the reason for the very existence of our nation. When our forefathers, including my 7<sup>th</sup> great grandfather, the Reverend Samuel Newman, in the Church of England, were prosecuted by the King's law for worshipping according to their conscience, they fled to the new world for freedom. In the greatest nation on earth the Bill of Rights assures that no one's free exercise of religion shall be impaired.

The Declaration of Independence assures those who differ from me the same life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. My ambition is not to force my fellow citizen to change according to my beliefs and values nor to deny them the marriage now afforded to them by the Supreme Court's ruling. I accept that same-sex couples free to be married.

There are many marriages in which our church and pastors will not participate. The Bible instructs us as to what marriages are condoned by God and which are forbidden. The wedding celebration is a deeply religious act before God. Churches have come to different conclusions as to which marriages are prohibited. Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals, and others do not all have the same practices neither do they put themselves in the position of compelling others to conform to their practice. It would be a very odd thing for the government to insert itself between the pastor and the Bible or between the church and the Bible dictating to them which marriages they must solemnize.

Here are examples of weddings not allowed by our church based on biblical teaching:

- 1) Those between a Christian and a non-Christian.
- 2) Those involving a person living in rebellion against the Bible's teaching.
- 3) Those involving someone who refuses to undergo pre-marriage counseling.
- 4) Those involving a prior divorce of such a nature that the Bible forbids remarriage.

These exclusions could include persons from a class of citizens, protected from discrimination: a minority race, religious group, or sexual orientation. My church refusing to participate in a marriage that against our religious beliefs is not a violation of the same-sex couple's rights because they may be married in many other places. But forcing my church and pastors to engage in a marriage they do not condone would be a deep violation of freedom.