

Thank you to Committee Chair Ginter, Ranking Minority Leader Boyd, and the entire committee for the opportunity to be heard this

Religious freedom is one of the core principles upon which the American system of government is based. And yet religious freedom in America is under assault: Individuals of all faiths or none, and from all points on the political and ideological spectrum, should be alarmed at the mounting assault on the free exercise of religion and freedom of religious expression.

The erosion of one constitutional right especially one as fundamental as religious liberty and the freedom of speech may serve as a precedent for the erosion of other rights to the detriment of all Americans. This rising challenge to religious liberty represents a marked break from the long-standing American tradition of accommodating religious practice and expression that predates the ratification of the Constitution. The freedom to live and speak in accordance with one's religious tenets is one of the core principles upon which the American system of government is based, with a historical foundation that predates the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

I have heard in opponents testimonies to the effect that there have been no lawsuits filed in Ohio against Pastors for refusing to marry same sex couples which is absolutely and I might add thankfully true. It is said that Pastors do not need the Pastors Protection act because this often used catch phrase may make a good sound bite but is only useful until a Pastor or Church in Ohio is sued and taken to court for standing for their constitutionally granted religious freedom

It seems to me the issue here is about more than just what happens within the worship centers of our churches though that I feel is threatened regardless of the perspective of many others, it is about all church properties and more particularly about what the beliefs held by the church mean on said property... Christian schools and Christian Universities are extremely vulnerable without this piece of legislation!

I applaud Rep Vitale for referencing *Bernstein et al v. Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association*. In that case, a boardwalk pavilion was generally open and available to the public to rent for parties, ceremonies, and events. It was open to everyone equally: groups were only turned away due to scheduling conflicts. Then, the Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association who owned the property turned away a same-sex couple seeking to have their commitment ceremony hosted at the center because of

its religious beliefs. That prompted a lawsuit, and it was held that the property was subject to the same New Jersey public accommodation nondiscrimination protections that all other businesses open to the public were held.

Though the Boardwalk pavilion was not for all intents and purposes a church matters not. Just because the state of New Jersey said it was the law of the land does not make it right nor does it make it constitutional.

In fact it sets a dangerous precedent for further erosion of freedom... This is crucial for this might well open the door or floodgate if you will for the loss of more religious liberty in our nation. All here today must agree that the loss of Christian bakers, photographers and Pizza shop owners religious freedoms being taken away sounds a clarion call that churches and their extended properties and ministries are the next target.

In his writing, Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments, James Madison wrote: “The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate. This right is in its nature an unalienable right.... It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage and such only as he believes to be acceptable to him. This duty is precedent, both in order of time and in degree of obligation, to the claims of Civil Society.... The equal right of every citizen to the free exercise of his Religion according to the dictates of conscience is held by the same tenure with all our other rights. If we recur to its origin, it is equally the gift of nature; if we weigh its importance, it cannot be less dear to us....”

Like Madison, Thomas Jefferson also wrote extensively about the Constitution’s protection of the freedom of conscience: “No provision in our Constitution ought to be dearer to man than that which protects the rights of conscience against the enterprises of the civil authority. Forced participation is against American values. This country is the home of the brave and the land of the free. One of our most sacred freedoms is the right to a moral objection.”

This is a freedom given by God, not government! The necessity of this timely bill is a reflection of our nations current state of affairs where religious freedom is threatened. It is well written and will provide protection to everyone in this great state. No pastor or church will ever force their beliefs on others... it just can’t work that way and neither nor should any entity or organization force a church, its pastor

or any entity of the churches ministries or organization to be forced to give up their God given and constitutional rights either.

Individuals of all faiths or none, and from all points on the political and ideological spectrum, should be alarmed at the mounting assault on the free exercise of religion and freedom of religious expression. The erosion of one constitutional right especially one as fundamental as religious liberty and the freedom of speech may serve as a precedent for the erosion of other rights to the detriment of all Americans.

Thank you all for time and for your dedicated service to our great state and may God bless you!