



# still church

still **preaching**

still **hymns**

still **family**

still **reverent**

still **men**

still **exciting**

April 9, 2019

Chairman Hambley and honored members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for this opportunity.

I would also like to thank my Representative, Tim Schaffer, of Ohio's 77th house district for proposing this common sense legislation and inviting me to advocate for it today. It is an honor to be involved in the legislative process.

My name is B.J. VanAman, and I am privileged to pastor a wonderful church, the Pickerington Baptist Temple. The state of Ohio considers me to be an employee of my church. As such, if I am personally ever forced to act in defense of my congregation, I already enjoy the immunity offered by our law. Of course, I pray there is never a time when such personal action is required.

However, we are living in a unique time in American history. The personal safety we took for granted ten years ago is now a common concern today. Recent current events prove the perils we face as a society as acts of violence continue to rise.

On November 5, 2017, Devin Patrick Kelly, armed with a rifle, entered a small Baptist church in rural Texas, opened fire and murdered twenty-six innocent and defenseless people. I wonder what would have happened if the church had allowed select members to carry a firearm. Sadly, we will never know; and sadly, such evil is not confined to one city or state. The possibility of such a horrific event unfolding at my church is always in the back of my mind. Though my church has never received a verbal threat of violence, I am always concerned for the safety of my congregation.

My church, Pickerington Baptist Temple, goes to great lengths to ensure the safety of all those attending our services. Everyone working with children undergoes a criminal background check. We have volunteer training, during which time protocols and procedures are explained to volunteers. We have even established a church security team, which is comprised of men who watch our parking lot, escort the ushers with the offering, and look for anything out of place or anyone exhibiting questionable behavior. Yes, there are even a select few men and women, to

whom I have given written permission, who carry a concealed firearm during services. These are upstanding, law-abiding citizens who have fulfilled the state of Ohio's requirements to carry a concealed weapon — and extra safety and training requirements from our church.

Some would ask, "Why do you find it necessary to allow people to carry firearms in church?" The answer is simple. We are responsible for the safety of every person who sets foot on our property, whether they are nursery age or a senior citizen. Therefore, if someone enters our building, draws a weapon, and attempts to harm, maim, or kill those in our church, we are compelled to stop them using any means necessary.

I pray that no church or other religious institution is ever forced to defend themselves in such a manner. However, if one of our volunteers, acting in good faith, stands to defend us from harm, I believe it is only right to extend to them the immunity House Bill 156 offers.

On behalf of both my congregation, fellow church leaders, and congregations of faith scattered across our great state, I humbly ask that you allow House Bill 156 to pass through this House Civil Justice Committee and be brought before your fellow Representatives for a vote.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I will be glad to answer any questions.