Advocating for Life, Faith, and Freedom in the Public Square

Proponent Testimony on H.B. 36
Ohio House of Representatives
Community and Family Advancement Committee

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I would like to begin by thanking Chairman Ginter and members of the Community and Family Advancement Committee for hearing our testimony today in support of HB 36, the Ohio Pastor Protection Act. My name is Chris Long. I am the president of the Ohio Christian Alliance, a public policy/voter education organization.

In 2003, our organization worked for the passage of Ohio's Defense of Marriage Act. The following year, the Ohio Christian Alliance, with other family groups, circulated petition for a constitutional amendment defining marriage as between one man and one woman. Over a half a million signatures were gathered to place the amendment language on the ballot. In November of that year, the amendment passed by nearly 62%, with a solid majority of Ohioans affirming that marriage is between one man and one woman. Ohio joined 32 other states who either by constitutional amendment or statute legislation affirmed that marriage is defined as a union between one man and one woman.

When the United State Supreme Court in a 5-4 decision handed down a ruling legalizing homosexual unions, with indifference to the states' laws, Justice Scalia, in his dissenting opinion quoted Justice Kennedy from a previous decision in which he stated, "[R]egulation of domestic relations is an area that has long been regarded as a virtually exclusive province of the States," and "[T]he Federal Government, through our history, has deferred to state-law policy decisions with respect to domestic relations." 11

There is still much speculation and discussion as to what the Court's decision actually means and how legislatures, Congress, and the courts will address these issues in the years to come. What is clear by the intent of those who pushed for this new social experiment is that they intend to challenge religious and traditional institutions on many fronts. When the Court's decision on Obergefell was handed down, constitutional attorneys announced that it is now time for states to move quickly to enact statute legislation to protect religious liberties.

There are those who argue that HB 36, the Ohio Pastor Protection Act, is not needed, that we have Article 1, section 7 of The Ohio Constitution and the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution that guarantee religious liberty. The Ohio Constitution and The Bill of Rights clearly declare the protections of religious liberty, but there comes a time in each generation when these liberties are challenged. The Ohio Pastor Protection Act, HB 36, is statute law that will address the new threats to religious liberty.

Thomas Jefferson, who was the author of The Declaration of Independence, our third president, an anti-federalist, a supporter of the Bill of Rights, made sure that of his life's accomplishments, the three listed on his gravestone at Monticello were - author of the Declaration of Independence, founder of the University of Virginia, and author of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom.

Religious liberty does not begin or end with the U.S. Constitution's acknowledgement of such liberty. Religious liberty predates the Constitution and the Magna Carta, and goes all the way back to creation as a fundamental right of man.

With these new threats to religious liberty, the time has now come to enact statute legislation in Ohio to address these new challenges and underscore the Constitutional rights of religious freedom and the practice thereof. No individual should be coerced against their religious conscience. No religious society should be forced by the State or a municipality to violate their sincerely held religious beliefs. It is for that reason that we urge the passage of the Ohio Pastor Protection Act, HB 36.

Thank you, Chairman Ginter, and members of the committee. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time.