Testimony by Pastor Johnathan Newman supporting HB-36, 11.27.18

Chairman Bacon and members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for your hard work to serve the people of Ohio. You and all our legislature are prayed for often by churches across our state. Thank you for hearing my testimony today. I am the pastor of a Southern Baptist church in Troy, OH, affiliated with the nationwide denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention and one of more than 700 Southern Baptist churches in Ohio.

I want to make it clear, first of all, that because I am 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 differing beliefs, practices, or sexuality. All people are created in the image of God. I and my church affirm the value of all people. I recognize the fact that the US Supreme Court’s Obergefell ruling gave same-sex couples the legal right to marry. I support the rights of all people to live and worship as they choose under the law. This is why I support the Pastor Protection Act. It will insure pastors like me the freedom to live and worship as we choose.

An unprecedented burden would be placed upon citizens if forced to choose between obeying the law of the land OR obeying the law of God. The idea that any citizen could be forced to violate their conscience before God is not only wrong, it is the most un-American thought possible. Indeed, that is the very reason our nation exists. My seventh great grandfather, the Reverend Samuel Newman, of the Church of England, along with our founding fathers, fled to the new world away from the King’s persecution for living according to their consciences. In the greatest nation on earth our constitution assures that no one’s free exercise of religion shall be impaired.

To say this freedom may never be infringed due to its protection by the US Constitution has been a safe assumption in our nation’s past. Yet we know now that a number of individuals have lost their livelihood over this very matter. Citizens have felt the force of government pushing them to violate their consciences by providing services for same-sex weddings. It is hard to imagine that pastors and churches will escape this same force applied by the courts. The Ohio Legislature must act now assuring Ohio residents that they are protected from this intrusion upon their liberty.

The Declaration of Independence assures those who differ from me the same life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness that I enjoy. My desire is not to force others to adopt my values nor to deny them the right to marriage afforded to them by the Supreme Court’s ruling. My desire is to enjoy the liberties granted to me by God and protected by the Constitution.

There are many marriages in which our church and pastors may not participate because they violate the law of God. Here are some examples:

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 a prior divorce of such a nature that the Bible forbids remarriage.

The wedding celebration is a deeply spiritual act before God and the Bible is specific in its instructions as to which marriages are condoned by God and which are forbidden. Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals, and others may differ on which marriages are prohibited but do not put themselves in the position of compelling others to conform to their practice.

These are matters for individuals and their churches to decide. Yet the courts have shown us their readiness to insert themselves between the citizen and their beliefs. The courts who would do this to private citizens will no doubt do this to churches and pastors because after all churches and pastors are nothing more than private citizens. The government that will allow its courts to deny constitutional freedoms to citizens in their businesses will also allow them to deny constitutional freedoms to citizens in their churches. The Ohio legislature must not be one of those governments. Ohio must speak with unmistakable clarity protecting the liberty of all her citizens to live and worship according to their beliefs and their God.

Thank you for hearing my testimony and thank you for all you do for our communities.