



# still church

still **preaching**

still **hymns**

still **family**

still **reverent**

still **men**

still **exciting**

November 27, 2018

Members of The Ohio State Senate Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the privilege of standing before you today, as we discuss the merits of House Bill 36. On behalf all those represented in this chamber, the countless who are unable to attend, and on behalf of the good people of the Pickerington Baptist Temple, whom I'm blessed to pastor, thank you for your time.

As the pastor of the Pickerington Baptist Temple, I stand here today as a representative of my congregation who live in Baltimore, Blacklick, Canal Winchester, Carrol, Columbus, Groveport, Lancaster, Logan, Pataskala, Pickerington, Reynoldsburg and Worthington. Though I am a Baptist and pastor a Baptist church, I come not solely in representation of Baptists, but on the behalf of all men and women of faith scattered throughout the state of Ohio, who purpose to worship and live according to their sincerely held religious beliefs.

As a Baptist, I believe the Bible to be the very Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16). According to the Bible, God created all people with both a conscience (Romans 2:15) and an ability to exercise choice (Joshua 24:15). In Romans 14:11-12, the Word of God teaches us that we will one day stand before God and give account of our lives. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that we do not violate or sin against our conscience.

The concerns that are being addressed in House Bill 36 are not in regard to the discrimination against organizations or peoples, as some would have us think. The question being addressed in this hour is twofold (and ages-old): the freedom of conscience and the freedom of religion.

On Thursday of last week, November 22, 2018, we celebrated the Thanksgiving holiday, which is a celebration of God's providential care for the Pilgrims. In 1620, the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, establishing Plymouth Colony. These brave Puritans traversed the stormy, frigid waters of the North Atlantic, and endured a brutal, cold winter, suffering death at every turn. Why would anyone voluntarily subject themselves to such conditions? The answer is quite simple: to flee religious persecution, which they were forced to endure in England. They

believed the principles and precepts of God's Word. They held firmly that no person or people should be compelled to participate in organizations or activities that violate their conscience or their sincerely held religious beliefs.

The persecutions and compulsories of both the state and the state sponsored churches remained well into the colonial days of our nation. Thus good, God-fearing men took it upon themselves to lead the way in the charge for religious liberty. Men such as John Clarke, Roger Williams, and William Penn were highly influential in this cause. Later men such as James Madison and Thomas Jefferson took upon themselves the advocacy for religious liberty. Within our Constitution's First Amendment, we find that Congress is prohibited from making laws "respecting an establishment of religion, or **prohibiting the free exercise thereof.**"

Roger Williams was an early arriver to the New World and the founder of the state of Rhode Island. He said that "government must remove itself from anything that touches upon human beings' relationship with God." His purpose in founding Rhode Island was that he was "distressed by conscience." As a minister of the Gospel of Christ, the state placed certain burdens upon him that are not found in the Bible. The government purposed to make him violate his conscience by disobeying his sincerely held religious beliefs.

Today we find ourselves facing a similar set of circumstances. Do we obey God and face the threat of being sued in a court of civil law? Or do we forfeit our God-given rights, violate and sin against our conscience, and allow the beliefs and burdens of others to infringe upon our sincerely held religious beliefs? The answer to those questions does not rest in the ruling of this committee, but in the soul of every man, woman, and child.

What we ask of you today is that you help protect the religious liberties of the thousands of Ohio's churches and the millions of Ohio's people of faith by passing House Bill 36.

Sincerely,

Brian Jay VanAman  
Pastor, Pickerington Baptist Temple