

A RESOLUTION

To urge the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom to take whatever action is necessary to address and rectify the situation described in this resolution, and consider adding Canada to the Special Watch List of countries where the government engages in violations of religious freedom.

Be it resolved by the House of Representatives of the State of Ohio:

WHEREAS, The citizens of Ohio are citizens of the United States, which by its nature is a country of religious freedom free of government interference; and

WHEREAS, Civilized societies normative structures show churches to have jurisdictions separate from civil authorities, with the civil authorities having no authority in church governance, courts, preaching, or sacraments; and

WHEREAS, The first line of the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus upholding freedom of religion as one of our most sacred of Rights; and

WHEREAS, The founders themselves elaborated upon and celebrated religious freedom in their writings; and

WHEREAS, Thomas Jefferson in his letter to the Danbury Baptist Convention, said "Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between Church & State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties"; and

WHEREAS, Roger Williams, founder of Rhode Island, believed that any government involvement in the church would corrupt the church and coined the term "separation of church and state" to keep the church safe from government interference; and

WHEREAS, The State of Ohio itself was founded upon similar premises from its inception as a part of the Northwest Territory; and

WHEREAS, The Northwest Ordinance stated in its first article, "No person, demeaning himself in a peaceable and orderly manner, shall ever be molested on account of his mode of worship or religious sentiments in the said territory"; and

WHEREAS, The Northwest Ordinance stated in its third article, "Religion, morality and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged"; and

WHEREAS, The Ohio Constitution's Bill of Rights states in Article I Section 7, "All men have a

natural and inalienable right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own conscience. No person shall be compelled to attend, erect, or support any place of worship, or maintain any form of worship, against his consent; and no preference shall be given, by law, to any religious society; nor shall any interference with the rights of conscience be permitted. No religious test shall be required, as a qualification for office, nor shall any person be incompetent to be a witness on account of his religious belief; but nothing herein shall be construed to dispense with oaths and affirmations. Religion, morality, and knowledge, however, being essential to good government, it shall be the duty of the general assembly to pass suitable laws to protect every religious denomination in the peaceable enjoyment of its own mode of public worship, and to encourage schools and the means of instruction"; and

WHEREAS, The citizens of Ohio have a robust system of local religious charity systems; and

WHEREAS, The citizens of Ohio have stood against injustices throughout our history; and

WHEREAS, During the American Civil War, to help rid the nation of the injustice of slavery, the State of Ohio provided the United States government with more than two hundred sixty regiments, upwards of three hundred thousand men, including the prominent Generals McDowell, Buell, Sheridan, McClellan, Sherman, and future President Ulysses S. Grant; and

WHEREAS, Ohio abolitionists played a prominent role in the Underground Railroad, helping thousands escape the bondage of slavery to find freedom, such as our involvement in the abolition of slavery in the North; and

WHEREAS, We, the members of the House of Representatives of the 134th General Assembly of the State of Ohio, are the State representative body of such a freedom-loving people; and

WHEREAS, During the COVID-19 emergency, the government of Ohio stood up for religious liberty and exempted religious services from COVID-19 restrictions; and

WHEREAS, The State of Ohio has a vested interest in the affairs of Canada, being our neighbor to the North and Ohio's number one trading partner in the world in both imports and exports; and

WHEREAS, Ohio's exports to Canada benefit many segments of the economy, and thousands of individual companies, on both sides of the border; and

WHEREAS, Indeed Ohio is not alone in valuing freedom. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms states that "Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms," which include the "freedom of conscience and religion." The arrests and actions described below, taken to enforce overly burdensome and unjustified orders, however, do not seem to live up to this praiseworthy statement; and

WHEREAS, We, the members of the House of Representatives of the 134th General Assembly of the State of Ohio, have taken note of the abuses of religious liberty that have gone on throughout the Provinces of Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, Pastor James Coates of Edmonton, Alberta was jailed for thirty-five days and in solitary confinement for seven days straight for holding religious services at a capacity not in keeping with the Public Health Act; and

WHEREAS, Brothers Artur and David Pawlowski, pastors from Alberta, Canada were arrested and spent three days in jail for organizing a church service that ignored COVID-19 social distancing rules and mask mandates; and

Whereas, Pastor Coates, and perhaps other Canadian pastors, have held services in undisclosed locations, essentially going underground, in order to avoid persecution by government authorities, and to allay congregant's fears; and

WHEREAS, Pastor Tobias Tissen of Steinbach, Manitoba, was arrested for holding an outdoor service that violated a health order that prohibited gatherings of more than five people; and

WHEREAS, Under Province of Alberta health orders, in-person faith group meetings, and other religious gatherings, have been prohibited in private homes while the emergency is in effect, thus intruding into the most sacred liberties of its citizens, those of religious freedom and privacy; and

WHEREAS, All of the Canadian provinces have at times prohibited religious gatherings outright,

or have limited the size of religious gatherings, and many provinces still have severe size limitations on religious gatherings either held indoors or outdoors, punishable by harassment, fines, and jail time of faith leaders, thus limiting the parishioners' or members' ability to attend the assembly of their choice, and generally limiting religious liberty; and

WHEREAS, On December 8, 2021, Canada's Senate Bill C-4 received royal assent and became law. This act is overly broad in scope and has potential negative implications for religious liberties and expression, including a prison sentence of up to five years for merely expressing a biblical view of marriage, thus restricting the ability of religious leaders from expressing sincerely held religious beliefs on marriage and sexuality; and

WHEREAS, In 1998, the Congress of the United States established the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom; and

WHEREAS, The Commission includes members appointed by the President of the United States, by the President Pro Tempore of the United States Senate, and by the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives; and

WHEREAS, The purpose of the Commission, as enumerated in federal law, in part, is to consider and recommend options for policies of the United States government with respect to each foreign country the government of which has engaged in or tolerated violations of religious freedom; and

WHEREAS, The Commission maintains a Special Watch List of countries where the government engages in or tolerates "severe" violations of religious freedom; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, That we, the members of the House of Representatives of the 134th General Assembly of the State of Ohio, urge the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom to take whatever action is necessary to address and rectify the situation, described in this resolution, and consider adding Canada to the Special Watch List; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Clerk of the House of Representatives transmit duly authenticated copies of this resolution to each commissioner of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, the President of the United States, the President Pro Tempore of the United States Senate, the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, each member of the Ohio Congressional delegation, the Prime Minister of Canada, the Speaker of the House of Commons of Canada, the Speaker of the Senate of Canada, and the news media of Ohio.

Speaker _____ *of the House of Representatives.*

Adopted _____, 20____