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Committees

Chair- Infrastructure and
Rural Development

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Ways & Means

Reggie Stoltzfus State Representative 50th Ohio House District

Sponsor Testimony: HR 194 House Civil Justice Committee

Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify as a Sponsor of House Resolution 194.

This resolution urges the President and Congress to place Canada on the Special Watch List of countries due to the Canadian government's engagement in violations of religious freedom.

Over the last couple years, Canada has seen clear abuses of religious liberty take place throughout its provinces during the COVID pandemic. While Ohio has stood up for religious freedom and protected the right to attend religious services, it is clear that Canada has not done the same.

Violations that have occurred include:

- Pastor Artur Pawlowski was arrested for preaching at church services twice
 - He was later given a specific script of things to say if he were to mention COVID in his sermons by a court in Alberta. Pastor Pawlowski was arrested after refusing such conditions and is currently still incarcerated
- Pastor Tissen from Manitoba was held in jail after refusing to stop preaching at church services
- Pastor James Coates was jailed for 35 days and had his Church property seized by the Alberta government as a result of holding religious services
- Pastor Henry Hildenbrandt and his congregation was ordered to vacate the building that they had met at to worship in for decades, as a result of a government order

The primary purpose of this legislation is to signal Ohioans' overwhelming support of religious freedom, in defense of our Canadian neighbors. It is also to defend Ohio's vested interest in the affairs of Canada, with Canada being the state's neighbor to the north and primary trading partner in the world; and to draw attention to the violation of Canada's stated commitment to religious freedom as expressed in their *Charter of Rights and Freedom*.

Ohio's own Constitution makes it clear that "all men have a natural and indefensible right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own conscience," and as the Legislature of Ohio, we must make it clear that we support this freedom whether here in Ohio or elsewhere.

Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thanks again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.