

Jacob Reaume

Sr. Pastor, Trinity Bible Chapel

1373 Lobsinger Line

Waterloo, ON, CA N2J 4G8

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Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and Members of the Ohio House State & Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of and in support of H.R. 194. I appreciate your time and consideration as I tell you my story of religious liberty violations during the COVID-19 emergency and its long-term effects. This story is not just about me and the effects on myself and my family, but it's about the effects of government violations have had on every family that calls Trinity Bible Chapel their spiritual home.

During the first lockdown in spring 2020, when gatherings of more than 5 people were banned due to the health crisis, the local Police Chief issued a press release in support of a BLM protest, which consisted of thousands of persons assembling in the streets of my community.

The government's published Covid data shows that places of worship were responsible for fewer than 1% of all outbreaks and 0% of deaths. Ontario has upheld stringent restrictions, including severe capacity limits, for churches, the effect of which was a gross and substantial interference in the practice of the Christian faith, individually and collectively. Scripture teaches that persons are more than biological units; they are created in the image of God to live with dignity and to worship together freely.

Local police first visited me at the church on Christmas Eve, 2020, to warn me to uphold capacity limits. I informed them that I could not comply in good conscience and that our church would gather. In December, 2020, I, along with all my elders, were consequently charged with exceeding capacity restrictions. Later, the Premier extended the lockdown, limiting gatherings to 10 persons. The Province of Ontario eventually retrieved a court order, demanding that we abide by all restrictions. We were found in contempt of court in January, 2021, and fined \$83,000 which we have paid.

The church and elders received more summonses after holding services Easter weekend, 2021, and on the weekends that followed. Each summons to the church carries a maximum penalty of \$10 million, and each carries a maximum penalty of \$100,000 and one year in jail to the elders and pastors. I have received 11 summonses, with other elders and the church itself also receiving multiple summonses. Shortly after Easter, local police parked outside our facility and chased parishioners down to issue summonses to individual congregants as they left the church after worship on a Sunday. We were charged with contempt of court again, fined over \$100,000 which we have paid, and in May 2021, the Sheriff, accompanied by an intimidating number of police cruisers, locked the doors of the church. When parishioners sang and prayed in the parking lot, I and several others were chased down by police again on the road and charged with organizing an illegal gathering. We have been subjected to vitriolic public verbal attacks and slander from government and media personalities, which have whipped up the population into issuing threats to our lives and property. The government had control of our building until the end of August, 2021, during which time our facility had a flood, producing significant water damage that went undetected because we were locked out.

Scripture commands the church to gather weekly, and physical gathering is essential for the church to practice the Lord's supper, baptism, the laying on of hands, etc. Thus, our church still worked diligently to do the work we were called to do.

We launched a constitutional challenge to the Superior Court of Ontario, and the court has ruled in favour of the government. We are now in the process of launching an appeal.

Thank you again for your time and attention to this very important issue today, and I urge your support of H.R. 194.