

Chairman Ginter & Members of This Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for HB 36, the Ohio Pastor Protection Act. The written testimony I would like to submit summarizes the multiple reasons why our church body supports this legislation.

In my oral testimony, however, I wish to address one point which has been often asserted in the hearings concerning this bill. The opponents of this bill have repeatedly assured this committee during the 131st General Assembly that the Ohio Pastor Protection Act is unnecessary and redundant primarily on the basis that no church has ever been sued over this issue: an assertion of future action based primarily on past action. To this I must state that I am impressed by their abilities to prognosticate the future. This year I will celebrate thirty-five years of ministry and I only wish I had as firm a grasp of scriptural prophecy as the opponents of this bill apparently do of political and judicial prophecy.

Using that line of thinking, please allow me to anticipate the future with proper consideration of the past. A few short years ago, it was correct to state that no lawsuits concerning same-sex marriage ceremonies had ever been filed against Christian bakers, Christian B&B owners, Christian photographers, Christian printers, state and local magistrates who state their Christian beliefs, Christian counselors, clerks of court, Christian owners or operators of pizza places, faith-based colleges, Christian T-shirt manufacturers, a Christian farm, a Christian campground, and even Christian wedding chapels.

Now, I am supposed to take for granted that a community which has zealously filed lawsuits against these groups – in spite of their sincerely-held religious beliefs – will suddenly come to a screeching halt simply because they find themselves in the shadow of a steeple?

Since the Obergefell decision, companies specializing in church insurance have notified their clients regarding the likelihood of civil litigation and have been attempting to prepare churches to expect lawsuits over this issue. Church Mutual Insurance Company, Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company, Guide One Insurance, Southern Mutual Church Insurance Company, as well as many others, have detailed their coverage guidelines to us in the assumption of future litigation over the refusal to participate in same-sex ceremonies. Generally, the

best advice they give to churches because of the fear of litigation is to change from being inclusive to the community to becoming exclusive.

In addition, we have great apprehension that public accommodation laws may be applied to the properties of churches and religious organizations. This has already resulted in a withdrawal of the involvement of churches from their communities. Ohio's neighborhoods need churches which are involved in the communities – not withdrawn from them. Congregations who once happily assisted their communities with providing a place for wedding receptions, Boy Scout meetings, community food drives, community organizational meetings, polling places and a host of other gatherings, may now be forced to refuse admittance to those groups for fear of being labeled a "place of public accommodation." Once they have been categorized as a place of "public accommodation," those churches will then be required to provide equal-access even in a religious expression to which they are opposed. This fear of litigation has already had a negative effect on churches and will certainly continue to compound unless we are afforded a safety net from overreaching lawsuits.

Chairman Ginter, and members of this committee, the thousands of churches in Ohio and its hundreds of thousands of congregants cannot remain as proverbial frogs in a pot of water, while the heat of litigation all about them rapidly rises. We urge you to recommend passage of HB 36.