

## Committee Testimony on HB 36

Rev. Dr. Deborah Countiss Lindsay  
November 29, 2018

Good morning Chair Bacon, Vice-Chair Dolan, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the Pastor Protection Act.

My name is Deborah Countiss Lindsay and I am an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ.

I've presided over a lot of weddings. I've performed wedding ceremonies for heterosexual couples and same sex couples, couples who are Christian, who come from different faiths, and who come from no particular faith background. We all, as Americans, have the constitutional right to free exercise of religion and for me as a minister, that means it is entirely up to me to determine which marriages I will perform.

HB 36, with its stated intent to protect pastors, is completely unnecessary. For centuries ministers of the church have exercised pastoral judgement about whether to perform a marriage ceremony and there is no threat to the exercise of that judgement.

As a pastor I do not need nor want this protection from you. There are, however, people who do need your protection, the people whose civil rights are in jeopardy under this legislation. This bill opens the door to discrimination...and it could be discrimination against anybody...interracial couples...interfaith couples.

The civil rights laws in this country are designed to ensure that people are treated equally...that all people are entitled to equal rights.

And by the way, from a theological perspective, the right to equal treatment is first a God-given right.

As a representative of the Christian faith, I want to remind you that Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

An abundant life includes civil rights for all.  
An abundant life is free of discrimination.

What's at issue here is not our rights as pastors- those are guaranteed under the constitution. What's important is that you protect the rights of the people we serve.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.