

Chair Bacon, Vice Chair Dolan, Ranking Minority Member Thomas, and the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is Rev. Richard P. Young, and I oppose House Bill 36.

I note that existing Ohio legislation says a minister MAY solemnize marriages, not just the ones that conform to their church's rules. It does not say they are required to. I have been an ordained person for nearly 41 years, and I have presided at hundreds of weddings. And there have been times that I refused to do a wedding for a couple, when it violated my conscience, when I felt convinced that the couple lacked the maturity for a healthy married relationship. I have never been in any kind of legal trouble for my refusals. There is the simple matter of separation of Church and State that protects me, and that principle, of course, is still in effect. We ordained people are ALREADY protected.

I also oppose HB 36, because, according to the analysis of the bill by the Ohio Legislative Service Commission, this proposal would create "an exception for a religious society from the prohibition against unlawful discriminatory practices regarding public accommodations for its refusal to allow its property to be used to host a marriage ceremony for a marriage that does not conform to its sincerely held religious beliefs." If church property is a public accommodation, it is for ALL the public. They should NOT be exempt from the laws that govern all other public accommodations. Religious societies already have too much freedom to discriminate. Creating an exception for them is unacceptable. It is especially unacceptable, when it is clear that they want to discriminate in order to insult the loving and devoted relationships of same-sex persons. LGBTQ+ couples are already not interested in using the facilities of churches that are hostile to them. This proposed legislation is just a way to insult them even further.

Imagine that I had a business, and one of my properties was a banquet hall which I rented to interested parties. It is, therefore, a public accommodation. Suppose that two very traditional and conservative and religiously fundamentalist persons wanted to use it for a wedding reception. With the expanded right to discriminate that HB 36 would give me, I could easily say to these persons, "My sincerely held religious beliefs tell me that I should not rent to you, because you are sinners, because you engage in discrimination against LGBTQ+ people. Sorry, you will have to go someplace else."

Surely, you do not want to put Ohio on a "slippery slope" to greater and more damaging discrimination. Our laws should send a signal that Ohio is a tolerant state that respects diversity and is committed to treating its citizens fairly. HB 36 sends the wrong message.

*Rev. Richard P. Young*