

Chair Bacon, Vice Chair Dolan, Ranking Minority Member Thomas, and the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is Paula M. Jackson and I oppose House Bill 36.

1. First, **its title (the “Pastor Protection Act”) is so misleading and tangential to the actual content of the bill** as to be deceptive; but it is also contrary to fact and insulting to religious organizations and clergy in our state.

No pastor or religious figure has ever been or is currently required to preside at any marriage of any couple whatsoever. Both religious canons and state laws already protect pastors to the ultimate degree in this regard. The state has never dictated the celebration of sacraments, it does not do that now, and it cannot do that in the future under the laws we already have. Pretending that this is not so works to **seriously undermine the authority of law already on the books.** If we have to enact new legislation to re-state what is already stated, in so arcane a matter as clergy solemnizing sacraments, then what other laws will we have to single out and rewrite, how many times and for how long?

Further, **it is a vote of no-confidence in the intelligence of clergy** when our legislature advertises to the State that clergy need protection in order to exercise our consciences in accord with the canons of our respective traditions and within the parameters of state law. As a priest in The Episcopal Church, serving as rector of a parish for nearly thirty years in this state, I find it unfortunate that the legislature thinks so little of the clergy as to offer this unwanted and unneeded so-called protection.

2. Secondly, I am opposed to **the actual content of the proposed legislation.** Having examined it, I can see that it is not about protecting anyone. It would more properly be titled the “Encouragement of Discrimination against Protected Classes of People” Act.

Perhaps some on this Committee have paid attention to the profiles of domestic terrorists in the United States. What connects them with violent disruptors of human civility from other countries, whom we routinely label as terrorists? It is often an allegedly religious rationale for their focus on some group as undesirable and undeserving of the same human and civil rights that are shared in our society. If you consider this seriously, you know that **anyone who dislikes people for being disabled, or transgender, or Albanian, or having a name that ends in the letter Z, will be able to manufacture a religious belief to justify their hatred** and ultimately their acts of violence. God help us, in our society they will even be able to find some self-styled religious congregation who will reinforce and support their beliefs, giving them institutional status.

The purpose of law in our democratic republic (including the State of Ohio) should be to protect rights and to further equality of opportunity, rather than to enshrine discrimination and inequality. Above all, the purpose should not be to endorse and promote the most intolerant religious views of a few, imposing them on the many. The latter is exactly what House Bill 36 manifestly intends and will accomplish, **undermining public accommodations rights** for all people because of the prejudices of a few; and **establishing a religion** at the same time, albeit one at variance with the beliefs of most people in the state. As a pastor who needs no protection, as a Christian who believes in civil rights, and as an Ohioan who wants to see justice served in our state laws, I urge you to stop House Bill 36.

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