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Government Operations and
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Joint Committee on Administrative,
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Testimony of Delegate Samuel I. Rosenberg

Before the House Judiciary Committee

In Support Of

House Bill 498

First Amendment Activities and Associations –

Use of Vehicle to Interfere or Damage Property

Mister Chairman of the Committee:

One of our most fundamental rights as Americans is our First Amendment right to freedom of speech. Often, we think of this right as protecting our speech from government overreach. But, as we know from recent events, this right can also be impaired by fellow citizens.

This past November, as a Biden campaign bus was travelling through Texas to urge supporters to cast their ballots on the state's last day of early voting, people in vehicles that were part of a "Trump Train" began yelling profanities and obscenities before blockading the entire Biden entourage. The vehicles slowed down to try and stop the bus in the middle of the highway and prevent its occupants from reaching their destination.

Regardless of our viewpoint, we need to be able to travel to places to exercise our First Amendment right free from interference. Whether travelling to a Biden rally or a 2nd Amendment rally, it is imperative that we not have to worry about other citizens trying to stop us from making our voices heard.

This is what House Bill 498 would address. It would make illegal the act of using a vehicle to intentionally interfere or attempt to interfere with another person's ability to engage in First Amendment activities.

HB 498 would also enhance the penalty for using a vehicle to destroy or damage real or personal property connected to a building because a person or group of a particular religious belief is associated with the building. This is analogous to a provision in Maryland's hate crimes law.

While these actions are already illegal, we need to recognize the severity of trying to impede the exercise of these constitutional rights.

I urge the Committee to act favorably on House Bill 498.

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