

Testimony
Before The House Economic Matters Committee

March 25, 2025

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Bethesda United Methodist Church near Damascus, Maryland by Kevin Beall, where I pastored at this church until June 2023, when the Baltimore Washington Conference no longer recognized me as such when I acknowledged I supported disaffiliation and Philip Sewell, where I serve as lay leader at the church.

Our church supports enactment of Senate Bill 586, as amended.

The reason for our support of Senate Bill 586, as amended, is that it provides a reasonable and equitable approach to our church's effort to disaffiliate, or separate, from the Baltimore Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church. This bill recognizes the contributions that we and the Baltimore Washington Conference have made to the ministries of our church as a fair and just basis for separation.

Since 1968, when we joined the United Methodist Church, until today, our church has paid capital costs of nearly \$800,000 for a new church, a parsonage and a recreational center. In addition, over that same 57 year time period, our operating costs is estimated to have been over \$5 million. Therefore, the total amount of money that our local church has applied to support all of our ministerial work is nearly \$6 million.

However, it should be noted that a portion of that \$6 million, or slightly more than \$1 million, was given to the Baltimore Washington Conference as an apportionment to the Conference. In contrast to our

contributions, the Baltimore Washington Conference has only provided a total of \$5,000 as a “conditional donation” in 1977 in support of our ministries.

Clearly, the buildings and church property has been paid for by our local church and the Conference has not. However, the Conference is using the Trust Clause language to justify their position that all of our assets, including the church property, buildings and monies belong to the Conference and not our church. With this justification as a baseline, their reaction to our church’s desire to separate, and other churches who shared our posture, was to establish onerous conditions in order to separate. The worse was a requirement to pay 50% of our church’s assessed property value, or nearly \$2 million. When asked if they would reduce that penalty to a more reasonable amount, their response was that they were being gracious because the Trust Clause gave them the right to access 100% of a local church’s assets. To make matters worse the time period the Conference allowed churches to meet their onerous separation conditions was closed after December 2023. Subsequently, no separation path is available and our church is being held hostage as an unwilling member of the Conference. Our only other option is to abandon the church property and forfeit all of our church assets to the conference.

For the conference to require anything more than \$5,000 from our church to separate is a major injustice. And Senate Bill 586, as amended, clearly addresses that injustice while identifying a rational approach to property rights.

For the reasons described above, our church strongly endorses enactment of Senate Bill 586, as amended

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding this important matter.