

Witness Testimony  
Before  
The House Economic Matters Committee  
February 25, 2025

Good afternoon. I am Kevin Beall, a former Bethesda United Methodist Church pastor in Damascus, Maryland. I pastored the church until June 2023, when the Baltimore-Washington Conference no longer recognized me as such when I acknowledged that I supported disaffiliation.

The Conference has used the Trust Clause in the Maryland Code that House Bill 1182 proposes repealing to stop efforts to disaffiliate from them. They want this law to remain in place because it benefits their agenda of holding churches captive.

It may be said today that the conference has followed the trust clause initiated by John Wesley in 1796, but that is no longer the case; if it were, we would not be here today. For over 200 years, the Book of Discipline has been used to bring order to the church, and people have chosen to follow God according to scripture. As of last year, the Discipline has been changed to support agendas we don't believe align with the Word of God. As a result, we are being held hostage against our will by being charged a 50% property value fee upon each church that wants to continue to follow the Word of God and leave the conference. The Conference alleges that the Trust Clause grants them possession of all local church assets. These actions by the Conference run counter to my sense of fairness since local Christians have built and maintained our church for 217 years, and the Conference has not.

Bethesda United Methodist Church hosts and participates in homeschooling, scouting, sports, and activities that teach character, integrity, and wholesome behavior to more than 500 young boys and girls. Leaders of these organizations have indicated they would no longer remain a part of the church if we stayed in the Conference because of its stance. As a result, this wonderful outreach effort in our community and state would be jeopardized if we were not to separate.

To some extent, you, as members of this House, are being held hostage of your time trying to remove a bill that was mistakenly put into law in the early 70's.

We, the Bible-believing church, fully support and thank you for your work and time to remove this bill from our code of law.