

Testimony Against HB0822

Honorable Delegates

Please enter an unfavorable report against HB0822.

I am against altering and removing references requiring a belief in God from certain provisions relating to religious freedom, religious tests, and oaths and affirmations.

The Maryland Declaration of Rights begins with the following preamble before listing each enumerated right (bolding and underlining added):

*We, the People of the State of Maryland, grateful to **Almighty God** for our civil and religious liberty, and taking into our serious consideration the best means of establishing a good Constitution in this State for the sure foundation and more permanent security thereof, declare:*

The entire Declaration of Rights is prefaced with stating our gratitude to Almighty God for our civil and religious liberty. Yet the sponsors of this bill want to remove all references to God and Divine Being from rights 36, 37, and 39 in the name of improving religious freedom. This appears to be oxymoronic.

John Adams, a founder of our country and one of the authors of the Declaration of Independence stated, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." Adams was expressing his belief that the successful functioning of the Constitution relies on the virtuous and ethical nature of the people it governs. Adams is highlighting the necessity for a moral compass and religious principles in the individuals who govern and are governed. He suggests that a constitution alone, no matter how well-crafted, cannot secure the stability and prosperity of a nation without the active participation of virtuous citizens. The emphasis placed on morality and religion implies that ethical values and spiritual beliefs bring about a sense of accountability, integrity, and respect for the law.

I am particularly concerned about striking the penultimate sentence in Article 36. This sentence would preclude the government from prohibiting the making reference to belief in, reliance upon, or invoking the aid of God or a Supreme Being in any government or public document, proceeding, activity, ceremony, school, institution, or place. This is such an important sentence for protecting our freedom of religion. While the first amendment protects us from Congress prohibiting the free exercise of religion, this sentence protects us from the state government doing the same.

This same sentence also protects us from the government forcing any of us to follow whatever religious practice it believes we should follow.

Article 39 essentially says that administering an oath can be tailored to the religion one follows, for those of the religious persuasion. . This "religious persuasion" phrase seems to me to allow those who do not believe in God, to take an oath that omits any reference to a deity.

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I believe this bill is unnecessary and is an attempt of a distinct minority who do not believe in God to override the basic foundation of our Government. Maryland has a long history of religious tolerance. Those who do not follow the Judeo-Christian belief system used to found this country are welcome to practice their religion or practice no religion at all. However, just because they do not believe, their beliefs should not be allowed to undo our longstanding beliefs.

So please enter an unfavorable report against HB0822.

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March 4, 2025

DECLARATION OF RIGHTS.

We, the People of the State of Maryland, grateful to Almighty God for our civil and religious liberty, and taking into our serious consideration the best means of establishing a good Constitution in this State for the sure foundation and more permanent security thereof, declare:

Art. 36. That as it is the duty of every man to worship God in such manner as he thinks most acceptable to Him, all persons are equally entitled to protection in their religious liberty; wherefore, no person ought by any law to be molested in his person or estate, on account of his religious persuasion, or profession, or for his religious practice, unless, under the color of religion, he shall disturb the good order, peace or safety of the State, or shall infringe the laws of morality, or injure others in their natural, civil or religious rights; nor ought any person to be compelled to frequent, or maintain, or contribute, unless on contract, to maintain, any place of worship, or any ministry; nor shall any person, otherwise competent, be deemed incompetent as a witness, or juror, on account of his religious belief; provided, he believes in the existence of God, and that under His dispensation such person will be held morally accountable for his acts, and be rewarded or punished therefor either in this world or in the world to come.

Nothing shall prohibit or require the making reference to belief in, reliance upon, or invoking the aid of God or a Supreme Being in any governmental or public document, proceeding, activity, ceremony, school, institution, or place.

Nothing in this article shall constitute an establishment of religion (*amended by Chapter 558, Acts of 1970, ratified Nov. 3, 1970*).

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Art. 37. That no religious test ought ever to be required as a qualification for any office of profit or trust in this State, other than a declaration of belief in the existence of God; nor shall the Legislature prescribe any other oath of office than the oath prescribed by this Constitution.

Art. 39. That the manner of administering an oath or affirmation to any person, ought to be such as those of the religious persuasion, profession, or denomination, of which he is a member, generally esteem the most effectual confirmation by the attestation of the Divine Being.