



HB0514 — Position: UNFAVORABLE

Chairman, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is **Pastor Paul J. Arcand II**, and I am the Senior Pastor of **Lighthouse Baptist Church in Severna Park, Maryland**. I am submitting this written testimony in **unfavorable** opposition to **HB0514**.

Lighthouse Baptist Church serves families in our community through weekly worship services, youth ministry, outreach, discipleship, benevolence, and many forms of charitable assistance. Like countless churches across Maryland, our ministry is not a business venture—it is a public good. We teach our people to be responsible citizens, to pray for those in authority, and to live quiet and peaceable lives while still speaking truth with a clear conscience.

HB0514 would create a new Maryland enforcement regime that threatens severe financial penalties and a two-year revocation of key tax-exempt statuses if a charitable organization is found to have participated in or intervened in a political campaign for or against a candidate. The bill authorizes civil penalties up to \$5,000 per violation, with each consecutive five-day period treated as a separate violation, and it authorizes a two-year revocation of state tax exemptions—including property tax exemption—if state officials determine a willful violation occurred.

I respectfully **oppose HB0514** for the following reasons:

1) It creates a chilling effect on constitutionally protected speech and religious exercise.

Churches must be free to teach moral truth without fear that the State will later claim a sermon, publication, or statement “intervened” in a campaign. The enforcement mechanism—especially when paired with property tax consequences—invites self-censorship.

2) It imposes unusually harsh penalties that can punish ministry rather than prevent misconduct.

Revoking a church’s property tax exemption for two years does not punish politics in a vacuum—it punishes a congregation and the community it serves. It diverts charitable dollars away from people and toward taxes and legal defense.

3) It delegates sensitive, viewpoint-laden judgments to state enforcement officials.

The standard allowing officials to find reasonable grounds for a willful violation creates the risk of inconsistent or selective enforcement in an already contentious political environment.

4) It introduces instability by tying state enforcement to potential changes in federal interpretation.

Charities and churches could face a moving target, where Maryland alters the risk landscape based on shifting federal actions. This uncertainty alone is harmful to long-term ministry planning and charitable work.

5) Maryland already possesses campaign finance and fraud laws.

If the concern is genuine corruption or unlawful coordination, the solution should target those narrow problems—not create a broad mechanism that can chill preaching and public moral witness.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee issue an **UNFAVORABLE** report on **HB0514**.

Respectfully submitted, **Pastor Paul J. Arcand II**

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