

I strongly oppose this bill because this bill goes directly against the First Amendment. The First Amendment reflects the foundational principles upon which the United States was established. It protects our freedom to express our beliefs openly, to think independently without government coercion, and to associate freely with others. These liberties are not optional privileges granted by the State; they are fundamental rights that sustain a free society.

The government should not condition nonprofit status in a way that pressures organizations to limit, censor, or control the ideas they express. I strongly oppose this bill because this bill attempts to do exactly that. By giving the government, the power to impose fines and even strip away Maryland income tax, sales tax, and property tax exemptions from our churches, parsonages, and religious schools for speaking about candidates and elections, the State of Maryland is attempting to silence political and religious speech. This is not regulation; this is coercion.

History reminds us why such government power is dangerous. In South Korea, there have been pastors who publicly criticized the government and expressed support for particular candidates, and as a result faced investigation, prosecution, and imprisonment. Regardless of one's political position, the fact that a pastor could face criminal punishment for expressing political views demonstrates how easily governmental authority can be used to suppress religious and political speech. When the State acquires the power to punish speech, it inevitably creates fear and self-censorship.

The First Amendment exists precisely to prevent such outcomes in the United States. It stands as a safeguard so that religious leaders, churches, and citizens do not have to fear fines, penalties, or the loss of essential status for speaking according to their conscience.

Therefore, I strongly oppose this bill.