I oppose this bill because it directly conflicts with the protections guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. The First Amendment embodies the foundational principles upon which our nation was established: the freedom to speak openly, to exercise religion without interference, to think independently without government coercion, and to associate freely with others. These liberties are not secondary privileges—they are essential pillars of a free and self-governing society.

At its core, this bill undermines freedom of speech. The First Amendment does not merely protect popular or widely accepted opinions; it exists precisely to safeguard speech that may be controversial, unpopular, or critical of those in power. Political speech, in particular, lies at the very heart of First Amendment protection. The ability to speak about candidates, public policy, and elections without fear of punishment is fundamental to democratic self-government. When the government conditions benefits or imposes penalties based on the content of speech, it engages in viewpoint discrimination—something the Constitution strongly forbids.

The government should never condition nonprofit status in a way that pressures organizations to censor, limit, or control the ideas they express. Yet that is precisely what this bill attempts to do. By granting the State of Maryland the authority to impose fines and even revoke Maryland income tax, sales tax, and property tax exemptions for churches, parsonages, and religious schools based on their speech regarding candidates or elections, the bill creates a coercive environment. Even if framed as a regulatory measure, the practical effect is clear: organizations will feel compelled to remain silent rather than risk severe financial consequences.

Freedom of speech includes not only the right to speak but also the right to speak without intimidation or indirect punishment. When the state uses financial leverage to discourage certain viewpoints, it chills speech. Organizations may self-censor, avoiding meaningful discussion of moral and civic issues that intersect with public life. This chilling effect is particularly troubling in the context of religious institutions, whose teachings often address social and political matters as part of their faith commitments.

Religious institutions and nonprofit organizations do not surrender their First Amendment rights in exchange for tax-exempt status. Speaking about moral, civic, and political issues—especially when those issues intersect with deeply held religious convictions—is part of their mission and calling. Conditioning tax exemptions on silence or self-censorship undermines both religious liberty and free political discourse.

For these reasons, I strongly oppose this bill. It threatens core constitutional freedoms, chills protected political speech, and sets a dangerous precedent of government intrusion into both religious expression and the free exchange of ideas that sustains our republic.