

## My Testimony

The First Amendment reflects the foundational principles upon which the United States was established. It protects our freedom to express our beliefs, to think independently without government coercion, and to associate freely with others. These liberties are central to a free society. The government should not condition nonprofit status in a way that pressures organizations to limit or control the ideas they express.

I oppose this bill because this bill tries to do exactly that. By giving the government power to impose fines and even strip away Maryland income-tax, sales-tax, and even property-tax exemptions for our churches, parsonages, and religious schools for speaking about candidates and elections, which is our God-given liberty, the State of Maryland is attempting to silence political and religious speech. This bill would infringe upon our constitutionally protected religious and political expression.

This bill also tries to force charitable and religious organizations to affirm that they “do not and will not” engage in candidate-related speeches as a condition to operating and retaining tax exemptions. That is an **unconstitutional** condition: the government is effectively saying, “Surrender your First Amendment rights or lose your legal status and tax protections,” even though our basic freedoms of thought, speech, and association protect the right of churches and ministries to speak about public life and those who seek to govern.

In South Korea, a pastor was imprisoned for his belief and zeal to speak out against a political view and as a Korean American, I have been proud to be an American where this is not supposed to happen. One of the reasons I am proud to be an American is because our constitutional system is designed to prevent that kind of government overreach. This is something we see currently occurring in South Korea, becoming almost like the communist North Korea, whose citizens do not have the luxury of even having an opinion. This is what we want America to avoid. However, this bill sets a troubling precedent and goes against the very core of our freedom and tries to punish churches that exercise this freedom.