

I firmly oppose this bill because it directly conflicts with the First Amendment, the cornerstone of the freedoms upon which the United States was founded, and without which, we wouldn't exist. The First Amendment protects our right to speak openly, to live according to our beliefs, to think independently without government coercion, and to associate freely with others. These are not secondary privileges; they are essential liberties that define a free society.

The government must never condition nonprofit status on whether an organization limits or controls its speech. Yet that is precisely what this bill attempts to do. By granting the State of Maryland the authority to impose fines and revoke Maryland income tax, sales tax, and property tax exemptions from churches, parsonages, and religious schools for speaking about candidates or elections, the state would be using financial penalties to pressure and silence religious and political expression. This is not regulation - it is coercion. It places the government in the position of punishing speech it disfavors, which is fundamentally incompatible with constitutional protections.

Religious leaders should not have to choose between faithfulness to their convictions and the financial survival of their ministries. The freedom to speak on moral and civic issues is not granted by the state; it is protected from the state. When the government begins attaching penalties to speech, it crosses a dangerous line.

In South Korea, in the past and in recent events, pastors have been imprisoned for expressing political views. As a Korean American, I am deeply grateful to live in the United States - a nation built on safeguards against government overreach. Our constitutional system exists specifically to prevent the abuse of power and the suppression of dissent. In places like North Korea, citizens cannot freely voice their opinions at all. America must never move in that direction.

This bill sets a dangerous precedent. It weakens the foundation of our constitutional freedoms and attempts to punish churches for exercising rights guaranteed under the First Amendment. For the sake of religious liberty, free expression, and the preservation of our constitutional principles, I strongly and unequivocally oppose this bill.