

Formal Opposition to SB 4 / HB 0514

To the Honorable Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express my strong opposition to SB 4 / HB 0514. This legislation constitutes an unconstitutional infringement upon First Amendment liberties, which protect the fundamental right of all citizens and institutions to express their beliefs and associate freely without fear of government coercion.

This bill attempts to condition non-profit status on the surrender of protected speech. By granting the State the power to impose civil fines and revoke vital income, sales, and property tax exemptions for churches, parsonages, and religious schools, Maryland is engaging in state-sponsored silencing of religious and political expression.

The "power to tax is the power to control." Forcing religious institutions to choose between their sacred mission and their tax-exempt status is a direct violation of the "unconstitutional conditions" doctrine. This doctrine clearly dictates that the government may not deny a benefit to a person or institution on a basis that infringes their constitutionally protected freedom of speech or religion.

This legislation is a direct assault on our fundamental liberties. I urgently request that this committee protect the Constitution and issue an unfavorable report on this bill.