

Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 0004
Maryland Baptist for Biblical Values

Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is James Vaughn, and I am speaking today on behalf of **Maryland Baptist for Biblical Values**, representing **nearly 200 churches across the State of Maryland**.

We oppose Senate Bill 0004F because it conflicts directly with the protections guaranteed under the **Maryland Declaration of Rights**, mainly **Article 24**, which safeguards freedom of speech, and **Article 36**, which protects the free exercise of religion and forbids civil penalties based on religious practice or expression.

SB0004F would empower the State to penalize churches and other charitable organizations by revoking tax exemptions and imposing sanctions if or when their speech is deemed too political. That places the government in the role of deciding **when moral or religious speech crosses an invisible political line**—a role the Declaration of Rights was written to prevent.

This is especially troubling for religious communities whose traditions require speaking truth to power. From the prophets of Scripture to the abolitionists and the leaders of the civil rights movement, faith has never been confined to abstract ideas. Moral teachings, by their very nature, have real world application. A law that pressures churches to speak only in vague moral terms and punishes them for applying those principles to real world examples in leadership and decisions is not neutral - it imposes a civil disability on religious expression and freedom of speech.

Article 36 was designed precisely to prevent this kind of indirect punishment; where religious exercise is *“technically”* permitted, but only if it is stripped of real-world application. Conditioning tax exemptions on silence or self-censorship functions as a civil disability on religious expression, which the Declaration of Rights expressly prohibits.

Maryland should not adopt a state-level enforcement scheme that chills speech, invites selective enforcement, and undermines the historic role of faith communities in public life.

For these reasons, and on behalf of the churches we represent across this state, we respectfully urge this committee to issue an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 0004.

Thank you.