

Thank you for the opportunity to be a witness for the RFRA bill-Protection of the free exercise of religion in Maryland.

As a native Marylander I have enjoyed my religious freedom. While pastoring a multicultural church in Glenn Dale, Maryland, I have the opportunity to minister to new citizens to our nation. They love the freedom we have to worship here in Maryland.

In 1993, the US Congress determined that the US Supreme Court had diminished First Amendment protections. Congress responded by passing the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA).

It is worth noting that the federal RFRA was introduced by then-Representative Chuck Schumer in the U.S. House and by Senator Ted Kennedy in the U.S. Senate. It was supported by Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi and passed with bipartisan support before being signed into law by President Bill Clinton. It remains the law of the land to this day.

In 1997, the US Supreme Court determined that the Federal RFRA could no longer be applied to state and local laws. That move prompted states to begin enacting their own RFRA's. Today, 28 states, including Illinois, have adopted an RFRA on the state level.

To sway public opinion, misinformation about the RFRA is often disseminated and needs to be corrected. A RFRA does NOT pick winners and losers. It simply provides guidelines for the courts when they are called upon to determine religious liberty cases.

Those guidelines come in the form of two questions:

Does the state have a compelling interest in forcing someone to violate their sincerely held religious beliefs...

...and if it does have a compelling interest, then...

Is the state fulfilling that compelling interest in the least restrictive way?

That is all that the RFRA does.

I hope we all agree that religious freedom is a fundamental human right that deserves legal protection. Marylanders should be free to live and work according to their faith without fear of being punished by the

government. This law simply ensures that freedom gets a fair hearing in court.

Religious freedom supporters want fairness, balance, respect for diversity of beliefs, and limits on government control over Marylanders' lives.

Opponents of religious freedom support a system in which the government has the power to enforce some beliefs and punish others. Furthermore, in their attempt to defend their dissent, they employ scare tactics by concocting hypothetical scenarios that have never happened in more than 31 years that we have lived under religious freedom laws like this one.

We also acknowledge that large corporations often oppose this bill. But we need to consider that large corporations are owned and run by people who operate them according to their own beliefs.

Should large corporations with huge legal departments and millions of dollars to spend defending their interests be allowed to operate according to their beliefs, while small local Maryland businesses are forced to violate their beliefs or close their doors, without so much as getting their day in court?

The government shouldn't have unchecked power to intrude on Marylanders' freedom. This law will help to prevent that from happening.

I urge the Committee to pass it.

Sincerely,

Pat Creed, Jr

Faith Independent Baptist Church

Glenn Dale, MD 20769