

HB 356: Human Relations - Protection of the Free Exercise of Religion: Please vote TO **SUPPORT** this bill **WITH AMENDMENTS**.

Dear Government, Labor & Elections Committee:

I am writing to express my **support for HB 356**, concerning *Human Relations – Protection of the Free Exercise of Religion*, **with important amendments**.

Protecting the free exercise of religion is a foundational constitutional principle. Individuals should not be penalized, coerced, or disadvantaged by the government for sincerely held religious beliefs. **HB 356 is an important step toward** strengthening these protections and **ensuring that Maryland law clearly safeguards religious liberty**.

At the same time, I respectfully urge an amendment addressing the language that allows government action if it is in the *“furtherance of a compelling governmental interest.”* **Its inclusion** in statute **can** create broad exceptions that **ultimately weaken the very protections the bill is intended to secure**.

The phrase “furtherance of a compelling governmental interest” is inherently subjective and has historically been interpreted expansively. Without clear limits, it risks allowing governmental entities to justify substantial burdens on religious exercise under broadly defined policy objectives. **If religious liberty is to be meaningfully protected, statutory language must ensure that protections are not easily overridden.**

I respectfully request that the bill be amended to either remove this clause or more narrowly define and strictly limit the circumstances under which the government may burden religious exercise. **Clearer guardrails would provide stronger, more predictable protections and reduce costly litigation over ambiguous standards.**

HB 356 presents an opportunity to reaffirm Maryland’s commitment to religious freedom. With thoughtful amendments that prevent overly broad exceptions, this legislation can provide meaningful, durable protections for people of faith across our State.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to **support HB 356 with amendments addressing the “compelling governmental interest” language**.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully,
Trudy Tibbals