



ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH

Pastor Donald R. Smith

(443) 945-0466

209 N. Earlton Road

Havre de Grace, MD 21078

February 16, 2026

HB 722

Position: UNFAVORABLE

SENT VIA MY MGA

Maryland General Assembly
House Judiciary Committee
Attn: Del. J. Sandy Dartlett, Chair
Attn: Del. Debra Davis, Vice Chair

Re: *HB 722 Child Sex Abuse Claims – Doctrine of Charitable Immunity – Abrogation*

Dear Madam Chair, Madam Vice Chair & Members of the Committee:

I am Donald R. Smith, Pastor of Antioch Baptist Church. We are a Maryland religious corporation and are located at 209 N. Earlton Road, Havre de Grace, within Harford County, Maryland. I am writing concerning House Bill 722 Child Sex Abuse Claims – Doctrine of Charitable Immunity – Abrogation. The position of Antioch Baptist Church, and the members of its congregation, for HB 722 is unfavorable (UNF).

Antioch Baptist Church was formed on July 31, 1962. We exist first and foremost to glorify God by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and helping people grow in their personal relationship with Him. Our mission is spiritual at its core- teaching the Bible, encouraging prayer, discipling believers, and sharing the message of salvation with our community and the world through foreign missions. Our work is not confined to Sunday services. It includes pastoral care, counseling, children and youth discipleship, marriage and family support, outreach and missions, both to our local community and internationally. We seek to be a visible expression of Christ's love in Havre de Grace and aim to strengthen the community by providing Biblical teaching that builds strong families and moral; offer care in times of grief, illness or hardships; create opportunities for fellowship and mentorship; support local outreach efforts and benevolence to those in need; and encourage members to live out their faith in everyday life- at work, school and in the neighborhood. In this way, we don't only serve as a place of worship, but as a source of stability, compassion, and hope within the community. We are supported entirely by voluntary giving. This reflects our belief that giving is an act of worship and gratitude to God, not an obligation imposed on members. Financial gifts are used to support church operations, maintain the facilities used for worship, teaching and community service, fund outreach, foreign missions and benevolence ministries and provide resources for children, youth and discipleship programs.

We have for years relied upon Maryland's charitable immunity protection in maintaining our work and ordering our finances. Our congregation counts on having their contributions go towards the mission of

the church and its ministries. We are able to provide the services that we do to our congregation and our community because of it.

HB 722 is deeply unfair and harmful to charities. Antioch Baptist Church has relied upon the doctrine of charitable immunity since it was formed in 1962. This reliance has dictated whether we have obtained insurance, coverage limits, and coverage exclusions. Maryland has now removed any statute of limitations for child sex offense cases. The abrogation of charitable immunity would compound the effects of the removal of the statute of limitations for child sex abuse cases and requires charities to defend cases where the alleged abusers and supervisors are often long deceased, witnesses are missing, and records are lost due to passage of time.

The impact of this bill is not only on our ongoing ministries, but on our very existence. One substantial liability claim could well end our ministry altogether, resulting in a loss to our community of the services that we freely provide.

We also believe that this bill violates our constitution rights as citizens of Maryland and of the United States. We and other charities have reasonably relied upon the assurance of immunity beyond the limited of their insurance in planning their affairs and arranging insurance. The retroactive removal of immunity covering cases dating back 80 years or more is an act of betrayal by the State that violates the fundamental principles of due process.

Our church leadership, our congregation, and we believe our community strongly opposes HB 722. We are writing to voice our opposition and ask that the bill be defeated.

Thank you for your attention and we are available for questions and discussion as needed.

Thank you for your attention to these matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "D. S. A.", written in a cursive style.