



*Proclaiming the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ,
applying all the Bible to all of life,
being the church for the glory of God.*

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 Gabe Powell, Lead Pastor of Hope Bible Church. We are a Maryland religious corporation and are located at 9112 Guilford Rd., Columbia MD, Howard County. I am writing concerning House Bill 722 Child Sex Abuse Claims – Doctrine of Charitable Immunity – Abrogation. The position of Hope Bible Church, and the members of its congregation, for HB 722 is unfavorable (UNF).

Hope Bible Church was formed in 1997 with the commitment to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to Howard County and beyond. Our passion is to teach the Bible, which declares that all people are sinners and deserving of divine judgment for our rebellion against our Creator. But to demonstrate His glory, God loved the world by sending Jesus Christ to take the punishment we deserve and grant eternal life to all who believe on Him. And for those who believe, not only are we forgiven of our sin and freed from judgment, but we begin to experience a transformed life and become more like Jesus Christ who is the perfect man showing us how to live out the character of God.

We accomplish our commitment to this news by gathering each Sunday for worship services, offering multiple classes where the Bible is taught for personal growth and change, gathering in homes throughout the region to encourage each other toward holiness, and many other activities to adults and children where the glory of God, the gospel of Christ, and the truth of Scripture is taught, encouraged, and pursued.

As well, we offer free counseling services to anyone in the community who desires to know what God's word says about their challenges. We have a team of 12 counselors, and growing, who give of their time to help people navigate marital problems, personal struggles, and life-dominating sins so that they change and flourish according to God's design. We have seen marriages saved and

people set free from bondage to all kinds of substance, sexual, and other kinds of addictions and behaviors.

We also offer regular training to people in our church and community teaching how they can help others who are struggling in life. In the last seven years we have trained about 600 people from over 50 churches and organizations in Maryland and surrounding states.

To enable us to accomplish these tasks, our church family donates to the church with the proper expectation that their donations will serve the purposes of sustaining and growing the ministry of the church.

Having been founded in 1997, most of our founding leadership and members are no longer part of our church. Due to the military and contractor work, many people have come and gone throughout the years. While we have sought to protect the children of our church in various ways (including background checks of all who seek to work in our children's ministry and video surveillance of all classrooms and hallways), there is no perfect protection. We strongly believe in the proper role of the State to punish evildoers and would cooperate closely with law enforcement if we learned of a crime committed in our church community. We do not believe in any form of confidentiality that would protect a perpetrator.

It would be unjust if a claim were made against our church for the horrific actions of a member from the past who perpetrated evil without being caught. To do so would be to punish our current church family and the community by depleting our resources, if not shuttering our church, for something that our present leadership and members had nothing to do with, and even our past leadership was unaware of. Further, because of our commitment to help people change, instead of addressing the problem, such a claim against our church would exacerbate the problem by removing an organization that might otherwise prevent such tragedies in the future.

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. Hope Bible Church has relied upon the doctrine of charitable immunity since it was formed in 1997. 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 constitutional rights as citizens of Maryland and of the United States. We and other charities have reasonably relied upon the assurance of immunity beyond the limitations of our insurance in planning our 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) those we serve in our community, strongly oppose 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.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gabe Powell', with a stylized, cursive script.

Gabe Powell
Lead Pastor
Hope Bible Church