

January 15, 2026

Del. Jheanelle Wilkins  
Chair  
House Ways and Means Committee  
130 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony in strong opposition to H.B. 24

Dear Chair Wilkins and members of the Ways and Means Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the FFRF Action Fund (FFRF AF) to provide testimony in strong opposition to H.B. 24. FFRF AF is an affiliate of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, a national nonprofit organization with more than 40,000 members across the country, including more than 800 members in Maryland. We work to ensure that our laws remain secular in order to protect the constitutional separation between state and church and to represent the views of nonreligious citizens.

H.B. 24 would allow public school boards to “use a chaplain as a volunteer aide in schools to provide support services to students.” Schools that take up this invitation would run into a host of constitutional problems.

**First**, most fundamentally public school students are entitled to a secular education, and schools violate this right when they fail to remain neutral on matters of religion by selecting a particular religious minister to be an official school chaplain. By facilitating religious counseling between that chosen minister and students, during the school day and on campus, and by encouraging students to meet with that minister (explicitly or implicitly), the school sends a clear message that it supports the chaplain’s religious message.

Schools promoting religion in this manner would flagrantly violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, and Art. 36 of the Maryland

Constitution's Declaration of Rights, which guarantees that "**all persons are equally entitled to protection in their religious liberty . . .**" Public schools would violate these protections by selecting a preferred religious minister, showing a clear preference for one religion over others. H.B. 24 does not, and cannot, remove this basic constitutional protection. Any school district that takes up the invitation to appoint a chaplain would be welcoming a losing lawsuit.

**Second**, H.B. 24 would push school districts into a separate constitutional quagmire by inviting public schools to employ school representatives whose role is to provide religious guidance. Just like other employees or board-approved volunteers, anything said by the chaplain in their official role as a school chaplain would be government speech. This is a major problem because, as explained above, public schools may not take sides on religious matters.

Further, the school's ongoing control over the chaplain's speech is an additional layer of trouble for schools. A school board that appoints a chaplain may also dismiss that chaplain, depending on what the chaplain says. That control over religious figures and their speech is a no-win scenario for schools.

Imagine school board's situation if they appointed a chaplain who gave students controversial religious advice—perhaps a progressive chaplain tells Christian students that God supports same-sex relationships, or a fundamentalist chaplain tells a gay student they will go to hell unless they repent. Parents in either case may reasonably be furious that a school official is telling this to their child, but if the board dismisses the chaplain or instructs them not to give that advice in the future, then the chaplain will argue they are being censored because of their religious belief. **This inherent tension in religious belief is why our public schools are, and must remain, secular.** The only way to adequately protect the religious liberty of *all* students is to prohibit public schools from taking sides on religious disputes. Public school chaplains makes this impossible.

**Third**, the organization behind chaplain bills around the country is the National School Chaplain Association.<sup>1</sup> Its parent organization, Mission Generation Inc.,<sup>2</sup> has a goal to reach "the largest unreached people group inside of the schools around the world" in order to "influence those in education until the saving grace of Jesus becomes well-known, and students develop a personal relationship with Him."<sup>3</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> [nationalschoolchaplainassociation.org/](http://nationalschoolchaplainassociation.org/).

<sup>2</sup> [www.ecfa.org/MemberProfile.aspx?ID=14153](http://www.ecfa.org/MemberProfile.aspx?ID=14153).

<sup>3</sup> [alabamareflector.com/2024/01/25/alabama-lawmaker-files-bill-to-allow-chaplains-in-public-schools](http://alabamareflector.com/2024/01/25/alabama-lawmaker-files-bill-to-allow-chaplains-in-public-schools).

Mission Generation’s own words, the organization works to exploit the “massive lack of school counselors throughout public schools” by filling the void with religious chaplains to “win” and “disciple” school-age children.<sup>4</sup>

The CEO of the National School Chaplain Association, Rocky Malloy, testified in support of a similar bill in Georgia, and recommended defining chaplains to exclude disfavored religious minorities.<sup>5</sup> The organization has bragged about how their chaplains target vulnerable students, “show up at [students’] homes” uninvited, and ultimately win the students over as Christian converts.<sup>6</sup>

Malloy, who reportedly admits to being convicted of international drug trafficking,<sup>7</sup> also makes massively implausible claims about chaplains, including that tens of thousands of schools with NSCA chaplains—covering more than 27 million students and teachers in 23 countries<sup>8</sup>—have had “zero” suicides over the course of 30 years of Malloy’s chaplains. With suicide accounting for more than one in 100 deaths globally, and low-income countries reporting upwards of 20% of adolescents attempting suicide,<sup>9</sup> Malloy’s claim becomes patently absurd. This committee should disregard any other claims from this obviously not credible organization.

**Finally**, H.B. 24 would create tension and strife in communities across the state. Church leaders would pressure schools to hire them as chaplains, parents who do not share the religious beliefs of the chosen chaplain would complain, and so on. It is precisely this sort of division that the Establishment Clause, and analogous provisions in the Maryland Constitution, were designed to avoid. The Framers understood that the only way to protect true religious liberty was to ensure that the government stays out of religious matters.

In short, there is no way to save this bill. Our secular public school system provides an environment where students of all religious affiliations, and none, may thrive without worrying that their school officially favors one religion over another, or religion over nonreligion. This bill utterly disregards this principle, inviting public schools to send a message to their students — many of whom are nonreligious —

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<sup>4</sup> [bjconline.org/s5-ep-05-alarming-push-to-put-chaplains-in-public-schools/](https://bjconline.org/s5-ep-05-alarming-push-to-put-chaplains-in-public-schools/).

<sup>5</sup> Georgia Senate Government Oversight Committee hearing (Feb. 21, 2024), at 33:00, available [here](#).

<sup>6</sup> National School Chaplain Association email (Apr. 24, 2025), available on request.

<sup>7</sup> See Robert Downen and Brian Lopez, *Key supporter of Texas school chaplain bill has pushed for evangelism in schools*, The Texas Tribune (May 19, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nationalschoolchaplainassociation.org/>

<sup>9</sup> See Lovero et al., *Suicide in Global Mental Health*, *Curr Psychiatry Rep.* 2023; 25(6): 255–262 (2023), available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37178317/>.

that they ought to be receiving religious advice from their school's favored minister. This committee should show its commitment to true religious liberty by rejecting this ill-conceived bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ryan D. Jayne". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "R" and "J".

Ryan D. Jayne  
Senior Policy Counsel  
FFRF Action Fund