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Reply to: Virginia

May 9, 2016

## **VIA EMAIL ONLY**

Representative A. Nino Vitale, District 85  
77 S. High St  
11th Floor  
Columbus, OH 43215  
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RE: Liberty Counsel supports HB 286 Pastor Protection Act

Dear Representative Vitale:

I write to commend you for your leadership in sponsoring HB 286, the Pastor Protection Act ("Act"), and to lend Liberty Counsel's support to this legislation. For the reasons set forth below, Liberty Counsel urges Ohio legislators to support this bill.

By way of brief introduction, Liberty Counsel is an international legal, media, and policy organization with an emphasis on First Amendment religious liberty issues. Liberty Counsel provides *pro bono* representation to individuals, pastors, and churches in a support of issues involving Life, Religious Liberty, and the Family. Liberty Counsel has been at the forefront of the fight to preserve marriage, and can attest to the attacks upon pastors and churches who continue to stand for marriage between one man and one woman, and a biblical view of sexuality.

In summary, HB 286, the "Ohio Pastor Protection Act," specifies that no ordained or licensed minister and no religious society is required to solemnize a marriage or allow property to be used to host a marriage ceremony, if the marriage does not conform to the minister's or society's sincerely held religious beliefs. HB 286 provides immunity from civil or criminal liability arising from the minister's or society's beliefs about marriage, or uses of property consistent with those beliefs, and prohibits the state or a political subdivision from penalizing or withholding any benefit or privilege from such a minister or society, including any governmental contract, grant, or license.

While ministers, churches, and religious societies already have a constitutional right to perform or host only those marriage ceremonies that conform to their religious beliefs, and to limit the use of their properties consistent with religious beliefs, HB 286 is still necessary, because homosexual activists seek to force pastors and churches to perform ceremonies between same-sex couples, despite the First Amendment.

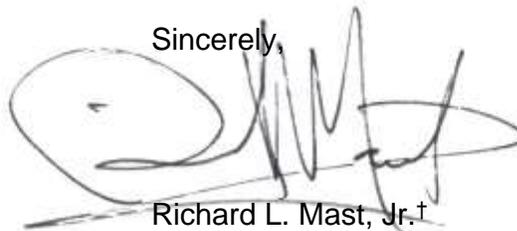
Nationwide, local municipal “nondiscrimination” ordinances increasingly attempt to limit pastors and churches in the Free Exercise of Religion, purporting to bind churches in employment decisions, and purporting to classify churches as “public accommodations” for purposes of bathroom or locker access by cross-dressing males, or for purposes of facilities use for homosexual weddings or receptions. A recent example is the [Osceola County, Florida, “Human Rights” ordinance](#).<sup>1</sup> [Another example](#)<sup>2</sup> was the [Hutchinson, Kansas “nondiscrimination” ordinance](#),<sup>3</sup> which purported to apply to churches, if they were “open to the public,” or if they allowed man-woman weddings or wedding receptions to take place on church property, between non-members. No church limits the use of its bathrooms to “members only,” and many churches allow non-member weddings in church sanctuaries or fellowship halls, as an outreach to the community.

In Ohio, the cities of Athens, Bowling Green, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Coshocton, Dayton, East Cleveland, Newark, Oxford, and Toledo; the village of Yellow Springs, and Summit County have passed “nondiscrimination” ordinances recognizing “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” as protected classes. To the extent there is any ambiguity with these ordinances, HB 286 would clarify that pastors and churches are exempt from any claims that they must allow their property to be used for activities which would violate their sincerely-held religious beliefs in the area of marriage ceremonies and facilities use.

Simply put, pastors, churches, and religious institutions must remain free to set forth God’s truth on issues involving sexuality, and must remain free to permit the use of their property consistent with their religious beliefs. Liberty Counsel greatly appreciates your leadership on this issue, and urges others to support HB 286. If HB 286 is signed into law, Liberty Counsel would defend it on a *pro bono* basis, at no charge to the taxpayers, should it be subjected to legal challenge.

Should you have questions about any of the points contained in this letter, I would be happy to discuss at 407-875-1776.

Sincerely,



Richard L. Mast, Jr.<sup>†</sup>

CC  
**VIA EMAIL**  
Ohio House Republican Members

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mynews13.com/content/dam/news/static/cfnews13/documents/2015/8/osceola-county-lgbt-ordinance-081415.docx>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.lc.org/newsroom/details/proposed-law-would-force-churches-to-host-drag-queen-parties-1>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.lifesitenews.com/images/pdfs/HutchinsonKansasLGBTOrdinance.pdf>

<sup>†</sup>Licensed in Virginia  
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