

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 1239

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE AFFAIRS

Hearing Date: March 25, 2021 8:00 AM

George Proctor, MR,

Self

ARTHUR CITY, TX

It is or First Amendment right to freely Assemble and worship as we wish and nobody has a right to prohibit my freedom of religion are freedom to assemble freedom of speech freedom that's what this is all about and this is something that cannot be taken for granite ever my father's fault for it and I want to preserve it for my children and my grandchildren religious freedom no matter what your religion is it is a god-given right. Sincerely George Proctor

TERRY TODD

SELF- PRECINCT CHAIR 109.

OVILLA, TX

LAWS PROTECTING RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS SHALL NOT BE SUSPENDED. PERIOD. THE FIRST AMENDMENT SECURES RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS. PERIOD. CHURCHES SHOULD NOT BE CLOSED FOR ANY REASON.

Regina Callender

Self/retired

Henderson, TX

Please vote to protect our religious freedoms and prohibit the closure of places of worship

Bob Long, Pastor

Rally Call Leadership Network

San Marcis, TX

Calamities , Emergencies, Disasters , Diseases, - actually NOTHING nor any Petson has the authority to disdain , ignore or override the Constitution . The Freedom of Religion AND the free expression & exercise of Religion are Sovereign . Communist nations have “ Freedom of Religion “ - you can BELIEVE whatever you desire there is NO guaranteed freedom to EXERCISE religion. Executive orders that actually prohibit or limit the FREE EXERCISE are indeed illegitimate ! Constitution clearly denied any powers to limit the free exercise.

Seaan Smith

self

Clute, TX

Not clear on what the bill intends. Churches need to be able to tend to the flock. The donations to the church have already been taxed before donated. Any laws protecting churches should remain in place.

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Frank Pomeroy

myself as a concerned citizen

Seguin, TX

As a pastor and concerned citizen I am here today in support of this bill that has been presented by Senator Paxton SB26.

Martin Luther the father of Protestantism wrote a pamphlet during the Plague of 1527 of the duties of a church and what his role was during the Plague. He ended up loosing his own daughter to the plague but yet stood true to what he knew his people needed in leadership. He knew that he was needed to help bring peace to a horrible situation. One of his quotes resonates with truth and stands true still today.

He said, ““We die at our posts. Christian doctors cannot abandon their hospitals, Christian governors cannot flee their districts, Christian pastors cannot abandon their congregations. The plague does not dissolve our duties: It turns them to crosses, on which we must be prepared to die.” ~Martin Luther, 1527

During times of trials and crisis the number one place that needs to be open is the place where people can find peace and solace. The place where their friends and family can gather in prayer and strengthen one another, and I believe that Spiritual strength that is needed to battle the adversity is found in their places of worship.

We saw in the last pandemic that liquor stores and casinos were considered essential while churches were being closed down and police were called to block doors and drive around drive through services to arrest those that did not fulfill the governments mandates on worship.

Though our constitution protects the rights of Americans to gather and worship we saw those rights swept away across the country. We need to pass this bill so that the citizens of Texas can have legal backing to stand and fight with when the government tries again to overreach and close down the one place that truly needs to stay open in times of calamity, the Church.

Janice Pomeroy

Self Artist

Maxwell, TX

Please protect our religious freedoms and vote to insure we have freedom to worship. Thank you

Marlow Newton

Self

The Woodlands, TX

Dear Committee members,

I fully support this bill. As a Texan and a Constitutionalist, I firmly believe that the Church and all religious organizations are protected by the 1st amendment. I fully support state legislation that is specific to protecting the Church from government edicts.

I appreciate your service to our state.

Sincerely,

Marlow Newton

William Fitch

Self - Retired

Kerrville, TX

Please do not close our churches... EVER again.

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Michael McCloskey

Self, Sales

CEDAR PARK, TX

Religious Activity is essential and it would violate U.S. Constitution First Amendment rights to assembly and worship to prohibit it.

Rachel Bresner, ADL Jean & Jerry Moore Southwest Civil Rights Counsel

ADL (Anti-Defamation League

Houston, TX

On behalf of ADL, we write to express our opposition to HB 1691, relating to the protection of religious freedoms and religious institutions during a declared state of disaster and opposition to HB 1239, relating to prohibited suspension of laws protecting religious freedom and prohibited closure of places of worship, opposition to HB 525, relating to the protection of religious organizations, and opposition to HB 1487, relating to the protection of religious organizations. These bills would restrict the ability of the Governor and other state and local officials to issue emergency orders that limit in-person religious services, even if the orders were treating religious services the same as all other gatherings and regardless of how dire the danger to public health and safety.

ADL is a strongly pro-religion, national anti-hate and civil rights organization which supports faith, fairness and freedom. For over a century, we have been an ardent advocate for religious freedom for all Americans-- whether in the majority or minority. HB 1691, HB 1239 and HB 525 are overbroad and likely unconstitutional and would have serious, detrimental consequences for all Texans. It is an essential responsibility of the government to protect the public during an emergency, including a public health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic. HB 1691, HB 1239 and HB 525 dangerously limit the ability of the government to respond to threats to the public by the COVID-19 pandemic and future pandemics. What is even more troubling is that they go even further by tying the hands of the Governor in non-pandemic emergencies as well, including but not limited to during fires, floods, explosions and hurricanes.

These bills are incredibly broad and would put the public health at risk. State and local officials must be able to issue emergency orders to protect public health under emergency circumstances. Tying the hands of government officials and forbidding or otherwise restricting them from limiting in-person religious gatherings regardless of the public health dangers or disaster or emergency situation will put lives at risk.

It applies to a wide category of religious organizations and prohibits the governor from placing limitations on any of their operations related to a declared state of disaster. These bills do not put religious organizations on equal footing with secular institutions. Instead, it targets them for vastly more favorable treatment, putting them out of reach of any regulation during an emergency even if that regulation applies equally to secular organizations.

Governors would have a harder time controlling the spread of COVID-19 because they would be unable to limit attendance at superspreader events. These bills would also limit the governor's ability to respond to all emergencies, not just COVID-19. For example, a governor might not be able to require a mandatory evacuation in preparation for a hurricane if it would close houses of worship or limit their hours

Robert M Santini

Republican Party of TX

San Antonio, TX

I support this bill. Please bring it up for a vote in committee and ask committee members to vote to pass it out of committee.

Debra Wolgemuth

Self Employed

Waco, TX

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I quit attending my Waco, Texas church due to the excessive church lockdowns from Abbott's Executive Overreach. Abbott's actions paralyzed many Texas congregations who chose to live in fear and timidity. I was determined to walk by faith, not choose fear and to fight for my constitutional liberties. I started following a California church, Calvary Chapel Chino Hills/Pastor Jack Hibbs, who provided wisdom and clarity during this past year. Amazingly a California church reopened before my Central Texas church. I am a widow who did not need to be cutoff and alone in my home. A special legislative session was NEVER called to give me representation regarding Abbott's dictator actions. I felt like I was living in back in California and my rights were stolen again. Please, never allow this to happen again in Texas. (Hebrews 10:25)

Jo Foley

Self N/A

Henderson, TX

Over the last year, we have seen religious rights abused and violated all over America. Churches were shut down, synagogue leaders were arrested and many religious organizations were fined because they held services against some legislators rule. Last year, churches across the country were told to close while grocery stores, liquor stores, strip clubs, and even casinos were allowed to remain open. This is an attack on our Freedom of Religion which is not only a Constitutional right but a GOD given right. No government should ever think they have the right to close religious meetings. Please vote FOR HB1239. For the same reasons, I ask you to support HJR 72 , HB525, HB1487 and HB1691 providing 'essential business' status to religious organizations. No one, not even the governor, should ever, by any means, have the power to cause religious organizations to cease meetings. Please vote Yes to all of these bills: HB1239, HJR 72, HB 525, HB1487 and HB 1691.

Liz Case Pickens

Self Retired Teacher

Dallas, TX

As a member of the Legislative Priorities Committee at state convention in Houston this summer, we heard three days of testimony at a convention that the delegates never attended. These people traveled to give testimony and then had to travel back home to attend the convention online. Protecting Religious Freedom was a top priority of the 6000 delegates at the convention.

* This was a principle our country was founded on and has been a concern of Texans for the last 20 years that I have served on a state committee but COVID has brought abuses we would never have imagined. Texans will not stand for letting Anyone usurp their religious freedoms in any way so implore you to support this bill and Representative Leach's bill too.

It is up to every single one of you, since this is a non partisan issue, to stand for our Constitutional Freedom of Religion. By crafting expert Religious Freedom legislation other states will look to the example that we as Texans set. Texans have always been strong leaders and it is up to you to uphold that tradition.

Mark McCaig

Texas Republican Initiative

Houston, TX

Texas Republican Initiative strongly supports HB 1239. Churches and other religious institutions are most needed during times of crisis and distress. This bill ensures that government officials cannot close down houses of worship during times when they are needed most in our communities. We thank Rep. Sanford for his leadership on this important issue.

Adrian Metzger

self

Luling, TX

I am in favor of any bill that prohibits the closure of religious institutions under any circumstances. Religious institutions must stay open and stay open fully.

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Susan Cornett

Self

Leakey, TX

In NO way should our religious freedom of meeting for religious meetings or services be denied the very support people access during difficult times or be limited at the discretion of those in power. Our Christian Judeo Rights ARE OUR POWER to uphold our state and nation!

Beverly Roberts, Mrs.

Self, Retired teacher

Houston, TX

I am asking that all members of this committee vote YES on HB by Rep. Sanford. Freedom of religion is enshrined in our U.S. Constitution and our national motto and reflects the principles of millions of our nation's citizens. Protect that freedom, even during an emergency, by allowing all places of worship to remain open at all times. The government depends on these caring communities of faith during times of need to protect those who have lost basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter.

Partial text of the bill: BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Article I, Texas Constitution, is amended by adding Section 6-a to read as follows:

Sec. 6-a. This state or a political subdivision of this state may not enact, adopt, or issue a statute, order, proclamation, decision, or rule that prohibits or limits religious services, including those conducted in churches, congregations, and places of worship in this state by a religious organization established to support and serve the propagation of a sincerely held religious belief.

WILMA JOY PUTNAM, MRS.

SELF

GEORGETOWN, TX

I support HB 1239 as I believe it will sufficiently address the suspension of laws protecting religious freedom and forced closures of places of worship that occurred across TEXAS at the beginning of , and in some locations, throughout the state-wide LOCKDOWN DUE TO Covid

Michael Sweeney

Self - Business Owner

Georgetown, TX

I support HB-1239 and ask the committee to pass this legitimization to stop government overreach infringing on our Constitutional Rights as provided under the 1st Amendment to gather freely in the exercise of our religious freedoms without interference or control.

Julia Dahlberg

Self

LA VERNIA, TX

IN SUPPORT OF
TEXAS HOUSE BILLS: HB525, HB1239, HB1487, HB1691, HJR72
PROTECTING RELIGIOUS LIBERTY
87th LEGISLATURE OF TEXAS

As a member of our church's safety response ministry, I would like to bring the committee's attention to the importance of protecting our religious liberty from a different vantage point.

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Our safety response ministry upholds a mission of ensuring an environment of comfort, refuge, learning and worship to all members and visitors who come through our doors. We take that mission very seriously and have a zero-tolerance policy on interruption of services, in order to maintain that safe and secure environment for our church family. If ever there has been the need for comfort and refuge for people who are hurting in these uncertain times of trials and fear, this last year has been it.

Due to the Governor's unchecked mandates regarding which businesses and activities are essential or not; the confusing and unclear expectations in enforcement of pandemic-related mandates against gatherings; and an inconsistent understanding by state and local authorities, our First Amendment protections have been threatened.

When we all saw instances across the state and nation where law enforcement officers were locking church doors and threatening church family and church leadership with citations and arrest for simply attempting to exercise their right to worship, church protectors like me are forced to envision a scenario where we could potentially have to become the last barrier between law enforcement officers – who have sworn an oath to protect our Constitutional right to freely worship – and our church family trying to exercise that right. And, forced to decide between our great respect for our law enforcement officers and protecting the right of our church family to worship without interruption. A scenario like that should never be imaginable in a free America and certainly not in the great State of Texas.

This overreach has placed church leadership at odds with law enforcement and local leaders – relationships that generally would be one of strength and collaboration in support and protection of the church family's free expression of their faith.

Even though I find it unbelievable that we even need to be having this conversation, the pandemic response has clearly shown that without this additional protection in our state law, the constitutional guarantees for Texas citizens are open to interpretation by those in authority who may not respect those protections. We cannot allow this to continue, unchecked. Passing HB525, HB1239, HB1487, HB1691, HJR72. would ensure in Texas law, that the appropriate 'hands off' language is made perfectly clear as it applies to religious liberty.

I urge each of you to publicly support and vote for HB525, HB1239, HB1487, HB1691, HJR72 to protect religious liberty in Texas. Thank you for your time and your service.

Dianna Biscan

SELF

Plano, TX

Very little 2020 election fraud was investigated and prosecuted. Some are intentionally denying the facts of electronic vote manipulation. Why?

HB6 CAIN

We are fed up with "business as usual" state politics. We demand stronger statewide oversight, fraud reporting, training, and standards for all officers, observers, poll workers, or volunteers involved in elections. We must have real-time transparency of all voters and audits, increased security and preservation of records, deterrents, and reduced opportunity for fraud; much more severe penalties for violators, and more prosecutions. Only lawful Texas resident citizens with current picture state ID should participate in any aspect of our elections. We demand 100% transparency and auditability of all: ballots, records, systems, logs, hardware, and software, to include contractors, all persons at polling stations, service providers, and manufacturers; no judicial or executive waivers ever, including SOS!

1. 100% Transparency and Auditability: Real-time accountability for open audit of voting records, and active security deterrents with much higher penalties for voter fraud, and the highest mandatory penalty for election fraud (over 20 ballots). Increase ID standards; instant fraud detection; real-time reporting of dead, duplicate or ineligible voters.

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2. Early & Absentee Voting: Early voting must be eliminated or limited to no more than 2 days. End the gap between early voting and Election Day or early release of data; Sunday and Monday before an election day only. Voting Absentee should only be allowed for: (A) in-state residents with a severe physical disability, verified by a doctor within 90 days, and identity-checked by a notary, and (B) Texas resident active duty or activated military reserves outside the State on Election Day. Allowing anyone to vote absentee has opened the door to blatant and rampant fraud.

3. Restrain Computer Usage: Computer election fraud is real. We must return to paper ballots. Outlaw internet connection for all voting systems. Tabulation must be based only on the paper hand count (double-verified, certified by a supervisor with commissioned observers present, and mandatory state audits, all under severe penalties for fraud), no tabulation on computers except for real-time audit, ballot reconciliation, detection of fraud, dead voters, duplicate or repetitive voting, ineligible, or unregistered voters.

4. Federal & Tech Restraints: We demand a resolution that provides severe criminal penalties, fines, arrest, or expulsion for any non-resident, to include any federal agency or social media entity that advocates for or attempts: voter registration, vote-by-mail, application distribution, prison registration, ballot distribution or harvesting, computer intrusion, foreign or external intervention. We DEMAND that federal overreach into Texas elections is stopped. Texas Elections! There should be a constitutional amendment

Darren Meyer, MD

Association of American Physicians and Surgeons

McKinney, TX

I wish to express my support for this bill. I wish this bill were not necessary, as the right to assembly and to worship is already guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. But since our state government exercised its power to place an indefinite emergency order in contravention to the United States Constitution, it seems a bill such as this is necessary, right, and just; therefore I support the passage of HB 1239.

Karen Page

Retired

San Angelo, TX

Would this bill also include organizations that hold meetings, events, etc at Church's? Whether it be free or rented.

Benjamin Wright

self (pastor)

Leander, TX

I support this bill, and I'm grateful for your consideration.

Derek Meldrum

Self

Deer park, TX

I appose HB 19 I live in The Houston Area I live 2 miles off one of the most traveled roadways in Texas Trucking company who don't have rules or are accountable don't hire the best driver's the hire the cheapest one bring your family and drive on 610n hwy225 or I10 with Un Accountable Trucking company

James Peinado

El Paso Republican Liberty Caucus

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El Paso, TX

I support HB 1239. religious liberty and the free exercise thereof is an inherent right, that no government should be able to infringe upon.

Pandemic restrictions on religious organizations are a relatively recent and dangerous precedent for religious freedom. Case law supports the essential nature of religious organizations and religious services.

The U.S. Supreme Court said it has “long recognized the importance of protecting religious actions, not just religious status.” *Espinoza v. Montana Dep’t of Revenue*, 140 S. Ct. 2246 (2020).

Many churches reported having police officers circle their parking lots even when holding church parking lot services where members sat in their individual spaced-out cars for worship. The fear and intimidation suffered by churches must stop.

Churches are essential because of the spiritual and mental health support they provide in times of crisis. The pandemic and economic stress caused a majority of Americans to face stress and mental health issues. For this reason, churches should be deemed essential.

I support HB 1239

Kristopher Bonilla

Self owner of Integrity Sevices

San Antonio, TX

I strongly support this bill. To remove the Freedom of assembly to worship for any reason is to violate the constitution and strip the American people of the freedoms, history, principals and values this nation was founded upon. A nation that turns it’s back on God is a nation that will surely be destroyed.

Scott Douglas

Myself as a citizen of Texas

Fort Worth, TX

Whether the existence of a Supreme Being outside of space and time that created this universe and all of us can be proved, the idea that all men are created equal and granted rights by said creator is safeguarded by this belief:

Such rights are not the state or governments rights to give or take away, they are immutable and granted by said creator, as laid forth in the Declaration of Independence. I do not trust any government made up of humans to claim the right to give and take such rights and liberties, and I fear these rights will be removed capriciously if we allow political bodies to decide which rights are convenient for them at any given time.

Isabel Ray

self (communications)

Austin, TX

I oppose HB 1239. While this bill is couched in language about “religious protection,” what it’s actually trying to do is gain special treatment for churches--treatment that, in the event of a pandemic such as COVID, puts all of Texas at risk. It is not “discrimination” for members of a church to follow the same public health guidelines as everyone else. When gathering in person is unsafe, churches have the same moral responsibility as everyone else to practice safer methods of communion, such as virtual meetings. Please do not endanger Texans’ health by exempting religious organizations from doing the right thing during a pandemic. Thank you.

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Julie Kellogg

self

Corpus Chrsti, TX

VOTE Yes, never should any local, county, state or federal government entity infringe on our 1st amendment rights. Freedom of religion and freedom to assemble for religious purposes must not be stopped or halted for any reason, or for any real or perceived threat.