

U.S. Senator Rob Portman
448 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown
713 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

Ohio House Speaker Robert Cupp
77 S. High Street, 14th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Ohio Senate President Matt Huffman
1 Capital Square, 2nd Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Governor Mike DeWine
77 S. High Street, 30th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

March 17, 2021

Dear Honorable Senators Rob Portman and Sherrod Brown, and the Honorable House Speaker Robert Cupp, Senate President Matt Huffman, and Governor Mike DeWine,

We are a diverse group of leading clergy representing one hundred-seventeen (117) congregations throughout the Buckeye Bible Belt of North Central Ohio. We are unified by Biblical Truth¹ and follow the instructions found in Matthew 25: to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to take in the stranger, to clothe the naked, to visit the sick and to counsel the incarcerated. Our congregations even serve the LGBT community and their loved ones without prejudice.

Last year in the 133rd Ohio General Assembly, clergy from (100) one hundred diverse congregations in North Central Ohio publicly-opposed ² House Bill 369/Senate Bill 11 which discriminated against people of faith to provide special privilege to the LGBT community. This legislation was defeated for the ninth consecutive time.

Having said this, we believe every human being is made in the image of GOD (Genesis 1). In addition, we collectively accept GOD made male and female (Genesis 1), and the principle that man should render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to GOD the things that are GOD's (Mark 12). Now more than ever, our faith community is unified in our opposition to the immoral Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) bills known as the H.R. 5 Federal "Equality Act" and the Ohio "Fairness Act." With the insertion of abortion as a "federal right" in H.R. 5, it is our understanding that these combined bills together will also:

- 1) Require men and boys be allowed in women's bathrooms, locker rooms and showers if they claim to identify as women
- 2) Require boys be allowed to play in girls' sports in public schools if they claim to identify as women
- 3) Allow government to remove children from parents' custody if they do not consent to dangerous conversion/hormone therapy
- 4) Force women's homeless and domestic violence shelters to allow men who claim to identify as women to bathe and bunk with victimized women
- 5) Force doctors to participate in 'gender transition' procedures
- 6) Prohibit faith-based ministries from operating in line with their religious beliefs

As servants to the orphan, widow, poor, and incarcerated, we believe the following:

I. H.R. 5 and the Ohio Fairness Act are in direct conflict with the separation of church and state

If passed, these two pieces of legislation will establish a state religion and position the state as a sacrilegious theological board that will prohibit free exercise of religion and erase the freedom of speech found in the First Amendment. It is indisputable that similar sexual orientation/ gender identity (SOGI) laws have caused persons to suffer economic disenfranchisement in other states.

For instance, Colorado cake artist Jack Phillips lost forty-percent of his business and over half his staff ³ after being cited by the Colorado Civil Rights Commission for refusing to make a gender-transition cake. Despite winning his case at the U.S. Supreme Court, the State of Colorado showed its hostility toward Mr. Phillips for his religious convictions and filed a lawsuit against him a second time. ⁴

In fact, seventy-four year old floral artist Barronelle Stutzman was forced by Washington State Supreme Court to create custom floral design for a gay wedding against her religious convictions. Despite referring the customer to florists who do provide such services, she is now faced with complying with the court's ultimatum, or face bankruptcy.⁵

II. Secondly, the proponents of H.R. 5 and Ohio Fairness Act have not sufficiently demonstrated the need for this ordinance. We believe Ohio is a tolerant and diverse state. LGBT persons presently have no traits of a discriminated class of people. LGBT persons have the support of corporate and political elites,⁶ have no economic disenfranchisement,⁷ and have no ongoing systemic discrimination.⁸ Furthermore, there is no Ohio law permitting discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation.

III. Thirdly, if passed, H.R. 5 and Ohio Fairness Act will lead to major violations of privacy. Arbitrary re-definitions of gender proposed by this legislation would jeopardize women's privacy and security in public accommodations like restrooms, locker rooms, and showers in public swimming pools and fitness centers. This creates huge privacy concerns for the majority of women who do not want to share these private facilities with members of the opposite biological sex. ⁹

Consequently, in 2016 leading clergy from one hundred-two (102) diverse congregations in Richland County, Ohio publicly-opposed the Obama restroom mandate. Their joint-letter told school and state officials the dictate "defies objectivity and logic by not classifying students as male or female on the basis of their biological sex at birth." They also stated the mandate "triggers intolerance and retribution with people having a different opinion."¹⁰

Tragically, in Anchorage, Alaska, a drunk biological man who identified as a woman was denied access because the faith-based homeless shelter did not want to force vulnerable women to sleep next to a biological man. As a result, the Downtown Hope Center was slapped with a federal lawsuit. ¹¹

IV. Lastly, if passed, H.R. 5 and Ohio Fairness Act will limit access to needed social services by effectively driving out faith-based providers. SOGI laws have been used in several states and localities to shut down faith-based adoption agencies. In Illinois alone, nearly 3,000 children were displaced when this happened.¹² Grants offered through the Violence Against Women Act have a SOGI provision that dictates the hiring practices of institutions that get grants to help battered women. Because this provision violates the conscience of religious institutions, they are unable to provide assistance to desperate battered women.¹³

Sadly, counseling ministries operated by people who have left the transgender lifestyle would likely not be allowed to operate. ¹⁴

In closing, it is our strong conviction the legacy of H.R. 5 and Ohio Fairness Act would be a nightmare for Ohioans, even with religious exemptions. These totalitarian dictates would crush the First Amendment and demolish the wall of separation between church and state. In our estimation, there is no tweaking these two draconian proposals that would flagrantly discriminate against the religious community and freedom-loving Ohioans. Thank you for taking our concerns into consideration.

The following are clergy cosigners representing one hundred- seventeen (117) congregations throughout the Buckeye Bible Belt of North Central Ohio in: Richland County (81), Crawford County (12), Ashland County (9), Morrow County (4), Wayne County (4), Knox County (3), Huron County (2), Medina (1), Stark (1)

Pastor James Mitchell, New Liberty Baptist	Pastor Anthony Cooper, Shelby Life Church
Pastors Les & Grace Farley, Irresistible Church	Pastor John Temple, Loudonville Trinity Community
Pastor George Lewis, Shelby Temple of GOD	Pastor Mike Mack, Trinity United Methodist
Pastor Robert O'Brien, Apostolic Faith Assembly	Pastor Russell Stanford, All Believers in Christs
Pastor Jerry O'Brien, Orville Faith Harvest	Pastor Brian Snow, Fredericktown First Baptist
Pastor Aaron Boggs, Fredericktown Freewill Baptist	Pastor Hank Webb, Belmont Community Church
Pastor Bryan Schatzinger, Mansfield Calvary Chapel	Pastor Rick Maddox, Galion Alliance Church
Pastor Louis Blevins, Latter Rain COGIC	Pastor Ron Smals, Woodville Grace Brethren
Pastor Doug Tackett, Taylortown Community	Pastor Steve Baldridge, Rome Community Church
Pastor Joshua Cole, Tabernacle of Praise	Pastor Jason Price, Victory Baptist Church
Pastor John Grimm, Plymouth United Methodist	Pastor Russell Smith, Shiloh Wesley Evangelical
Pastor Steve Kistler, Bellville New Life Church	Pastor Les Vnasdale, Cornerstone Grace Brethren
Pastor Mark Abel, Southview Grace Brethren	Pastor Christopher Replogle, Crestline Calvary Baptist
Pastor Steve Dennis, Cardington St. Paul Lutheran	Pastor Patrick Bailey, North Bend Church of Brethren
Pastor Mark Wireman, Shiloh Pentecostal Church	Pastor Denny Finnegan, First Evangelical Presbyterian
Pastor Mike Rose, Hope on the Hill Chapel	Pastor John Bouquet, Savannah Bethel Baptist
Pastor Larry Hulver, Lexington New Liberty Baptist	Pastor Ferlie Yates, Hanna Road Church of GOD
Pastor Clint Zeigler, Sovereign Christ Church	Pastor Bill Fox, Crestline Faith Community
Pastor Howdie Burnette, Perrysville Baptist Church	Pastor Chad Hayes, Mansfield Caeserea Baptist
Pastor Ron Puff, Pleasant Valley Baptist	Pastor Brad Gentile, Shelby First Baptist
Pastor Steve Schag, Shelby Calvary Baptist	Elder Moe Hill, Grace Evangelical Free Church
Pastor Rich Rader, Mayflower Congregational	Pastor Eric Byrom, Mansfield Grace Fellowship
Pastor James Spencer, Peoples' Baptist	Pastor Robert Kurtz, Mansfield Temple Baptist
Pastor Bruce Philippi, Journey Life Center	Pastor Mark Dettmer, Pleasant Grove Community
Pastor Matt Pond, First Freewill Baptist	Pastor Earl Eiklor, Cornerstone Freewill Baptist
Pastor Dave Rentzel, Ontario Abundant Life	Pastor Dallas Waggle, Lucas Foursquare Gospel
Pastor Brian Phillips, New Beginnings Freewill	Pastor James Marshall, Ganges Community Church
Pastor Dan Zediker, Mansfield Mission Point	Pastor Clarence Sanderfer, New Life Baptist
Pastor Steve Brennemen, Awakening Church	Pastor Joe Maggelet, Ashland Fellowship Christian Athletes
Pastor Tim Davis, Newville Baptist Church	Pastor J.C. Church, Victory in Truth Ministries
Pastor Patrick Bailey, Danville Church of Brethren	Pastor Ronald Kosa, Living Word Church
Pastor Bruce Copley, Mansfield Faith Chapel	Pastor Dana Gammill, Cathedral of Life
Pastor Christopher Thomas, Diamond Hills Baptist	Pastor David Ferrell, Mansfield Holiness Chapel
Pastor Clyde Kerby, Ministries of Hope & Healing	Pastor El Akuchie, Godsfield House of Prayer
Pastor Ben Gregg, Plymouth Church of GOD	Pastor Rob Ratcliff, North Woodbury Freewill Baptist
Pastor Steve Burkhalter, Ontario Potter's House	Pastor Dink Porter, First Church of Open Bible
Pastor Paul Lintern, Southside Christian	Pastor Paul Lintern, Oakland Lutheran
Pastor David Bates, Galion Unity Freewill Baptist	Pastor Mark Bailey, Mansfield Freewill Baptist
Pastor Rick Lewis, Shelby Church of GOD	Rabbi William Hallbrook, Sar Shalom Center
Pastor George Swain Homerville Grace Brethren	Pastor Layton Broome, Paradise Hill United Methodist
Rabbi Bob Bauer, Beit El Elyon Congregation	Pastor Ricky Branham, Willard Ripley Chapel
Pastor Tim George, Abundant Grace Fellowship	Pastor James Hill, Mansfield Paradise Church
Pastor Matt Potosky, Albion Brethren Church	Pastor Ted Howard, Apostolic Holiness
Pastor Daniel Baer, Mansfield Gospel Assembly	Pastor Paul Matthewson, Maranatha Bible Baptist
Pastor David Parsons, Zion's Refuge Baptist	Pastor Floyd Allen, Philippian Community Church

Pastor Matt Merendino, Clear Fork Alliance
Pastor Kevin Evans, Ganges Liberty Baptist
Pastor Joe Smith, Ontario Westside Baptist
Pastor Art Kennard, Shelby Maranatha Christian
Pastor David Guild, Mansfield Foursquare
Pastor Mike Wilson, Lincoln Heights Baptist
Pastor William Strader Jr., Bucyrus Alliance
Pastor Charles Burgess Jr., West Salem COG
Pastor Glen Phillips, Hillside First COG
Pastor Terry Garrett, Lexington Fusion Church
Pastor Paul Staton, Honey Creek Freewill Baptist
Pastor David Mahon, Galion Apostolic Assembly
Elder James DeWeese, Providence Church
Pastor Robert Bird, Perrysville Vermillion Baptist

Pastor Troy Wooten, Christian Life Center
Pastor Don Wilson, Mansfield Faith Assembly
Pastor Christopher Spencer, Crestline Grace Baptist
Pastor Randy Raynes, Mansfield Fellowship Baptist
Pastor Justin Lawhorn, New Vision Church God Prophecy
Pastor Mark Cobb, Mansfield Providence Baptist
Pastor Todd Grover, Ashland Maranatha Baptist
Pastor Rich Hurlles, Plymouth LifePoint Community Church
Pastor Jeffrey Geaslen, West Salem Christ the Cornerstone
Pastor Joseph Shannon, Living Hope Community Church
Pastor Aaron Williams Jr., Maddox Memorial COGIC
Pastor Matt Smith, Crestline Love Action Church
Pastor Jonas Clawson, Southwood Hills Assembly of GOD

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