

April 20, 2022

To: Mayors & Chambers of Commerce of Ashland, Coshocton, Crawford, Huron, Knox, Morrow, Richland, Stark, and Wayne Counties

Re: **110 North Central Ohio clergy safeguard society from the harms of recreational marijuana and the softening of drug enforcement laws**

Dear Local Economic Leaders:

The stabilizing Judeo-Christian foundations of our society are under assault. With a skyrocketing Opioid Crisis and the implementation of drug-legalization policies, our vibrant communities are being threatened. As the Bible says in the Book of Psalms, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

With Congress actively pursuing the passage of HR 3617 to federally legalize marijuana, and with Congress debating the allocation of \$30 million in federal taxpayer funds to subsidize drug paraphernalia (i.e. crackpipes) and syringe exchanges, (1) it is apparent there are coordinated efforts to decriminalize illicit drug use and further corrupt society.

Closer to home, the Ohio Legislature is considering the Ohio HB 382 recreational marijuana proposal, and the Ohio HB 498 expansion of non-medicinal marijuana use. If these two measures are successfully defeated, it is our understanding a state measure to legalize marijuana will automatically be put on the ballot this coming fall.

We support vibrant communities and encourage policymakers to "Believe Local." Therefore, based on local community standards reflected in its history and leadership, and as clergymen representing one hundred and ten (110) congregations across North Central Ohio, we believe the legalization of recreational marijuana and the relaxation of drug enforcement laws like syringe exchange programs and designated outdoor refreshment areas disrupt health and safety and are morally wrong.

Results from states who have already legalized the Schedule 1 narcotic: marijuana, have shown negative impacts on brain development in youth, increases in road deaths, surges in chronic absenteeism, and the fortification of the black market. (2)

Further, it is our understanding the Village of Crestline in October of 2021, had a month-long experimental "designated outdoor refreshment area," or DORA; the first community in Crawford or Richland counties to do so. (3)

In 2017 the Ohio General Assembly allowed municipalities to have the option to allow people to publicly consume alcohol and be exempt from Open Container Laws inside a DORA zone. It is believed local leaders are considering replicating these ordinances in other nearby localities that will endanger traffic safety with pedestrians (4) and burden our already depleted police departments.

As key stakeholders with numerous drug treatment ministries, we believe the legalization of marijuana, and the ratification of syringe exchange programs and DORA zones do not meet local community standards. There is no question the faith community has historically been unified with one voice in opposing the legalization of marijuana. (5-7) thwarting syringe exchange programs, (8) and countering beer gardens on public property. (9-10) After all, several area police departments display the words "In GOD we trust" on their patrol vehicles.

Our local community standards are based on Judeo-Christian values. You may recall, national headlines of lead clergymen from 150 local congregations across North Central Ohio declaring 2019 as the “Year of the Bible.” (11) Following this declaration at BibleWalk Museum, various elected leaders representing the region have publicly validated these values.

We partner with Mayor Theaker as he works to “make Mansfield the best city in which to live, work, worship and raise a family.” (12) We agree with the Ontario City Council President Gallo who said “Ontario is a faith-based community.” (13) We support Mayor Miller as he “gives the City of Ashland to the LORD Jesus Christ.” (14) And we join the Board of Commissioners in proclaiming “Richland County as ‘God’s Land.’” (15) These are just several public statements reiterating this theme.

In conclusion, just as the “Buy Local” campaign has been ongoing to promote local businesses, local houses of worship are encouraging our economic and civic leaders to “Believe Local” to preserve a vibrant future for our region by adhering to our local community standards. This can be done by safeguarding our communities from the harmful effects of marijuana and the softening of drug enforcement laws like syringe exchange programs and DORA zones. In the words of our state motto, “With GOD all things are possible.”

The following clergymen representing one hundred and ten (110) congregations throughout North Central Ohio are urging the Mayors and Chamber of Commerce’s to “Believe Local” and oppose legalization of recreational marijuana and sanctioning of syringe exchange programs and DORA zones. Lead clergy co-signers include:

Pastor Jerry O’Brien, Orville Faith Harvest	Bishop Anthony Cooper, Shelby Life Church
Pastor Clarence Sanderfer, First Life Baptist	Pastor Chad Hayes, Caesarea Baptist Church
Pastor Dink Porter, Mansfield Open Bible	Pastor Dan Zediker, Mansfield Mission Point
Pastor Dave Rentzel, Ontario Abundant Life	Pastor Hank Webb, Belmont Community Church
Pastor Louis Blevins, Mansfield Latter Rain	Reverend El Akuchie, Godsfield House of Prayer
Pastor Mark Meyer, Lexington GracePoint	Pastors Les & Grace Farley, Irresistible Church
Pastor Bruce Philippi, Journey Life Center	Pastor Christopher Thomas Diamond Hills Baptist
Pastor Chad Berry, New Liberty Baptist	Pastor Art Kennard, Shelby Maranatha Christian Ctr.
Pastor James Spencer, People’s Baptist	Pastor Patrick Bailey, North Bend Church Brethren
Pastor Mark Dettmer, Pleasant Grove Church	Pastor Brian Phillips, New Beginnings Freewill Baptist
Pastor Robert Kurtz, Mansfield Baptist Temple	Pastor Doug Tackett, Taylortown Community Church
Pastor Russell Stanford, All Believers in Christ	Elder Moe Hill, Grace Evangelical Free Church
Rabbi William Hallbrook, Ontario Sar Shalom	Pastor Bryan Schatzinger, Mansfield Calvary Chapel
Pastor Robert O’Brien, Apostolic Faith	Pastor Lex Vnasdale, Cornerstone Grace Brethren
Pastor Steve Schag, Shelby Calvary Baptist	Pastor Dan Baer, Mansfield Gospel Assembly
Pastor Paul Staton, Honey Creek Baptist	Pastor Dallas Waggle, Lucas Four Square Church
Pastor Ben Gregg, Plymouth Church of GOD	Pastor Steven Conn, Bethel Freewill Baptist
Pastor Joe Nichols, ARC Empowerment Ctr.	Pastor Brad Gentile, Shelby First Baptist Church
Pastor J.C. Church, Victory in Truth Ministries	Pastor Bobby Edwards, Jesus is Alive Holiness
Pastor Russ Smith, Shiloh Wesley Evangelical	Pastor Mark Wireman, Shiloh Pentecostal Church
Pastor Steve Brennemen, Awakening Christian	Pastor Aaron Boggs, Fredericktown Freewill Baptist
Rabbi Bob Bauer, Beit El Elyon Messianic	Pastor Rob Ratcliff, North Woodbury Freewill Baptist
Pastor Ed Colegrove, Edison Enterprise Baptist	Pastor Christopher Repogle, Crestline Calvary Baptist
Pastor Ron Smals, Woodville Grace Brethren	Pastor David Bates, Galion Unity Freewill Baptist
Pastor Clint Zeigler, Sovereign Christ Church	Pastor John Temple, Loudonville Trinity Community
Pastor Layton Broome, Hayesville United Methodist	Pastor Layton Broome, Lakefork United Methodist
Elder James DeWeese, Mansfield Providence	Pastor Aaron Rose, Madison Fusion Church
Pastor John Bouquet, Savannah Bethel Baptist	Pastor Mike Rose, Hope on the Hill Chapel
Pastor Robert Bird, Vermillion Baptist Church	Pastor George Lewis, Shelby Temple of GOD
Pastor James Marshall, Ganges Community	Pastor John Campos, Bowman St. Church of GOD

Pastor Troy Wooten, Christian Life Center
Pastor Faron Cole, Eastern Rd. Church of GOD
Pastor Joe Silvestri, Wooster Bible Church
Pastor Joe Smith, Ontario Westside Baptist
Pastor Steve Baldrige, Rome Community
Pastor Clyde Kerby, Hope & Healing Ministries
Pastor Ferlie Yates, Hanna Road Church GOD
Pastor James Hill, Mansfield Paradise Church
Pastor Sheldon Mencer, Mission 3:16 Church
Pastor Jason Price, Mansfield Victory Baptist
Pastor James Mitchell, Polk New Liberty Baptist
Pastor Rich Hurles, Plymouth LifePoint Church
Pastor Paul Lintern, Oakland Lutheran
Pastor Floyd Allen, Philippiian Community Church
Pastor Dave Guild, Mansfield Foursquare
Pastor John Grimm, Greenwich United Methodist
Pastor Kevin Evans, Ganges Liberty Baptist
Pastor Chris Spencer, Crestline Grace Baptist
Pastor David Parsons, Zion's Refuge Baptist
Pastor Berry Carter, Massillon Bible Church
Elder Henry Bradley, New Community Temple
Bishop Andy Keim, Amish Perry District 1
Pastor Bill Fox, Crestline Faith Community
Pastor Lucian Baker, Christ the King Church
Pastor Danny Akers, Victory Rock Praise & Worship

Pastor Matthew Pond, Shelby First Freewill Baptist
Pastor Randy Raynes, Mansfield Fellowship Baptist
Pastor Tim George, Abundant Grace Fellowship
Bishop Sylvester Ginn, Hesus Agape Fellowship
Pastor Glenn Phillips, Hillside First Church of GOD
Pastor Ron Puff, Pleasant Valley Baptist
Pastor Joe Maggelet, Ashland Fellowship Christian
Bishop Rick Lewis, Shelby First Church of GOD
Pastor Matt Merendino, Clear Fork Alliance
Pastor Matthew Potosky, Albion Brethren Church
Pastor David Mahon, Apostolic Assembly Galion
Pastor Eric Byrom, Mansfield Grace Fellowship
Pastor Paul Lintern, Southside Christian Church
Pastor Rick Wiseman, Promised Land Fellowship
Pastor Brian Snow, Fredericktown First Baptist
Pastor John Grimm, Plymouth United Methodist
Pastor Paul Matthewson, Shelby Maranatha Bible
Pastor Bill Strader, Bucyrus First Alliance
Pastor Dr. Ricky Branham, Willard Ripley Chapel
Pastor David Ferrell, Mansfield Holiness Chapel
Pastor Jeffrey Geaslen, West Salem Christ Cornerstone
Bishop Eli Miller, Amish Perry District 2
Pastor Joe Stafford, Galion Wesley Chapel
Pastor Eddie Massey, Mt. Vernon Apostolic Faith
Pastor Matt Smith, Crestline Love Action Church

These listed clergymen endorsees are from congregations located in 9 counties throughout the state. Counties represented in the letter include: Richland (74), Crawford (11), Ashland (7), Wayne (5), Knox (4), Morrow (4), Huron (3), Coshocton (1), and Stark (1).

References:

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- (3) "Crestline launches monthlong DORA trial run this Thursday, allowing outdoor drinking," by Gere Goble, Bucyrus Telegraph-Forum, October 6, 2021, <https://www.bucyrustelegraphforum.com/story/news/2021/10/06/crawford-richland-counties-get-designated-outdoor-refreshment-area-along-seltzer-street-crestline/6024475001/>
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- (5) "Clergymen representing 70 congregations oppose medical marijuana in Richland County," Richland Source, March 5, 2017, http://www.richlandsource.com/news/clergymen-representing-congregations-oppose-medical-marijuana-in-richland-county/article_8d0b02b2-010a-11e7-a4a7-7b1361141b2d.html
- (6) "Economic leaders says local clergy prevented cannabis company from coming to Ontario," Frontlines Ohio, June 20, 2017, <http://frontlinesohio.com/index.php/2017/06/20/economic-leader-says-local-clergy-prevented-cannabis-company-from-coming-to-ontario/>

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- (9) "Ohio county fair nixes beer sales after criticism," Akron Beacon Journal, May 29, 2012 <https://www.beaconjournal.com/article/20120529/NEWS/305299255>
- (10) "Year-long fight over alcohol in Galion still brewing," by Zack Lemon, Mansfield News Journal, June 1, 2016, <https://www.mansfieldnewsjournal.com/story/news/local/2016/06/01/year-long-fight-over-alcohol-galion-still-brewing/84994284/>
- (11) "150 Ohio Pastors Sign Year of the Bible Proclamation: 'Bible Illiteracy Is Plaguing Our Politically-Correct Society'" by Heather Clark, Christian News Network, January 21, 2019, <https://christiannews.net/2019/01/21/150-ohio-pastors-sign-year-of-the-bible-proclamation-bible-illiteracy-is-plaguing-our-politically-correct-society/>
- (12) "2020 State of the City," March 31, 2020, City of Mansfield, <https://ci.mansfield.oh.us/2020-state-of-the-city/>
- (13) "After council vote on menorah, Ontario seen in a new light (SLIDESHOW)," Frontlines Ohio, November 29, 2021, <http://frontlinesohio.com/index.php/2021/11/29/after-council-vote-on-menorah-ontario-seen-in-a-new-light-slideshow/>
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