

HB 575 -- MO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM PROTECTION ACT

SPONSOR: Riley

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Special Committee on Government Accountability by a vote of 10 to 4.

This bill establishes the "Missouri Religious Freedom Protection Act", which prohibits a public official, as defined in the bill, from issuing an order that has the effect of limiting or prohibiting religious groups from holding religious services or meetings.

The bill also prohibits a public official from issuing an order that has the effect of limiting or prohibiting places of worship from holding religious services or meetings.

These prohibitions do not apply to religious groups using places of worship to intentionally commit or plan to commit acts of violence or harm against others, or to emergency evacuation orders involving imminent danger from flooding, fires, tornadoes, earthquakes, terrorist threats, civil unrest, or hazardous material incidents that apply generally to the area where the worship or the residences of its members are located. Once the imminent danger has passed, religious service will be allowed to resume.

These prohibitions can not be interpreted to exclude places of worship from complying with applicable building and fire codes.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that the bill is broader than others and will prohibit closing religious buildings in most situations. The right to worship must be protected.

Testifying for the bill was Representative Riley.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that the bill does not apply equally to all as it should. The language in the bill is ambiguous as to what "civil unrest" is.

Testifying against the bill were Arnie Dienoff; Nikolas Nartowicz, Americans United for Separation of Church and State; Ryan Jayne, Freedom From Religion Foundation; Brian Kaylor, Word&Way; Churchnet; and American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.