

HCS HB 746 -- FREE EXERCISE OF RELIGION

SPONSOR: Baker

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

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 746.

This bill prohibits the state, any state agency, political subdivision, county commission, county health board, or any person from prohibiting or restricting the free exercise of religion, including attendance or participation in any prayer, service, meeting, or similar religious activity, during an emergency.

During an emergency, any hospital under Chapter 197, RSMo., cannot limit visiting hours for clergy or persons ordained for religious or pastoral duties if requested by a patient or the family of a critically ill patient, in accordance with such hospital's established regular visitation hours and security protocols.

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that the bill will protect the right to worship for all Missourians during emergencies. Missourians rely heavily on their faith and should not be prohibited from exercising their faith.

Testifying for the bill was Representative Baker.

OPPOSERS: Those who oppose the bill say that the bill is dangerous because it ignores hospital regulations during an emergency. The bill does not apply equally to all.

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.