

HCS HB 75 -- MISSOURI RELIGIOUS FREEDOM PROTECTION ACT

SPONSOR: Loy

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Emerging Issues by a vote of 10 to 4. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules-Administrative by a vote of 7 to 2.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 75.

This bill establishes the "Missouri Religious Freedom Protection Act". The bill specifies that no public official can issue an order that has the effect of limiting or prohibiting a religious group or place of worship from holding religious services or meetings.

This prohibition does not apply to religious groups using places of worship to intentionally commit or plan acts of violence.

This prohibition is not to be interpreted to exempt places of worship from complying with applicable building and fire codes.

This bill is the same as HB 1959 (2024) and HB 293 (2023).

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 many fundamental rights were overlooked during the COVID pandemic and that the provisions of this bill add an extra layer of protection for religious practitioners. For instance, during the pandemic lock downs, citizens could freely visit places like casinos or liquor stores, but not churches. Supporters further say that although the practice of religion is embedded in the US Constitution, that right has been unequally applied, especially since government officials of certain municipalities allowed religious people to congregate, while other municipalities did not. Supporters say such restrictions are counterproductive because studies show that regular church attendance helps with mental health issues.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Loy; Byron Keelin, Freedom Principle Mo; Jennifer Houcek; Timothy Faber; and Arnie Dienoff.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that the provisions of this bill go too far because it ties the hands of public officials who should have the ability to protect their communities. Opponents further say that the language in the bill would actually impose restrictions on the practice of religion, which is the very thing that this bill seeks to eliminate.

Testifying in person against the bill were Brian Kaylor, Word&Way; and American Civil Liberties Union Of Missouri.

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