

HB 2760 -- HOUSES OF WORSHIP

SPONSOR: Pouche

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Emerging Issues by a vote of 8 to 4. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules-Legislative by a vote of 9 to 2 with 1 member voting present.

This bill establishes the "Protecting Religious Assembly in States of Emergency (PRAISE) Act".

The bill specifies that during a state of emergency declared by the Governor or through orders issued by the Department of Health and Senior Services regarding infectious, contagious, communicable, or dangerous diseases, neither the State nor any political subdivision can impose restrictions on a religious house of worship with the intent to make, or the effect of making, religious services impractical. Such orders cannot prohibit religious services that are held on private property.

An exception is made for emergency evacuation orders that apply generally to the area, but once the imminent danger has passed, religious services will be allowed to resume.

If the State or any of its political subdivisions impose restrictions on religious houses of worship during an emergency, affected religious houses of worship can bring a civil action for relief. Relief sought can include injunctive orders, compensatory damages, nominal damages, declaration of violation, and punitive damages.

This bill is similar to HB 2035; and HB 1194 (2025).

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that this bill will clarify constitutionally protected religious rights. Supporters further state that without this clarification, faith communities would be subject to local officials having the ability to prevent church services or gatherings. This bill would serve as a preemptive measure to ensure that COVID-like policies will not happen again, in which churches were ordered not to conduct regular services.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Pouche; and Arnie Dienoff.

OPPOSERS: Those who oppose the bill say that this bill would go too far in its objectives, primarily because it would effectively

tie the hands of public health officials whose job it is to protect all citizens, especially during a pandemic. Opponents further state that courts already serve as a check against overreach when local officials pass unneeded laws, rules, or regulations, and churches should not receive a special exemption.

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

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.