

HB 61 -- RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ACT

SPONSOR: Schnelting

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Special Committee on Government Accountability by a vote of 9 to 4. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules- Administrative Oversight by a vote of 9 to 4.

This bill establishes the "Missouri Religious Liberty 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 shall be allowed to resume.

PROponents: Supporters say that the bill protects the religious liberty and right that every Missourian has. Houses of worship play a significant role in our society so we must protect every Missourians right to attend houses of worship.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Schnelting; and Don Hinkle, Missouri Baptist Convention.

OPponents: Those who oppose the bill say that the bill is not balanced. While houses of worship should not be treated any less than other facilities, it should not be treated any more than them either. This bill will endanger lives of many people. The Religious Freedom Restoration Act already regulates these issues.

Testifying against the bill were Arnie Dienoff; Americans United for Separation of Church and State; Ryan Jayne, Freedom From Religion Foundation; Brian Kaylor, Word&Way; Churchnet; Kelsey Thurman; 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.