

INTERIM RESOLUTION 2023-003

REQUESTING THAT THE ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PROCLAIM JANUARY 23, 2024, TO BE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM DAY.

WHEREAS, our country's democracy is rooted in the fundamental truth that all people are created equal and endowed with certain unalienable rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and

WHEREAS, the freedom of conscience was highly valued by the individuals seeking religious freedom who settled in the American colonies early; the founders of the United States; and Thomas Jefferson, who wrote in his letter to the Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church at New London, Connecticut, dated February 4, 1809: "No provision in our constitution ought to be dearer to man, than that which protects the rights of conscience against the enterprizes of the civil authority"; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom was drafted by Thomas Jefferson, who considered the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom to be one of his greatest achievements, enacted on January 16, 1786, and the forerunner to the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution; and

WHEREAS, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution protects the right of individuals to freely express their religious beliefs and to act peacefully on those religious beliefs and also protects individuals from coercion to profess or act on a religious belief to which they do not adhere; and

WHEREAS, Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1798 that each right encompassed in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution is independent of the other rights described in that amendment, "thereby guarding in the same sentence and under the same words, the freedom of religion, of speech, and of the press; insomuch that whatever violates either throws down the sanctuary which covers the others"; and

1           WHEREAS, in 1822, Thomas Jefferson wrote that the constitutional  
2 freedom of religion is "the most inalienable and sacred of all human rights";  
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5           WHEREAS, individuals who have studied United States democracy from an  
6 international perspective, including Alexis de Tocqueville, have noted that  
7 religion plays a central role in preserving the United States Government  
8 because religion provides the moral base required for democracy to succeed;  
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11           WHEREAS, after quoting George Mason's statement from the Virginia  
12 Declaration of Rights that "all men are equally entitled to the free exercise  
13 of religion according to the dictates of conscience", President Franklin D.  
14 Roosevelt went on to state in a 1935 speech delivered at the University of  
15 Notre Dame, "in the conflict of policies and of political systems which the  
16 world today witnesses, the United States has held for its own guidance and  
17 for the guidance of other Nations if they will accept it, this great torch of  
18 liberty of human thought, liberty of human conscience. We will never lower  
19 it"; and  
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21           WHEREAS, religious freedom "has been integral to the preservation and  
22 development of the United States", and "the free exercise of religion goes  
23 hand in hand with the preservation of our other rights", as expressed by  
24 President George H.W. Bush in his Presidential Proclamation on Religious  
25 Freedom Day in 1993; and  
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27           WHEREAS, "our laws and institutions should not impede or hinder but  
28 rather should protect and preserve fundamental religious liberties", as  
29 expressed by President William Jefferson Clinton in his remarks accompanying  
30 the signing of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993; and  
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32           WHEREAS, "We must continue to proclaim the fundamental right of all  
33 peoples to believe and worship according to their own conscience, to affirm  
34 their beliefs openly and freely, and to practice their faith without fear or  
35 intimidation", as expressed by President Clinton in his Presidential  
36 Proclamation on Religious Freedom Day in 1998; and

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WHEREAS, "Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right that must be upheld by every nation and guaranteed by every government", as expressed by President Clinton in his Presidential Proclamation on Religious Freedom Day in 1999; and

WHEREAS, "Religious faith has inspired many of our fellow citizens to help build a better Nation" in which "people of faith continue to wage a determined campaign to meet needs and fight suffering", as expressed by President George W. Bush in his Presidential Proclamation on Religious Freedom Day in 2003; and

WHEREAS, the principle of religious freedom "has guided our Nation forward" and "is a universal human right to be protected here at home and across the globe," as expressed by President Barack Obama in his presidential proclamations on Religious Freedom Day in 2011 and 2013, respectively; and

WHEREAS, in *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, 572 U.S. 565 (2014), Justice Anthony M. Kennedy stated that "people of many faiths may be united in a community of tolerance and devotion"; and

WHEREAS, for many people in the United States, faith is an integral part of every aspect of daily life and is not limited to their homes, houses of worship, or doctrinal creeds; and

WHEREAS, the role of religion in the society and public life of the United States has a long and robust tradition,

NOW THEREFORE,  
BE IT RESOLVED BY THE ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL OF THE NINETY-FOURTH  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

THAT the Arkansas Legislative Council proclaim January 23, 2024, as "Religious Freedom Day", honor the anniversary of the enactment of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, and affirm that religious freedom is a fundamental human right.

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Respectfully submitted,

Representative Mary Bentley  
District 54

Senator Kim Hammer  
District 16

Prepared by: DTP/DTP