

Written Testimony Presented by

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to the

Labor Relations Committee

of the

Pennsylvania House of Representatives

House Bill 2626

I am Dr. Al Cremard, Senior Pastor of the Independent Bible Church of Duryea, Pennsylvania. I regret that I am not able to appear before you but many months before this Hearing was announced I agreed to be out-of-state for these days. Please accept my written comments for now, but be assured that I would be glad to meet with the Committee on some occasion in the future and I would be glad to discuss these matters with you as individuals as you desire.

I have ministered as the pastor of Independent Bible Church since June of 1975. The members and friends of our church have residences and work places scattered throughout the valley. We are part of the special culture that is here, and we find that many who have never lived here do not fully comprehend how we all think up here. We are who we are, and we allow outsiders to just get over it if they think we should change! By way of personal note, in addition to being a pastor of a church, my wife and I have had a family and have utilized Christian schools to educate my two daughters from elementary school through their bachelor's degree. Subsequent to collegiate training, one of the two, the eldest, taught in the Christian high school from which she graduated. Through many different experiences, I have been rather deeply involved in the Christian education movement.

I also host and lead a local Pastor's Fellowship in North Eastern Pennsylvania which meets monthly at our Church's facility. This meeting, although loosely organized, serves over fifty local churches located throughout the region. Like our Duryea church, these pastors and congregations are part of this the communities that dot the landscape.

House Bill 2626 recently came to my attention and the attention of those in our pastor's fellowship. At a recent meeting, we talked about this bill to consider its content. As one pastor commented, he has been hearing all about the current events involving the Roman Catholic Bishop and some of the teachers. He just presumed that this was an internal struggle and he felt that the struggle was none of his business but the business of those in the Roman Catholic Church. There was agreement with that among our pastors. However, as the pastors discerned that there was now a House Bill, they became increasingly concern as to the implications for those outside the Catholic Church and even outside the Scranton area. This group discussion among pastors has led me to take some time for you as a Committee. I am pleased to have this opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of my local church and these churches of our fellowship.

There seems to be a misunderstanding of the differences between religious and secular education and the ministry offered by Christian teachers to the families of any local Church assembly. For example, I see that religious education is considered to be "commerce." By that word I believe you mean the church is engaged in "the large scale buying and selling of goods and service."¹ By using this word the idea of ministry is completely ignored and the concept of Christian Education is missed. My daughter's education, BS in Education, Math and Science, was not considered by us to be a commodity she was selling to the highest bidder. It is an academic degree to be used to minister to Evangelical Christian families in Northeast Pennsylvania. We considered this a ministry because she was expected to, and personally wanted to infuse Biblical principles into Math and Science just as other teachers infused those principles into their subject areas. She was not selling religion but she was strengthening the hand of pastors and families in Christian principles that transcended the rote of one plus one. She was not just teaching academics for she was also teaching through her personal life what the Scriptures describe as a life that honors the Lord. The desired end of Christian school ministry is "to encourage the careful and sensitive weaving together of the gospel demands within the life of the Christian community."²

We understand the Scriptural injunction of Ephesians 4:11-13 - *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; (12) For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: (13) Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*" to mean that ministry is to be done by the entire church membership, not just the members of religious orders. To reduce Christian School teachers to a lower position than that of ministers, ordained or not, is to do a disservice to their high calling and to damage to Biblical text indicating the potency of their service to the church.

I believe the language that you are suggestion in this bill will always damage the doctrinal beliefs of any Church once its staffing decision-making policies and procedures are called into question by secular government. For example, the bill states that, "*the board may neither define nor interpret religious doctrine. The board may inquire into whether the espoused doctrine is a pretext for the action of the employer.*" In our view, this will always lead to intrusiveness by the board for it is left to the

¹ Encarta Dictionary, North America.

² Robert W. Pazmino, *Principles & Practices of Christian Education, An Evangelical Perspective*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1992, p.95.

board to determine the validity of the doctrine. Where does employment end and ministry begin? I suggest that there is no difference between the secular and the sacred and all ground for the Christian is sacred. This language seems to pry into the intention rather than the doctrines of the Church.

Again, the language suggest that *"the employee or the employee's representative establishes that the employer's religious justification is a pretext for engaging in any of the unfair labor practices listed in section six."* This still leaves one at the disposal of personal interpretation. Ultimately, it will lead to the Board determining what the local church may and may not believe. Who will prevail in a dispute of the nature suggested? Will the State begin to dabble in Church polity? For example, if the evangelical church hires a teacher, that teacher has been approved and voted upon by a school board and by a congregation as to salary, and the teacher given the option to accept or reject the offer. If accepted, and then the teacher becomes disgruntled with the Church, will the state impose itself and reverse the votes of the congregation?

It is of no satisfaction that mediators and PLRB members are guided to make "right" decisions. It is of no satisfaction that differences could be adjudicated. With the enactment of legislation such as this, a government takeover has happened. It is of little consequence if the churches have acted prudently and properly. The sheer weight of defending its actions in the face of a secular decision-making criteria would be stifling. This is the very reason why our founding fathers recognized the urgency of religious liberty in this new land.

As stated previously, I have lived and ministered in this valley for a considerable time and the various pastors of our fellowship also have some longevity. We, like most citizens of this area have read and heard zillions of words about the Catholic schools, the teachers, and the Bishop and his staff. I as a pastor, and we as pastors, are also very familiar with how churches of the protestant, evangelical faith can go through disagreements on a full range of issues. I suggest to you as a committee that even with the problem at hand, the Catholic Schools of Northeastern Pennsylvania seem to have devised capable of dealing with their internal situation. According to the transcript of the committee hearing conducted on August 18, there may be a lot of internal debate within the Catholic church as to whether or not the actions of the Bishop are supported by Catholic Canon Law. Fine. Let the Catholic Church sort that out. It certainly appears that they have the internal mechanism in place to do this. That is their business.

Committee members, I as a pastor, and we as a group of pastors, are very conscious of how people can reach out to leaders when they wish for others to solve their problems. Please allow me to

demonstrate this and to apply it. (1) We as pastors experience this regularly with our parishioners and we have to learn how to gracefully tell parishioners when it is not our responsibility to solve their problems; and if we seek to do so, we are not really helping them learn to solve their own problems. (2) We as pastors experience this regularly as folks from other churches approach us seeking advice, counsel, and even intervention in their church. It takes some wisdom to keep out of the affairs of other churches, even if those churches are part of our pastor's fellowship. It sometimes takes diplomacy to explain to people why we will not get involved. (3) I suggest a parallel position is appropriate for legislators at times, too. Legislators can't solve everything for everyone any more than pastors can. In this instant matter involving the Catholic schools and their teachers, the best action you can take is to gracefully tell your constituents that it is not government's task to solve the internal matters of any church. We view HB 2626 as a reaction to a matter best left to the Bishop, his counselors, and the internal system that is part of the polity of this well-established church. Government should stay out of it.

Thank you for your consideration.