

By: Representative Bentley
By: Senator G. Stubblefield

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION
TO PROCLAIM RELIGIOUS FREEDOM DAY.

Subtitle
TO PROCLAIM RELIGIOUS FREEDOM DAY.

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

WHEREAS, the freedom of conscience was highly valued by 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 express freely and to act peacefully on their 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 violated either, throws down the sanctuary which covers the others"; and in 1822, he wrote that the constitutional freedom of religion is "the most inalienable and sacred of all human rights"; and

WHEREAS, individuals who have studied United States democracy from an international perspective, including Alexis de Tocqueville, have noted that religion plays a central role in preserving the United States Government because religion provides the moral base required for democracy to succeed; and

WHEREAS, after quoting George Mason's statement from the Virginia Declaration of Rights that "all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion according to the dictates of conscience", President Franklin D. Roosevelt went on to state in a 1935 speech delivered at the University of Notre Dame, "in the conflict of policies and of political systems, which the world today witnesses, the United States has held for its own guidance and for the guidance of other nations if they will accept it, this great torch of liberty of human thought, liberty of human conscience. We will never lower it"; and

WHEREAS, religious freedom "has been integral to the preservation and development of the United States", and "the free exercise of religion goes hand in hand with the preservation of our other rights", as expressed by President George H.W. Bush in his Presidential Proclamation on Religious Freedom Day in 1993; and

WHEREAS, "our laws and institutions should not impede or hinder but rather should protect and preserve fundamental religious liberties", as expressed by President William Jefferson Clinton in his remarks accompanying the signing of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993; and

WHEREAS, we "continue to proclaim the fundamental right of all peoples to believe and worship according to their own conscience, to affirm their beliefs openly and freely, and to practice their faith without fear or intimidation", as expressed by President Clinton in his Presidential Proclamation on Religious Freedom Day in 1998; and

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 (2013), the United States Supreme Court quoted John Adams that "people of many faiths may be united in a community of tolerance and devotion"; and

WHEREAS, for countless people of 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 HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NINETY-FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS, THE SENATE CONCURRING THEREIN:

THAT the House of Representatives and the Senate concurring, proclaim January 16, 2023, 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.