

Members
Arizona Senate
1700 W Washington St
Phoenix Arizona 85007

Re: HB 2648, Religious Services; Essential Services

Dear Senators:

For people of faith, the church is home. It is God's house, where we meet with fellow believers, and where we worship. But it is also the communities' resource, especially during a public crisis.

Churches of all faiths serve their communities on a daily basis. We provide essential services that are vital to the health and welfare of the public – not only in meeting the spiritual needs of our populace, but also supporting social services, health care, and addressing economic needs.

We do these daily as part of our heart's desire to show God's love to our neighbors. In doing so, we ease the strain on government resources, help lift people out of despair, keep families together, and fill hungry bellies.

Religious organizations benefit society as a whole by contributing economically in the way of services provided, charitable activities, educational services, job training programs, and volunteer activities to assist the poor and individuals struggling with addiction or mental illness.

These needs do not cease during a public crisis; they increase substantially. It's during a crisis like the pandemic when churches and their affiliated organizations are most needed for both practical and spiritual assistance.

The emotional toll left by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdown cannot go unmentioned. Many people struggling with the emotional pain of losing a loved one, losing their livelihoods, or aching with loneliness find comfort and healing in a church community.

All this does not exempt the church from emergency governmental mandates, but it certainly should make us as at least as essential as grocery stores, liquor stores, and other essential businesses in the community, especially during public emergencies.

We are asking for nothing more than what God has called us to, and what the First Amendment protects – the freedom to exercise our religion and help serve our neighbors.

Please protect these established rights by passing HB 2648.

Thank you,