Legislative Testimony

In **Opposition** to Senate Bill 520
Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs
March 10, 2026

Written-Only Testimony

Chair Thompson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Logan DeMond, and I am the Director of Policy and Research at the American Civil Liberties Union of Kansas. The ACLU of Kansas is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with more than 35,000 supporters statewide that works to protect and strengthen the civil rights and liberties of all Kansans. On behalf of the ACLU of Kansas, I write in opposition to Senate Bill 520. While everyone deserves to practice their faith free from threats, violence, and property destruction, this bill risks infringing on constitutionally protected speech and protest rights.

The Risk of Redundant, Ill-Defined Laws

Kansas law already prohibits the conduct this bill seeks to address. Existing statutes covering trespass, disorderly conduct, assault, criminal damage to property, and obstruction already allow law enforcement to respond when individuals disrupt religious services or damage places of worship. SB 520 duplicates existing law while significantly increasing criminal penalties for conduct that is already prohibited. This bill, which comes on the heels of public arrests in Minnesota, is unnecessary in Kansas.

Additionally, the bill uses broad and undefined terms such as “interference,” “intimidation,” and conduct occurring “at a place of worship.” Without clear statutory definitions, these provisions pose serious threats to constitutionally protected activities, such as the right to peaceful protest on public sidewalks near religious institutions. Laws that are overly broad risk chilling lawful expression and assembly protected by the First Amendment.

The bill’s civil enforcement provisions only heighten these concerns. By creating a private cause of action, allowing treble damages, and authorizing the attorney general to pursue civil penalties, SB 520 creates powerful legal tools that could be used to deter or punish lawful protest, thus discouraging individuals from engaging in protected speech out of fear of severe financial liability.

Conclusion

Protecting the right to worship is critically important, but it must be balanced with protecting the fundamental right to free expression. Because Kansas law already provides tools to address disruptive or harmful conduct, SB 520 risks creating unnecessary criminal penalties while

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threatening core constitutional freedoms. On behalf of the ACLU of Kansas, I respectfully urge the members of this Committee to oppose SB 520 and recognize the chilling effect this bill and others like it pose to constitutional freedoms.

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