

STATE OF KANSAS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony on HB 2037

The question of Freedom of Religion seems to be brought up more often than it used to be. For some reason, my ability to express my religious freedoms come under attack from many more sides than some years ago as many claim to be offended by nearly everything. The Christian religion is many times on the receiving end of criticism, and the Christian cross seems to be the focal point of that criticism.

The bill before you was drafted three or four years ago but was simply put aside at the time. Over this summer, my home town of Buhler came under attack for having a Christian cross on the city sign which is on the edge of town in the city park, so introducing this bill seemed appropriate at this time.

The city sign was originally erected at least ten years ago. It is round, about ten feet in diameter and contained a painted scene that portrays the history and values of the community. The original sign contained a Christian cross and wheat in the design, but was needing some refurbishing as it was becoming a little rusty. A logo was also part of the sign that said; "traditional values, progressive ideas." I thought it was well done and portrayed the agricultural and religious heritage of the community very well.

Buhler is a Mennonite community and those who know the history of Mennonites understand the strong ties between hard red winter wheat and the Christian faith within that group of people. Many Mennonite families smuggled hard red winter wheat out of Prussia when they immigrated to the area. Often, they had to leave nearly everything behind but managed to sew kernels of wheat into clothing hems and dolls to hide it from border guards. The reason they left was because they were seeking religious freedom.

HB 2037 allows for religious expression on public property . The Christian cross is probably the most recognized religious symbol in the United States. It is not a symbol of oppression, but one of freedom. But, this bill is not limited to allowing only one kind of religion to express itself, but allows all types, as the forefathers intended. Yes, it even allows atheist religious expression. Atheism is a belief as much as any other belief system so cannot be excluded.

Communities like Buhler so identify with agriculture and Christian faith that separating the two would tell only half the story of the community. I encourage you to pass this bill out favorably to allow the whole story of Buhler, and other communities, to be told.