

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 6, 2020

The Honorable Muriel Bowser
Mayor of Washington, D.C.
1350 Pennsylvania Ave NW #406
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser:

The most sacred fundamental liberties enshrined in our Bill of Rights are those dealing with the human conscience. For that reason, the rights of religious liberty, the free press, petition, and peaceable assembly are first among the original ten amendments.¹ “Conscience,” wrote the father of our Constitution, James Madison, is “the most sacred of all property.”²

However, it would appear that in cities across the United States recently, officials have taken it upon themselves to selectively prioritize public health over these rights for some and not others. We write today requesting an explanation of such an action in the District of Columbia.

While places of worship throughout our nation’s capital were still not allowed to fully reopen under your extended stay-at-home order, your social media accounts simultaneously encouraged and praised people who gathered to demonstrate in large crowds (many without masks). One tweet encouraged people to gather at the newly-named Black Lives Matter Plaza “soon.”³ Another showed you speaking without a mask in the middle of a non-socially distanced crowd with the text “On #BlackLivesMatter Plaza, we said ‘no’ [/] In November we say ‘next’.”⁴ The next day you tweeted that you were “proud of everyone” in a large crowd who came to protest near the White House,⁵ and you retweeted an image of the crowd with the hashtag #DCProud.⁶

¹ U.S. Const. amend. I.

² James Madison, *Property*, National Gazette (1792).

³ Muriel Bowser (@MurielBowser), Twitter (June 6, 2020, 6:37 AM), <https://twitter.com/MurielBowser/status/1269216950053462016>.

⁴ Muriel Bowser (@MurielBowser), Twitter (June 6, 2020, 2:39 PM), <https://twitter.com/MurielBowser/status/126933825700071833.8>.

⁵ Muriel Bowser (@MurielBowser), Twitter (June 7, 2020, 10:12 AM), <https://twitter.com/MurielBowser/status/1269633408860409857>.

⁶ Muriel Bowser (@MurielBowser), Twitter (June 7, 2020, 11:53 AM), <https://twitter.com/MurielBowser/status/1269658830692134912>.

There are only two conclusions that can be derived from this contrast: Either your administration holds the view that the virus cannot be spread among protestors championing causes you believe in, or you believe you have the authority to prioritize the right to assemble over the right to practice one's religion.

Make no mistake: We are ardent supporters of the First Amendment and the right of the American people "peaceably to assemble," but the glaring inconsistency, in this case, is stunning. If people can gather together in large crowds for the sake of calling for justice and police reform, certainly they can congregate in a socially-distanced setting to fulfill their duty to their Creator. A prayer is no more dangerous in a pandemic than a protest.

As the Attorney General has said, the Constitution is not suspended during a crisis, and neither is our founding principle that all American citizens deserve equal treatment under the law. Indeed, it is the principle for which many people are justly protesting. But if we are to take this principle seriously, we cannot have instances where some violations of public safety orders are punished and others are praised. Such discrimination is insulting to our Constitution, our fundamental rights, and our common sense.

We appreciate your efforts in combatting the spread of COVID-19 in the District; however, we are concerned the First Amendment is not being fully protected, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Ralph Norman
Member of Congress



Jody B. Hice
Member of Congress



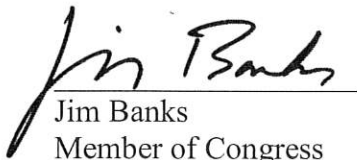
Jeff Duncan
Member of Congress



Kevin Hern
Member of Congress



Andy Biggs
Member of Congress



Jim Banks
Member of Congress



Doug Lamborn
Member of Congress



David P. Roe, M.D.
Member of Congress



Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S
Member of Congress



Thomas Massie
Member of Congress



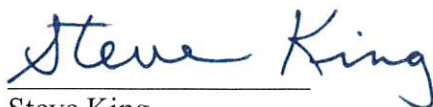
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