

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 8239

To amend title 18, United States Code, to prohibit harassment of persons lawfully exercising or seeking to exercise the First Amendment right of religious freedom at a place of religious worship, within a distance of 100 feet or closer to such place of religious worship, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 9, 2026

Mr. SUOZZI (for himself and Mr. MILLER of Ohio) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

A BILL

To amend title 18, United States Code, to prohibit harassment of persons lawfully exercising or seeking to exercise the First Amendment right of religious freedom at a place of religious worship, within a distance of 100 feet or closer to such place of religious worship, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Safeguarding Access
5 to Congregations and Religious Establishments from Dis-
6 ruption Act” or the “SACRED Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. FREEDOM OF ACCESS TO PLACES OF RELIGIOUS**
2 **WORSHIP.**

3 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 13 of title 18, United
4 States Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-
5 lowing:

6 **“§ 251. Freedom of access to places of religious wor-**
7 **ship**

8 “(a) PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES.—Whoever, in or af-
9 fecting interstate or foreign commerce—

10 “(1) engages in any course of conduct within
11 100 feet of a place of religious worship, with the in-
12 tent to intimidate or obstruct the passage of any
13 person exercising or seeking to exercise the First
14 Amendment right to religious freedom therein, and
15 in a manner that causes any person to reasonably
16 fear for their physical safety while entering or
17 exiting the place of religious worship; or

18 “(2) within 100 feet of a place of religious wor-
19 ship, intentionally approaches and harasses any per-
20 son seeking to exercise the First Amendment right
21 to religious freedom, within 8 feet of such person,
22 shall be punished as provided in subsection (b).

23 “(b) PENALTIES.—Whoever violates this section
24 shall—

1 “(1) in the case of a first offense, be fined in
2 accordance with this title, or imprisoned not more
3 than one year, or both; and

4 “(2) in the case of a second or subsequent of-
5 fense after a prior conviction under this section, be
6 fined in accordance with this title, or imprisoned not
7 more than 3 years, or both;

8 except that for an offense involving exclusively nonviolent
9 conduct, the fine shall be not more than \$10,000 and the
10 length of imprisonment shall be not more than six months,
11 or both, for the first offense; and the fine shall, notwith-
12 standing section 3571, be not more than \$25,000 and the
13 length of imprisonment shall be not more than 18 months,
14 or both, for a subsequent offense; and except that if bodily
15 injury results, the length of imprisonment shall be not
16 more than 10 years, and if death results, it shall be for
17 any term of years or for life.

18 “(c) CIVIL REMEDIES.—

19 “(1) RIGHT OF ACTION.—

20 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Any person aggrieved
21 by reason of the conduct prohibited by sub-
22 section (a) may commence a civil action for the
23 relief set forth in subparagraph (B), except that
24 such an action may be brought only by a person
25 lawfully exercising or seeking to exercise the

1 First Amendment right of religious freedom at
2 a place of religious worship or by the entity
3 that owns or operates such place of religious
4 worship.

5 “(B) RELIEF.—In any action under sub-
6 paragraph (A), the court may award appro-
7 priate relief, including temporary, preliminary
8 or permanent injunctive relief and compen-
9 satory and punitive damages, as well as the
10 costs of suit and reasonable fees for attorneys
11 and expert witnesses. With respect to compen-
12 satory damages, the plaintiff may elect, at any
13 time prior to the rendering of final judgment,
14 to recover, in lieu of actual damages, an award
15 of statutory damages in the amount of \$5,000
16 per violation.

17 “(2) ACTION BY ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE
18 UNITED STATES.—

19 “(A) IN GENERAL.—If the Attorney Gen-
20 eral of the United States has reasonable cause
21 to believe that any person or group of persons
22 is being, has been, or may be injured by con-
23 duct constituting a violation of this section, the
24 Attorney General may commence a civil action

1 in any appropriate United States District
2 Court.

3 “(B) RELIEF.—In any action under sub-
4 paragraph (A), the court may award appro-
5 priate relief, including temporary, preliminary
6 or permanent injunctive relief, and compen-
7 satory damages to persons aggrieved as de-
8 scribed in paragraph (1)(B). The court, to vin-
9 dicate the public interest, may also assess a
10 civil penalty against each respondent—

11 “(i) in an amount not exceeding
12 \$10,000 for a nonviolent offense and
13 \$15,000 for other first violations; and

14 “(ii) in an amount not exceeding
15 \$15,000 for a nonviolent offense and
16 \$25,000 for any other subsequent viola-
17 tion.

18 “(3) ACTIONS BY STATE ATTORNEYS GEN-
19 ERAL.—

20 “(A) IN GENERAL.—If the Attorney Gen-
21 eral of a State has reasonable cause to believe
22 that any person or group of persons is being,
23 has been, or may be injured by conduct consti-
24 tuting a violation of this section, such Attorney
25 General may commence a civil action in the

1 name of such State, as parens patriae on behalf
2 of natural persons residing in such State, in
3 any appropriate United States District Court.

4 “(B) RELIEF.—In any action under sub-
5 paragraph (A), the court may award appro-
6 priate relief, including temporary, preliminary
7 or permanent injunctive relief, compensatory
8 damages, and civil penalties as described in
9 paragraph (2)(B).

10 “(d) RULES OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this
11 section shall be construed—

12 “(1) to prohibit any expressive conduct (includ-
13 ing peaceful picketing or other peaceful demonstra-
14 tion) occurring outside places of religious worship
15 protected from legal prohibition by the First Amend-
16 ment to the Constitution; or

17 “(2) to provide exclusive criminal penalties or
18 civil remedies with respect to the conduct prohibited
19 by this section, or to preempt State or local laws
20 that may provide such penalties or remedies.

21 “(e) DEFINITIONS.—For purposes of this section:

22 “(1) The term ‘obstruct’ means to render im-
23 passable ingress to or egress from a place of reli-
24 gious worship, or to render passage to or from a

1 place of religious worship unreasonably difficult or
2 hazardous.

3 “(2) The term ‘intimidate’ means to place a
4 person in reasonable apprehension of imminent
5 physical injury to himself or herself or to another
6 person.

7 “(3) The term ‘harass’ means to commit a seri-
8 ous act or engage in a course of conduct directed at
9 a specific person that interferes with their freedom
10 of movement, and is intended to and does place that
11 person in reasonable fear of physical harm, or is in-
12 tended to and does cause that person to reasonably
13 experience substantial emotional distress.

14 “(4) The term ‘course of conduct’ means a se-
15 ries of acts over a period of time, however short, in-
16 dicating a continuity of purpose.

17 “(5) The term ‘serious act’ means a single act
18 of threatening, intimidating, or violent conduct.

19 “(6) The term ‘place of religious worship’
20 means any building, structure or space that is used
21 primarily for religious worship activities or to pro-
22 vide religious education or instruction, and includes
23 the parking lot, parking lot entrance, driveway and
24 driveway entrance of any such building, structure, or
25 space.”.

- 1 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections
2 for chapter 13 of title 18, United States Code, is amended
3 by adding at the end the following:

“251. Freedom of access to places of religious worship.”.

