



Secular Maryland

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February 13, 2024

SB 429 - UNF

Corporations and Associations – Protestant Episcopal Church, Diocese of Washington

Dear Chair William C. Smith Jr., Vice-Chair Jeff Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

The Church of England was established under the Act for the Establishment of Religious Worship enacted by the Maryland Provincial General Assembly in 1702. Parish clergy and rectors were appointed by the Provincial Government and were for the most part loyalists, or priests sent from England. After the Revolution, most of the loyalist clergy fled to England or Canada leaving many parishes without rectors. The question of governance and ownership of Established Church property in Maryland became a concern of vestries. The state's politicians intervened to resolve these issues in the Vestry Acts of 1779 and 1798. The vestry of any Episcopal parish serves as the legislative authority for the parish and transacts the temporal business of the parish. The primary responsibilities are parish finances, maintaining parish facilities, choosing parish leadership, and assisting the rector with religious activities.

There should be no need for the state of Maryland to continue to maintain a law that addressed a temporary problem from several hundreds of years ago for this particular Protestant denomination in this particular state. Instead of bills like this that revise the Vestry Act, Secular Maryland would much prefer a bill that removes all references to the Episcopal Church from state law.

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