



ENACTMENT NEWS

House Bill 504

Disturbing religious gathering - penalties

Effective April 6, 2023

On January 5, 2023, Governor DeWine signed House Bill 504 (Reps. Kevin Miller and Rick Carfagna) into law. The bill increases penalties for the offense of disturbing a lawful meeting when the meeting is a religious gathering. It takes effect on April 6, 2023.

Existing law includes the offense of disturbing a public gathering (R.C. 2917.12). That offense prohibits a person, with purpose to prevent or disrupt a lawful meeting, procession, or gathering, from either doing any act which obstructs or interferes with the due conduct of such meeting, procession, or gathering, or making any utterance, gesture, or display which outrages the sensibilities of the group.

Generally, the offense is a misdemeanor of the fourth degree. H.B. 504 now provides that the violation becomes a first-degree misdemeanor if either of the following applies:

- The violation is committed with the intent to disturb or disquiet any assemblage of people met for religious worship at a tax-exempt place of worship, whether the conduct is inside or outside the place the group is meeting, and disturbs the order and solemnity of the assemblage
- The violation is committed with the intent to prevent, disrupt, or interfere with a virtual meeting or gathering of people for religious worship, through use of a computer, computer system, telecommunications device, or other electronic device or system, or in any other manner

The Ohio House passed the bill by a vote of 95-1 on April 6, 2022, and the Senate passed the bill by a vote of 32-0 on December 14, 2022.