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SYNOPSIS:

This bill would prohibit the use of force, threat of force, or physical obstruction to intentionally injure, intimidate, or interfere with any other person's right to exercise religious activity at a place of religious worship.

This bill would prohibit any person from engaging in activity constituting disorderly conduct, harassment, or riot at a place of religious worship.

This bill would prohibit the intentional damage or destruction of the property or place of religious worship.

This bill would provide criminal penalties for a violation.

This bill would also authorize a private civil cause of action to provide compensatory damages to victims of the offense.

A BILL
TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

Relating to crimes; to prohibit the use of force to interfere with another's right to engage in religious worship;



29 to prohibit engaging in disorderly conduct, harassment, or
30 riot at a place of religious worship; to prohibit the
31 intentional damage or destruction of the property or place of
32 religious worship; to provide criminal penalties for a
33 violation; and to authorize the commencement of a private
34 civil action to recover damages.

35 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF ALABAMA:

36 Section 1. (a) The Legislature finds and declares the
37 following:

38 (1) The right of the people to meet and assemble for
39 religious worship and other religious activities is imperative
40 for the people of this state.

41 (2) The right to engage in a peaceful protest is
42 essential to a free society of people, and the right extends
43 to public fora traditionally open to political speech and
44 debate, including public streets, sidewalks, and parks, with
45 minimal constitutional restrictions; however, the right has
46 never been interpreted to authorize the trespass and
47 disruption of private property used for legitimate,
48 constitutionally protected purposes.

49 (3) Prevention of the willful disruption of religious
50 services and activities is a matter of statewide concern.

51 (4) It is a compelling interest of this state to
52 protect the ability of its people to meet and assemble for the
53 exercise of religious worship and other religious activities
54 guaranteed by the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment
55 to the United States Constitution, and Article 1, Section 3 of
56 the Constitution of Alabama of 2022.



57 (b) As used in this section, the following terms have
58 the following meanings:

59 (1) DISORDERLY CONDUCT. The crime of disorderly conduct
60 pursuant to Section 13A-11-7, Code of Alabama 1975.

61 (2) HARASSMENT. The crime of harassment pursuant to
62 Section 13A-11-8, Code of Alabama 1975.

63 (3) INTERFERENCE. To restrict a person's freedom of
64 movement.

65 (4) INTIMIDATE. To place a person in reasonable
66 apprehension of bodily harm to himself or herself or to
67 another.

68 (5) PHYSICAL OBSTRUCTION. To render impassible ingress
69 to or egress from a place of religious worship or religious
70 activity, or rendering passage to or from such place
71 unreasonably difficult or hazardous.

72 (6) PLACE OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP OR RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY.
73 Any church building, mosque, synagogue, temple, or other real
74 property used for religious worship or religious activities by
75 any person, religious society, or ecclesiastical body of any
76 sect, order, denomination, congregation, or any other
77 religious body.

78 (7) RIOT. The crime of riot pursuant to Section
79 13A-11-3, Code of Alabama 1975.

80 (c) It shall be unlawful for any person to do any of
81 the following:

82 (1) Use force, a threat of force, or physical
83 obstruction to intentionally injure, intimidate, or interfere
84 with, or attempt to injure, intimidate, or interfere with, any



85 other person lawfully exercising or seeking to exercise the
86 First Amendment right of religious freedom at a place of
87 religious worship or religious activity.

88 (2) Engage in any activity constituting disorderly
89 conduct, harassment, or riot at a place of religious worship
90 or religious activity.

91 (3) Intentionally damage or destroy the property of a
92 place of religious worship or religious activity.

93 (4) Provides funds for support of any activity
94 described in this subsection.

95 (d) An individual who violates this section shall be
96 guilty of a Class C felony.

97 (e) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the
98 contrary, if any person commits disorderly conduct,
99 harassment, or riot at a place of religious worship or
100 religious activity, the person shall be punished as provided
101 in subsection (d).

102 (f) Any person aggrieved by reason of the conduct
103 prohibited in subsection (c), or the Attorney General on
104 behalf of such person, may commence a civil action in a state
105 court of competent jurisdiction for appropriate relief, which
106 shall include all of the following:

107 (1) Temporary, preliminary, or permanent injunctive
108 relief.

109 (2) Compensatory damages or, at the option of the
110 plaintiff in lieu of compensatory damages, statutory damages
111 in an amount of ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) per violation.

112 (3) Punitive damages.



113 (4) Court costs.
114 (5) Attorney fees.
115 (6) Expert witness fees.
116 Section 2. This act shall become effective on October
117 1, 2026.