RELIGIOUS FREEDOM INSTITUTE

October 15, 2026

An Open Letter to Those Who Exercise Religious Freedom in Political Life

The Religious Freedom Institute commends the Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Arlington, Virginia, for his sustained leadership in bringing religious convictions into public life. Bishop Burbidge has expressed his opposition, and that of the Catholic Church, to Virginia's proposed constitutional amendments on abortion and marriage. His efforts affirm religious communities' legitimate place in public life and their responsibility to make contributions to the common good – as intended by America's Founders.

Our Founders believed that the American people must be free to live according to their deepest religious convictions, join others of like mind and spirit, and express those convictions publicly by the "free exercise" of their religion. The Founders' goal was to involve America's religions in peaceful civic participation that would sustain virtue in our national life. Just as the Constitutional right to free exercise encourages the work of religious individuals and institutions, so too it protects the natural role of parents in fulfilling their responsibilities to oversee the religious and moral formation of their children.

Debates concerning life, marriage, and the family draw upon convictions central to many religions. The free exercise of religion in America allows religious leaders and believers to enter the political arena with their religious truth claims about morality, justice, and the common good.

We commend Bishop Burbidge for articulating the Catholic Church's convictions clearly, and for encouraging informed civic engagement by Catholics and like-minded citizens. Proposed changes to the Virginia Constitution, he writes,

> *would create a legal right to unregulated abortions, performed by unlicensed abortion practitioners at any time during pregnancy. This threatens the health and safety of mothers and would allow for abortions targeting healthy babies all the way up to birth. The amendment extends this so-called right even to minors. It would remove the role of parents concerning life-altering and irreversible decisions for their minor daughters.*

A second proposed amendment, the Bishop writes,

> *would remove from our state constitution the truth, as Jesus taught, that marriage is between one man and one woman. It would also enshrine gender ideology by falsely separating the reality of one's sex and gender, obscuring the truth that we are created in the image and likeness of God.*

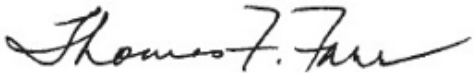
2011 Pennsylvania Ave. NW | Suite 300 | Washington, D.C. | 20006
202.838.7734 | rfi@rfi.org
www.rfi.org

We applaud Bishop Burbidge for his clarity, his courage, and his contribution to the Constitutional right of religious free exercise. RFI welcomes the opportunity to work with His Excellency and with other religious and civic leaders to ensure that religious communities can contribute fully to our common life. We pledge our solidarity in that work throughout this election season and beyond.

Devotedly,



David Trimble, President



Thomas Farr, President Emeritus

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