**Suggested Items for Inclusion**

**in a Proclamation Recognizing Religious Freedom Day**

United States democracy is rooted in the fundamental truth that all people are created equal, endowed by the Creator with certain inalienable rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The freedom of conscience was highly valued by:

1. Individuals seeking religious freedom who settled in the American colonies;
2. The founders of the United States; and
3. Thomas Jefferson, who wrote in his letter to the Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church at New London, Connecticut, dated February 4, 1809: “No provision in our Constitution ought to be dearer to man than that which protects the rights of conscience against the enterprizes of the civil authority.”

The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom was:

1. Drafted by Thomas Jefferson, who considered the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom to be one of his greatest achievements;
2. Enacted on January 16, 1786; and
3. The forerunner to the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States protects:

1. the right of individuals to express freely and act on their religious beliefs and
2. individuals from coercion to profess or act on a religious belief to which they do not adhere.

Thomas Jefferson wrote—

1. in 1798, that each right encompassed in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution is dependent on the other rights described in that Amendment, “thereby guarding in the same sentence, and under the same words, the freedom of religion, of speech, and of the press: insomuch, that whatever violated either, throws down the sanctuary which covers the others;” and
2. in 1822, that the constitutional freedom of religion is ‘‘the most inalienable and sacred of all human rights.”

Individuals who have studied United States democracy from an international perspective, such as Alexis de Tocqueville, have noted that religion plays a central role in preserving the United States Government, because religion provides the moral base required for democracy to succeed.

After quoting George Mason’s statement from the Virginia Declaration of Rights that “all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion according to the dictates of conscience,” President Franklin D. Roosevelt went on to state, “In the conflict of policies and of political systems, which the world today witnesses, the United States has held forth for its own guidance and for the guidance of other nations, if they will accept it, this great torch of liberty of human thought, liberty of human conscience. We will never lower it.” (1935 speech delivered at the University of Notre Dame)

Religious freedom ‘‘has been integral to the preservation and development of the United States,” and “the free exercise of religion goes hand in hand with the preservation of our other rights,” as expressed by President George H. W. Bush in his Presidential proclamation on Religious Freedom Day in 1993.

‘‘[O]ur laws and institutions should not impede or hinder but rather should protect and preserve fundamental religious liberties,” as expressed by President William Clinton in his remarks accompanying the signing (11/16/93) of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (42 U.S.C. 2000bb et seq.).

We “continue to proclaim the fundamental right of all peoples to believe and worship according to their own conscience, to affirm their beliefs openly and freely, and to practice their faith without fear or intimidation,” as expressed by President Clinton in his Presidential proclamation on Religious Freedom Day in 1998.

Section 2(a)(1) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6401(a)) states these findings by the Congress.

1. “The right to freedom of religion undergirds the very origin and existence of the United States.”
2. Religious freedom was established by the founders of the United States “in law, as a fundamental right and as a pillar of our Nation.”
3. ‘‘From its birth to this day, the United States has prized this legacy of religious freedom and honored this heritage by standing for religious freedom and offering refuge to those suffering religious persecution.”

“Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right that must be upheld by every nation and guaranteed by every government,” as expressed by President Clinton in his presidential proclamation on Religious Freedom Day in 1999.

“Religious faith has inspired many of our fellow citizens to help build a better Nation” in which “people of faith continue to wage a determined campaign to meet needs and fight suffering,” as expressed by President George W. Bush in his Presidential proclamation on Religious Freedom Day in 2003.

The principle of religious freedom “has guided our Nation forward” and “is a universal human right to be protected here at home and across the globe,” as expressed by President Barack Obama in his Presidential proclamations on Religious Freedom Day in 2011 and 2013, respectively.

In *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, 134 S. Ct. 1811 (2014), the United States Supreme Court affirmed that ‘‘people of many faiths may be united in a community of tolerance and devotion.”

For countless people of the United States, faith is an integral part of every aspect of daily life and is not limited to their homes, houses of worship, or doctrinal creeds.

The role of religion in United States society and public life has a long and robust tradition. Now, therefore, be it RESOLVED and AFFIRMED that this State:

1. on Religious Freedom Day on January 16, [year], honors the [xxx] anniversary of the enactment of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom; and
2. affirms that—
   1. for individuals of any faith and individuals of no faith, religious freedom includes the right of an individual to live, work, associate, and worship in accordance with the beliefs of the individual;
   2. all people of the [state] can be unified in supporting religious freedom, regardless of differing individual beliefs, because religious freedom is a fundamental human right; and
   3. “the American people will remain forever unshackled in matters of faith,” as expressed by President Obama in his Presidential proclamation on Religious Freedom Day in 2012.

**Note**

Most of the preceding items are taken from the 2017 Congressional proclamation for Religious Freedom Day. The list illustrates the long and continuous history of recognizing and protecting religious freedom in our country, but is certainly not exclusive.