



THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS
LIBERTY COMMISSION
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

June 16, 2023

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chris Coons
Chairman
Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations, and Related Programs
218 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations, and Related Programs
211 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Collins, Chairman Coons, and Ranking Member Graham:

I am writing to you today as the President of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC). Our organization serves as the public policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the nation's largest Protestant denomination with over 50,000 churches and congregations and nearly 14 million members.

The ERLC wishes to convey our support for the current, narrowly focused statutory mandate given to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). Some advocates wish to add language that unhelpfully broadens the scope of USCIRF's mission to include all human rights violations, distracting the commission from effectively continuing its designated mission of advancing the freedom of religion or belief internationally. We strongly urge lawmakers from both parties to fully and robustly fund the USCIRF at \$4.7 million for FY24 and oppose any efforts to expand the commission's current scope and mandate.

The ERLC has been charged by the SBC with advocating for religious freedom around the globe in every context. Freedom of religion is an essential right and is often the foundation for other basic human rights. At a time when people of all faiths, including over [360 million Christians](#), are facing intense persecution for their beliefs, the work of USCIRF is more important than ever.

A congressional decision to broaden the Commission's scope would pose a real challenge to its continued effectiveness. USCIRF is the only agency dedicated exclusively to the monitoring of and advocating for religious freedom. It has been this narrow scope that has allowed the Commission to be highly effective since its inception, even with a relatively small budget. If USCIRF's mandate is unwisely widened in scope, it will impede the Commission's ability to do the important work it was founded to do.



THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS
LIBERTY COMMISSION
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

In its current form, USCIRF is vital for people of all faiths around the world. An expanded scope will only hinder this important work.

In light of these concerns, I urge you to fund USCIRF at \$4.7 million for Fiscal Year 2024 and to protect the commission's existing mandate. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Respectfully,

Frederick Brent Leatherwood
President
Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission
of the Southern Baptist Convention