

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-1803**

March 13, 2020

Governor John Bel Edwards  
Office of the Governor  
PO Box 94004  
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Governor Edwards,

Thank you for your quick and decisive action to contain and combat the spread of COVID-19 in Louisiana. Mitigating the spread of coronavirus in our communities is a shared priority for all officials in Louisiana and the nation.

Historically, in times of crisis, many Americans have found safety and solace in places of faith and worship. These institutions are cornerstones of our nation, playing a large role in caring for the needy, sick, and suffering in times of turmoil. That is why I was disturbed to see that the Louisiana Department of Health has issued guidance interpreting your proclamation as follows:

“Additionally, the Governor has signed a proclamation that immediately halts any gathering of more than 250 people until Monday, April 13th. This **DOES** include church congregations and faith-based meetings. This **DOES NOT** include going to businesses such as shopping malls, pharmacies, grocery stores, etc.”

As you know, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution specifically bars the government from making laws respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. **I agree that all our constituents and religious leaders should follow the recommendations of the Center for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC).** However, the decision to gather should be the choice of the individual or institution and not a mandate by any government entity. The State has no authority to enforce this proclamation nor any ban on worship.

I respectfully ask that you clarify to the people of Louisiana that the freedom of religious expression will be protected in our State.

Sincerely,



Clay Higgins  
United States Congressman