

Date: October 1, 2024

To: Detroit City Council

From: Louis Brown Jr., Esq.

Re: Written Testimony regarding the proposed Buffer Zone Ordinance

My name is Louis Brown, I am submitting this written testimony to urge Detroit City Council Members to vote ‘no’ on the proposed Buffer Zone Ordinance.

I am an African American man and HBCU graduate who is originally from Metro Detroit. I have previously gone to school in Detroit (at the now closed St. Scholastica elementary school on Outer Drive) and formerly worked and practiced law in city of Detroit.

I am an attorney who is licensed in Michigan. I formerly served as the Acting Deputy Director for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in Washington, D.C. At HHS, I helped oversee civil rights enforcement in health care nationwide under the leadership of the then Director of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR). I also have taught law as a law lecturer at Catholic University of America School of Law (CUA Law) in Washington, D.C. I am a fellow at CUA Law’s Center for Religious Liberty. Currently, I am blessed to serve at a faith-based nonprofit that, among several initiatives, supports providing care for the needs of residents in Detroit.

I am submitting this written testimony in opposition to the proposed Buffer Zone Ordinance because it is an unjust and potentially unconstitutional violation of the civil rights guaranteed under the First Amendment. The proposed Buffer Zone Ordinance would violate the basic civil rights of people who simply want to pray with, minister to, and inform pregnant mothers and families. Many pregnant mothers, especially single mothers, are alone and have suffered real trauma. These mothers are in need of prayer, love, and real support in which they are treated with dignity.

Tragically, this proposed Buffer Zone Ordinance would have a chilling effect on the civil rights of faith-based communities to pray, serve, and inform pregnant moms. Black people, and all residents, in Detroit deserve better than this ordinance.

To uphold basic civil rights, including the right to free speech, free association, and religious freedom, I urge council members to oppose the unjust proposed Buffer Zone Ordinance. I therefore respectfully submit this testimony. Thank you and God bless you.