I am Colonel Gwen Linde, United States Air Force retired. I live in Sparks. For the record I support SB-192 and urge your support for SB-192 as well.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify this morning. You know, when I was commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1979, I took an oath to uphold and defend the constitution of the United States. It’s an oath—and a privilege—which I take very seriously. I see my work today in support of the religious freedom of all Nevadans as a continuation of that solemn oath.

You are going to hear today from people who will say that SB 192 discriminates against women, but this just isn’t so. We heard from these people at the Senate Judiciary Committee in March and we were mystified to discover that their lobbyists had been pressuring senators and assembly members to oppose something as common-sensical as SB-192. They have told us that this bill discriminates against women, indeed that it wages war on women. Well, I know a little bit about war and more than a little bit about war on women. This bill is neither. When I joined the Air Force, women were not allowed to serve our nation in what were then called “men’s career fields.” We were not allowed to fly airplanes—to be mechanics—to drive trucks—to be
anything other than nurses or clerks. That is discrimination against women—this bill is not. This bill is about protecting our freedom to live our faith—whatever that faith might be. I was among the first group of women selected to be pilots in the Air Force—to prove whether or not women could fly military airplanes. I was in squadrons as the only woman among over 100 men, some of whom did not want me there. I know what discrimination is—I’ve lived it. This bill is not that. This bill is about establishing a fair standard under which religious liberty cases will be judged—pure and simple. No outcome is pre-determined—the bill only establishes the standard that the court must use, and it’s a very high standard, which is right and just for religious freedom cases.

Other people will try to convince you that this bill enables discrimination against the powerless. I know, from personal experience, what it means to be held down, to be belittled, to be told that you just aren’t equal, that you just aren’t welcome. That is discrimination—this bill is none of that. In fact, an amendment was added to the bill to remove any doubt that the bill could be used to discriminate. Frankly, it is insulting to a retired military officer like me, who spent so many years in the front lines of the battle for women’s rights to have someone reduce all of our sacrifices to the simple-minded formula that “women’s rights are primarily about reproduction.” The people that tell
you this do not represent women and they don’t speak for our rights. Women are about a lot more than simply reproduction — we are about our faith, our families, our communities, our careers, and our constitutional rights. Women’s rights are as rich and diverse as women themselves and religious liberty is the right that this woman holds most dear of all. You’ve already heard about the real “war on women” today—a Fernley woman—both a mother and grandmother—who wants to make the most intimate of family decisions based on faith, and is told by a judge—a male judge—that her faith has no place in his Washoe County courtroom. That just isn’t right—but you can make sure that such travesties do not happen in Nevada again.

Have you heard the conjecture that women will be discriminated against because of this bill? We sure heard the most creative of stories at the Senate hearing—but let’s stick with the facts and the law. There has been no such discrimination in any state with a law like SB 192—not a single lawsuit dealing with reproductive issues. In fact, I met with Ms. Cafferata and asked her for any information, any data, any documentation of such cases anywhere in the United States. Nothing.

This bill is about fairness, about giving my fellow Nevadans the same protection for our religious freedom that the citizens of 29 other states
enjoy These are the same standards that federal jurisdictions must apply. If you’ve been listening to the news over these past weeks, you know very well that loose cannons in governmental agencies like the IRS can do a lot of damage before ordinary people can find redress, so here in Nevada we need to walk the extra mile to protect our freedom, especially religious freedom, the free exercise of which historically safeguards our civil liberties as well.

Committee members, I ask you to walk the extra mile to protect the rights of all women, and all men, and all Nevada families by voting to pass SB 192.