

September 19, 2025

*Submitted via email*

Representative Ronald Mariano  
Speaker of the House  
Massachusetts House of Representatives  
24 Beacon St., Room 356  
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Re: Call to Support S. 2564

Dear Speaker Mariano:

The Center for Inquiry (CFI) writes to urge the Massachusetts House of Representatives to vote in favor of S. 2564. **This bill would repeal an archaic provision in Massachusetts state law that prohibits “blasphemy.”**

CFI is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing science, reason, and secularism in American law and policy. We have numerous supporters in Massachusetts.

#### Key Elements of the Bill

S. 2564 would repeal Chapter 272, Section 36, of the General Laws of Massachusetts in its entirety.

That section states: “Whoever wilfully blasphemes the holy name of God by denying, cursing or contumeliously reproaching God, his creation, government or final judging of the world, or by cursing or contumeliously reproaching Jesus Christ or the Holy Ghost, or by cursing or contumeliously reproaching or exposing to contempt and ridicule, the holy word of God contained in the holy scriptures shall be punished by imprisonment in jail for not more than one year or by a fine of not more than three hundred dollars, and may also be bound to good behavior.”

#### CFI’s Analysis

**CFI supports S. 2564 because bans on “blasphemy” privilege religion and restrict Massachusetts residents’ right to free speech—under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution as well as Article 16 of the Massachusetts Constitution.**

To begin with, blasphemy provisions such as the one found in Chapter 272, Section 36, of the General Laws of Massachusetts are outdated relics of a bygone time in American history. While blasphemy laws “restricting the act of insulting or showing contempt for religion, or lack of reverence for sacred things” were “prevalent throughout the states around the time of



America’s founding,”<sup>1</sup> they are clearly understood today as a violation of the freedom of expression protected by the First Amendment. **Only six states still have a blasphemy ban on the books, and unfortunately Massachusetts is one of them;** the other states are Michigan, Oklahoma, Wyoming, South Carolina, and Pennsylvania.<sup>2</sup>

Massachusetts lawmakers have an opportunity to correct this unfortunate wrong by passing S. 2564. **By enacting this ameliorative legislation, the General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts would stand up for true religious freedom, which necessarily requires the freedom to lampoon, satirize, question, or criticize any religion and its doctrines.** As in any free society, residents of Massachusetts must be allowed to speak freely on matters of religion without fear of official censorship or punishment.

Conversely, allowing a blasphemy ban such as the one still found in the General Laws of Massachusetts to remain on the books sends the wrong message to citizens. It would tell them that their expressive rights are limited and conditional—and that religious dissent can still be curbed or punished.

Nor are concerns over blasphemy provisions merely theoretical. In 2010, a Pennsylvania man named George Kalman attempted to register a film production company named “I Choose Hell Productions,” yet state officials rejected his application because Pennsylvania law dictates that corporation names are not to be “blasphemous.”<sup>3</sup> While a federal district court later ruled the state’s action to be a violation of the First Amendment, that unconstitutional provision remains the law in Pennsylvania.<sup>4</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that Massachusetts legislators have spoken favorably of S. 2564 and its attempt to repeal the blasphemy ban. With the Massachusetts Senate passing this bill by a 40-0 vote on July 24, Senate President Karen E. Spilka (D-Ashland) declared: **“When dusty and dangerous relics of a bygone era darken our laws, it creates the potential for real harm to residents today. ... [W]e are on a path to making our laws better represent who we are in 21st-century Massachusetts.** With a White House that glorifies—and seemingly longs for—the days when many Americans were discriminated against because of who they are, now is the time to make sure our state laws respect and support the rights and dignity of our residents.”<sup>5</sup> (Emphasis added.)

Federal lawmakers have likewise voiced their opposition to blasphemy laws. In December 2020, the U.S. House of Representatives adopted a resolution “citing Article 18 of the International Declaration of Human Rights and calling upon all nations to repeal their blasphemy laws and to release all individuals who had been imprisoned under them.”<sup>6</sup> The U.S. House of Representatives’ decision, by a 386-3 vote, to adopt the resolution brought by

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<sup>1</sup> <https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2023/12/a-history-of-blasphemy-laws-in-the-united-states>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.telegram.com/story/opinion/columns/guest/2025/07/27/opinionguest-column-relegate-states-law-against-blasphemy-to-history/85343322007>

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> <https://malegislature.gov/PressRoom/Detail?pressReleaseId=230>

<sup>6</sup> <https://firstamendment.mtsu.edu/article/blasphemy>



Representative Jamie Raskin of Maryland speaks volumes. Massachusetts now has an opportunity to join the right side of history on this issue by repealing its own blasphemy statute.

Conclusion

For the reasons set forth in this testimony, CFI urges the House of Representatives to vote in favor of S. 2564. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Azhar Majeed', written in a cursive style.

Azhar Majeed  
Director of Government Affairs

cc:

Representative Michael J. Moran, Majority Leader  
Representative Kate Hogan, Speaker Pro Tempore  
Representative Bradley H. Jones, Jr., Minority Leader  
Members, Massachusetts House of Representatives