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Thursday February 18, 2010

**CONTACT:** Julia Kim  
804-698-7534

**Sen. Chap Petersen's Church Protection Bill Advances in House Committee**

Richmond, Virginia – February 18, 2010 – Sen. Chap Petersen's Senate Bill 116 that substantially expands Virginia's Consumer Protection Act to safeguard houses of worship from fraud and gives the Attorney General the ability to prosecute perpetrators of such fraud passed unanimously (19-0) in the House Committee on Commerce and Labor on Thursday.

According to Dave Irvin from the office of the Commonwealth's Attorney General, the expansion to the Consumer Protection Act attempts to address the situation where over 200 churches nationwide and dozens in the Washington metropolitan area were defrauded by a marketing scheme in which area congregations were leased faulty advertising kiosks that never generated the income that was allegedly promised<sup>1</sup>. Irvin stated that the leasing agreements combined with unlawful collection practices swindled individual churches out of tens of thousands of dollars.

“As a church and nonprofit agency, we are trying to work with the Attorney General's office so that houses of worship can be protected and our Attorney General can work for us. This bill is very helpful in the predatory environment in which we live today,” said Pastor Alonza Lawrence, who spoke on behalf of his congregation, the More Street Missionary Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia, which was also a victim of the marketing scheme.

The House of Delegates will vote on Senate Bill 116, which is also supported by the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, the Commonwealth's oldest faith-based advocacy coalition, in the coming weeks.

Senator Chap Petersen represents Virginia's 34<sup>th</sup> State Senate district, which includes Fairfax City and much of Fairfax County.

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<sup>1</sup> Graham, C. (2010). *General Assembly Notebook*. Retrieved February 18, 2010 from Augusta Free Press: <http://augustafreepress.com/2010/01/24/general-assembly-notebook/>.

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