

**State of Vermont**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Montpelier, Vermont**



**Joint House Resolution**

J.R.H. 13

Joint resolution affirming all Vermonters' right to freedom of expression and dissent through nonviolent means of expression and assembly and that the State of Vermont must ensure the protection of these fundamental rights

Offered by: Representatives Emmons of Springfield, Buckholz of Hartford, and Burke of Brattleboro

Whereas, throughout Vermont's history, the right of individuals and assembled groups to express dissenting political viewpoints nonviolently has been constitutionally enshrined, and

Whereas, Vt. Const. Ch. I, Art. 13 provides "that the people have a right to freedom of speech, and of writing and publishing their sentiments," and

Whereas, Vt. Const. Ch. I, Art. 20 provides "that the people have a right to assemble together to consult for their common good—to instruct their Representatives—and to apply to the Legislature for redress of grievances, by address, petition or remonstrance," and

Whereas, the legal commentator John W. Whitehead has written that "if the government can control speech, it can control thought," and that "by muzzling the citizenry, by removing the constitutional steam valves that allow people to speak their minds ... the government is ... creating a climate in which violence becomes inevitable," and

Whereas, throughout the country, a number of states with similar constitutional protections have proposed laws that would curtail the right of individuals and assembled groups to express dissenting political viewpoints nonviolently, and

Whereas, examples of such proposals are Indiana Senate Bill 285, creating the crime of mass traffic obstruction when 10 or more persons obstruct vehicular traffic as part of a protest; Iowa Senate Bill 426, establishing increasingly severe penalties for subsequent offenses of obstructing traffic on a public highway with a minimum speed limit of 55 miles per hour, culminating in a maximum fine of \$7,500.00 and prison term of five years; Minnesota House Bill 322, directing the assessment of public safety response costs of persons convicted of participating in or being present at an unlawful demonstration or committing a public nuisance; and Virginia Senate Bill 1055, creating a crime for remaining at an unlawful assembly after having been warned to disperse, and

Whereas, the increased national interest in state legislation curtailing the right of expression and nonviolent assembly is extremely troubling, now therefore be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the General Assembly affirms all Vermonters' right to freedom of expression and dissent through nonviolent means of expression and assembly and that the State of Vermont must ensure the protection of these fundamental rights.