

Written Testimony: Päivi Räsänen
U.S. House Judiciary Committee Hearing
“Europe’s Threat to Speech and Innovation: Part II”

4 February 2026

My name is Dr. Päivi Räsänen. I have served as a member of the Finnish Parliament for the Christian Democrat Party since 1995, in addition to serving as Minister of the Interior from 2011-2015. I am also a medical doctor and proud grandmother of twelve. Finland is a democracy that was built on the rule of law and fundamental freedoms. These values matter deeply to me as a European and a Christian.

In June 2019, the board of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland announced its official partnership with the LGBT event “Pride 2019” in Helsinki. In response, I expressed my Christian beliefs about marriage and sexuality in a Twitter post. I directed my post to my church leadership, questioning their decision to participate in the Pride event, which I believe contradicts our Christian faith. I added a picture of some Scripture verses from the book of Romans with the post that guided my perspective on this issue. I did so peacefully and respectfully, without targeting or insulting anyone.

For this exercise of my free speech, I was investigated by the police and interrogated for more than thirteen hours. The questions from police were shamelessly about the Bible and its interpretation. I was asked, “What is the message of the book of Romans and its first chapter?” and “What do I mean by the words ‘sin’ and ‘shame’?” A joke spread on social media that Päivi Räsänen was once again meeting for a Bible study at the police station. The police asked if I would agree to delete my writings within two weeks. I said no and reasserted my belief in the Bible’s teachings, no matter the consequences. I will not apologize, I explained, for what the Apostle Paul has stated.

On 29 April 2021, the Finnish Prosecutor General, Raija Toivainen, formally charged me with three counts of “agitation against a minority group” for publicly voicing my opinion on marriage and human sexuality in a 2004 pamphlet, for comments I made on a 2019 radio show, and for the tweet. Lutheran Bishop Juhana Pohjola was charged alongside me for publishing my pamphlet for the church. The crime of “agitation against a minority group” falls under the “war crimes and crimes against humanity” section in the Finnish criminal code and can carry up to two years of prison time. I did not insult or call for harm against anyone. I was being criminally charged for simply expressing convictions rooted in my faith and conscience.

Twice, Finnish courts unanimously acquitted me. The Bishop and I faced two days of trial at the Helsinki District Court on 24 January and 14 February 2022. In the trial at the District Court, the prosecutor at first stated that the trial would not be an inquisition concerning the Bible. But then she surprisingly targeted the core doctrine of Christianity: the teachings of the Gospel. She claimed that my views amounted to a doctrine that she summarized as “love the sinner, hate the sin.” This doctrine she regarded as insulting and defaming because, according to her, you cannot distinguish between the person’s identity and his or her actions. In this view, if you condemn the act, you also condemn the human being and regard him or her as inferior. This statement clearly goes against

both the Christian view of man and common sense. The thought that it is not possible to distinguish between a person's deeds and the core of their identity is contradictory to our lived reality as well as Gospel truth.

On 30 March 2022, the Helsinki District Court unanimously acquitted us, stating that "it is not for the district court to interpret biblical concepts". The court also ordered the prosecution to pay more than 60,000 EUR in legal costs. The prosecution then appealed the "not guilty" ruling in April 2022 and continued to demand tens of thousands of Euros in fines and that my publications be censored. Unlike many other legal systems, under Finnish law the prosecutor can appeal "not guilty" verdicts all the way to the Supreme Court. On 31 August to 1 September 2023, the Helsinki Court of Appeal heard our case. On 14 November 2023, the court confirmed our acquittal. The prosecutor then appealed again in January 2024. What is evident here is that despite these clear rulings, the state prosecution has continued to relentlessly pursue their charges against us, seeking to make an example out of our case.

In April 2024, the Supreme Court communicated that it would hear the case and our case was subsequently heard before our nation's highest court on 30 October 2025. In the hearing, prosecutors reiterated their claim that my words were "insulting" and that "intent is irrelevant," and that what matters is how readers interpret the text. The prosecution called for me and Bishop Pohjola to be criminally convicted for "incitement against a group," for fines to be imposed, and for the tweet and pamphlet to be censored from the internet (the charges for the radio show have been dropped).

My hope is that the Supreme Court ruling will affirm the right of every person in Finland to express their beliefs freely, without fear of punishment. A final acquittal by the Supreme Court would establish a strong precedent defending free expression for all, especially in matters of faith and conscience. The Bishop and I are now awaiting the decision of the Supreme Court.

Throughout, my defence has been coordinated by legal advocacy group ADF International, led by lawyers Paul Coleman and Lorcán Price, alongside Finnish legal counsel Matti Sankamo, based on the freedoms of speech and religion protected by Finnish, European, and international law. My defence has argued that the right to freedom of speech is a fundamental right protected in all major human rights treaties and is the foundation of a democratic society. Vaguely worded "hate speech" laws undermine this important right by criminalizing speech based on highly subjective definitions of "offense".

This case has never been only about me and the Bishop. It is about whether peaceful expression of deeply held beliefs can be treated as a criminal act in today's Europe. It is about whether citizens, including clergy and elected representatives, may speak openly on matters of faith and conscience without fear of prosecution. Ultimately, it is about whether it is illegal to say what you believe.

It is evident that the meaning of Bible verses should not be up for interpretation in a court room and yet this is exactly what has transpired. A court has no business judging the Bible's teachings and our right as Christians to uphold and express them. Our prosecution for "hate speech" has

turned into a theological trial of what Christian beliefs can and cannot be expressed in Finland. It is incredible that this has happened in a modern European country.

Even when courts ultimately acquit, our story shows how the process itself becomes the punishment. We have faced years of investigation, public scrutiny, and legal uncertainty. This creates a chilling effect, not just for Christians, but for everyone who holds views outside a narrow, state-approved consensus. Unfortunately, Finnish authorities have sent the message that all must be careful what they say because the police could come knocking at their door too. Through fear, “hate speech” laws undermine public discourse and drive diverse views from the public square.

Censorship is one of the greatest existential threats to today’s democracies in Europe. You do not need to agree with my beliefs to see the danger of criminalizing peaceful speech. When the state controls which ideas and beliefs may be expressed, democracy becomes fragile. My case reveals where this path can lead. Recent developments from the European Union, like the Digital Services Act, make European censorship a worldwide concern. Speech that is lawful today can become criminalized tomorrow. Increasingly, the fight for free speech is focused online, and we are seeing that censorship measures adopted in Europe do not remain confined to Europe. This should concern every person that values freedom.

During my ordeal I have been supported by my faith and the thousands of expressions of support I’ve received from around the world, including many from the U.S. Congress. I remain hopeful and I trust that freedom of expression can still be upheld. It is too important to lose. My wish is that Europe, and our democratic partners, remain places where every person can speak openly and live according to their conscience without fear.

What has happened to me following a simple decision to post a Bible verse on Twitter six years ago demonstrates that the fight for free speech is no longer theoretical. Moreover, it is not just a fight that is local, but instead one with truly global ramifications. I have considered it a privilege and an honor to defend freedom of speech and religion, which are fundamental rights in a democratic state. Without the criminal charges imposed on me, I would not have had the exceptional chance to share my Christian faith in police stations, courtrooms, and through live broadcasts and press conferences heard around the world. I look forward to the day when the fundamental right to free speech is upheld for all who seek to peacefully express their convictions.

I thank you for your commitment to freedom.