The Washington Flyer
June 24, 2016

"Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not for themselves; and, under a just God, cannot long retain it."
Abraham Lincoln

Legislation Introduced Threatens Religious Liberty
On the federal level, a bill has been introduced that would limit religious freedom by amending the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) so that the law's provisions could not be used to "authorize an exemption from generally applicable law that imposes the religious views, habits, or practices of one party upon another." Introduced by Rep. Patrick Kennedy, the Do No Harm Act (H.R. 5272) is intended to ensure that RFRA could no longer be used as a defense for religious liberty in cases involving perceived LGBT discrimination or the Obamacare mandate for employer-provided contraception. Enacted in 1993, RFRA ensures that the government cannot "substantially burden religious exercise without compelling justification." The law provided the legal basis the Supreme Court used in maintaining the religious liberty protections in the Hobby Lobby case. The law has also been referenced in defense of religious business owners and organizations whose religious tenets have compelled them to decline services for gay weddings. Upon introduction of the Do No Harm Act, Rep. Kennedy charged that RFRA "has become a vehicle for those seeking to impose their beliefs on others or claim that the tenets of their faith justify discrimination." He further claimed the bill would "restore the balance between our right to religious freedom and our promise of equal protection under law." The Do No Harm Act has only 11 cosponsors and is not likely to gain traction during this congressional session; however, the introduction of the bill presents a grave concern to those seeking to protect our First Amendment rights.

CA Bill Threatens Religious Liberty of Faith-Based Schools
Last month, a bill was passed in the California senate that is intended to significantly narrow the conditions under which faith-based schools are free to make decisions consistent with their religious identity. Currently, California prohibits discrimination in education on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity but allows a religious exemption for faith-based schools. SB 1146 would amend the exemption to cover only the programs which prepare students for a religious vocation. Opponents of the bill argue that the new criteria would make it impossible for religious schools to operate according to their beliefs. The Daily Signal quoted John Jackson, president of William Jessup University in Rocklin, California, who explained his specific concerns: "For us, the most chilling effect of this bill if it becomes law is it could result in an attempt to eliminate faith-based decisions when it comes to admission, housing, and perhaps even employment at faith-based campuses." Jackson went on to say that "it's actually an attempt to decrease diversity in higher education rather than increase it. Students attend our schools voluntarily, and we think that the senator is making a grave mistake with this bill."

CDC Report Shows Increase in Youth Making Positive Choices

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released a report in early June which shows a decrease in the number of teens engaging in harmful activities. Specifically, fewer teens are drinking, smoking, involved in fighting, and sexually active. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveys have been conducted since 1991, and the most recent report shows the lowest rate of teen smoking since 1991 and a 28% increase in the number of teens who have never had sex. While some try to attribute these positive numbers to the struggling economy, teens' increased time on social media, the increased availability of contraception, and even the TV show "16 and Pregnant," conservative policy leaders point to the success of Sexual Risk Avoidance (SRA) education (abstinence education) in helping youth make positive, safe choices. Valerie Huber serves as the president of Ascend, an organization devoted to promoting SRA education and encouraging young people to make wise life choices. Upon the release of the CDC report, Huber noted, "I think this data is very clear. It confirms that SRA is realistic and that it resonates with teens. It also tells us that we need to be more intentional with the messages we send to teens—and the importance of giving teens the skills to graduate high school without any of the negative consequences that can surround teen sex. Today, those messages normalize sex, especially for older students. This must change."

AACS Congratulates Work of Former Intern and YLTC Alumnus

Adam Burton, a former AACS intern and alumnus of our AACS Youth Legislative Training Conference, has published an insightful article, "The Message that Matters: Public Accommodation Laws, Race, and Same-Sex Marriage" on the FRC blog. In his article, Burton offers evidence from Supreme Court decisions that public accommodation laws, which have been used to charge religious vendors of discrimination for declining to provide services at gay weddings, should not trump freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Burton graduated from Maranatha Baptist University in 2014 and will enter his 3rd year at Regent University School of Law in the fall. He is currently interning in the legal department at the Family Research Council. The AACS congratulates Adam for the publication of his piece and appreciates his work to protect religious liberty.

Register Now for the AACS National Legislative Conference

Don't miss the AACS National Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C., on September 12–14. This unique conference will give you the opportunity to learn firsthand about the top issues for Christian education and to communicate with your congressional leaders. Register by August 15 to receive the special conference rate on your hotel room and the discounted registration fee.

In Case You Missed It:

Weekly Market Update provided by Jeff Beach of the AACS Investment Team at Merrill Lynch

Compelling Reasons to Retain Tax Exemptions for Religious Institutions

Research Shows Private School Principals Report Strong Influence

Jamison Coppola: Legislative Director
Maureen Van Den Berg: Policy Analyst
Legislative Office, 119 C Street SE, Washington, DC 20003
Phone: 202.547.2991 Fax: 202.547.2992