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"Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom."
George Washington Carver

Virginia Bill That Threatened Liberty of Private, Religious Schools Is Defeated

A Virginia bill that posed a serious threat to the autonomy and liberty of private schools was blocked in committee from moving forward during this legislative session. The bill, [HB 359](#), placed intrusive and burdensome requirements on any private and religious school that participated in school choice programs. Specifically, the overreaching requirements included state testing for *all* students in the schools, state-approved non-discrimination policies for students, an opt-in allowance for religious instruction, IEPs for students with disabilities, data reporting requirements, teacher certification requirements, and government audits. Essentially, participating private schools would lose their autonomy and freedom to operate according to their religious mission.

The bill was introduced in reaction to former Gov. Glenn Youngkin's decision in January to opt Virginia into the newly established federal [Education Freedom Tax Credit](#) (EFTC). The EFTC is a provision that allows for a national tax credit scholarship program to provide school choice in every state where the governor opts in. Virginia's newly elected Gov. Abigail Spanberger and the Democrat-majority state legislature are strongly opposed to school choice and responded to Youngkin's action by introducing HB 359. Proponents claimed the bill would only apply to schools that enrolled students participating in the EFTC and that it would not affect a school's freedom or ability to follow its religious mission. However, opponents of the bill pointed to the broad language of the bill, which encompassed far more than just those participating in the EFTC. As [explained](#) by the Virginia Family Foundation, "HB 359 would coerce private schools into an impossible choice: abandon their mission and independence—or stop serving families who rely on educational assistance to access private education."

At a House Education Committee hearing on Monday, Dan Zacharias, executive director of the Old Dominion Association of Church Schools, [testified in opposition](#) to the bill, pointing out that the bill is a "serious violation of the principle of the separation of church and state." He explained that the "definition of public funding is way too broad: it includes private dollars that get a federal tax credit . . . but they are private donations, they're not public money." He further stated that "for the first time, it's been suggested that VDOE [Virginia Department of Education] have control of our curriculum. To us, that's no different than controlling the rest of our ministries and what they teach." Several other speakers argued the bill violates the Virginia and U.S. Constitutions, undermines private school autonomy, and erases educational diversity. However, the education committee passed the bill and sent it to the appropriations committee. On Tuesday, families and parents lobbied against the bill during the [Family Foundation's Parental Rights Day](#). On Wednesday, the appropriations committee voted to move the bill to the 2027 legislative session, effectively defeating the bill for this year. While the battle will likely continue next year, the defeat of this bill during this legislative session is a victory for the freedom of private and faith-based education.

Court Case and Medical Community Recognize Harm in Sex-Rejecting Procedures for Minors

Recent decisions by a court and medical communities are paving the way to protect future generations of children from the irreversible harms of sex-rejecting procedures. In late January, the New York Supreme Court awarded Fox Varian \$2 million in damages in a [medical malpractice case](#). Varian was only 16 years old when she underwent a mastectomy because she was considered to have a transgender identity. Varian argued that the medical community rushed her toward the surgery and failed to account for her other medical conditions, such as depression and autism. Despite expressing doubts about her gender identity to medical professionals, Varian ultimately underwent the surgery four months later. Varian's victory in the case is the first of its kind and could lead other courts to award damages to those suing for medical malpractice related to sex-rejecting procedures. Now, two major medical associations have reversed their stances on these surgical sex-rejecting procedures, perhaps recognizing the enormous legal risk for doctors who perform them. The [American Society of Plastic Surgeons](#) has now recommended that surgeons wait to perform these procedures until an individual is at least 19 years old. The [American Medical Association](#) (AMA) also released a statement cautioning against surgical sex-rejecting procedures for minors. However, the battle to protect children remains. Although the AMA advised against these surgical procedures, it still supports chemical sex-rejecting procedures. However, Manhattan Institute senior fellow Leor Sapir [noted](#), "If the AMA was wrong about surgeries, could it also have been wrong about hormones?"

Fifth Religious Liberty Commission Meeting Sparks Contention, Debate

On Monday, the [Religious Liberty Commission](#) met for the fifth time in a hearing unlike previous events. President Trump [established](#) the commission to consider the role of religious liberty in America and to advise the administration on religious liberty policies. Past hearings have discussed topics such as religion's role in America's founding and in education. The main focus of Monday's hearing, which AACS staff attended, was the religious liberty implications of antisemitism. The commission heard from many witnesses, including some who have experienced antisemitic attacks. However, the hearing quickly turned tense as Commissioner Carrie Prejean Boller told witnesses, "Catholics do not embrace Zionism, just so you know." And then she demanded the witnesses reply to the question, "So are all Catholics antisemites?" Throughout the hearing, she continued to question witnesses about their beliefs on Zionism. Prejean Boller, who wore a U.S. and Palestine flag pin, asked if a witness was "willing to condemn what Israel has done in Gaza" and incorrectly inveighed against "Islamophobic" remarks. The same day, several groups [sued](#) and claimed the commission lacked religious diversity. On Wednesday, Texas Lt. Gov. and commission Chair Dan Patrick removed Prejean Boller as a commissioner. "No member of the Commission has the right to hijack a hearing for their own personal and political agenda on any issue," [posted](#) Patrick. The hearing and Prejean Boller's removal have highlighted the ongoing debate about [Christianity and Zionism](#). It also overshadowed the hearing's second half on religious liberty in the private sector. The commission is currently scheduled for two more hearings before its term ends and its report delivered to the president.

In Case You Missed It:

[Weekly Market Update](#) provided by Jeff Beach of the [AACS Investment Team at Merrill Lynch](#)

[Practical Legal Help for Christian Schools: ADF Ministry Alliance](#)

[Presidential 1776 Award—Competition for High School Students](#)

[Always Ready: Speaker Johnson Gives Biblical Defense of Borders](#)

[U.S. Departments of Education and Treasury Release Joint Fact Sheet for Education Tax Credit Program](#)

Jamison Coppola: Government Relations Director

Olivia Summers: Government Relations Assistant

Maureen Van Den Berg: Policy Analyst

Washington Office, 119 C Street SE, Washington, DC 20003