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“The problem isn't that Johnny can't read. The problem isn't even that Johnny can't think. The problem is that Johnny doesn't know what thinking is; he confuses it with feeling.”
Thomas Sowell

AACS Joins Amicus Brief in Youth 71Five Ministries Case

The AACS has joined an amicus brief in support of Youth 71Five’s appeal to the Supreme Court. The case considers the right of a religious organization to hold policies and make hiring decisions free from government interference. [Youth 71Five Ministries](#), named after Psalm 71:5, serves at-risk youth in Rogue Valley, Oregon, and offers them a safe place to learn about Jesus and build relationships with trustworthy adults. For several years, Youth 71Five was approved for a grant from the Oregon Department of Education to continue its excellent work in the community. But in 2023, after initially approving Youth 71Five’s application, Oregon rescinded the grant, stating that the ministry’s requirement that staff and volunteers abide by its statement of faith and regularly attend church was discriminatory. A district court and the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against Youth 71Five, leading the ministry and Alliance Defending Freedom to [appeal](#) the case to the Supreme Court.

The amicus brief joined by the AACS notes the importance of this case. “Withdrawing otherwise available funding simply because a religious non-profit requires its own employees to adhere to the organization’s religious tenets offends the First Amendment.” By forcing Youth 71Five to choose between its religious beliefs and participating in Oregon’s grant program, the state violated Youth 71Five’s religious autonomy. The brief explains that under the religious autonomy doctrine, “Religious organizations are free to hire co-religionists without judicial meddling . . . and without state coercion via conditions on funding.” Additionally, the brief argues that the 9th Circuit wrongly bars religious organizations from affirmatively asserting their right to religious autonomy. According to the 9th Circuit, Youth 71Five could claim religious autonomy only as a defense against litigation. However, other appellate courts have held that religious autonomy is an affirmative right rooted in the First Amendment. The Supreme Court will decide in the coming months whether it will take up the case. Without a ruling from the Supreme Court, the brief states, “Government officials hostile to religion—or to particular religious sects—will have no trouble weaponizing this power to thwart religious autonomy by pressuring religious groups into hiring decisions the government favors.”

The State of the Union Includes Protection of Minors and Parental Rights

President Trump gave his [State of the Union address](#) on Tuesday night, highlighting the economic and national security gains of his administration since he took office last year. He also took the time to recognize several [American heroes](#), as well as individuals and families who have suffered because of bad policies that need to be changed. One such recognition was of [Sage Blair](#), a young girl who suffered tremendous harm when school officials tried to “socially transition” her without her parents’ knowledge. As the president described, “Before long, a confused Sage ran away from home. After she was found in a horrific situation in Maryland, a left-wing judge refused to return Sage to her parents because they did not immediately state [incorrectly] that their daughter was their son.” Sage was placed in a state boys’ home, which resulted in further abuse before law

enforcement was able to return her to her parents. Trump’s remarks showed not only his strong opposition to “transitioning” of minors, but also his strong support for parental rights: “Surely we can all agree no state can be allowed to rip children from their parents’ arms and transition them to a new gender against the parents’ will. Who would believe that we’re even talking about it? We must ban it, and we must ban it immediately.”

Following his speech, Secretary of Education Linda McMahon issued a [statement](#), describing the speech as a “powerful and forward-looking State of the Union address that highlighted the remarkable progress our nation has made in just one year.” While the president did not discuss education, McMahon’s statement recognized the administration’s accomplishments and priorities in this area: “From restoring accountability in education, empowering parents and expanding opportunity for students across the country, and passing historic reforms in the Working Families Tax Cuts Act, this Administration has moved with urgency and purpose to put American families first. This is only the beginning.” She concluded, “We will continue working to ensure every student has the chance to succeed and every family has a voice in their child’s education. The progress of the past year is proof that when we put America first, there is no limit to what we can achieve.”

Education Department Announces New Partnerships with Other Agencies

The Education Department (ED) has announced it will move [additional programs](#) to other agencies in its goal to return education to the states. In the effort to downsize the Department, multiple interagency agreements were [signed last year](#) to outsource several programs to other departments. Now, the Department has signed two additional agreements. The first agreement is with the State Department for the [Section 117 partnership](#). Institutions of higher education are currently required under Section 117 of the Higher Education Act to disclose gifts and contracts of at least \$250,000. The State Department will now administer the foreign funding portal where those disclosures are reported. The second agreement is with the Health and Human Services Department (HHS) for the [family engagement and school support partnership](#). Under this agreement, HHS will now administer several safety and security-related programs. For instance, HHS will oversee [the Statewide Family Engagement Centers](#) program that grants money to organizations to support and train state and local educational agencies. Several Senate Democrats have [criticized](#) the interagency agreements. Congress almost prohibited these agreements but [reversed course](#) in its most recent ED funding bill. However, Education Secretary Linda McMahon [praised](#) the new agreements as “efforts [that] strengthen accountability and security in our education system, ensuring it serves students and families above all else.”

In Case You Missed It:

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

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

[Perkins: When Free Exercise Draws Hostility](#)

[Freedom250: American Heroes Art Contest for Students](#)

[Education Resource: The Heritage Guide to Historic Sites](#)