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“The religion which has introduced civil liberty is the religion of Christ and His apostles. . . . This is genuine Christianity and to this we owe our free constitutions of government.”
Noah Webster

AACS Washington Office Welcomes Summer Interns

The AACS Washington office is pleased to welcome two [summer interns](#), Seth Walker and Johnathan Dys. Walker is a rising junior at California Baptist University, where he is pursuing a double major in applied theology and philosophy. A graduate of Valley Christian Academy, he attended the school from preschool through 12th grade and participated twice in the AACS Youth Legislative Development Conference during high school. As he considers his future, Walker is prayerfully exploring opportunities in ministry, potential doctoral studies in theology, and work in political advocacy. Dys is a rising junior at Hillsdale College, majoring in history with a minor in theology. Raised in West Virginia and Texas, he completed his education through Classical Conversations and graduated as a homeschool student. Regarding his future, he is “optimistically open to spreading the gospel and defending truth in the world’s greatest country, the U.S.A.” The AACS summer internship program gives college students in-depth training on how the legislative process works, how to communicate effectively with legislators on the importance of protecting our freedoms, and how to inform others on current issues. Additionally, the interns assist the AACS staff in research and writing, as well as organizing various office projects, including the [AACS Youth Legislative Development Conference](#). AACS is thrilled to have Dys and Walker join the work in its Washington office this summer and prays this is a profitable experience for them.

Teacher Union Influence Declining

The political influence of teachers’ unions seems to be declining, according to a report released by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. The report, titled [“A Crowded Table: Teacher Union Strength in 2026,”](#) compares recent data with a similar report from 2012 and found that membership in teacher unions has declined in 45 states and Washington, D.C. Additionally, the proportion of political contributions from teachers’ unions to state political parties fell in 34 states. Not surprisingly, the study found that blue states had the strongest unions, and red states had the weakest unions. The authors suggest that the decline of union influence could be attributed to several changes in the “landscape of education politics.” For example, the Supreme Court’s 2018 ruling *Janus v. AFSCME* prohibited unions from collecting fees from non-members, thus decreasing union revenue. COVID-era school closures, which many observers viewed as being heavily influenced by teacher unions, led to public scrutiny of the unions’ role and priorities in education advocacy. This criticism also resulted in the expansion of school choice programs and the growth of alternative education advocacy groups. The authors pointed to information from the [Policy Innovators in Education Network](#), which reported over 190 education advocacy groups this year, up from only 30 groups in 2012. “Sixty-nine percent of the participants across states didn’t list unions as the ‘most influential player’ when it came to state education politics. So, that’s pretty jarring. It was actually only 36%, a little over a third, that had the unions at all . . . in their top five of players that were most influential in state education politics,” noted Dr. Amber Northern, vice president for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, on a recent episode of the [Freedom to Learn podcast](#). She added, “That’s why we landed on ‘A

Crowded Table’ [for the report title]. . . . There were a lot more folks that are trying to exert influence over state education politics than there were in 2012.” The report concluded that, while teachers’ unions remain influential in educational policy, they are not the dominant force in many states.

Ninth Circuit Decides for a Re-Hearing of a Religious Hiring Case

On June 18, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals [agreed](#) to rehear a case by a religious ministry challenging a Washington state law that violates religious hiring rights. The suit was filed by Union Gospel Mission of Yakima, a religious organization whose hiring policies conflicted with state law, forcing them to compromise their religious liberties. The Washington law violated the mission’s religious freedom by forcing it to consider candidates who did not share its beliefs. The mission sued the state and asserted that it had the right to hire only those who agreed with its religious beliefs. A federal district court sided with the mission. The ruling was appealed to the 9th Circuit, where a three-judge panel upheld the district court’s decision. The [AACS joined](#) an amicus brief to the 9th Circuit in support of the mission. The panel ruling in favor of the mission has now been vacated by the full 9th Circuit, a move that may indicate disagreement with it. This process is called hearing a case [en banc](#), a rare event in which the full court, rather than a three-judge panel, hears the arguments and issues a new ruling. The decision elicited a very [strong dissent](#) by the three original judges. “The Ninth Circuit has relegated religious liberty to a second-class right. In case after case, our court has condoned governmental interference with the rights of the religious to practice their faith as they believe,” wrote Patrick Butamay, one of the original three judges. Given the heated nature of the case in our current political environment, a verdict either way will likely prompt an appeal to the Supreme Court. *Written by AACS intern Seth Walker*

Court Rules for Religious Freedom of Judge in Marriage Case

The District Court for Travis County in Texas has ruled in [favor of religious liberty](#) through a final judgment that the State Commission on Judicial Conduct (SCJC) cannot discipline a judge for her refusal to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies. In 2019, the SCJC issued a “public warning” against Justice of the Peace Dianne Hensley when she declined to officiate same-sex marriages. Hensley filed a lawsuit, pointing to the Texas Religious Freedom Restoration Act, and charged that the SCJC had violated her religious freedom. While the lawsuit was ongoing, the [Texas Supreme Court](#) revised the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct with a comment that explicitly stated that state judges had the freedom to refuse a marriage ceremony that violated their religious beliefs. The same court then ruled in a similar case that the SCJC cannot discipline a judge who makes such a decision. The recent decision by Travis County District Judge Maya Guerra Gamble issued a [final judgment](#) that ordered the SCJC to pay \$10,000 to Hensley for compensatory damages as well as \$630,000 for attorneys’ fees. The judgment further prohibited the SCJC from “investigating, sanctioning, or disciplining Judge Dianne Hensley over her refusal to officiate at same-sex weddings on account of her religious beliefs, regardless of whether Judge Hensley continues to perform marriages for opposite-sex couples.”

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](#)

[Register Now for the AACS National Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C.—September 14-16, 2026](#)

[Tony Perkins: If We Forget Our Story, We Lose Our Identity](#)

[Arkansas Schools Teachers Unions and Proves Education Can Be Improved](#)