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*“By renouncing the Bible, philosophers swing from their moorings upon all moral subjects. . . . It is the only correct map of the human heart that ever has been published.”
Benjamin Rush, signer of the Declaration of Independence*

U.S. Department of Education Hosts Leadership Conference for Private School Leadership

Last week, the AACCS legislative staff attended the annual National Private School Leadership Conference hosted by the [Office of Non-Public Education](#) (ONPE) in the U.S. Department of Education (DOE). The ONPE serves as a liaison between the private school community and the Department of Education, working to ensure maximum opportunities for private school students and teachers in federal education programs while also working to protect private schools from excessive government interference. The conference presentations covered topics related to nonpublic schools, including educational pluralism, the administration’s school choice initiative, resources for disaster recovery, updates from the National Assessment Governing Board and the National Center for Education Statistics, and best strategies for collaboration between private schools, ombudsmen, and local and state education agencies. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos joined the conference to discuss her strong support of all schools and the work that is being done on the federal level to promote school choice and ensure religious liberty is protected in federal education programs. She referenced the DOE’s decision to allow [religious organizations to be providers](#) of certain educational services that are provided under the Every Student Succeeds Act, and she also noted the DOE is following the [court cases](#) that could potentially rule Blaine Amendments to be unconstitutional. Following the secretary’s remarks, McKenzie Snow from the Office of the Secretary briefed the attendees on the administration’s school choice proposal, [Education Freedom Scholarships](#) (EFS), which would create a national tax credit scholarship program to enhance school choice opportunities nationwide. One presentation highlighted the new [Disaster Recovery Unit](#) (DRU) within the DOE which was created to help schools that have been affected by natural disasters “return to their full capabilities as quickly and effectively as possible.” The DRU presenters provided information on the various programs that are available to private schools, including the [Restart Program](#), which provides materials to damaged schools, the [Emergency Impact Aid](#) program, which provides educational funds for students who are displaced due to a disaster, and the [School Emergency Response to Violence](#) (SERV) program, which provides assistance to schools affected by a violent or traumatic event. The conference also included a panel that discussed the recently released [Non-Regulatory Guidance](#), which provides “information about some federal education benefits and services available to private school students, teachers and, in some programs, families.” The schedule also included a student testimony from Tuvya Zonenberg, a senior at Sulam School in Rockville, Maryland, and special recognition of a Christian school, Trinity School at Meadowview in Falls Church, Virginia, which was recently recognized as a [National Blue Ribbon School](#). Through events like this conference, the ONPE continues to build relationships with religious and private schools, ensuring that their interests and concerns are not forgotten within the Department of Education.

U.S. Department of Justice Files Statement of Interest in Religious Liberty Case

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has issued a [Statement of Interest](#) in a case regarding the hiring and firing practices of a religious institution. The case involves a teacher, Joshua Payne-Elliott, [who was fired](#) from Cathedral High School after it became public knowledge that Mr. Payne-Elliott was in a same-sex marriage. The Archdiocese of Indianapolis asked Cathedral High School and Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School to enforce Catholic teachings and not continue to employ two teachers in homosexual marriages or else cut ties with the Catholic church. [Brebeuf refused](#), was stripped of its Catholic privileges, and is now awaiting appeal from the Vatican. However, Cathedral High School complied and subsequently fired Mr. Payne-Elliott, who then sued the Archdiocese in a county court. In its [statement](#), the DOJ asserts that the “United States has a substantial interest in religious liberty” and “is strongly invested in ensuring that its citizens’ religious freedoms are not impinged.” To that end, the DOJ argues that the court may not impose upon the Archdiocese’s right to associate with schools that align with its teachings. In this case, a school could not employ teachers in a same-sex marriage and still effectively teach biblical marriage. The DOJ also argues that a court may not determine whether the Archdiocese correctly interpreted Catholic doctrine in its firing of Mr. Payne-Elliott. Such entanglement is a clear violation of the Constitution. The DOJ statement makes a clear case for true religious freedom and further distinguishes the Trump administration as one that will defend our most fundamental rights.

Federal Judge Rules in Favor of Religious Liberty of Adoption Agency

Last week, a district court judge gave an initial [win to St. Vincent Catholic Charities](#), an adoption and foster care agency, in its case against the state of Michigan. Although the case is ongoing, the [judge’s ruling](#) requires the State of Michigan to continue its long-standing contract with St. Vincent to help provide loving homes for children in need. This case began earlier this year, when the Attorney General of Michigan Dana Nessel [refused to enforce](#) the state law, which she described during her campaign as “discriminatory,” further calling supporters of the law “hate mongers” that “disliked gay people more than they cared about children.” However, for decades St. Vincent has been an exceptional provider of adoption and foster care services in Michigan, offering continued support and resources to families. Because of its Catholic beliefs, St. Vincent does not place children with unmarried or LGBT couples, but it does refer those couples to other adoption agencies that are able to serve them in good conscience. In a state with over 13,000 foster children that sees 600 children age out of the system each year without finding a family, St. Vincent has been uncommonly successful at finding homes for children. St. Vincent has been a steadfast support for two of the defendants in the case, Chad and Melissa Buck, who have adopted five special-needs children through St. Vincent. The judge’s decision is a hopeful indication that St. Vincent can still serve children in need without compromising its religious freedom.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Education in the 2020 Presidential Race](#)

[Supreme Court Showdown Looming on Religious Liberty, LGBTQ Cases](#)

[Trump Admin Sends \\$33.6 Million of Planned Parenthood’s Taxpayer Funding to Legitimate Health Care Groups](#)

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