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“Our unalterable resolution should be to be free.”
Samuel Adams

AACS Submits Comments on Child Care and Preschool Policies

The AACS Legislative Office recently submitted comments regarding child care and early education policies to the Administration of Children and Families (ACF), an office in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The comments were in response to a [Request for Information](#), published by ACF, seeking feedback on “improving access to affordable, high quality child care.” The ACF specifically requested information in areas pertaining to regulations which are duplicated on the state and federal level, policies which might hinder access for families, and licensure requirements which should be adjusted to ensure high quality centers. Under the Obama administration, certain federal requirements for early learning and child care were imposed on states, often causing states to change their existing licensure requirements or regulations for child care and early education centers; in turn, this caused burdensome requirements for many private and faith-based child care or preschool centers. The Request for Information signaled an opportunity to provide feedback regarding these policies which hindered the growth of faith-based centers, and thus, limited the diversity of options available to parents. The AACS comments began with an explanation of two foundational principles which should guide child care and early education policies: first, parents have the primary rights and responsibility for their children; and second, private and faith-based centers must be able to maintain autonomy and follow their mission. The AACS then emphasized that any regulations pertaining to private centers should be limited to health and safety standards and must not infringe in the areas of curriculum and program standards, hiring practices, employment policies and practices, and teacher certification or credentialing requirements. Furthermore, the comments explained the importance of religious exemptions, noting that the states that provided such exemptions had a wide array of options for parents to access as faith-based child care and preschool centers had the freedom to thrive according to their mission. In contrast, some states impose excessive requirements pertaining to teacher training and curriculum that make it financially impossible for private centers to operate, thus decreasing the options available to parents. The comments addressed the effects of expanded public programs, noting that in states that offer free child care and early education programs, the result has been a decrease in attendance at private centers, which in turn, decreases the number of options available to parents and employs a one-size-fits-all approach to education. The AACS also recommended that the models for school choice programs (such as tax credit scholarship programs and education savings accounts) be followed in order to streamline funding and expand parental choice and access to a diversity of programs. The AACS stated that “when at all possible, programs should direct available funding to parents, rather than to programs, schools, centers, or institutions” and further noted that “this is the best way to improve options for parents, ensuring that diverse options are available, as well as protecting the autonomy of private and faith-based programs.”

Trump Administration Supports Christian School in Religious Freedom Lawsuit

The Department of Justice (DOJ) has filed a [statement of interest](#) in *Bethel Ministries v. Salmon*, a religious liberty case in Maryland that concerns a Christian school, Bethel Christian Academy. The school participated for two years in Maryland's BOOST scholarship program for low-income students and complied with state law that prohibited the school from discriminating against students' race, color, national origin, or sexual orientation. Although Bethel has maintained that it does not consider sexual orientation when it enrolls students and further states that no sexual activity is permitted between students, the state searched through the school's handbook in 2018 and found that the school held traditional biblical views of marriage and gender. The state then disqualified Bethel from participating in BOOST and ordered that the school pay back over \$100,000 it had been given in scholarships. In its statement, the DOJ points out the hypocrisy of the state in determining a school's biblical beliefs to be discriminatory while simultaneously claiming to enforce a provision that the state cannot "require any school or institution to adopt any rule, regulation, or policy that conflicts with its religious or moral teaching." The department also argues that the state was wrong to revoke Bethel's participation in light of the Supreme Court's decision in *Trinity Lutheran*, which prohibits discrimination against religious organizations in public programs. [Alliance Defending Freedom](#) is representing Bethel in the case, which was [recently allowed to move forward](#) in the courts.

AACS Represents Christian Education at Meeting with Administration and House Leadership

Last week, AACS President Dr. Mike Rouse and AACS Legislative Director Jamison Coppola represented the American Association of Christian Schools at a meeting with members of House Republican leadership, Trump administration officials, and other leaders from conservative organizations. House Republican leadership, including Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, Whip Steve Scalise, House Republican Conference Chair Liz Cheney, and Representative Vicky Hartzler, heard directly from AACS and other leaders in the conservative community on important social issues facing our country. The AACS staff had the opportunity to be involved in these discussions and give direct feedback on some of the issues most important to Christian schools, including religious liberty, educational freedom and school choice, and family and life issues. Regarding religious liberty issues, the values-oriented organizations explained the legislative threats to this foundational freedom, including the [Equality Act](#), which passed in the House of Representatives earlier this year, and the [Fairness for All](#) proposal, which is expected to be introduced today. The meeting gave groups like AACS that fight to protect the fundamental rights of all Americans the chance to present these issues directly to key leaders in the Republican party and administration to help inform them and strategize how to further promote shared American values.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Survey: Gen Z Divided on First Amendment and Free Expression](#)

[The Education Exchange: Making the Case for the Blaine Amendments](#)

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