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“It is easier to build strong children than repair broken men.”
Frederick Douglass

AACS Submits Public Comments Supporting Religious Liberty Protections

The AACS has submitted public comments in response to proposed regulations that were published by several federal agencies intending to strengthen religious liberty protections. While each department’s proposal is unique to the purpose and statute guiding that agency, all the regulations state that they were written in order to comply with current law, to follow the [2017 Memorandum on Religious Liberty](#) by the U.S. Attorney General, and also to conform with the Supreme Court’s [Trinity Lutheran](#) decision. The regulations were published as part of the Trump administration’s actions to recognize National Religious Liberty Day. They are intended to remove burdensome requirements for religious organizations receiving federal funds so that these institutions are treated the same as secular organizations. Specifically, the regulations eliminate the referral policy which was established under President Obama’s leadership and required religious providers to post a notice of their religious character and offer referrals to secular providers in case the beneficiaries objected to receiving aid from a religious group. The proposed regulations also ensure protection of the religious “exercise” of a faith-based organization (and not simply religious “character”), as well as the freedom to maintain its autonomy, beliefs, and practices. The AACS submitted comments to the [Department of Justice](#) and [Department of Health and Human Services](#), applauding their efforts to protect religious liberty, noting that “faith-based organizations are uniquely equipped to serve those in need and should be allowed to participate in social service programs while maintaining their religious identities and practice.”

The AACS also submitted public comments on the proposed regulations by the [U.S. Department of Education](#) which not only eliminate the referral policy for faith-based organizations but also strengthen religious liberty protections for students and faith-based educational institutions. Specifically, the AACS comments praised the department’s efforts to protect the freedom of speech and academic freedom of higher education students and to recognize the freedom of private institutions to follow their institutional policies. Most significantly, the AACS comments praised the DOE for strengthening the religious exemption for Title IX, the law which prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender. In recent years, liberal policies have attempted to use Title IX to force schools to adopt policies which attempt to create LGBT rights, causing more religious schools to claim the religious exemption in the law. The AACS comments thanked the DOE for its work to ensure that the religious exemption covered all religious schools and also urged the DOE to clarify that the statute does not require the DOE’s approval of a school’s religious exemption. The AACS noted that “religious freedom as secured under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is vital to the operation and success of our schools.”

VA Legislature Considers Bill that Threatens Religious Liberty of Churches and Christian Schools

The Virginia legislature this week [considered bills](#) that would severely restrict the ability of Christian schools and churches to operate according to biblical principles by adding sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) to Virginia anti-discrimination law. The Virginia Values Act ([HB 1663](#) and [SB 868](#)) provides a cause of action for sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination in public accommodations and employment. It does not contain strong religious exemptions and loosely defines public accommodations, meaning that Christian schools, churches, nonprofit organizations, and small businesses would all fall under this draconian law. By radically expanding nondiscrimination to include SOGI, the bill forces Virginia's Christian schools and churches to endorse the state's preferred sexual ideology in their staff, restrooms, sports teams, and even their use of gendered pronouns. Religious freedom advocates argue that the bill opens religious ministries up to unfettered lawsuits and does irreparable damage to religious freedom. At a [Virginia Family Foundation press conference](#) held on Tuesday in Richmond, Dan Zacharias, Executive Director of the Old Dominion Association of Church Schools, stated, "We are concerned that the sexual orientation and gender identity bills collectively threaten our ability to minister to our students and our families." He further stated that the bill would "effectively dictate . . . church doctrine and teaching" and advocated for the freedom of Christian schools to continue teaching biblical values to the next generation. Versions of the bill have passed the House and Senate but must be approved by the other chamber before being signed into law.

ACTION: The AACS encourages Virginia residents to contact their legislators and urge them to oppose these bills and protect religious liberty. Contact information for legislators can be found [here](#).

President Trump Proposes Nearly 8% Cut in Education Spending

In his recently released budget, [President Trump proposed a nearly 8% cut](#) in Department of Education spending. The [proposed education budget](#) of \$66.6 billion is \$5.6 billion (or 7.8%) less than the department's current budget. Last year, the President requested an even tighter budget for the Department of Education, but Congress instead increased department spending by \$1.3 billion. The goal of the President's budget is to "implement fundamental reforms aimed at reducing the size and scope of the federal role in education," and to return that power to the states and localities that should primarily be responsible for schools. The proposed budget would cut dozens of inefficient federal programs and save the taxpayers \$6.7 billion. It also makes clear that the number one priority for the President is expanding school choice. The request includes increased spending on charter schools from \$440 to \$500 million, and it also expands the DC Opportunity Scholarship program to more low-income families. While cutting spending in many nonessential areas, the President's proposed budget continues to support Title I grant programs for poor schools, Impact Aid programs for schools on military bases and Indian reserves, and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) grants for children with special needs. While many aspects of President Trump's budget will not be adopted by the House or Senate, the budget request reveals the President's federal education priorities and urges Congress to focus its attention on restraining and improving some Department of Education programs.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Lawmakers in 9 States Move to Protect Children from LGBT 'Transition' Agenda](#)

[Why Socialism Isn't Christian](#)

[Study Shows Unborn Babies Can Feel Pain as Early as 12 Weeks](#)