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“A sacred respect for the constitutional law is the vital principle, the sustaining energy of a free government.”
Thomas Jefferson

AACS Resource Page for Schools on Coronavirus

The AACS National Office has developed a [resource page](#) for member schools to use as a reference while thinking through their response to the Coronavirus. Our trust is in the Lord, and we ought not live in fear, but we must exercise wisdom as we seek to lead our school families. To access the resource page, click [here](#).

Battle for Religious Liberty for Churches and Religious Schools in Virginia

Supporters of a Virginia House bill (HB 1663) that would add sexual orientation and gender identity to the state’s anti-discrimination law have [pulled the measure](#) in order to avoid adding a religious exemption. The bill would provide a private cause of action for sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination in public accommodations and employment. The bill seeks to expand the definition for public accommodations indicating that Christian schools, churches, nonprofit organizations, and small businesses will all fall under the requirements of the law. As such, the bill would have severely restricted the ability of Christian schools and churches to operate according to biblical principles. After much pressure from concerned citizens, religious leaders, and the [Family Foundation](#), the state Senate added an amendment to HB 1663 which provides a religious exemption that allows religious organizations to “require that all employees or applicants for employment conform to the religious tenets of the organization.” The House of Delegates, however, voted against the amendment, which then sent the bill to a conference committee to work out the difference before sending a final version to the governor. After intense pressure to keep the religious exemption, supporters of the bill, the Democrat delegates, finally chose to withdraw the entire bill rather than be forced to include the religious exemption, revealing the intent of Democrats to deprive religious organizations of their religious liberty rights. As the Family Foundation noted, “While in one sense it’s a mammoth victory that our pressure and lobbying campaign caused the LGBTQ advocates to actually kill their dream bill they’ve waited decades to pass, it also shows just how committed they are to ensuring that no religious organization is spared from the impact of their radical ideologies.” This was also [evidenced](#) by the comments of Delegate Marcus Simon, who claimed the bill’s existing religious exemption, which only allows religious organizations to hire members of their own religion, was sufficient. He then criticized the proposed amendment: “This [amendment] says that employees or applicants will conform to the *religious tenets* of the organization. So, this isn’t about who you are. This isn’t about what your religion is. This is about what you DO in your private life. And this gets very much to gutting the entire purpose of this bill.” A similar bill, without a religious exemption, has already passed both state houses and sits on the Governor’s desk. In Virginia, the governor has the ability to amend the bill before he signs it.

ACTION: The AACS encourages Virginia residents to [contact Governor Ralph Northam](#) and urge him to fix S. 868 to ensure churches and religious schools are not considered places of public accommodation.

SCOTUS Hears Oral Arguments in Pro-Life Case

Last week, the [U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments](#) in *June Medical Services v. Russo*, a case about a Louisiana law that requires abortionists to acquire admitting privileges at a hospital within thirty miles of the abortion clinic. [Supreme Court Justices questioned](#) both sides heavily on the standing of the abortionists to sue the state over what they claim is a law that poses an undue burden on women's right to abortion. Since the purpose of the law is primarily to protect women's health and safety, justices wondered whether abortion providers, who are not constitutionally protected from undue burdens, could sue on the behalf of women. Justice Alito asked Julie Rikelman, counsel for June Medical Services, an abortion provider in Shreveport, LA, if abortionists could sue "to protect the rights of other people," and whether there was a "real conflict of interest" between abortionists and the women they perform abortions on. Representing Louisiana and the United States government, Elizabeth Murrill and Jeffrey Wall focused on the threat to women's health that would persist if abortionists were not required to obtain admitting privileges from nearby hospitals. They claimed that there was a conflict of interest between abortion providers and women and explained that some of the June Medical abortionists successfully obtained admitting privileges. The Court's decision is critical for the abortion industry in Louisiana, which would face closures if providers are unable or unwilling to obtain admitting privileges at nearby hospitals.

Tennessee School Choice Program Heads to Court

Tennessee is the latest state to be involved in a lawsuit over a school choice program. In this case, eleven parents from Nashville and Shelby County public schools are suing the state for its education savings account (ESA) program because they argue the program unfairly targets their two counties in violation of the state's Home Rule Amendment. On the other side of the case are families who would benefit from the new program, which primarily helps low-income students who attend failing public schools. The program passed the legislature last year by one vote and would give up to 15,000 students in underperforming schools an ESA of up to \$7,300 to use at a school of their choice. One of the [parents suing to end the program](#), Tracy O'Connor, stated that the law should be invalidated because "our public schools are severely underfunded as it is," continuing to say that "vouchers will encourage similar fly-by-night private schools to open so they can receive tuition." However, the parents of children who would benefit from the ability to attend a quality school [pushed back](#) on that notion. Natu Bah, a single mother represented by Institute for Justice, stated, "I am defending the ESA program because it will help me provide a better education for my sons." The Institute for Justice is also representing parents in *Espinoza v. Montana*, a school choice case that challenges Montana's Blaine Amendment that is currently before the U.S. Supreme Court. The Tennessee case is expected to move through the courts quickly.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[In Congress, an Assault on Religious Liberty, in the Name of LGBT Rights](#)

[National School Choice Week and Survey Show Voters Support Education Options](#)

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