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*“Freedom is not a gift bestowed upon us by other men,
but a right that belongs to us by the laws of God and nature.”
Benjamin Franklin*

New Report on School Choice and School Safety

A recent [report released by EdChoice](#) shows that school safety is an important reason parents choose private or charter schools for their children. Authors Jude Schwalbach of the Heritage Foundation and Corey A. DeAngelis of the Reason Foundation note that most research that examines the outcomes of school choice programs focuses on the academic achievements and successes of the students who attend private schools through these programs; however, “no formal reviews of the evidence linking both private and charter school choice to safety outcomes exist.” Their report seeks to summarize the findings of several studies that examine how school safety relates to parental choice of a private or charter school for their children. The report notes that, as evidenced by several studies that examine the factors that influence parents’ educational decisions for their children, school safety generally ranks high on parents’ list of reasons for choosing a school other than their assigned district public school. The authors examine the findings of nineteen different studies (eight regarding charter schools and eleven regarding private schools) that relate to parental choice and school safety, and they specifically focus on the perceptions of students, parents, and principals towards the environment and climate in their schools. Of the eight studies regarding charter schools, seven showed an overall more positive view of school safety in the charter schools than in the public schools, and one showed no difference between the two. All eleven studies of the private schools indicated “school safety advantages overall for private schools relative to public schools.” None of the studies for charter or private schools found safety advantages for public schools. For the private schools, students overall reported a more positive school environment with less bullying and a decreased “fear of abuse;” parents felt the private schools offered a safer school climate than the public schools in their district; and principals of private schools reported fewer problems relating to violence, drug use, gang activity, abuse, and racial tensions than their public school counterparts.

The report concludes that the evidence shows that school safety is a positive link in school choice for private schools and charter schools, and, therefore, providing for more school choice will increase school safety for students. The authors suggest that this can be accomplished by raising the caps for the number of charter schools allowed in a state and also by creating and expanding school choice programs to allow for more access to private schools. One idea that has been [proposed by the Heritage Foundation](#) is a program that would offer school choice specifically to students who have been victims of violence or bullying. Florida has created such a program, the [Hope Scholarship Program](#), and it has received overwhelming support from parents who rate their child’s new private schools as overall 94% higher overall in school safety, environment, and engagement than the previously attended public school.

Department of Justice Files Amicus Brief in Support of Catholic Adoption Agencies

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) recently [filed an amicus brief](#) in the Supreme Court case *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia* supporting the right of Catholic Social Services to operate according to their religious beliefs. Catholic Social Services has operated in Philadelphia for over one hundred years, successfully placing children in loving homes. As a Catholic organization, the agency upholds biblical marriage and requires potential foster care and adoptive parents to be either single or a married man and woman. But in 2018, following an article in the Philadelphia Inquirer that criticized Catholic Social Services for not placing children with same-sex couples, Philadelphia ended its contract with the agency. In its [brief](#), the DOJ argues that Philadelphia’s actions “impermissibly discriminated against religious exercise” and “reflect unconstitutional hostility toward Catholic Social Services’ religious beliefs.” The DOJ further finds that Philadelphia’s laws were not “neutral and generally applicable” to religious organizations as the First Amendment of the Constitution and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act require. Although Philadelphia allows for exemptions to its nondiscrimination requirements, it has refused to accommodate the religious beliefs of Catholic Social Services or exempt them from the requirements. The DOJ concludes that the city’s “impermissible hostility” toward religious agencies should lead the Supreme Court to prohibit the city from discriminating against Catholic Social Services and allow the agency to continue its work placing children with loving families.

Trump Signs Executive Order Advancing International Religious Freedom

Last week, President Trump issued an [executive order](#) identifying the promotion and protection of religious freedom, a “moral and national security imperative,” as a priority for the United States’ international relations, especially in countries of concern—including those on the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) [Watch List](#). The executive order allocates \$50 million per fiscal year to support programs that combat international religious persecution and bring perpetrators to justice, and it calls for measures to eliminate religious discrimination in the process of applying for federal aid. Additionally, the executive order directs Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, in collaboration with John Barsa, the Administrator of United States Agency for International Development (USAID), to devise a plan to advocate for and defend religious liberty through U.S. foreign policy and aid. [International Christian Concern](#) and the [American Family Association](#), both supportive of the Executive order, describe its prescribed economic and diplomatic tools as “teeth” to enforce the United States’ demand for religious freedom in any country that has participated in or allowed religious persecution within its borders. Senator James Lankford also [voiced his support](#), stating that the “executive order continues to advocate for America’s engagement in an even more meaningful way through training for all foreign service personnel, the use of tools like visa restrictions or sanctions and ensuring religious freedom is an integral part of our national security strategy.”

In Case You Missed It:

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

[AACCS Resource Page to Help Christian Schools Responding to COVID Crisis](#)

[Blaine Amendments and the Future of Religious Liberty](#)

[Supreme Court Weighing Life, School Choice, and Religious Liberty](#)

[Reshaping the Courts](#)