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“When one side only of a story is heard and often repeated, the human mind becomes impressed with it insensibly.”
George Washington

Maryland Governor Blocks County Effort to Close Private Schools

Maryland Governor Larry Hogan [issued an executive order](#) Monday which will allow private schools to reopen in person this fall if they choose to do so. The governor’s move was in response to a [mandate issued last Friday](#) by Montgomery County health officials Marc Elrich and Travis Gayles that banned all private schools from offering in-person schooling this fall. Montgomery county public schools and some private schools had already moved to 100% virtual learning, but many other private schools had worked hard to meet CDC guidelines to offer a safe environment for students attending school in-person. The mandate by the health officials sparked a [wave of outrage](#) from parents and school leaders, and even [criticism from the governor who tweeted](#) that “this is a decision for schools and parents, not for politicians.” The governor then on Monday [amended his executive order](#) regarding the health emergency to ensure that the county health officials did not have the power to shut down schools. In a statement, the governor emphasized, “Private and parochial schools deserve the same opportunity and flexibility to make reopening decisions based on public health guidelines. The blanket closure mandate imposed by Montgomery County was overly broad and inconsistent with the powers intended to be delegated to the county health officer.” Other states such as Virginia, New York, and Indiana have also issued requirements for private schools to submit reopening plans to agencies (like the health department) that have no legislative authority to regulate or oversee private schools. In a recent [radio interview](#) with Stand in the Gap Ministries, AACCS executive Director Jeff Walton explained that one of the biggest challenges for Christian schools is the “constantly changing and often conflicting data and guidance” that schools are expected to follow. On Wednesday, county health official Travis Gayles reissued his order, defying the governor and reasserting his directive prohibiting private schools from opening for in-person instruction.

AACS Legislative Director Jamison Coppola and Jeremy Dys, special counsel for the First Liberty Institute, issued a joint press release praising Governor Hogan’s “efforts to balance the needs for public health while respecting the freedom, and religious autonomy, of private, religious institutions.” Coppola and Dys noted, “We [are] committed to following appropriate health and safety guidance from the CDC and other public health agencies, [and] we agree with Governor Hogan that blanket dictates from central planning rarely provide the freedom and flexibility to develop appropriate plans that meet the needs of Maryland’s private, Christian schools. Those plans are best developed by the parents and local private school administrators who care more than anyone else for the health and safety of their school community.” The AACCS continues to offer [resources](#) to their member schools across the country as they grapple with the best way to offer a safe and excellent Christian education to their students during the pandemic.”

States Considering School Choice Options in Response to Pandemic

Public school districts across the country are turning to virtual learning this fall due to coronavirus, leaving many parents searching for [better options](#) for their children's education. Some states are heeding their call and [considering new school choice programs](#). In South Carolina, Governor Henry McMaster set aside \$48 million of CARES Act funding to start Safe Access to Flexible Education (SAFE), which provides \$6,500 grants for needy students. In Oklahoma, Governor Kevin Stitt will also direct a portion of CARES Act funding to create a school choice program for low-income students. Legislators in Pennsylvania are considering an education scholarship account (ESA) program that would provide \$1,000 for students to access education options. The program will be offered to low-income students initially and be expanded to all students this November. In [New Hampshire](#), Governor Chris Sununu has directed \$1.5 million in scholarships, an average of \$1,875 each, for students to attend private schools. As some states expand school choice, other states are fighting to keep the school choice programs they have. This week, the [Tennessee Court of Appeals](#) considered whether the state's 2019 ESA program, which would provide \$7,000 scholarships to needy students, could begin this fall after public schools sued to stop the program. According to Institute for Justice attorney Keith Neely, scholarships like those offered in Tennessee give parents the invaluable ability "to make decisions for themselves to find schools that fit their educational needs, in the midst of an unprecedented pandemic."

AACS DC Office Thanks Interns

Each spring, the AACS Legislative Office in Washington, D.C., selects college students or recent graduates to become a part of our legislative team for a summer internship. This year, the AACS was pleased to host two interns for the summer internship program. Alison Heape joined the office during her summer break as an elementary music teacher in the Greenville County (South Carolina) public school system. Alison received her degree in music education from Bob Jones University before starting her teaching career, during which time she has developed an interest in education policy and a passion for seeing school choice opportunities advance for students and families (check out her [recent letter to the editor](#) supporting South Carolina's new SAFE grants). Ariana Rubbet joined our office after graduating from Pensacola Christian College with a degree in political science. Immediately following her time with us, she started a new job working for the New Jersey Republican Committee as a field organizer campaigning for Tom Kean Jr. with the 7th Congressional District. Both Alison and Ariana provided great support to the AACS legislative staff through their research and writing (see some of their *Washington Flyer* articles [here](#)), and also through their help as we coordinated our virtual Youth Legislative Training Conference this summer. We are grateful for the hard work and contributions of both Alison and Ariana and pray the Lord will use their time with us to open doors of opportunity for them to serve Him and our great country.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[President Trump Names Pro-Life Leaders to Panel Investigating Sale of Aborted Baby Body Parts](#)

[Lost and Founders: America's Answers in the Past](#)

[Now is the Time to Advance School Choice Policy](#)