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*“The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for among old parchments or musty records. They are written, as with a sunbeam, in the whole volume of human nature, by the hand of the divinity itself; and can never be erased.”*

*Alexander Hamilton*

**AACS Hosts Virtual National Legislative Conference**

This week, the AACCS hosted its annual National Legislative Conference. Due to the unfortunate COVID-19 travel restrictions in place in Washington, D.C., the conference was held online. State leaders, administrators, pastors, and teachers participated from across the country, including some who in other years have been unable to travel to D.C. During the legislative briefing, Legislative Director Jamison Coppola and Policy Analyst Maureen Van Den Berg highlighted the primary legislative issues for Christian educators, emphasizing four pieces of legislation that Christian school leaders can support.

The [School Choice Now Act](#) (SCNA), introduced by Sen. Tim Scott (SC), would provide both temporary and long-term education relief to parents struggling to find quality education options for their children. The SCNA helps families through a one-time education freedom grant to scholarship granting organizations (SGOs) and through incorporation of the Education Freedom Scholarships and Opportunities Act, which would give a dollar-for-dollar federal tax credit for donations made to state SGOs. Another bill by Sen. Scott, the Creating Hope and Opportunity for Individuals and Communities Through Education Act ([CHOICE Act](#)), would expand and create school choice opportunities for military families, students with disabilities, and low-income students in Washington, D.C. Additionally, the Support Children Having Open Opportunities for Learning Act ([SCHOOL Act](#)), introduced by Sen. Rand Paul (KY), would enable federal education dollars to follow each student, regardless of where he attends school. The program creates an education savings account (ESA) that parents can use to direct the education of their children at a public, private, or home school, and that can be used for a variety of education expenses. Along with these three education bills, Mr. Coppola presented on the Universal Charitable Deduction (UCD), a [provision within the Senate version](#) of the latest coronavirus relief bill that would expand the charitable deduction for non-itemizing taxpayers. The UCD would increase the CARES Act’s above-the-line deduction from \$300 to \$600 for individuals and from \$300 to \$1,200 for married couples. The UCD would also encourage greater charitable giving to the thousands of charitable organizations that selflessly serve their communities in times of need. After presenting on these important pieces of legislation, the AACCS legislative staff were able to take questions from state leaders, elaborating on their efforts to advance the principles of private school autonomy, religious liberty, and educational freedom. Although this year’s National Legislative Conference was unlike any other, AACCS staff pray it was a valuable event for all the dedicated school leaders defending the fundamental rights necessary to preserving a distinctively Christian education.

## **COVID-19 and Christian School Enrollment**

A recent episode of the podcast [“The World and Everything in It”](#) highlighted how COVID-19 has affected enrollment in Christian schools this year, noting that “online education fatigue” has brought an increase in enrollment for many Christian schools that have been able to open for in-person instruction. Reporter Sarah Schweinsberg interviewed several Christian school leaders and administrators for the [podcast](#), including AACS Executive Director Dr. Jeff Walton. Dr. Walton’s close communication with AACS schools and state leaders throughout last spring’s distance learning and this fall’s reopening enabled the observation that “most of those schools have not experienced an overall decline in enrollment.” While some schools in AACS are seeing a portion of their families leave to homeschool, in some cases, enrollment is going up. This is the case for many Christian schools across the country. Sarah Schweinsberg found this to be attributed to several factors: public school families are seeking in-person education, Christian schools have been able to work with families and staff to implement strong health and safety strategies, schools are able to offer some options for online learning in addition to in-person schooling, and some schools have been able to provide financial assistance for struggling families. Schweinsberg noted that Christian schools still face tight budgets, especially with the increased costs for extra cleaning and new health equipment, but they are committed to their mission. Mike Phillips, administrator of Bay City Christian School in Green Bay, WI, stressed that they best meet “the spiritual, the academic, the social, and the physical needs” of students by being “in school, five days a week.”

## **Court Ruling Prohibits Indoor Worship in Los Angeles County**

Last week, Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Mitchell L. Beckloff issued a preliminary injunction against Grace Community Church, upholding the Los Angeles county health order which prohibits indoor services. The church resumed indoor services in July and also filed a lawsuit against the state of California charging that the health mandates violated their religious liberty. The judge ruled that the health orders did not target religion because the county “allows worship to occur outdoors, virtually through the internet and any manner that is not indoors with a large gathering of people.” However, Jenna Ellis, attorney for Thomas More Society representing the church, [pointed out](#) that the judge’s characterization of the county “allowing” certain types of worship, gives “broad and arbitrary, unlimited, indefinite power” to the state and violates the free exercise clause in the First Amendment. In church last Sunday, Pastor John MacArthur [explained](#) why the church could not comply with the court and county orders, listing the myriad of requirements that had been laid out, including preregistration and health screening of every person who comes, maintaining and monitoring a 6-foot distance between people—including in the parking lot and in the restrooms, disposable seat covers to be changed between each service, and a two-week quarantine for anyone who comes into contact with someone outside his family for more than 15 minutes. MacArthur stated, “Obviously, this is not constitutional, but more importantly it goes against the will of the Lord of the church. He calls us to gather.” Jenna Ellis indicated they would be [appealing the decision, stating](#), “Church is essential, and no government agent has the runaway, unlimited power to force churches to close indefinitely.”

## **In Case You Missed It:**

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

[Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos Issues Final Rule Protecting Religious Liberty on College Campuses](#)

[Trump Releases List of Potential Supreme Court Nominees](#)