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“The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man: and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate.”
James Madison

Covid Relief Bill Supports Abortion and Includes Billions for Education, Early Childhood Education

The American Rescue Plan Act, the latest COVID relief bill signed into law last week by President Biden, was passed on a strict party line, receiving only Democratic support in Congress. [All Republicans opposed](#) the measure, criticizing the amount of funding going towards projects not related to the pandemic, with House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy calling the bill “too costly, too corrupt, and too liberal.” One of the most controversial aspects of the \$1.9 trillion package was the exclusion of the Hyde Amendment, a provision which has been included with most funding bills since 1976 that prohibits federal dollars from funding abortion. While the bill was being considered in the Senate, Senators James Lankford (OK) and Steve Daines (MT) [offered an amendment](#) to add the Hyde Amendment to the bill, but it failed by a vote of 52-47, missing the two-thirds vote needed to pass the amendment. Other pro-life amendments were also offered in the Senate, but all were voted down by the Democrats. As a result, the Family Research Council estimates that approximately [\\$459 billion appropriated for various health care purposes](#) could also be used to fund and support the abortion industry. This includes \$50 million allocated for Title X funding, which will likely be directed to Planned Parenthood. Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the pro-life organization Susan B. Anthony List, said the bill essentially “[creates a \\$50 million slush fund](#) for Planned Parenthood—which violently ends the lives of more than 354,000 unborn children a year—and changes the rules for small business funding so that the abortion giant can tap into that money as well.”

The education provisions in the bill include [\\$170 billion for education](#), with \$125.4 billion allotted for K–12 public education and \$39.6 billion for higher education. While the bill retains the Emergency and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER), essentially adding money to the COVID-relief education program created in the CARES Act, the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER) received no allocation of funds. For non-public schools, the ESSER fund includes \$2.75 billion for governors to distribute to private schools that “enroll a significant percentage of low-income students and are most impacted by the qualifying emergency.” Additionally, the relief package includes funding for early education and child care programs, allocating [\\$39 billion for child care programs](#), including \$15 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant and \$24 billion for child care stabilization block grants. An additional \$1 billion is granted to Head Start programs. Senator Lankford, while recognizing that “there’s a lot of need in education across the country,” [criticized the level of spending](#) directed towards education programs. He noted that there is “still \$68 billion unspent from the education funds from the five COVID bills last year, and there’s no requirement that the schools actually open or use that money to open the schools.” He also pointed out that “95 percent of the money allocated for COVID relief for education, CBO has said can’t even be spent this year at all. The earliest it could even be spent would be next year, and it’s well in excess of \$100 billion.”

Senate Judiciary Committee Holds Hearing on Equality Act

This Wednesday, the Senate Judiciary Committee held a [hearing](#) for the Equality Act, a dangerous threat to religious liberty, the family, and the fabric of American society. The hearing featured several witnesses including Alphonso David, President of the Human Rights Campaign, the largest LGBT advocacy group in the country; Abigail Shrier, independent journalist and author of the book *Irreversible Damage* on the transgender epidemic in America; and Mary Rice Hasson, a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, a conservative think tank in Washington, D.C. During the hearing, senators asked questions about how the Equality Act would affect religious liberty, women's sports, locker rooms, bathrooms, businesses, and employment. Mr. David asserted that the Equality Act would in no way undermine the freedom of religious institutions or force religious Americans to change their beliefs. Mrs. Shrier and Mrs. Hasson, however, testified that the bill would radically change religious liberty by prohibiting the use of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) as a defense against claims of discrimination and punishing anyone who holds a differing opinion on human sexuality. Although supporters of the Equality Act claimed that the law was necessary, none of the supporting witnesses produced any solid evidence showing that LGBT people face systemic discrimination in America. We are grateful for the testimonies of Mrs. Shrier and Mrs. Hasson and the senators who pointed out the bill's many harms and flaws.

Update: School Choice in the States

School choice legislation continues to advance through [several state legislatures](#), with several bills near becoming law and creating more educational opportunities for families and students. The [West Virginia](#) House and Senate have passed a bill to create an education savings account program, the Hope Scholarship Program, that will provide scholarships up to \$4600 for public school students to attend the school of their choice. Private school students would be eligible to receive scholarships by the year 2026. Governor Jim Justice is expected to sign the bill into law, making it the most expansive school choice program in the country. In [Iowa](#), the state house is considering a bill which will provide scholarships to low-income families to use towards the school of their choice. The bill has already passed the state senate, along with a bill that would expand charter school options in the state. Both bills are part of Governor Kim Reynolds' agenda for education reform. The house chamber in [Idaho](#) has also passed a bill which would create an education savings account program for students enrolled in public schools to use towards the school of their choice. The bill is now being considered in the state senate. Expansion of existing school choice programs is being considered in [Florida](#) and [Arizona](#). While teachers' unions continue to oppose school choice, the movement supporting educational options is growing in popularity among parents and state leaders.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Practical Legal Help for Christian Schools: ADF Ministry Alliance](#)

[Joint Statement Regarding the Equality Act on Behalf of Christian Schools and Educators](#)

[Pro-American Resources for America's K-2 Students](#)