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“It is easier to build strong children than repair broken men.”
Frederick Douglass

Battle to Protect Religious Liberty for Virginia Christian Schools

The Virginia state legislature is considering a bill that would amend the onerous [Virginia Values Act](#), signed into law in 2020 by the former Governor Ralph Northam. Under the guise of stopping discrimination, the law provides a private cause of action for sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination in public accommodations and employment. The law defines “public accommodation” in such a way that it includes Christian schools, churches, nonprofit organizations, and small businesses, inevitably opening the door for an abundance of litigation. Before the law was passed, multiple attempts were made to include exemptions for religious institutions, yet none of the efforts passed the Democrat-controlled legislature. With the new conservative leadership of Governor Glenn Youngkin and a Republican majority in the House of Delegates, supporters of religious liberty are making efforts to amend the law through HB 753 to ensure religious liberty protections are included. Specifically, HB 753 would clarify that churches, schools, and other faith-based organizations can fulfill their mission and maintain their autonomy and freedom for hiring, admissions policies, membership requirements, and publishing standards without penalty or government retaliation. The bill has faced intense scrutiny in the committees of both legislative chambers and just recently narrowly passed the House committee. Yesterday it passed the Virginia House with bipartisan support. The bill will now cross over to the Senate for consideration. The Old Dominion Association of Church Schools (ODACS), the Virginia state affiliate with AACCS, has been actively involved in supporting HB 753 in an effort to ensure Virginia Christian schools can continue their important work of providing a Christian education that is based on biblical truth, including the teaching of biblical marriage and human sexuality.

AACS Government Relations Director Jamison Coppola joined ODACS Executive Director Dan Zacharias to express support for HB 753 to the committee members emphasizing the bill’s importance in protecting religious liberty not only for Christian schools but also for all Virginians. Pointing to the U.S. Constitution, Mr. Coppola stated, “The First Amendment protects the right of parents to pass on the tenets of their beliefs to their children and to choose a school environment that teaches and models those values. Virginia should recognize this fundamental right in its law by making it clear that religious schools are protected from harassment, fine, and prosecution by government officials who don’t share those values.” The AACCS also submitted public comments regarding HB 753, offering a thorough explanation of how the Virginia Values Act infringes on religious liberty. The comments not only pointed to several recent Supreme Court cases (*Hosanna-Tabor*, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, and *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*), which have upheld the First Amendment rights of faith-based organizations; but the comments also emphasized the Virginia Bill of Rights and the Virginia Religious Freedom Restoration Act—Virginia laws that reinforce the religious liberty of faith-based organizations and individuals. The AACCS comments conclude, “Every religious ministry has the right to operate according to its religious beliefs without unconstitutional interference from the government. This bill will add common sense protections that allow all Virginians to live fully protected in [their] speech, associations, and religious beliefs.”

Congressman Calls for Investigation into National Association of Independent Schools

Last week, Congressman Jim Banks (R-IN) [called for an investigation](#) into the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) after a group of “Undercover Mothers” [revealed the indoctrination](#) happening in some NAIS schools. The [group](#) is among a growing number of Americans pushing back against political indoctrination such as critical race theory and gender ideology in schools. The group alleges that although the schools within the NAIS are independent institutions, their actions promoting leftist ideology stem from the efforts of the NAIS organization. They argue that the NAIS has departed from its academic mission, noting that among its chief values are “embracing diversity, championing inclusivity, and empowering community.” Further, the group alleges that the NAIS’s accrediting standards have fallen, finding that two-thirds of NAIS accrediting factors are “focused on social justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and nothing . . . focused on actually educating the kids.” Congressman Banks, member of the House Education and Labor Committee, stated in response to the allegation that “COVID has exposed just how far removed these schools, public and private, and their administrations are from parents, and how far removed from putting the interests of our kids first over the political interests of those who run our schools.” He continued, “This is all part of a large design by the left to take over these accrediting bodies, national associations, and use them as political tools” instead of focusing on providing an excellent education for students. Fortunately, parents are increasingly aware of these efforts and are standing up for their right to guide and control their children’s education.

Studies Showing Adverse Effects of State-Funded Universal Pre-K

While [universal pre-K](#) continues to be a top priority for the Biden Administration, a [study](#) showing the adverse effects of state-funded universal pre-K is gaining national attention. As reported earlier this month in [The Washington Flyer](#), a recent study out of Vanderbilt University shows that a state-funded universal pre-K program, the Tennessee Voluntary Pre-K Program, led to poorer student performance academically and behaviorally over time compared to students that did not participate in the program. In an op-ed discussing early education options, education policy expert Dan Lips pointed to the Tennessee study and also a Congressional report from 2012 as reasons that Democrats should “rethink the universal pre-K program” that they are trying to push as part of President Biden’s Build Back Better plan. The 2012 Congressional report reviewed the government-run Head Start program and [found](#) that “by the end of 3rd grade there were very few impacts found for either cohort in any of the four domains of cognitive, social-emotional, health and parenting practices.” Mr. Lips, who currently works as a visiting fellow with the Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity, recommended that lawmakers should consider offering school choice opportunities to parents for early education such as education savings accounts or tax credit scholarships rather than simply pouring funds into state-run preschool programs. He stated, “The Build Back Better plan would have steered millions of American children into state preschool programs that may do more harm than good. A better approach would be to give parents control of existing preschool funds to make the right choices for their children.”

In Case You Missed It:

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

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

[Promise to America’s Children](#)

[ABC’s of School Choice 2022 Edition Released](#)

[Teachers Unions’ Nonsensical Fight Against School Choice Hurts Students, Families](#)