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*“No people can be truly happy, though under the greatest enjoyment of civil liberties, if abridged of . . . their religious profession and worship.”*  
**William Penn**

**AACS Submits Amicus Brief in Defense of Religious Liberty**

The AACS joined an amicus brief that defends the religious freedom of religious institutions to make employment decisions based on the tenets of their faith. The brief was submitted for the case [Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish v. Nessel](#), in which a Catholic parish and academy along with some parents filed a lawsuit against the state of Michigan over a recently passed “nondiscrimination” amendment to the Michigan Civil Rights Act. The amendment added sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of groups protected from discrimination, and failed to include any religious exemption to protect faith-based institutions with religious beliefs that conflict with the government-endorsed gender ideology. As Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) [explained](#), the amendment “provided no protection for religious organizations that believe marriage between one man and one woman and the immutability of sex support human flourishing.” The Michigan Supreme Court ruled in 2022 that “sex discrimination” in the state’s civil rights law included sexual orientation and gender identity, and then the state legislature took the additional step last spring to codify the change into law through the passage of the amendment. Representing the Catholic church and school, ADF [argues](#) that the ruling and subsequent law means that the church and school could be forced to hire employees who do not adhere to their religious teaching on human sexuality, and they could be forced to offer teaching that violates the tenets of their faith. Furthermore, the government-imposed ideology threatens the rights of parents who may choose that school specifically because of the values and religious teachings.

The AACS joined with three other religious educational organizations in an amicus brief, submitted to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, that offers a thorough explanation of how the Michigan law violates the First Amendment and also the [ministerial exception](#) and [coreligionist doctrine](#). Regarding the ministerial exception, the brief explains that this principle “helps to safeguard the essential character and mission” of religious educational institutions which are “increasingly experiencing the conflict between the prevailing culture and schools’ teaching on human sexuality, marriage, and gender.” The brief states, “a strong ministerial exception preserves schools’ ability to hire teaching staff that will teach full-orbed biblical understanding of the world,” while a “weak ministerial exception jeopardizes the unique religious contributions of these institutions.” The brief also addresses the importance of “religious employers’ pursuit of employees that share their mission,” emphasizing that this practice “is not invidious but indispensable to maintaining the character of an organization.” The brief further pointed out that Michigan’s “use of its employment nondiscrimination laws to punish religious schools and organizations for hiring those who share their religious beliefs is a complete denial of these organizations’ right to operate in accordance with their religious doctrine.” Pointing to the First Amendment, the brief states that “by placing a *statutory* right on equal footing with a *constitutional* right, Michigan now wields its authority against religious organizations that act consistently with beliefs about important issues on which members of a free society may reasonably disagree.”

## **Jamison Coppola Radio Interview on Christian Education**

AACS Government Relations Director Jamison Coppola was [recently interviewed](#) on the Don Kroah radio show regarding the threats and challenges that face Christian education. Coppola stated that the “biggest challenge is who gets to decide what our religious practice looks like when it’s out of step with what bureaucrats or legislators or the general population thinks ought to be our religious practice.” Pointing to the [Old Deluder Satan Act](#) in 1647 which first established a form of public education, he reminded the listeners that this law was passed in order to ensure children would read the Bible and not be deceived by the “Old Deluder Satan.” The public education system today has strayed far from this original, spiritual intent; and while Christian schools maintain their autonomy, there are efforts underway to force conformity to secular ideology and teaching. One such attempt asserts that the tax-exempt status of religious schools makes them recipients of federal funding and, thus, accountable to government mandates. This has been the subject of lawsuits in three separate federal districts (one settled before finalized, one is against [Baltimore Lutheran High School Association](#), and one recently against [Hillsdale College](#).) Additionally, the Biden administration is mounting a government-wide attempt to redefine the word “sex” to include gender identity and sexual orientation through federal regulations, which would effectively establish a government-endorsed gender ideology that is contrary to the teachings of religious schools. Coppola also discussed the efforts of AACS to push back against these advances. The full interview can be found [here](#).

## **Eyes on the Board Act Introduced**

The AACS has supported an effort by Texas Sen. Ted Cruz to introduce the [Eyes on the Board Act](#), a bill that would prohibit the government from subsidizing unsupervised social media access on school buses. Congress created the E-Rate program to enable schools and libraries to obtain affordable broadband and directed the Federal Communications Commission to oversee the program. However, the Commission has decided to expand the program to school buses even though Congress specifically limited the program to classrooms and libraries. Currently, the program lacks any prohibition against students using subsidized Wi-Fi to be on social media. In other words, the program’s expansion will enable unsupervised students on school buses to spend their unsupervised school commute using apps like TikTok or Instagram. Cruz’s bill fights back against this expansion by requiring program users to block social media access on subsidized services, devices, and networks. Schools participating in the E-Rate program would have to create a screen time policy, similar to the internet safety policies required to protect children from obscene content. “Addictive and distracting social media apps are inviting every evil force on the planet into kids’ classrooms, homes, and minds by giving those who want to abuse or harm children direct access to communicate with them online,” [said Cruz](#). “The very least we can do is restrict access to social media at school so taxpayer subsidies aren’t complicit in harming our children.”

## **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](#)

[Promise to America’s Children](#)

[The Politically Incorrect Reality About What Boosts Kids Chances for Success](#)

[Opportunity to Support the AACS Youth Legislative Training Conference](#)