

From: Adam Wallace <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE-ADAM W.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:38:25 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of The Religious Liberty Commission:

I would like to formally express my outright and unequivocal objection to the notion of the merging of "Church and State." As an American citizen I have rights and the freedoms to express them so long as they do not oppress others because I am bound by civil law. However, as a Christian I am commissioned to preach the gospel of my Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel teaches me to love my neighbor as myself, to do good to those that hate me, to not return evil for evil, as well as to love my enemies. I do this not because I am bound by state law but because I am bound by God's law.

However, the difference is that I made that decision. I personally chose to subject myself to His moral law when I decided to follow after Christ, but I also am well aware that there are many other religious bodies within this nation that do not believe in or serve the same God as me. Therefore, to force them to would be oppressive which would undermine the First Amendment concerning Religious Freedom, which means that, in actuality, it is the antithesis of Religious Liberty. Religious Liberty means exactly what it says. Therefore, it equally means freedom for religion as much as it does freedom from religion. The civil law is mandatory but the moral law is optional because you can not force one to love another.

Jesus once said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15 ESV). He says this because love is optional. Therefore, if you do not love Him then you cannot serve Him. Furthermore, He denied every opportunity provided to merge Himself or His movement with the state, and He always drew a distinction between the two. The first example that I will use is found in Matthew 22, when Jesus was tempted by the Pharisees to answer whether or not it was lawful to pay taxes unto Caesar. During that time, Rome was the state and Jesus and His disciples were the church.

Matthew 22:18-21 ESV

But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Notice that He did not say, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are God's," or "Render unto God through His servant Caesar." The state in which I reside requires me to pay taxes, both local and federal, to properly fund its government jobs, social programs and infrastructure but God does not simply because to serve Him is optional. Therefore it is my duty to render to each their due. Jesus used this opportunity to show the differences between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world. One requires you to pay money but the other says "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1 ESV). There is not a single country or government that could ever exist in this world that could properly function without collecting a tax of some kind. Therefore, these two entities can not be symbiotic.

My second example is found in John 18. When Jesus was brought in to be questioned by Pilot the governor of Judea, who promptly asked Him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" This ultimately resulted in Jesus's response.

John 18:36 ESV

Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”

When Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world,” He openly declared that all things that are associated with or pertain to this world, fundamentally, have no association with His kingdom and thus the world that is to come. When one studies either the kingdoms of this world or the kingdom of Heaven, one will always find a contrast simply based on its lordship. Once when there was strife among the disciples of Jesus He declared, “...The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves...even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Luke 22:24-26, Matthew 20:28 ESV). Governments structurally do not reflect the mind of God, though certainly this government has come closest: a government to serve the people. However, we witness the exercise of lordship daily in all governments, and this is proof of their gentile nature.

The Lord said to His people, “And you will be holy to me, for I *am* holy, *the* LORD your God, the one separating you from all the nations, to be mine” (Leviticus 20:26, ABP). God calls us out of the world and nations to separate His people from the world. Therefore, no nation can enact His law. “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13, ESV). The gospel of Jesus Christ requires for there to always be a separation of “Church and State” simply because we live in a world of sin and just as much as there is no communion between “light and darkness” there is equally no fellowship between “righteousness and unrighteousness” (2 Corinthians 6:14-18 KJV).

For these reasons, I object to the following:

- Government funding for religious non-profit activities
- Government funding for religious education and religious clubs on public campuses
- Special treatment given to any group based on religion, whether Jewish or otherwise
- Repealing the Johnson Amendment

I, therefore, request that the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced.

Sincerely,
Adam W.

From: BRENDA JOHNSON <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:39:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Religious_Liberty.docx

I was troubled to read that the Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." With respect, that is exactly backwards — and as a person of faith, I find the idea more than alarming. That wall wasn't built by secularists to keep religion down. It was built by believers to keep the church free. A bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it opens the door for government money and political favors to march right in, until churches are competing for grants and answering to politicians instead of to God. History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, and it isn't good for either one. Also, in areas of conscience man has no jurisdiction or influence. That is between GOD and Man himself. For this fact alone they must be kept separate. To blend or bridge the line between them both will eventually result in national apostasy to GOD, which will cumulate in national ruin to America itself. And this great empire will cease to exist like all the great empires of the past. A quick check of the history of persecution in the first centuries will reveal the horror of what happens when they're combined. Please go back in history to take a look at the following resources in your local library. Luther at the Diet of Worms, Protest of the Princes, The Magna Carta 1215 A.D., The Mayflower Compact, Congressional documents (USA), serial No. 200, document No. 271. The United States Constitution is the fruit of centuries of ideas and experience. Sources include the English Parliament, English Petition of Right (1628), and the English Bill of Rights (1689). The establishment of this bridge will cause the ruin of America as we know.

Please don't build that bridge. Keep the wall. It protects the church far more than it constrains it. Sincerely,

Daniel L. Johnson

Jacksonville, Florida

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Daniel L. Johnson

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a citizen to ask you to sincerely reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state — especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God — and that's bad for the church and the country alike. Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please, keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free. I would love to include more history and facts; however, space will not allow.

Sincerely, Daniel L. Johnson Jacksonville, Florida

From: daveanitag2jablonski <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:40:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

The Separation of church and state is an indispensable element of our Constitution.

"We The People "... (Which was actually written by Gouverneur Morris NOT Madison)
demanded a right to Freedom of Conscience in religious matters.

The problem is...that those who flee Religious persecution often become the ones who DO the persecuting
THEMSELVES.

Case in point. 1630 Roger Williams being forced to flee the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and form " Rhode Island
and the Providence Plantations "
He was a good Puritan, but not quite "Good enough" to remain.

Too much control and regulation by ANY group, government included, starts out nicely, but is a recipe for
disaster.

Our Founding Fathers wanted to ban STATE FUNDED, AND STATE PROMOTED RELIGION...of ANY kind.

ALL people have the right to practice their religion with ZERO government involvement.

As a whole, I am NOT in favor of the Commission pursuing their findings, although there are some points that are
good on the surface...

BUT, as a WHOLE...NO...

Sent from my Galaxy

From: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Dennis Norton

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:40:45 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for the considerable time and effort you have invested in examining the state of religious liberty in the United States. Like you, I believe religious liberty is among America's greatest blessings and one of the principal reasons our nation has become a refuge for people of every faith. I also appreciate the Commission's desire to defend religious expression in an increasingly secular culture.

After carefully reading the Commission's report, however, I have become deeply concerned that it represents a significant departure from the historic American understanding of religious liberty. I do not question the sincerity of the Commission's motives or its desire to strengthen religion's influence within society. My concern is whether the report preserves the constitutional principle that has protected both religion and civil liberty since the founding of our nation.

The central question is not whether religion should influence society. Christians have always preached publicly, cared for the poor, defended justice, addressed moral questions, and spoken before rulers. Jesus Himself did all these things, and His followers should continue to do the same.

The question is different:

Where did God place the limits of civil government?

When Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate, He declared, *"My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight"* (**John 18:36, KJV**). Earlier He had taught, *"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's"* (**Matthew 22:21, KJV**). Christ acknowledged the legitimacy of civil government while also defining its limits. Civil rulers bear the sword to preserve order, protect life, and punish crime, but nowhere does Scripture entrust them with authority over worship, doctrine, or the conscience. Those belong to God alone.

America's founders recognized this biblical principle after witnessing centuries of persecution produced by the union of church and state throughout Europe. Thomas Jefferson expressed it clearly in his Letter to the Danbury Baptist Association (January 1, 1802) when he wrote that religion *"lies solely between Man & his God,"* that every individual *"owes account to none other for his faith or his worship,"* and that *"the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions."* James Madison likewise argued that *"The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man,"* and that religion is *"wholly exempt from its cognizance"* (James Madison, Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments, 1785). Jefferson also reflected upon Europe's history in Notes on the State of Virginia, Query

XVII (1785), observing that *"millions of innocent men, women and children... have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned,"* without advancing religious uniformity *"one inch."*

These men were not attempting to remove religion from public life. They believed religion was indispensable to a free society. Their concern was that civil government never assume authority that God had reserved to Himself.

For that reason, I was particularly concerned by Chairman Dan Patrick's statement that *"the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution"* and that *"from this day forward, that phrase should have no power over people of all faiths ever again in America."*

I agree that the exact phrase **"separation of church and state"** does not appear in the Constitution.

But that has never been the real question.

The real question is whether the Constitution establishes the principle that civil government possesses no jurisdiction over matters of faith and conscience.

Thomas Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptists did not invent that principle. It explained it. More than 150 years before Jefferson, Roger Williams spoke of a *"hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wilderness of the world"* (Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered*, 1644). Baptist leaders such as Isaac Backus argued that *"God has appointed two kinds of government in the world, which are in their nature and ought never to be confounded together"* (Isaac Backus, *An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty*, 1773). John Leland insisted that *"The liberty I contend for is more than toleration"* (John Leland, *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable*, 1791). James Madison defended the same principle through his Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments, and the First Amendment embodied it in constitutional law. Jefferson simply described what many of the founders believed the Constitution had already accomplished.

Nor was this understanding unique to America's founders. After touring the United States in the early nineteenth century, the French historian Alexis de Tocqueville sought to discover why religion flourished in America. After speaking with ministers of every denomination, he concluded that they attributed the peaceful influence of religion in America to its independence from civil government (Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, Part II, Chapter 9, 1835). He further observed that religion exercised enormous influence, not by governing the state, but by shaping the character of the people. America demonstrated that religion became stronger, not weaker, when it remained independent of civil power.

This is why I believe the Commission's proposal to replace a **"wall"** with a **"bridge"** deserves careful reconsideration.

A wall establishes a jurisdictional boundary.

A bridge establishes an institutional connection.

That change is more than a change in metaphor. It represents a different understanding of the relationship between civil government and religion.

The report also recommends expanded partnerships between government and faith-based organizations, broader opportunities for government funding of religious institutions, repeal of the Johnson Amendment, additional executive guidance concerning religion in public life, and the creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty. Each proposal may be debated on its own merits. Taken together, however, they move the discussion away from limiting governmental jurisdiction and toward encouraging institutional partnership between government and religion.

That shift raises an important constitutional question. Every institutional partnership requires someone to establish standards. Government must determine which religious organizations qualify for public support, what activities deserve funding, what beliefs satisfy the required standards, and what practices fall outside those limits. Questions that once belonged entirely to the church gradually become questions of public administration. In doing so, the state inevitably begins deciding matters that are inseparable from doctrine and conscience. The difficulty is not that government becomes religious; it is that government gradually becomes an arbiter of religion. America's founders sought to prevent precisely this progression by denying civil government jurisdiction over religion from the very beginning.

History repeatedly demonstrates where that path leads. Church-state unions rarely begin with persecution. They begin with cooperation. Government offers assistance. Religious institutions welcome support. Public funding brings public oversight. Oversight gradually becomes regulation, and regulation eventually reaches the conscience. America's founders understood this progression because they had inherited the painful lessons of European history. They established constitutional restraints not because they distrusted Christianity, but because they understood both Scripture and human nature.

One additional historical observation deserves consideration. For centuries, the Roman Catholic Church rejected unrestricted liberty of conscience. Pope Gregory XVI condemned what he called "*that absurd and erroneous proposition which claims that liberty of conscience must be maintained for everyone*" (Pope Gregory XVI, *Mirari Vos*, §14, 1832). Pope Pius IX described liberty of conscience as "*a most pestilential error*" (Pope Pius IX, *Quanta Cura*, §3, 1864). Pope Leo XIII likewise rejected unrestricted liberty of worship (Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas Praestantissimum*, §§15–16, 1888). Following the Second Vatican Council, the Church articulated a different understanding of religious freedom in *Dignitatis Humanae* (Second Vatican Council, 1965). Whether one accepts that development or not, it raises an important historical question. Is the Commission preserving the constitutional understanding embraced by America's founders, or is it moving toward a different historical understanding of the relationship between church and state?

Because a letter cannot adequately present centuries of biblical, constitutional, and historical evidence, I have attached my booklet, ***From Separation to Partnership: How the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Redefines Religious Liberty***. It documents the historical sources, constitutional documents, papal quotations, and biblical evidence summarized in this letter. I hope you will receive it in the spirit in which it is offered—not as an attack upon the Commission, but as a sincere contribution to an issue of profound importance for our nation.

If the Commission concludes that Jefferson's phrase should no longer shape America's understanding of religious liberty, I respectfully ask that it also consider whether the constitutional principle Jefferson was describing should likewise be abandoned. In my

judgment, that is the real question before the nation, not whether a particular phrase appears in the Constitution, but whether the Constitution continues to limit civil government to the jurisdiction God has entrusted to it.

Thank you for your willingness to consider these observations. It is my sincere prayer that America will continue to protect both religion and civil government by preserving the principle that has served this nation so well for nearly two and a half centuries:

The conscience belongs to God. Caesar has no rightful claim upon it.

Respectfully,

Dennis Norton

From: Tom Mejeur <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Tom Mejeur

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:40:58 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a United State of America citizen by birth asking you **to reconsider the majority report recommendations that would weaken the separation of church and state**, especially using government money to fund religious activities and the repeal of the Johnson Amendment.

The wall of separation between churches is important to me because my ancestors fled France because of religious persecution going to the Netherlands for religious freedom, and then migrated to the USA. **The church and state must be separate politically and financially for the benefit of both.** Majority religious control of the state eventually leads to oppression of minority religions.

The first amendment of the U.S. Constitution forbids the government from creating an official religion. Financial support from the government is establishing and maintaining religion. This is a slippery slope that countries throughout history did and **our founders purposely did not want our country to follow suit.**

The Johnson Amendment helps maintain a distance between religion and the state. Repealing or weakening it would be going in the wrong direction.

I urge you to retract this report for the direction it is headed.

Sincerely,

Tom Mejeur

Cadillac, MI

From: Jimmy France <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] A Thanks & Question About the Phrase - Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:41:04 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Letter_to_the_Religious_Liberty_Commission_-_Monday,_July_13,_2026.docx

Letter to the Religious Liberty Commission - Monday, July 13, 2026
Re: A Thank-you & Question About the Phrase, Separation of Church & State

Monday, July 13, 2026

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for all your efforts to protect religious liberty for every American. That is, protecting the freedom that neither the church nor the state can take away the unalienable right (a right no people can take from other people), of liberty of conscience, so every American can have the freedom to worship God according to his or her own conscience.

I also have a question regarding the phrase, Separation of Church and State.

The same word or phrase can mean something different to parties in a conversation, seeking the same goal.

The Protection of Religious Liberty to Every American
Regardless of Religious Faith

To some people, Separation of Church and State, means that people of faith cannot hold office.

To others this phrase, Separation of Church and State, means the removal of religious liberty for Americans. That is, a return of persecution to people of faith, that just didn't happen hundreds of years ago, but also to people of faith on our American shores from 1620 - the time the Pilgrims came to America to found a state based on religious liberty for themselves and their children.

Since both groups are seeking the same goal - protecting religious liberty - I'd like to take the Religious Liberty Commission back in time on a journey in our liberty loving and liberty pursuing history of American's and religious freedom, to do 2 things:

1. See 2 points that may help us understand this phrase of separation of church and state to see how both views can accomplish the same goal: Protect Religious Freedom
2. See 3 Points that John Wesley, founder of the Methodist church, shows how to correct society's admittedly low morals Biblically.

Point 1 - To Protect Religious Liberty

Where Religious Liberty Initially Began

Our Nation's Liberty-Loving Story Began...Long before...

- 1787 - Our USA Constitution - With Its Safeguards to Religious Liberty
- 1776 - Declaration of Independence - With its Unalienable Rights
- 1631 - Roger Williams - Brought Full Religious Liberty to America
- 1620 - Pilgrims - Came to Found a State on Religious Liberty
- 1529 - Protest of the Princes - Protecting Religious Liberty in Germany as a Right not a Favor
- 1517 - Protestant Reformation - Beginning to Restore Religious Liberty
- AD 31 - Early Christian Centuries - Who Didn't Have Religious Liberty - And Religious Liberty was Termed Heresy & Its Upholders were Hated & Proscribed
- BC 3 - AD 31 - Christ's 1st Advent - When He Modeled Religious Liberty

Our Nation's Liberty-Loving Story Began...

- In the Very Beginning!
- In the heart of our liberty-loving God

This is the correct place our Nation's Liberty-Loving Story Began!

Point 2 - To Protect Religious Liberty

God does not force the conscience

- **2 Cor. 3:17**, Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty.
- Since He doesn't, and we say our nation is Spirit led, we should not force the conscience either. That is, the church cannot use the state to enforce the ordinances of the church.
- This is what separation of church and state means to people who understand that separation of church and state is in the constitution in these two principles and location in the constitution:

Article 6 - Section 3 of USA Constitution:

Article 6: Debts, Supremacy, Oaths.

- **[Federal Legislators]** "The senators and representatives before mentioned,
- **[State Legislators]** and the members of the several state legislatures,
- **[State & Federal Executives]** and all executive
- **[State & Federal Judges]** and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by oath or affirmation, to support this Constitution; **but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.**"
- Why included?
- Who created this test?

Amendment 1

Amendment 1 - Freedom of Religion, Press, Expression (Ratified, 12-15-1791). "[1] Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion,

...or [2] prohibiting the free exercise thereof;

...or [3] abridging the freedom of speech, of the press;

...or [4] the right of the people peaceably to assemble,

...and [5] to petition the Government for a redress of grievance."

— Why included

— Who created this establishment of religion?

- Definition of Church and State:
 - "...the church may employ or control the power of the state;

- "...that religious observances may be enforced by secular laws;
- "...in short, that the authority of church and state is to dominate the conscience..."
- James Madison - 6th president of the USA said, "The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries." - Letter objecting to the use of government land for churches, 1803
- John Adam's Letter to the Militia of Massachusetts - 1798

1787 - USA Constitution 11 yrs Earlier America's Religious People Wrote...What They As a Religious People Could Not Do...	1798 - Adam's Letter
Article 6: Debts, Supremacy, Oaths. "The senators and representatives before mentioned, and the members of the several state legislatures, and all executive and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by oath or affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States."	Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people . It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other. (FROM TO THE OFFICERS OF THE FIRST BRIGADE OF THE THIRD DIVISION OF THE MILITIA OF MASSACHUSETTS, 11 October, 1798)

Also...

- Christ does not force conscience
- Holy Spirit does not force conscience: (2 Cor. 3:17)
- God's angels do not force conscience
- c. 3 BC - AD 31 - Christ modeled religious liberty on earth when He came. Examples:
 - Example 1: When the 5,000 left Him and followed Him no more after He fed them from 5 loaves and 2 fishes (Jn. 6:66-68), He didn't send the soldiers after them to bring them back. Instead, He turned to His 12 disciples and asked, "Will you leave also?" Because He lived God's liberty loving heart to all He came to save.
 - Example 2: When Christ sent the 70 out to prepare the way to come to their cities, He told them if the people of any town rejected His message and gospel of peace, He didn't tell them to:
 - Throw them into the fiery furnace like Nebuchadnezzar did to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego in Daniel 3.
 - Throw them into the den of lions like the enemies of Daniel did to Daniel in Daniel 6.
 - Instead, in harmony with His liberty loving heart, He instructed His disciples to simply shake off dust from their feet and move to the next town or city (Lk. 10:11).
- 1517 - Reformation began restoring religious liberty
- 1529 - German Protestant Princes defended religious liberty - not as a favor granted by governments to their citizens, but as a right given by God to every inhabitant of earth that governments were not allowed to take away. This same thought made its way with Protestants onto our liberty loving soil into our liberty loving constitution. They said:
 - "In matters of conscience the majority has **no power**."
 - "To protect liberty of conscience is the duty of the state, and this is the limit of its authority in matters of religion. Every secular government that attempts to regulate or

enforce religious observances by civil authority is sacrificing the very principle for which the evangelical Christian so nobly struggled."

- They corrected 2 abuses:

2 Abuses of Man in Matters of Faith	Instead, Protestants Sets...
Abuse 1: "...the intrusion of the civil magistrate..."	Correction 1: "...the power of the conscience above the magistrate..."
Abuse 2 "...the arbitrary authority of the church."	Correction 2 (GC 203:4 - 204:0): "...the authority of the word of God above the visible church."

- 1620 - Pilgrims came to America to found a state to provide religious liberty for themselves and their children. But they were not equally willing to extend this same religious liberty that differed from their views.
 - Their farewell pastor, John Robinson, reminded them of their church covenant to keep all God has said and will say whenever and through whomever God chooses.
 - When they arrived they:
 - Didn't extend the same religious liberty to others that they sacrificed so much to secure to themselves.
 - Set up a policy that only church members could hold office and vote.
 - They legislated on the 1st table of the 10 Commandments - the 1st 4 commandments - man's responsibility to God, and punished all who dissented from their views.
 - 1631 - Roger Williams came to help them see full religious liberty.
 - The Pilgrims refused to follow their farewell pastor, John Robinson's counsel that more truth was coming, hear it, test it by the Bible, and follow it. Therefore, the Pilgrims banished Roger Williams.
 - So Roger Williams established Rhode Island to established full religious liberty we enjoy today.
 - 1776 - We embedded into our Declaration of Independence - seen coming from the heart of God.
 - 1787 - Our founding father's wisely included these safeguards of religious and civil liberty in our USA Constitution that we enjoy today.

This is what the group believing that the work of the state (enforce only the 2nd Table of the 10 Commandments about the uncivil actions of its citizens) and the church to share the gospel.

For when the church uses the state to enforce the church's ordinances or the state tries to enforce the 1st Table (Commandments: 1 - 4 = Man's duty to God), persecution always results:

Babylon	Medo-Persia	Pagan Rome
Daniel 3 - Fiery Furnace	Daniel 6 - Lions' Den	Coliseum - Christians

And remember, Ecclesiastes 1:9, says:

History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new.

Now 3 Points to Correct Society's Low Morals Biblically

Now let's follow Christ's advice to replace the wrong - remove religious liberty - with 3 points for the right - Correct Society's Low Morals ... Biblically:

Point 1 - Exalt God's Law (The 10 Commandments) = God's Moral X-Ray

It is absurd, therefore, to offer a physician to them that are whole, or that at least imagine themselves so to be. You are first to convince them that they are sick; otherwise they will not thank you for your labor. It is equally absurd to offer Christ to them whose heart is whole, having never yet been broken.”—*Ibid.*, sermon 35.

Point 2 - Uplift Christ as a Complete Savior

The Great Physician offering the Cure from the Moral X-Ray

John Wesley declared the perfect harmony of the law and the gospel. “There is, therefore, the closest connection that can be conceived, between the law and the gospel. **On the one hand, the law continually makes way for, and points us to, the gospel; on the other, the gospel continually leads us to a more exact fulfilling of the law.** The law, for instance, requires us to love God, to love our neighbor, to be meek, humble, or holy. We feel that we are not sufficient for these things; yea, that ‘with man this is impossible;’ but we see a promise of God to give us that love, and to make us humble, meek, and holy: we lay hold of this gospel, of these glad tidings; it is done unto us according to our faith; and ‘the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us,’ through faith which is in Christ Jesus....

Point 3 - Let God Be Sole Judge of Faith

If someone loves his~~er~~ her sin more than the Savior post-Moral X-Ray

Condemn no man for not thinking as you think. **Let every one enjoy the full and free liberty of thinking for himself.** Let every man use his own judgment, since every man must give an account of himself to God. Abhor every approach, in any kind or degree, to the spirit of persecution, if you cannot reason nor persuade a man into the truth, never attempt to force a man into it. If love will not compel him to come, **leave him to God, the judge of all.**

So here are some thoughts from those who are concerned about the implications of the removal of the wall of the separation of church and state. Perhaps this view makes more sense now to the objection of the removal of the wall of separation of the church and state in this healthy discussion of this misunderstood phrase:

The Wall of Separation of Church & State

So thank you again for all the hard work your commission is doing to protect religious liberty for every American. Please continue protecting religious freedom for every America, regardless how both sides define this key phrase.

Your friend in Christ,
Jimmy France

Letter to the Religious Liberty Commission - Monday, July 13, 2026
Re: A Thank-you & Question About the Phrase, Separation of Church & State

Monday, July 13, 2026

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

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Regardless of Religious Faith

To some people, Separation of Church and State, means that people of faith cannot hold office.

To others this phrase, Separation of Church and State, means the removal of religious liberty for Americans. That is, a return of persecution to people of faith, that just didn't happen hundreds of years ago, but also to people of faith on our American shores from 1620 - the time the Pilgrims came to America to found a state based on religious liberty for themselves and their children.

Since both groups are seeking the same goal - protecting religious liberty - I'd like to take the Religious Liberty Commission back in time on a journey in our liberty loving and liberty pursuing history of American's and religious freedom, to do 2 things:

1. See 2 points that may help us understand this phrase of separation of church and state to see how both views can accomplish the same goal: Protect Religious Freedom
2. See 3 Points that John Wesley, founder of the Methodist church, shows how to correct society's admittedly low morals Biblically.

Point 1 - To Protect Religious Liberty

Where Religious Liberty Initially Began

Our Nation's Liberty-Loving Story Began...Long before...

- 1787 - Our USA Constitution - With Its Safeguards to Religious Liberty
- 1776 - Declaration of Independence - With its Unalienable Rights
- 1631 - Roger Williams - Brought Full Religious Liberty to America
- 1620 - Pilgrims - Came to Found a State on Religious Liberty
- 1529 - Protest of the Princes - Protecting Religious Liberty in Germany as a Right not a Favor
- 1517 - Protestant Reformation - Beginning to Restore Religious Liberty
- AD 31 - Early Christian Centuries - Who Didn't Have Religious Liberty - And Religious Liberty was Termed Heresy & Its Upholders were Hated & Proscribed
- BC 3 - AD 31 - Christ's 1st Advent - When He Modeled Religious Liberty

Our Nation's Liberty-Loving Story Began...

- In the Very Beginning!
- In the heart of our liberty-loving God

This is the correct place our Nation's Liberty-Loving Story Began!

Point 2 - To Protect Religious Liberty

God does not force the conscience

- **2 Cor. 3:17**, Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty.
- Since He doesn't, and we say our nation is Spirit led, we should not force the conscience either. That is, the church cannot use the state to enforce the ordinances of the church.
- This is what separation of church and state means to people who understand that separation of church and state is in the constitution in these two principles and location in the constitution:

Article 6 - Section 3 of USA Constitution:

Article 6: Debts, Supremacy, Oaths.

- **[Federal Legislators]** "The senators and representatives before mentioned,
- **[State Legislators]** and the members of the several state legislatures,
- **[State & Federal Executives]** and all executive
- **[State & Federal Judges]** and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by oath or affirmation, to support this Constitution; **but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States."**
 - Why included?
 - Who created this test?

Amendment 1

Amendment 1 – Freedom of Religion, Preess, Expression (Ratified, 12-15-1791). “[1] Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion,

...or [2] prohibiting the free exercise thereof;

...or [3] abridging the freeddom of speech, of the press;

...or [4] the right of the people peaceably to assemble,

...and [5] to petition the Government for a redress of grievance.”

- Why included
- Who created this establishment of religion?
- Definition of Church and State:
 - "...the church may employ or control the power of the state;
 - "...that religious observances may be enforced by secular laws;
 - "...in short, that the authority of church and state is to dominate the conscience...”
- James Madison - 6th president of the USA said, "The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries." - Letter objecting to the use of government land for churches, 1803
- John Adam’s Letter to the Militia of Massachusetts - 1798

1787 - USA Constitution

11 yrs Earlier

America's Religious People Wrote...What

They As a Religious People Could Not Do...

Article 6: Debts, Supremacy, Oaths. “The senators and representatives before mentioned, and the members of the several state legislatures, and all executive and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be **bound** by oath or affirmation, to support this Constitution; but **no religioius test** shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.”

1798 – Adam’s Letter

Our Constitution was made only for a moral and **religious people**. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.

(FROM TO THE OFFICERS OF THE FIRST BRIGADE OF THE THIRD DIVISION OF THE MILITIA OF MASSACHUSETTS, 11 October, 1798)

Also...

- Christ does not force conscience
- Holy Spirit does not force conscience: (2 Cor. 3:17)
- God’s angels do not force conscience
- c. 3 BC - AD 31 - Christ modeled religious liberty on earth when He came. Examples:
 - Example 1: When the 5,000 left Him and followed Him no more after He fed them from 5 loaves and 2 fishes (Jn. 6:66-68), He didn’t send the soldiers

after them to bring them back. Instead, He turned to His 12 disciples and asked, "Will you leave also?" Because He lived God's liberty loving heart to all He came to save.

- Example 2: When Christ sent the 70 out to prepare the way to come to their cities, He told them if the people of any town rejected His message and gospel of peace, He didn't tell them to:
 - Throw them into the fiery furnace like Nebuchadnezzar did to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego in Daniel 3.
 - Throw them into the den of lions like the enemies of Daniel did to Daniel in Daniel 6.
- Instead, in harmony with His liberty loving heart, He instructed His disciples to simply shake off dust from their feet and move to the next town or city (Lk. 10:11).
- 1517 - Reformation began restoring religious liberty
- 1529 - German Protestant Princes defended religious liberty - not as a favor granted by governments to their citizens, but as a right given by God to every inhabitant of earth that governments were not allowed to take away. This same thought made its way with Protestants onto our liberty loving soil into our liberty loving constitution. They said:
 - "In matters of conscience the majority has **no power**."
 - "To protect liberty of conscience is the duty of the state, and this is the limit of its authority in matters of religion. Every secular government that attempts to regulate or enforce religious observances by civil authority is sacrificing the very principle for which the evangelical Christian so nobly struggled."
 - They corrected 2 abuses:

2 Abuses of Man in Matters of Faith

Abuse 1: "...the intrusion of the civil magistrate..."

Abuse 2 "...the arbitrary authority of the church."

Instead, Protestants Sets...

Correction 1: "...the power of the **conscience** above the magistrate..."

Correction 2 (GC 203:4 - 204:0): "...the authority of **the word of God** above the visible church."

- 1620 - Pilgrims came to America to found a state to provide religious liberty for themselves and their children. But they were not equally willing to extend this same religious liberty that differed from their views.
 - Their farewell pastor, John Robinson, reminded them of their church covenant to keep all God has said and will say whenever and through whomever God chooses.
 - When they arrived they:
 - Didn't extend the same religious liberty to others that they sacrificed so much to secure to themselves.
 - Set up a policy that only church members could hold office and vote.

- They legislated on the 1st table of the 10 Commandments - the 1st 4 commandments - man's responsibility to God, and punished all who dissented from their views.
- 1631 - Roger Williams came to help them see full religious liberty.
 - The Pilgrims refused to follow their farewell pastor, John Robinson's counsel that more truth was coming, hear it, test it by the Bible, and follow it. Therefore, the Pilgrims banished Roger Williams.
 - So Roger Williams established Rhode Island to established full religious liberty we enjoy today.
- 1776 - We embedded into our Declaration of Independence - seen coming from the heart of God.
- 1787 - Our founding father's wisely included these safeguards of religious and civil liberty in our USA Constitution that we enjoy today.

This is what the group believing that the work of the state (enforce only the 2nd Table of the 10 Commandments about the uncivil actions of its citizens) and the church to share the gospel.

For when the church uses the state to enforce the church's ordinances or the state tries to enforce the 1st Table (Commandments: 1 - 4 = Man's duty to God), persecution always results:

Babylon	Medo-Persia	Pagan Rome
Daniel 3 - Fiery Furnace	Daniel 6 - Lions' Den	Coliseum - Christians

And remember, Ecclesiastes 1:9, says:

History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new.

Now 3 Points to Correct Society's Low Morals Biblically

Now let's follow Christ's advice to replace the wrong - remove religious liberty - with 3 points for the right - Correct Society's Low Morals ... Biblically:

Point 1 - Exalt God's Law (The 10 Commandments) = God's Moral X-Ray

It is absurd, therefore, to offer a physician to them that are whole, or that at least imagine themselves so to be. You are first to convince them that they are sick; otherwise they will not thank you for your labor. It is equally absurd to offer Christ to them whose heart is whole, having never yet been broken.”—*Ibid.*, sermon 35.

Point 2 - Uplift Christ as a Complete Savior

The Great Physician offering the Cure from the Moral X-Ray

John Wesley declared the perfect harmony of the law and the gospel. "There is, therefore, the closest connection that can be conceived, between the law and the gospel. **On the one hand, the law continually makes way for, and points us to, the gospel; on the other, the gospel continually leads us to a more exact fulfilling of the law.** The law, for instance, requires us to love God, to love our neighbor, to be meek, humble, or holy. We feel that we are not sufficient for these things; yea, that 'with man this is impossible;' but we see a promise of God to give us that love, and to make us humble, meek, and holy: we lay hold of this gospel, of these glad tidings; it is done unto us according to our faith; and 'the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us,' through faith which is in Christ Jesus....

Point 3 - Let God Be Sole Judge of Faith

If someone loves his / her sin more than the Savior post-Moral X-Ray

Condemn no man for not thinking as you think. **Let every one enjoy the full and free liberty of thinking for himself.** Let every man use his own judgment, since every man must give an account of himself to God. Abhor every approach, in any kind or degree, to the spirit of persecution, if you cannot reason nor persuade a man into the truth, never attempt to force a man into it. If love will not compel him to come, **leave him to God, the judge of all.**

So here are some thoughts from those who are concerned about the implications of the removal of the wall of the separation of church and state. Perhaps this view makes more sense now to the objection of the removal of the wall of separation of the church and state in this healthy discussion of this misunderstood phrase:

The Wall of Separation of Church & State

So thank you again for all the hard work your commission is doing to protect religious liberty for every American. Please continue protecting religious freedom for every America, regardless how both sides define this key phrase.

Your friend in Christ,
Jimmy France

From: Brigitte Henrich <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Brigitte A Henrich

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:41:06 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing to comment on the Commission's draft report. I respectfully urge you to defend both religion clauses of the First Amendment — no establishment, and free exercise — with equal vigor. My reasons are these:

Religious liberty is a right, not a majority's permission. "A right is something which, in its very nature, is inherent in the one possessing it, independent of the will of all other persons." Popular support can justify a highway bill; it cannot justify a religious one, because religion was never among the things submitted to the vote.

Separation was the founders' deliberate design, urged on them by the churches themselves. Madison told the Virginia ratifying convention: "There is not a shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion. Its least interference with it would be a most flagrant usurpation." I ask the Commission to honor that design, not explain it away.

Force can make hypocrites, never Christians — and state sponsorship corrupts the faith it favors. President Grant said it plainly in 1875: "Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the Church, and the private school, supported entirely by private contribution. Keep the State and Church forever separate."

The founding generation's own Congress already examined this question. The reports of Richard M. Johnson's committees, adopted in 1829 and 1830, declared: "It is not in the legitimate province of the legislature to determine what religion is true or what false. Our government is a civil and not a religious institution." I ask the Commission to align its report with that precedent.

I support the separation of state out of areas of conscience like faith and bodily health.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Brigitte A Henrich
Welsh, LA

From: Katherine Bussard <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on the Draft Report of the President's RLC from Salt & Light Global

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:42:04 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: SLG_Comment_on_Religious_Liberty_Report_Draft.pdf

Inline-Images: Part_2.png

Good afternoon,

Please find attached public comment regarding **the Draft Report of the President's Religious Liberty Commission**.

Thank you for your excellent work and consideration of our humble suggestions!
God bless you!

Katherine

Katherine Bussard
Executive Director & C.O.O.
Salt & Light Global



SALT & LIGHT GLOBAL

Cell: [REDACTED] PII
www.SaltLightGlobal.org
www.SLGwitness.com



Monday, July 13, 2026

Via Electronic Mail to [REDACTED] PII

Religious Liberty Commission

U.S. Department of Justice

Office of the Associate Attorney General

950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Room 5706, Washington, DC 20530

Re: Public Comment on the Draft Report of the President's Religious Liberty Commission

Chairman Patrick, Vice Chairman Carson, and Distinguished Members of the Commission:

Salt & Light Global is grateful for the opportunity to provide comment on the Draft Report of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty. As a faith-based nonprofit organization dedicated to defending religious liberty and promoting good governance under the rule of law, Salt & Light Global commends the Commission for its thoughtful, comprehensive, and principled work. The thousands of request for counsel that our staff receives year over year testify to that fact that churches, business owners, parents, students, medical professionals, elected leaders, and others continue to face adverse action because of their sincerely held faith—often at the hands of government entities who do not properly understand the First Amendment. The report reflects a serious commitment to protecting what has long been recognized as America's First Liberty—the free exercise of religion—and to restoring a constitutional understanding of religious freedom that benefits people of every faith and of no faith.

We thank the members of the Commission for their diligent efforts and express our strong support for the report and its recommendations. We particularly appreciate the

report's emphasis on education, accountability, and the restoration of constitutional protections that have too often been neglected or misunderstood.

Support for Recommendations; Strengthening Written Explanations

Among the Twelve Key Recommendations, we wish to express our especially strong support for the third recommendation (page 200), which would require a public official to provide a written explanation of an alleged religious liberty violation within thirty days of the incident, citing the specific constitutional or statutory authority relied upon. Too often, citizens whose religious liberties have been burdened receive little or no meaningful explanation for governmental action, making it difficult to understand the legal basis for the decision or to pursue timely corrective action. In other cases, what a governmental agency may presume is unconstitutional due to misinformation may in fact be lawful; the act of citing a specific reference and alleged violation may aid resolving such a misunderstanding before anyone's rights are harmed. This recommendation represents an important step toward governmental transparency and accountability but could be even stronger and more enduring if enshrined in law. We respectfully encourage the Commission to further develop this recommendation by considering how it would be enforced in practice. Without meaningful enforcement mechanisms that are resilient throughout the changing political landscape, reporting requirements can become merely aspirational. The final report should consider whether administrative oversight, inspector general review, reporting requirements, or other accountability measures would best ensure compliance and provide real-world benefit to citizens whose constitutional rights are at stake.

Investing in Enforcement & Accountability

Salt & Light Global also believes the report highlights an important need for greater federal resources dedicated to protecting religious liberty. The Department of Justice, particularly those offices responsible for enforcing federal civil rights protections and defending religious liberty, should receive sufficient funding and staffing to investigate complaints promptly, provide timely guidance to federal, state, and local governments, and pursue appropriate litigation where necessary. Delayed justice often functions as denied justice, particularly for individuals and small organizations lacking the financial resources to sustain prolonged legal disputes. Delayed justice can also embolden perpetrators of injustice (particularly state and local governmental agencies) who feel accountability and enforcement of federal law will never come—especially when those same agencies are threatened with aggressive enforcement of conflicting state statutes.

Support for Reversing Harmful Precedent and Reforming the Judiciary

Likewise, we strongly support continued efforts to confirm originalist judges and restore robust Free Exercise protections by overturning *Employment Division v. Smith* and other related case precedent. The Commission correctly recognizes that *Employment Division v. Smith*, *City of Boerne v. Flores*, and *Christian Legal Society v. Martinez*, significantly weakened constitutional protections for religious exercise and has contributed to decades of uncertainty and unnecessary litigation. Restoring meaningful constitutional scrutiny would better safeguard the First Amendment rights of all Americans. Regardless of whether an injustice is “generally applicable,” it remains an injustice and ought to be righted in accordance with the rule of law.

Civic Education and Prevention

One of the report's greatest strengths is its emphasis on preventative measures. Preventing constitutional violations before they occur is preferable to relying solely upon litigation after rights have already been infringed. We strongly support expanded educational initiatives directed toward federal agencies, state and local governments, employers, educational institutions, and the general public regarding the scope, practical application, and importance of religious liberty protections under the Constitution and federal law.

In particular, we believe additional attention should be devoted to educating state and local governments regarding their obligations under Article VI, Clause 2 of the Constitution—the Supremacy Clause—which establishes that the Constitution and federal law are the supreme law of the land. Increased federal education and guidance may help reduce unnecessary conflicts before they develop into litigation.

This need is especially acute in jurisdictions whose civil rights statutes have created recurring tensions between religious liberty and protections based upon sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). States including California, Connecticut, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, and the District of Columbia have enacted laws establishing equal placement for SOGI protections alongside protections against religious discrimination. In practice, conflicts frequently arise when the sincerely held religious beliefs and practices of many faith communities—including Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others—concerning marriage, sexuality, or biological sex intersect with these statutory frameworks. As a result, religious individuals and organizations often find

themselves in recurring legal conflicts with state and local agencies, creating what has become, in many instances, a perpetual race to the courthouse. Rather than reducing conflict, clearer federal guidance regarding constitutional protections for religious exercise as *the first civil liberty* and federal preemption where applicable could help prevent unnecessary violations while providing greater certainty for government officials and citizens alike.

Similar concerns arise in the healthcare context. For example, amendments to Michigan's Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act expanding protected classifications have generated concerns among pro-life physicians and healthcare professionals regarding conscience protections and religious liberty. As states continue to revise their civil rights laws in ways that may intersect with constitutional protections for free exercise of sincerely held religious beliefs, robust federal education regarding First Amendment jurisprudence and federal constitutional obligations becomes increasingly important.

We also encourage the Commission to address another area of religious liberty that deserves greater attention: equal access rights for religious organizations and student groups to use public facilities on the same terms as other community organizations. Although Supreme Court precedent has repeatedly affirmed equal access principles, religious student organizations and community groups continue to encounter barriers when seeking to use public school classrooms, gymnasiums, auditoriums, and other public facilities during non-instructional hours. For example, in Lansing, MI Public Schools, a faith-based after school club that encourages students in character formation and community service has been shut out of the district for multiple school years, "Due to the religious nature/content of Fire Up For Life Curriculum." While the wheels of the justice system turn slowly, religious children miss out on years of positive learning opportunities. This instance is just one example of many where local government bars the doors to faith-based activities on public property. Additional guidance and educational materials directed toward school districts and local governments could substantially reduce these recurring constitutional violations and aid in restoring the enjoyment of the first civil liberty to all citizens.

Finally, Salt & Light Global applauds the Commission's recognition that long-term protection of religious liberty requires cultural understanding in addition to legal enforcement. Public appreciation for the constitutional meaning of religious liberty has diminished over time, making civic education an essential component of preserving this foundational freedom. To complement the educational initiatives proposed in the report, we recommend the development of a comprehensive national public awareness campaign utilizing modern communications platforms, including social media. Such a campaign could include professionally produced educational content, partnerships

with civic organizations and educational institutions, and paid placement of digital content to ensure broad public reach. Effective civic education requires meeting citizens where they receive information today, and strategic use of digital media offers an unprecedented opportunity to improve public understanding of religious liberty, constitutional rights, and the mutual respect necessary for a pluralistic society.

Conclusion

Again, we thank the Commission for its outstanding work and commend its commitment to preserving one of our Nation's most fundamental constitutional freedoms. Salt & Light Global strongly supports the recommendations contained in the Draft Report and encourages continued efforts to strengthen accountability, increase educational outreach, ensure adequate enforcement resources, and restore the robust constitutional protections for religious liberty envisioned by the Framers. We stand ready to assist in advancing these important objectives and appreciate the Commission's leadership in protecting America's First Liberty.

Respectfully submitted,

Katherine Bussard

C.E.O. & Executive Director

Salt & Light Global

PII

www.SaltLightGlobal.org

From: Jai Roza <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- Separation of Church and State – Jai Roza, Founder & CEO, Eden's Conflict LLC

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:42:29 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

As the founder and CEO of Eden's Conflict, my life's work has been helping people voluntarily discover Scripture, wrestle with difficult questions, and build a genuine relationship with God. Our mission has never been to convince people through political power, but through personal conviction.

For that reason, I believe the separation of church and state remains one of the greatest protections for authentic faith.

Throughout history, whenever governments have gained authority over religion, or religious institutions have sought political power to accomplish spiritual goals, both have suffered. Governments begin deciding religious questions they were never designed to answer, while churches become tempted to rely on legislation rather than discipleship.

Faith cannot be legislated. It must be chosen.

The greatest commandment calls people to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love, by its very nature, requires freedom. A coerced conscience may produce outward compliance, but it cannot produce genuine faith.

As Christians, our commission is to make disciples, not merely to win political influence. The Church has always been strongest when its message has been carried by conviction, service, sacrifice, and the work of the Holy Spirit rather than by governmental authority.

Because of that conviction, I believe policies that blur the distinction between church and state deserve careful reconsideration. The independence of both institutions protects the freedom of every citizen to worship according to conscience, or not at all, without fear that the government will favor one religious viewpoint over another.

This protection benefits Christians as much as anyone else. Today's majority can become tomorrow's minority. Principles that safeguard religious liberty today will continue protecting future generations regardless of who holds political power.

Eden's Conflict exists to inspire people to seek truth freely. That mission depends on liberty of conscience. I hope the Commission will continue to uphold policies that preserve both religious freedom and the institutional separation that has allowed faith to flourish in America without government control.

Respectfully,

PII
PII

PII

PII

From: Stephanie H <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- Separation of Church and State- Stephanie Hall

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:43:09 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a citizen to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state — especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God — and that's bad for the church and the country alike. Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Hall
Columbia, TN

From: " [REDACTED] PII " < [REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" < [REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State - Dennis Norton (second submission with address)

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:44:00 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for the considerable time and effort you have invested in examining the state of religious liberty in the United States. Like you, I believe religious liberty is among America's greatest blessings and one of the principal reasons our nation has become a refuge for people of every faith. I also appreciate the Commission's desire to defend religious expression in an increasingly secular culture.

After carefully reading the Commission's report, however, I have become deeply concerned that it represents a significant departure from the historic American understanding of religious liberty. I do not question the sincerity of the Commission's motives or its desire to strengthen religion's influence within society. My concern is whether the report preserves the constitutional principle that has protected both religion and civil liberty since the founding of our nation.

The central question is not whether religion should influence society. Christians have always preached publicly, cared for the poor, defended justice, addressed moral questions, and spoken before rulers. Jesus Himself did all these things, and His followers should continue to do the same.

The question is different:

Where did God place the limits of civil government?

When Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate, He declared, *"My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight"* (**John 18:36, KJV**). Earlier He had taught, *"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's"* (**Matthew 22:21, KJV**). Christ acknowledged the legitimacy of civil government while also defining its limits. Civil rulers bear the sword to preserve order, protect life, and punish crime, but nowhere does Scripture entrust them with authority over worship, doctrine, or the conscience. Those belong to God alone.

America's founders recognized this biblical principle after witnessing centuries of persecution produced by the union of church and state throughout Europe. Thomas Jefferson expressed it clearly in his Letter to the Danbury Baptist Association (January 1, 1802) when he wrote that religion *"lies solely between Man & his God,"* that every individual *"owes account to none other for his faith or his worship,"* and that *"the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions."* James Madison likewise argued that *"The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man,"* and that religion is *"wholly exempt from its cognizance"* (James Madison, Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments, 1785). Jefferson also reflected upon Europe's history in Notes on the State of Virginia, Query

XVII (1785), observing that *"millions of innocent men, women and children... have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned,"* without advancing religious uniformity *"one inch."*

These men were not attempting to remove religion from public life. They believed religion was indispensable to a free society. Their concern was that civil government never assume authority that God had reserved to Himself.

For that reason, I was particularly concerned by Chairman Dan Patrick's statement that *"the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution"* and that *"from this day forward, that phrase should have no power over people of all faiths ever again in America."*

I agree that the exact phrase **"separation of church and state"** does not appear in the Constitution.

But that has never been the real question.

The real question is whether the Constitution establishes the principle that civil government possesses no jurisdiction over matters of faith and conscience.

Thomas Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptists did not invent that principle. It explained it. More than 150 years before Jefferson, Roger Williams spoke of a *"hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wilderness of the world"* (Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered*, 1644). Baptist leaders such as Isaac Backus argued that *"God has appointed two kinds of government in the world, which are in their nature and ought never to be confounded together"* (Isaac Backus, *An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty*, 1773). John Leland insisted that *"The liberty I contend for is more than toleration"* (John Leland, *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable*, 1791). James Madison defended the same principle through his Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments, and the First Amendment embodied it in constitutional law. Jefferson simply described what many of the founders believed the Constitution had already accomplished.

Nor was this understanding unique to America's founders. After touring the United States in the early nineteenth century, the French historian Alexis de Tocqueville sought to discover why religion flourished in America. After speaking with ministers of every denomination, he concluded that they attributed the peaceful influence of religion in America to its independence from civil government (Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, Part II, Chapter 9, 1835). He further observed that religion exercised enormous influence, not by governing the state, but by shaping the character of the people. America demonstrated that religion became stronger, not weaker, when it remained independent of civil power.

This is why I believe the Commission's proposal to replace a **"wall"** with a **"bridge"** deserves careful reconsideration.

A wall establishes a jurisdictional boundary.

A bridge establishes an institutional connection.

That change is more than a change in metaphor. It represents a different understanding of the relationship between civil government and religion.

The report also recommends expanded partnerships between government and faith-based organizations, broader opportunities for government funding of religious institutions, repeal of the Johnson Amendment, additional executive guidance concerning religion in public life, and the creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty. Each proposal may be debated on its own merits. Taken together, however, they move the discussion away from limiting governmental jurisdiction and toward encouraging institutional partnership between government and religion.

That shift raises an important constitutional question. Every institutional partnership requires someone to establish standards. Government must determine which religious organizations qualify for public support, what activities deserve funding, what beliefs satisfy the required standards, and what practices fall outside those limits. Questions that once belonged entirely to the church gradually become questions of public administration. In doing so, the state inevitably begins deciding matters that are inseparable from doctrine and conscience. The difficulty is not that government becomes religious; it is that government gradually becomes an arbiter of religion. America's founders sought to prevent precisely this progression by denying civil government jurisdiction over religion from the very beginning.

History repeatedly demonstrates where that path leads. Church-state unions rarely begin with persecution. They begin with cooperation. Government offers assistance. Religious institutions welcome support. Public funding brings public oversight. Oversight gradually becomes regulation, and regulation eventually reaches the conscience. America's founders understood this progression because they had inherited the painful lessons of European history. They established constitutional restraints not because they distrusted Christianity, but because they understood both Scripture and human nature.

One additional historical observation deserves consideration. For centuries, the Roman Catholic Church rejected unrestricted liberty of conscience. Pope Gregory XVI condemned what he called "*that absurd and erroneous proposition which claims that liberty of conscience must be maintained for everyone*" (Pope Gregory XVI, *Mirari Vos*, §14, 1832). Pope Pius IX described liberty of conscience as "*a most pestilential error*" (Pope Pius IX, *Quanta Cura*, §3, 1864). Pope Leo XIII likewise rejected unrestricted liberty of worship (Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas Praestantissimum*, §§15–16, 1888). Following the Second Vatican Council, the Church articulated a different understanding of religious freedom in *Dignitatis Humanae* (Second Vatican Council, 1965). Whether one accepts that development or not, it raises an important historical question. Is the Commission preserving the constitutional understanding embraced by America's founders, or is it moving toward a different historical understanding of the relationship between church and state?

Because a letter cannot adequately present centuries of biblical, constitutional, and historical evidence, I have attached my booklet, ***From Separation to Partnership: How the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Redefines Religious Liberty***. It documents the historical sources, constitutional documents, papal quotations, and biblical evidence summarized in this letter. I hope you will receive it in the spirit in which it is offered—not as an attack upon the Commission, but as a sincere contribution to an issue of profound importance for our nation.

If the Commission concludes that Jefferson's phrase should no longer shape America's understanding of religious liberty, I respectfully ask that it also consider whether the constitutional principle Jefferson was describing should likewise be abandoned. In my

judgment, that is the real question before the nation, not whether a particular phrase appears in the Constitution, but whether the Constitution continues to limit civil government to the jurisdiction God has entrusted to it.

Thank you for your willingness to consider these observations. It is my sincere prayer that America will continue to protect both religion and civil government by preserving the principle that has served this nation so well for nearly two and a half centuries:

The conscience belongs to God. Caesar has no rightful claim upon it.

Respectfully,

Dennis Norton
Bedford, Iowa

From: Jason Ings<[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:44:12 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission: I was troubled to read that the Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. With respect that is exactly backwards- and as a person of faith I find this idea alarming. That wall was not built by secularists to keep religion down. It was built by believers to keep the church free. A bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it opens the door for government money and political favors to march right in, until churches are competing for grants and answering to politicians instead of to God. History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, and it isn't good for either one. Please don't build that bridge. Keep the wall of separation between church and state. It protects the church far more than it constrains it. Sincerely, Jason Ing Spokane, WA

From: "PII" <PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Opposing the draft report by the Commission on Religious Liberty 2026

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:44:20 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: CommissionReligiousLiberty2026.pdf

Please see the below attachment for comments by a concerned citizen regarding the draft report by the Commission on Religious Liberty, 2026.

Bradley Smith, MD
PO Box 290
Enterprise, Oregon

July 13, 2026

Via Electronic Mail to PII

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty U.S. Department of Justice 950
Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Room 5706 Washington, DC 20530

Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian, I am exceedingly and highly opposed to the draft report by the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty. While the committee has spent considerable time and effort to draft this report, if implemented, it will devastate religious liberty and will lead to state-religion tyranny.

Why does the government continually creep into every area of its citizens lives? Why would churches solicit governmental support for their agendas? The very nature of unconverted people, government, power, authority and the abuse thereof is clearly etched into the annals of history. To deny this is revisionist history and disingenuous. The darkest periods of the past and the grossest human rights abuses have taken place under the State favored church using the government to implement its will. Rome's crucifixion of Christ is such an example. The Reformation and Protestant movement came out of the Dark Ages and those seeking relief risked life and property to flee to this country and escape state-church tyranny. Unfortunately, the idea of State control of religion came with those escaping Europe and it took time for States to let go of church-state tyranny. The framers of our Constitution knew the minds of men and the temptations of governance. The Constitution charters citizen's protection against this tyranny. Repeated efforts to tear this down by anti-constitutionalists over the last 250 years attest to the robust language and structure of our Constitution.

I am sickened and saddened by Vice Chair Dr. Ben Carson repudiating the truths he has been made aware of and for facilitating the degradation of the wall of separation of church and state. Vice Chair Carson knows what will be the result of this church-state coming together. This is antithetical to God's governance founded upon love. That love is championed in loyalty. If churches were rightly being under-shepherds to their congregants, they wouldn't need the power of the State to compel religion. Hypocrisy of the most hideous form will certainly result with implementing the ideas espoused in the draft report.

We have only to look at what the Blue Laws of the late 1800's accomplished to ascertain what the effects on society will be of the so called Religious Liberty Commission. We find that the best citizens, the productive and godly citizens, the orderly and law-abiding citizens were jailed, fined, deprived of property and some lost their lives. Families lost their husbands and bread-winners because evil men used these laws, backed by the State, to obtain the godly man's estate.

My family experienced the abuses of church-state union in Utah Valley. Being of a minority religion aroused every form of prejudice, discrimination and depersonalization. This was fostered by the homogenization of people groups in the form of a State religion. The State is the stick that the church uses to attempt conformity and sameness.

If the pulpit is to remain a stanchion of truth, the Johnson Amendment must be maintained and actively enforced. Without the Johnson Amendment, we will see bully-pulpits and churches having the semblance of Trade Unions with greed, power and corruption driving their activities. When the state funds church activities, the purse-strings control the message. We already have seen rank abuses of this with NGOs under the Biden administration. Let the church members support the ministry of the church free from government coercion, messaging and manipulation.

One of the majestic accomplishments of the Constitution is its protection of minorities against the majority. Certain "unalienable rights" are enjoyed by citizens of both the majority and minority. Implementing the designs of the Draft Report as it is currently written will certainly disenfranchise the minority and result in tyranny.

Please, please, please, for the sake of God, freedom and this Land of Liberty, do not proceed down this path as currently drafted. If you do, the commission will have to be renamed the Commission on Religious Tyranny and you will have pulled the pin from the grenade perpetrating the greatest evil and lawlessness in this once great society.

Pleading and praying for wisdom and restraint,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bradley Smith', with a stylized, cursive flourish at the end.

Bradley Smith, MD.

From: Morales Margaret <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:45:13 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with the Pillars of Freedom comments!

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

From: Larry Nicholas <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:45:19 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Religious_Liberty_Letter.pdf

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to formally address the assertions made by the Department of Justice's Commission on Religious Liberty regarding the constitutional relationship between Church and State. Specifically, I wish to challenge the report's emphasis that the literal phrase "separation of Church and State" does not appear in the text of the U.S. Constitution.

Please review my response in the attached letter

--

Thank You

Larry L. Nicholas

[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]



MOUNT CARMEL MINISTRIES

PII
PII
PII

Website: www.mcmstudies.com

July 13, 2026

Via Electronic Mail to PII

The Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to formally address the assertions made by the Department of Justice's Commission on Religious Liberty regarding the constitutional relationship between Church and State. Specifically, I wish to challenge the report's emphasis that the literal phrase "separation of Church and State" does not appear in the text of the U.S. Constitution. While it is a matter of textual fact that those precise words are not written in the document, treating this semantic omission as evidence that the *principle* is absent misinterprets both the spirit of the Constitution and the foundational history of American religious liberty.

The mechanism of a "wall of separation" is fundamentally woven into the architecture of our government, primarily through the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment. The separation of church and state is not an attack on faith; rather, it is the single greatest protector of it. When the government aligns itself with a specific religious ideology, it inherently compromises the liberty of those who believe differently or not at all. True religious freedom requires a neutral state that neither sponsors nor persecutes any faith.

To understand the profound importance of this principle, we must look to the very genesis of religious liberty in the New World. Eleven years after the planting of the first colony, Roger Williams arrived in the New World. Like the early Pilgrims, he came to enjoy religious freedom; but unlike them, he saw—what so few in his time had yet seen—that this freedom was the inalienable right of all, whatever might be their creed. He was an earnest seeker of truth, holding it impossible that all the light from God's Word had yet to be received. Williams became the first person in modern Christendom to assert, in its plenitude, the doctrine of the liberty of conscience and the equality of opinions before the law.

Williams famously declared it to be the duty of the civil magistrate to restrain crime, but never to control the conscience of the individual. As he profoundly noted:

"The public or the magistrates may decide what is due from men to men, but when they attempt to prescribe a man's duty to God, they are out of place, and there can be no safety; for it is clear that if the magistrate has the power, he may decree one set of opinions or beliefs today and another tomorrow; as has been done in England by different kings and queens, and by the different popes and councils in the Roman Church; so that belief would become a heap of confusion."

MCM MOUNT CARMEL MINISTRIES



At the time, the Puritan colonies required attendance at the services of the established church under a penalty of fine or imprisonment. Williams fiercely reprobated this law, viewing the enforcement of parish church attendance as the worst statute of the English code. To compel men to unite with those of a different creed was, in his eyes, an open violation of their natural rights. To drag the irreligious and the unwilling to public worship was nothing short of requiring hypocrisy. When an antagonist, amazed by his tenets, challenged him by asking, *"Is not the laborer worthy of his hire?"* Williams perfectly replied, *"Yes, from those who hire him."* He firmly believed that no one should be forced to worship, or to maintain a worship, against his own consent. Despite being respected and beloved as a faithful minister of rare gifts, unbending integrity, and true benevolence, Williams' steadfast denial of civil authority over the church could not be tolerated by the Puritan authorities. They argued that his doctrines would subvert the fundamental state and government of the country, and he was sentenced to banishment. To avoid arrest and deportation back to England, Williams was forced to flee during the bitter cold and storms of winter into the unbroken forest. For fourteen weeks, he was sorely tossed in a bitter season, not knowing what bread or bed meant. He survived by finding shelter in hollow trees and receiving food from the Native American tribes whose confidence and affection he had won.

Making his way at last to the shores of Narragansett Bay, he laid the foundation of Rhode Island—the first State of modern times that in the fullest sense recognized the right of religious freedom. The fundamental principle of Williams' colony was that every man should have the right to worship God according to the light of his conscience. His little State became an asylum for the oppressed, and its foundational principles of civil and religious liberty eventually became the cornerstones of the American Republic.

When the Framers drafted the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, they drew directly upon the hard-won wisdom of Roger Williams' experiment. They understood that fusing religious authority with state power breeds corruption, persecution, and civil strife.

Therefore, I urge the Department of Justice and its Commission to honor the full legacy of American liberty. Acknowledging the "wall of separation" is not a denial of our nation's religious heritage, but an affirmation of the very principle that allows faith to flourish freely. I request that the Commission reflect this vital historical and constitutional framework in its future findings and reports.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and dedication to upholding justice for all Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'L. Nicholas', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Larry Nicholas

President

From: Tammy Andrews <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] public comment on the 1st recommendation-Tammy Andrews

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:45:59 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

This letter is to inform you of my disagreement with certain of the recommendations set forth by the Religious Liberty Commission. Other commentators who have read the entire report have noted that it recommends "that the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment be reinterpreted to diminish the historic separation of church and state." Based on my own research I strongly disagree with this recommendation. Although the direct phrase "separation of Church and state" may not be in the First Amendment, that concept is. There is evidence that our founding fathers made clear statements in support of this concept. And even the Bible supports the concept of the separation of Church and state.

The First Amendment states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." One definition of the "establishment clause" states that "This prohibits the government from establishing an official state religion, endorsing a specific faith, or coercing religious participation." And the same source defines the "free exercise clause" as "This forbids the government from penalizing individuals for their religious beliefs—or lack thereof. It guarantees citizens the right to worship or practice no faith at all without state interference." These are clear statements that the government shall not use its power over religion, thus the concept of "separation of Church and state."

[https://www.google.com/search?](https://www.google.com/search?q=that+government+possesses+no+rightful+authority+to+establish%2C+direct%2C+or+compel+religious+observance.&rlz=1CAJCUZ_enUS1176&oq=that+government+possesses+no+rightful+authority+to+establish%2C+direct%2C+or+compel+religious+observance.&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOdIBCjkxMDk3ajBqMTWoAgiwAgHxBQQtWu17wv4bJ&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

[q=that+government+possesses+no+rightful+authority+to+establish%2C+direct%2C+or+compel+religious+observance.&rlz=1CAJCUZ_enUS1176&oq=that+government+possesses+no+rightful+authority+to+establish%2C+direct%2C+or+compel+religious+observance.&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOdIBCjkxMDk3ajBqMTWoAgiwAgHxBQQtWu17wv4bJ&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=that+government+possesses+no+rightful+authority+to+establish%2C+direct%2C+or+compel+religious+observance.&rlz=1CAJCUZ_enUS1176&oq=that+government+possesses+no+rightful+authority+to+establish%2C+direct%2C+or+compel+religious+observance.&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOdIBCjkxMDk3ajBqMTWoAgiwAgHxBQQtWu17wv4bJ&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

I propose another modern support for the concept of "separation of Church and state" found in an essay by Michael Stokes Paulsen published on the website The Yale Law Journal dated December 4th of 2023. He states, "Here's a radical thought. The religious-freedom protections of the First Amendment exist **for religion**—for the benefit of religion, *for* its affirmative protection, *for* its liberal free exercise, *for* the autonomy of religious institutions, and *for* the purpose of enabling the pursuit of religious truth." He goes on to expound on this statement: "the original perspective underlying the First Amendment's Religion Clauses is the conviction that there really is (or well may be) such a thing as "religious truth"; that the right to pursue such truth, and to hold on to it once one has found it, is of supreme value and ultimate concern and, consequently, worthy of the highest degree of protection by government; that the obligations of devotion to God, and of acting in accordance with God's believed will are, more than just theoretically, of prior and superior obligation to the commands of the state and of human society; and that American governments are premised on recognition of this reality. In a nutshell, the vision underlying the First Amendment's religious-liberty provisions is that freedom of religious belief and exercise is a fundamental, natural right that precedes the social compact of government and one with which government rightfully possesses no power to interfere." Then he concludes with: "Further, since the state, or any mere human authority, cannot be trusted to know and follow God's will perfectly, the state lacks any rightful authority to prescribe matters of religious doctrine, belief, or conduct or to compel adherence to any religious creed. Government therefore

must never dictate religious belief or conduct, and it must give the broadest berth possible to the sincere exercise of religious convictions by individuals and groups."

But the support for the "separation of Church and state" is not only a modern endeavor. In 1802, one of our founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson described the "establishment clause" and the "free exercise clause" as "...a wall of separation between Church and State". People today try to claim that this phrase is not significant to the Constitution. But this is not something that Jefferson himself came up with. He was describing a principle already embedded in the First Amendment as demonstrated by this statement on the First Amendment Center website: "the clause forbids more than the establishment of religion by the government. It forbids even laws *respecting* an establishment of religion. The establishment clause sets up a line of demarcation between the functions and operations of the institutions of religion and government in our society. It does so because the framers of the First Amendment recognized that when the roles of the government and religion are intertwined, the result too often has been bloodshed or oppression."

James Madison, the "Father of the Constitution" and 4th President of the United States, also indicated that the "separation of Church and state" is in the Constitution when, in his 1785 Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments, he wrote, "Religion or the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence." At another time he mentioned that, "Strongly guarded as is the separation between Religion and Government in the Constitution of the United States, the danger of encroachment by Ecclesiastical Bodies, may be illustrated by precedents already furnished in their short history." The founding fathers knew about the religious persecutions in the history of Europe and those that had taken place in their time among various Christian denominations and even Jewish communities and wanted to make sure it would not happen again.

And later, in 1822 Madison wrote, "Religion & Govt. will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together." This shows the understanding that when the government exerts power over religion or vice versa both will become corrupted. This same understanding was expressed by Benjamin Franklin this way: "When a Religion is good...it will support itself...and when its Professors are oblig'd to call for the help of the Civil Power...'tis a Sign... of its being a bad one."

Separation of Church and state are also indicated in the Bible. In Matthew chapter 22 the Pharisees were trying to set Jesus up so they could condemn Him. They sent people to Him and asked, "Is it lawful to give tribute (money, taxes) unto Caesar, or not?" And Jesus answered, "Whose is this image and superscription?" They said, "Caesar's." Jesus replied, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." By this statement Jesus was showing a clear separation between the areas of authority of government and the areas of authority of religion. Civil order and the protection of civil rights come under the authority of the government. But it has no authority over worship, religious doctrine, and an individual's relationship with God. When the government usurps religious authority it always results in persecution of other believers.

In conclusion I request that the Department of Justice not adopt the first recommendation of the Religious Liberty Commission.

Respectfully,
Tammy Andrews

From: Aric Glasser <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Cc: Aric Glasser <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Draft Report COMMENTS

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:46:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: July_13_Religious_Liberty_Report_Comment.pdf

July 13, 2026

Via Electronic Mail to [REDACTED] PII

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty U.S. Department of Justice 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Room 5706 Washington, DC 20530

Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report, June 2026

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a self-employed Engineer and a Bible believing Christian. I am also aghast at some of the events unfolding in our Country. However, I am one of the minority Christians that are fearful of the combination of Church and State. As I look at history, I see much of the violence and death being caused by the Church being in partnership with the State (as in the Dark Ages). If church or religious activity is combined with the state or government authority, even if by a "bridge" or otherwise, it will inevitably lead to the preference of one religion over another.

Again, as a minority group Christian, my preferences will likely not get acknowledged which will lead to the loss of religious freedom and liberty of conscience as it has in the past. Please reference Revelation Chapter 13 where just as in the Dark Ages the "church-state" went to "make war with the saints", it will happen again where the "church-state" will cause that "no man might buy or sell" and that "as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed".

I realize "wall of separation of church and state" isn't literally in the Constitution but is however established in the First Amendment by the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause, as follows: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." U.S. Const. amend. I, cl. 1.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to reconsider its report to:

1. Reject any interpretation of the U.S. Constitution that diminishes the historic separation of church and state, and
2. Maintain proper boundaries between the state and government authority and matters of conscience, in order to preserve liberty of conscience;
3. Withdraw any recommendation that would fund religious activities;
4. Withdraw any recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment, and

Thank you for your consideration of my thoughts.

Sincerely,
Aric Glasser

July 13, 2026

Via Electronic Mail to [REDACTED] PII
Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report, June 2026

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2. Maintain proper boundaries between the state and government authority and matters of conscience, in order to preserve liberty of conscience;
3. Withdraw any recommendation that would fund religious activities;
4. Withdraw any recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment, and

Thank you for your consideration of my thoughts.

Sincerely,
Aric Glasser

From: Maegan Janevski <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Comments

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:46:50 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a deeply concerned citizen to ask you to please reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state — especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes into the church. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of God — that's negative for the church and the country alike.

Separation wasn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here in the United States of America!

Please keep church and state separate.

That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,

Maegan Janevski

From: "PII" <PII>

To: Rlcs <PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - DRAFT REPORT - JOHN

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:47:47 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: RLC_DraftReport_Response.pdf

Sir and or Madam,

Please see attached PDF commenting on the Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report. From the perspective of someone with family that has lost life, limb, and property due to the inevitable consequence of church and state unity, and who himself am, along with said family, are Christians and legal citizens of the United States of America after escaping said consequence in a foreign land, the attached PDF/Public Comment was written.

With Sincerity and Thanks,

--

A Citizen's Response to the Draft Report

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Although the intentions of the Draft Report appear to be noble, the methods, suggestions, and reasons will prove to be fatal to the safety, security, and prosperity of these United States. A proven remedy to the onslaught against religious liberty already exists, and has even been suggested in the report, yet the final conclusions drawn, and the ultimate recommendations made, will prove to be anything but remedial. For the sake of the Religious Liberty Commission, for the strength of the American Republic, and for the benefit of not only the American people, but for all of the people of all the world, the Establishment Clause of the Constitution of the United States of America, as it stands written, must not be repudiated.

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:

For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Matthew 7:24-29

Seeking to re-interpret the Establishment Clause, as if it were some fluid tradition subject to the popular feelings of the time, will only leave future generations with a house built on sand. The issue, which is made blatantly clear in the report, is not about the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, but about the proper enforcement thereof. The solution therefore could not be more simple and clear: enforce the Constitution as it stands written, for this is why the Constitution was written. If the issue is from the lack of the enforcement thereof, then the solution is as plain as the enforcement thereof. Anything extra will take this great country from a beacon of Religious Liberty to a wasteland of Religious Despotism. History attests to this without controversy.

The above will be proven to be true, and as such it is my fervent wish, even my prayer, that you take the following words to heart, and re-think your approach to building the American house on a rock. Study more, grow more in knowledge, and come to understand the form of religious liberty that has kept the integrity of this country as firm as a needle to the pole for the last 250 years of its excellence.

The Fourteenth Amendment

In order to understand religious liberty in the context of the Constitution, we can not just look at the First Amendment. Since the core issue is with the enforcement of the Constitution, then the

First Amendment is justly seen as one part of an “irreducibly complex” machine that functions in harmony with the sum of its pieces. One of those pieces, the Fourteenth Amendment, is what guarantees not only the enforcement of the First Amendment, but too its power to ensure religious liberty.

“All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States, and of the State in which they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

Before this amendment was adopted there was, primarily, no such thing as citizenship of the United States. Citizenship of the United States came, except to aliens, only as a consequence of citizenship of a State. The reason of this peculiar fact was that the thirteen States were all here as sovereign independencies before the United States Government was formed; and the people, being citizens of these States to begin with, when these very persons formed the national government they became, by that very process, citizens of the United States. And as there was no provision in the Constitution touching the subject with respect to any but aliens, the situation still remained the same citizens of a State first, and, as a consequence of that, citizens of the United States. As stated by an authority in the time when the matter stood thus, it is as follows:-

“Citizenship, as we understand it, may be acquired in either of two ways,-by birth or by adoption, called, when applied to aliens, naturalization. After the Declaration of Independence, and before the adoption of the Constitution of the United States, the power of conferring citizenship by naturalization or otherwise, like all other sovereign powers, was in the several States. And as the power vested in Congress by that instrument applies to aliens only, and as all powers not delegated to Congress by the Constitution, nor prohibited to the States, are expressly reserved to the States respectively or to the people, the power of conferring citizenship on all persons not aliens, necessarily remains in the several States both as to persons born on their soil, and as to those born in other parts of the Union; and any person upon whom such rights are conferred becomes a citizen of the State conferring them. And every citizen of a State is, ipso facto, a citizen of the United States.” -Law Reporter, June, 1857, p. 14.

As more fully stated by authority since it was changed, it is as follows:-

“Before the adoption of this amendment, citizenship of the United States was inferred from citizenship of some one of the States, for there was nothing in the Constitution defining or even implying national citizenship as distinct from its origination in, or derivation from, a State. It was declared in Article IV, section 2, of the Federal Constitution, that citizens of each State shall be entitled to all the privileges and immunities of citizens of the several States; but nothing was better known than that this provision was a dead letter from its very origin. A colored man who was a citizen of a northern State was certain to be placed under the surveillance of the police if he ventured south of the Potomac or the Ohio, destined probably to be sold into slavery under State law, or permitted as a special favor to return at once to his home. A foreign-born citizen, with his certificate of naturalization in his possession, had, prior to the war, no guarantee or protection

against any form of discrimination, or indignity, or even persecution, to which State law might subject him, as has been painfully demonstrated at least twice in our history.”

At that time any State could have as thorough-going an establishment of religion as might be chosen, and persecute without limit, and yet there was no refuge under the national Constitution, because that document only said that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The Constitution did not say that no State should do it; and as the powers not delegated to the United States, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States or to the people (Amendment X), it followed that each State might do all this without restraint, at its own will. The fourteenth amendment overturned this. Further we quote:-

“But this rank injustice and this hurtful inequality were removed by the fourteenth amendment. Its opening section settled all conflicts and contradictions on this question by a comprehensive declaration which defined national citizenship, and gave to it precedence of the citizenship of a State. 'All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof are citizens of the United States, and of the States wherein they reside.' These pregnant words distinctly reversed the origin and character of American citizenship. Instead of a man being a citizen of the United States because he was a citizen of one of the States, he was now made a citizen of any State in which he might choose to reside because he was antecedently a citizen of the United States.” -Blaine Twenty years, Vol. II, pp. 312, 313.

Every such person, then, being by the supreme law a citizen of the United States first of all, and this citizenship holding precedence of every other, it follows that all privileges, immunities, and rights secured to him by the national Constitution are likewise his first of all and take precedence of all others. This is as certainly true as it would be if there were no other citizenship known to the Constitution.

Now absolute freedom from any sort of an establishment of religion is an immunity, and exemption from every kind of law prohibiting the free exercise of religion is the privilege of every citizen of the United States; for it is written, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” If there were no other citizenship known to the Constitution than citizenship of the United States, the only law-making power that could possibly affect the citizen would be Congress. The only government that could have anything to do with the citizen would be the United States Government, and Congress is forbidden to make any law respecting religion or that would interfere with the free exercise of religion. Therefore, absolute freedom from any such thing is a privilege and immunity of every citizen of the United States, by the Constitution.

And now the second sentence of section I of this fourteenth amendment declares that “no State shall make or enforce any law abridging the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States.” That is to say, that no State shall make any law, or enforce any law already made, which abridges, which restricts, which lessens, the privilege or immunity of any citizen of the United States to be absolutely free in things religious. It practically declares that “no State shall make any law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

“Whatever one may claim as of right under the Constitution and laws of the United States by virtue of his citizenship, is a privilege of a citizen of the United States. Whatever the Constitution and laws of the United States entitle him to exemption from, he may claim an exemption in respect to. And such a right or privilege is abridged whenever the State law interferes with any legitimate operation of federal authority which concerns his interest, whether it be an authority actively exerted, or resting only in the express or implied command or assurance of the Federal Constitution or law.” -Cooley, Principles, p. 247; Quoted by Bryce, American Commonwealth, chapter 36, par. 22, note.

Accordingly, this provision of the fourteenth amendment annihilates the force of every religious law, or law abridging the free exercise of religion, in every State in the Union. This is as plain a consequence as ever came or could come from any provision of law. It prohibits the persecution of any Christian, Jew, Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, or anybody else, by any State law which interferes with the free exercise of his religion. This is the effect of the provision as it is in its plain reading. This is certain. And it is no less certain that the intent of those who made it was that this should be its effect.

James G. Blaine was one of the leading spirits in the framing of this amendment, and, after remarking of the first provision of this section, that it “establishes American citizenship upon a permanent foundation, gives to the humblest man in the republic ample protection against any abridgment of his privileges and immunities by State law,” and that “the first section of the constitutional amendment, which includes these invaluable provisions, is in fact a new charter of liberty to the citizens of the United States,” with the matter before quoted, he continues:- “The consequences that flowed from the radical change in the basis of citizenship were numerous and weighty. Nor were these consequences left subject to construction or speculation. They were incorporated in the same section of the amendment. The abuses which were formerly heaped on the citizens of one State by the legislative and judicial authority of another State were rendered thenceforth impossible. The language of the fourteenth amendment is authoritative and mandatory: 'No State shall make or enforce any law abridging the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

“Under the force of these weighty inhibition, the citizen of foreign birth cannot be persecuted by discriminating statutes, nor can the citizen of dark complexion be deprived of a single privilege or immunity which belongs to the white man. Nor can the Catholic, or the Protestant, or the Jew, be placed under ban or subjected to any deprivation of personal or religious right.

“The provision is comprehensive and absolute, and sweeps away at once every form of oppression and every denial of justice. It abolishes caste and enlarges the scope of human freedom. It increases the power of the republic to do equal and exact justice to all its citizens, and curtails the power of the State to shelter the wrongdoer, or to authorize crime by a statute. To Congress is committed the authority to enforce every provision of the fourteenth amendment, and the humblest man who is denied the equal protection of the laws of the State can have his wrongs redressed before the supreme judiciary of the nation.” -Twenty Years of Congress, Vol. II, pp. 313, 314.

Such is the statement, the pledge, and the security, of religious right in the States, according to the “weighty,” “authoritative, and mandatory” provisions of the national Constitution. Every single provision to guarantee religious liberty for the citizen of the United States is already in place.

It is true that each State constitution contains strong guaranties of the perfect freedom of religious right, yet the Legislatures have ignored them, and the State Supreme Courts have interpreted them away. Thus, with the recommendations put forth by the Draft Report, the national power, instead of maintaining the high dignity which the people have given it to protect the privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States from invasion by the States, has abandoned its high station, and has gone down and actually joined the States in the invasion.

Nevertheless, the right of the people still abides. The Constitution as the people have made it, is still the voice and will of the people. It still guarantees privilege, immunity, and freedom, to citizens of the United States, but only as the agencies appointed by the people to maintain these guaranties. The entirety of the Constitution, enforced as it stands with the Establishment Clause at its forefront, is sufficient for maintaining the religious liberty of the United States citizen.

Repudiating the Establishment Clause will be such a failure by the federal branch of government to maintain the guarantees as written in the Constitution. Having failed to maintain the Constitution, the responsibility and the right to religious liberty would automatically devolve upon the people themselves to see that it is done. Is now, or ever, the time to shake the foundations of these United States? To release flooding waters on a country whose foundation has eroded into sand?

Addressing Direct Quotes in the Draft Report

“There are countless examples of individuals and communities who have been harmed by this misconstrued understanding of ‘church and state,’”

And throughout the entirety of recorded history, there are even more historical examples of entire nations, countries, and even continents, that have been destroyed, that have been left beyond repair with tens of millions murdered, due to the “bridging” of church and state. In Scott's “Church History” we find one of many such results of a bridge being made between church and state:-

“No computation can reach the numbers who have been put to death, in different ways, on account of their maintaining the profession of the gospel, and opposing the corruptions of the church of Rome. A million of poor Waldenses perished in France; nine hundred thousand orthodox Christians were slain in less than thirty years after the institution of the order of the Jesuits. The Duke of Alva boasted of having put to death in the Netherlands thirty-six thousand by the hand of the common executioner during the space of a few years. The Inquisition destroyed, by various tortures, one hundred and fifty thousand within thirty years. These are a few specimens, and but a few of those which history has recorded. But the total amount will never be known till the earth shall disclose her blood and no more cover her slain.” When studying the number of those murdered throughout the aptly called Dark Ages of state-led-church-authored persecution, historians put the lowest estimate of deaths at 50,000,000 people.

Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

John 15:20-21

The force that persecuted God Himself, Jesus Christ, was a force acting under the unity of church (Pharisee) and state (Romanism). The same was true in the government of Ahab and Jezebel, and it was specifically the government of Belshazzar and Nabonidus, a system of unity between church and state with Nabonidus sitting as the ecclesiastical sword over Belshazzar the civil sword, that God pronounced His judgment on. To seek unity between these two forces is to verily refute the judgments of God.

"To preserve this freedom, we must build bridges, not walls, between the City of God and the City of Man."

Every single Biblical and historical example refutes this claim. You have to prove a claim to knowledge, not just assert it, before even thinking about building a house of reason atop it. The separation of church and state is not a wall between the "City of God and the City of Man", it is the very hedge of protection that promotes the citizenship of man in the Kingdom of God (if he so chooses), while still being able to live freely in the cities of men. This will be shown throughout the entirety of this letter.

"Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.'s reliance upon Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Augustine"

In the context of the religious liberty enjoyed by the American people for the last 250 years, the mention here of Thomas Aquinas and Augustine are peculiar. Augustine, whom Aquinas quoted more frequently than any other theologian, wrote:-

"It is indeed better that men should be brought to serve God by instruction than by fear of punishment, or by pain. But because the former means are better, the latter must not, therefore, be neglected. Many must often be brought back to their Lord, like wicked servants, by the rod of temporal suffering, before they attain to the highest grade of religious development."

Of this theory, Dr. August Neander, "the father of modern church history", remarks:-

"It was by Augustine, then, that a theory was proposed and founded which [...] contained the germ of that whole system of spiritual despotism, of intolerance and persecution, which ended in the tribunals of the Inquisition." -Church History, p. 217.

The history of the Inquisition is only the history of the carrying out of this infamous theory of Augustine's. But this theory is only the logical sequence of the theory upon which the whole series of religious liberty laws attacking the separation of church and state were founded.

Then says Neander:-

"In this way the church received help from the State for the furtherance of her ends."

The Constitution was founded on Protestant and Republican principles. These principles have kept away the torrents of blood spilt by the inquisitional mindset. To re-introduce them to these United States, in the form of this Draft Report and as a “reliance” for civil rights, even as an outflow of religious liberty, is either ignorance or craft.

“As Colby concluded, ‘Our democracy depends on schools teaching and modeling the essential lesson that the First Amendment protects everyone’s free speech and religious beliefs, especially the speech and beliefs of those with whom we disagree.’”

Now Colby stated this wonderfully, along with many of the other witnesses, and do notice something in common with each witness: they all call for the knowledge of, and the enforcement of, the Constitution as it stands. To take their testimonies, then create this Draft Report calling for the effective repudiation of the Establishment Clause, is disingenuous, unnecessary, and an insult to many of the first-hand witnesses who had the courage to brave their testimonies in front of the public.

“Earlier administrators claimed that allowing religious groups to meet in empty classrooms somehow violated the Establishment Clause. When courts rejected that argument and Congress protected high school groups, some officials changed tactics. They began using nondiscrimination policies to argue that religious groups could not require their leaders to share the group’s beliefs.”

And the Draft Report even admits this as true: when the Constitution is enforced as it stands, then all is well with religious liberty. The issue is not with the Establishment Clause, it is with the upholding of the entirety of the Constitution. This can not be repeated enough, and it will be repeated ad-nauseum.

Even in this example, the “officials changed tactics”. The Establishment Clause was, and still is, the very thing that protects these religious groups, but those who seek lawlessness will continue to seek any and all other means. Is the issue now becoming more obvious as to what isolating religious liberty to the Establishment Clause will lead to? It will fail in protecting religious liberty, and the logical consequences, perhaps after thinking to change even more of the Constitution in response to those who “change tactics”, would be to seek regulation and legislation not only over the actions of such people, but also over the morality that warrants their action.

Repudiating the Establishment Clause through its re-interpretation will verily begin the deconstruction of religious liberty. So as long as the Constitution remains as it is written, then any and all other tactics will fail: there is nothing in the entirety of the Draft Report that singles out the Establishment Clause as any hindrance to religious liberty. In fact, with only the brief history presented so far, and with thousands of years of written history available to the honest and sincere searcher, only after the separation of church and state has religious liberty prospered.

“Like the parents and students who testified, the teachers and coaches who came before the Commission had the law on their side. But in practice, it didn’t matter.”

The law, as it stood, was on their side. The government, as the impersonal tool formed by the Constitution as the guarantor of the upholding of the law as it is written, did not do its job. The fault is not then on the law, namely the Establishment Clause, but is on the lack of the enforcement thereof.

“Offer First Amendment training for law enforcement officers.”

Which is why this recommendation is a good start, but the question is then: who is educating them on the First Amendment? Is it according to the eisegesis of the religious liberty Commission and this Draft Report in regards to the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, or is this education according to the plain writings of their authors and the exegesis of the three? What about the entirety of the Constitution according to the recommendations of people such as James Madison and George Washington? And what about a training in history and an education in the consequences of building a “bridge” between church and state, the consequences of which were fresh in the minds of those who penned the Constitution in the first place?

“For a self-governing country like the United States to prosper, citizens must be formed in civic virtue—the character traits needed to govern. Many of these virtues are developed and promoted through religious education and practice.”

In the context of the entire Draft Report, to make such a statement is dangerously close to implying not only the possibility of state-sponsored religion, but also the future legislation of morality under a system of church and state unity. To be “formed” is to be “made through influence (that includes force and coercion)”, and “civic virtue” requires a foundation of morality that the state has no right to declare itself as the builder or sponsor of. These things are only possible by clearly infringing upon the Establishment Clause that this Draft Report works to repudiate.

“Without establishing religion, we value and honor it in the same manner that we value and honor art, philosophy, education, statesmanship, science, as well as other experiences and contributions.”

Such a statement is not only untrue, but it also affirms the desire to establish a religion. The United States is distinctly the first and only government in history that is based on the principle established by Christ, which is a principle that plainly refutes the government establishment of religion. This will be shown shortly.

Now in Article VI of the national Constitution, this nation says that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” By an amendment making more certain the adoption of the principle, it declares in the first amendment to the Constitution, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” This first amendment was adopted in 1789 by the first Congress that ever met under the Constitution.

In 1796 a treaty was made with Tripoli, in which it was declared (Article II) that “the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion.” This treaty

was signed by an ex-Congregationalist clergyman, and was signed by President Washington. It was not out of disrespect to religion or Christianity that these clauses were placed in the Constitution, and that this one was inserted in that treaty. On the contrary, it was entirely on account of their respect for religion, and the Christian religion in particular, as being beyond the province of civil government, pertaining solely to the conscience, and resting entirely between the individual and God.

“The alternative, which has been explored in countries like Soviet Russia, North Korea, Cuba and other oppressive regimes, is to subject people of faith to isolation, repression, and punishment. America has rejected this since the United States Constitution was signed in 1787.”

Since America has rejected this since the signing of the Constitution, religious liberty has flourished. But in these 250 years of history, there has not been an established religion, only an established constitution. The alternative to establishing religion is not oppression; the direct logical consequence of establishing religion is oppression of the worst kind, which is namely inquisition. This will to be shown shortly.

Therefore, in order to understand why religion can not be established by the state if the desire is religious liberty and freedom of conscious, there needs to be a distinction made between what is civil and what is moral.

Civility and Morality

“And while there are still areas of debate, it remains clear that religion and government are not inherently in conflict.”

But by building a “bridge” between church and state, the two will verily come into conflict once again. Therefore, only by clearly differentiating civility from morality, and by plainly upholding the Constitution as it stands, can the logical conclusion of the repudiation of the Establishment Clause, which is religious despotism at the hands of a united church and state, be forever removed from these lands.

But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, **Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money.** And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, **Whose is this image and superscription?** They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, **Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.**
Matthew 22:18-21

In these words, Christ established a clear distinction between Caesar and God,-between that which is Caesar's and that which is God's; that is, between the civil and the religious power, and between what we owe to the civil power and what we owe to the religious power. To say that we are to render to Caesar that which is God's, or that we are to render to God, by Caesar, that which is God's, is to pervert the words of Christ, and make them meaningless. To work religious legislation through the hands of an impersonal government is such a perversion, and such an

interpretation that serves only to conflate civility and morality would be but to entangle Jesus in His talk,-the very thing that the Pharisees sought to do.

Religion and religious duties pertain solely to God; and as that which is God's is to be rendered to him and not to Caesar, it follows inevitably that, according to the words of Christ, civil government can never of right have anything to do with religion,-with a man's personal relation of faith and obedience to God. This is what the Establishment Clause guarantees.

Morality and moral duty is the conformity of action to the divine law, and thus it is plain that morality also pertains solely to God, and with that, civil government can have nothing to do. This is what the Establishment Clause guarantees.

“‘The only way I could keep [the ministry] was to renounce my faith and apologize for biblical convictions about gender,’ Fox explained. ‘I couldn’t do that. I won’t do that, and I will never do that.’ Dr. Fox filed suit against the City of Austin, arguing that his termination violated the First Amendment. The decision, he said, was necessary. ‘I knew I had to be faithful to God and not to Caesar.’

For Dr. Fox, the stakes extend far beyond his own case. ‘If government can punish clergy for posting something on a personal blog about Scripture,’ he said, ‘then all American rights are in jeopardy.’ He continued: ‘No political regime can ever have ownership of the human soul. Only God has that.’”

And wonderfully enough Dr. Fox, in his testimony, re-iterated and re-affirmed not only the Biblical instruction to separate church and state, but also the Constitutional clause which keeps church and state separate.

Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Matthew 5:21-22

Now being angry begins in the heart and mind; being angry without a cause is a breach of morality. This transgression then requires inquiry into the inner domain of man. However, no man has either the ability or the right to investigate the heart and mind of another man. The investigation of such is called inquisition.

As obedience to the moral law is morality, and as morality pertains to the thoughts and the intents of the heart, by the very nature of the case, morality lies beyond the reach or control of the civil power. To hate, is murder; to covet, is idolatry (Colossians 3:5); to think impurely of a woman, is adultery (Matthew 5:27-28);-these are all equally immoral, and violations of the moral law, but no civil government seeks to punish for them. A man may hate his neighbor all his life; he may covet everything on earth; he may think impurely of every woman that he sees,- he may keep it up all his days; but so long as these things are confined to his thought, the civil power cannot touch him. It would be difficult to conceive of a more immoral person than such a

man would be; yet the State cannot punish him. It does not attempt to punish him. With morality or immorality, the State can have nothing to do.

But let us carry this further: only let that man's hatred lead him to attempt an injury to his neighbor, and the State will punish him; only let his covetousness lead him to lay hands on what is not his own, in an attempt to steal, and the State will punish him; only let his impure thought lead him to attempt violence to any woman, and the State will punish him. Yet bear in mind that even then the State does not punish him for his immorality, but for his incivility.

Now immorality lies in the heart, "for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:" Matthew 15:19. Thus immorality can be measured by God only, "hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;)" 1 Kings 8:39. The State punishes no man because he is immoral. If it did, it would have to punish as a murderer the man who hates another, because, according to the true standard of morality, hatred is murder. Therefore it is clear that in fact the State punishes no man because he is immoral, but because he is uncivil. It cannot punish immorality; it must punish incivility.

"As a company, do you think it's possible to regulate morality?" she asked. That question set off a chain of events that ended her employment. "

Lacey Smith certainly understood this. Neither a company, nor a government, nor any such thing of creation, can regulate morality.

Now the sole reference to religion in the Constitution (as formed by its convention), and submitted to the people, is in the declaration that:-

"No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States."

The national government being one of delegated powers only, no mention whatever of religion, nor any reference to the subject, in the Constitution, would have totally excluded that subject from the cognizance of the government. And this sole mention that was made of it, was a clear and positive evidence that the makers of the Constitution intended to exclude the subject of religion from the notice of the national power. Thus, for the people of the United States and for the world, "religion is avowedly the attribute of man and not of a corporation."

Yet the Draft Report states the following:-

"Being the conscience of the state requires pastors and religious leaders who courageously bring God's word to the public square."

Man is not the conscience of the state, for the state is not only impersonal, but also has no role in the promotion and punishment of morality. If man were the conscious of the state, then the only logical conclusion would be for the state to then protect its conscious, just as man seeks to protect his own. But how would the state do this? How only can the state do this? Through legislation. But this would amount to an establishment of religion, even of morality and its legislation.

Now man can be conscious for no other one, and no other thing, for that implies a moral authority that is neither vested in man nor in government. But by making statements such as this in the Draft Report, the consequences of the suggestions presented becomes clear: the replacement of Religious Liberty with Religious Despotism.

“Religion offers moral standards to which government can be held accountable, keeping tyranny at bay. The Declaration of Independence cites God as the source of unalienable rights and equality.”

Government, by the very nature of its function and form as inanimate and impersonal, can not be held accountable to any moral standard. To even suggest so is to claim that religion and the state should be united, and that by the virtue of accountability deriving itself from religion, religion then becomes the authority over, even the conscience of, the state. This is expressly what the Establishment Clause has successfully worked to prevent for these 250 years, and is expressly what has kept religious tyranny, which history has attested to as being the worst form of tyranny, at bay.

But what can government be held accountable to? Civility and “We the People”. To understand this, let us not only mention the Declaration of Independence, but actually begin to unpack it:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that when any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.”

The Declaration of Independence announces the perfect principle of civil government. And to the extent to which this principle is exemplified among the people, to the extent to which the individual governs himself, just to that extent and no further will prevail the true idea of both the Declaration, and the republic which it created. Such is the first grand idea of the American Revolution. And it is too the scriptural idea, even the idea of God. But to utilize government to form citizens in civic virtue, or to hold government accountable to a standard of morality, is the complete rejection of both Scripture and the Declaration of Independence.

In declaring the right of the people, in the event named, to alter or abolish the government which they have, and institute a new one on such principles and in such form as to them seems best; there is likewise declared not only the complete subordination, but also the absolute impersonality, of government. In thus declaring the impersonality of government, there is wholly uprooted every vestige of any character of paternity in the government.

Shortly after signing the Declaration of Independence, as part of the Presbytery of Hanover, the following words were spoken to the General Assembly of Virginia:-

“We beg leave farther to represent that religious establishments are highly injurious to the temporal interests of any community. Without insisting upon the ambition and the arbitrary practices of those who are favored by government, or the intriguing, seditious spirit which is commonly excited by this as well as every other kind of oppression, such establishments greatly retard population, and consequently the progress of arts, sciences, and manufactories: witness the rapid growth and improvement of the northern provinces compared with this. No one can deny that the more early settlement and the many superior advantages of our country would have invited multitudes of artificers, mechanics, and other useful members of society to fix their habitation among us, who have either remained in their place of nativity or preferred worse civil governments and a more barren soil, where they might enjoy the rights of conscience more fully than they had a prospect of doing it in this. From which we infer that Virginia might have been the capital of America, and a match for the British arms without depending on others for the necessaries of war, had it not been prevented by the religious establishment. Neither can it be made to appear that the gospel needs any such civil aid. We rather conceive that when our blessed Savior declares his kingdom is not of this world he renounces all dependence upon state power; and as his weapons are spiritual, and were only designed to have influence upon the judgment and heart of man, we are persuaded that if mankind were left in quiet possession of their unalienable rights and privileges, Christianity, as in the days of the apostles, would continue to prevail and flourish in the greatest purity by its own native excellence and under the all-disposing providence of God.”

Spoken by James Otis, a man whose work established the legal framework for American independence, a man who phrased “no taxation without representation” and who was called the “child of independence” by John Adams, is the following:-

“Man came into the world and into society at the same instant. There must exist in every earthly society a supreme sovereign, from whose final decision there can be no appeal but directly to heaven. This supreme power is originally and ultimately in the people; and the people never did in fact freely, nor can rightfully make unlimited renunciation of this divine right. King-craft and priest-craft are a trick to gull the vulgar. The happiness of mankind demands that this grand and ancient alliance should be broken off forever.” Or in other words, “a bridge between state-craft and church-craft is a trick to gull the vulgar.”

The Promotion and Punishment of Morality

As God is the only moral governor, as His is the only moral government, as His law is the only moral law, and as it pertains to Him alone to punish immorality, so likewise the promotion of morality pertains to Him alone. But obedience to God must spring from the heart (1 John 3:21-22) in sincerity and truth (Joshua 24:14). This it must do as a free-will offering of choice, as love demands choice, or it becomes of force and not of obedience; for, as we have proved by the word of God, the law of God takes cognizance of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

But herein is the current situation of man: “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” By transgression, all men have made themselves immoral. “Therefore by the deeds of the law [by obedience] there shall no flesh be justified [accounted righteous, made moral] in his sight.” Romans 3:20. As all men have, by transgression of the law of God, made themselves immoral, therefore no man can, by obedience to the law, become moral, because it is that very law which

declares him to be immoral (Galatians 2:16). The demands, therefore, of the moral law, must be satisfied before he can ever be accepted as moral by either the law or its Author. But the demands of the moral law can never be satisfied by an immoral person; and this is just what every person has made himself by transgression. Therefore it is certain that men can never become moral by the moral law.

From this it is equally certain that if ever man shall be made moral, it must be by the Author and Source of all morality. And this is just the provision which God has made. For "now the righteousness [the morality] of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness [the morality] of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference; for all have sinned [made themselves immoral], and come short of the glory of God." Romans 3:21-23. It is by the morality of Christ alone that man can be made moral. And this morality of Christ is the morality of God, which is imputed to us for Christ's sake; and we receive it by faith in Him who is both the author and finisher of faith; and there is no other in this world.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Galatians 2:16

Therefore, as morality springs from God, and is planted in the heart by the Spirit of God, through faith in the Son of God, it is demonstrated by proofs of Holy Writ itself, that to God alone pertains the promotion of morality.

Now the Spirit of God and the gospel of Christ are both essential to the teaching of morality, but neither of these is committed to the State, but both to the church, even to the church that is formed from a congregation of faithful believers in sincerity and in truth. But though this work be committed to the church, even then there is not committed to the church the prerogative either to reward morality or to punish immorality. She beseeches, she entreats, she reasons with men to be reconciled to God; she trains them in the principles and the practice of morality. It is hers by moral suasion or spiritual censures to preserve the purity and discipline of her membership. But hers it is not either to reward morality or to punish immorality. This pertains to God alone, because, whether it be morality or immorality, it springs from the secret counsels of the heart; and as God alone knows the heart, he alone can measure either the merit or the guilt involved in any question of morals.

By this it is demonstrated that to no man, to no assembly or organization of man, to no church of which man belongs to, does there belong any right whatever to punish immorality. Whoever attempts it, usurps the prerogative of God. The Inquisition is the inevitable logic of any assembly of man to punish immorality, because to punish immorality it is necessary in some way to get at the thoughts and intents of the heart; it is necessary to inquire, to question, the hidden man of the heart. When a re-interpretation of the Establishment Clause fails to achieve its desired end, following the same logical stream, the final logical outcome would be punishment not of the behavior (civility), but of the mindset (morality).

By all these evidences is established the plain, commonsense principle that to civil government pertains only that which the term itself implies,-that which, is civil. The purpose of civil government is civil, and not moral. Its function is to preserve order in society, and to cause all its subjects to rest in assured safety, by guarding them against all incivility. Morality belongs to God; civility to the State. Morality must be rendered to God; civility, to the State.

The End Result of a “Moral Government” that Forms its Citizen’s Character

But it may be asked, Does not the civil power enforce the observance of the commandments of God, which say, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, and, Thou shalt not bear false witness? Does not the civil power punish the violation of these commandments of God?

Answer:-

The civil power does not enforce these, nor does it punish the violation of them, as commandments of God. The State does forbid murder and theft and perjury, and some States forbid adultery, but not as commandments of God. From time immemorial, governments that knew nothing about God, have forbidden these things.

If the civil power attempted to enforce these as the commandments of God, it would have to punish as a murderer the man who hates another; it would have to punish as an adulterer the person who thinks impurely; because these things are violations of the commandments of God. Therefore if the State is to enforce these things as the commandments of God, it will have to punish the thoughts and intents of the heart.

But even more than this, such an effort would be an attempt to punish sin, because transgression of the law of God is sin; but sins will be forgiven upon the repentance of a contrite heart, and God does not punish the sinner for the violation of his law when his sins are forgiven. If the civil power undertakes to enforce the observance of the law of God, it cannot justly enforce that law upon the transgressor whom God has forgiven. Suppose a man steals, is arrested, prosecuted, and found guilty, but then repents with a broken and contrite heart and is thus forgiven by the Lord. Now he is counted by the Lord as though he had never sinned; the commandment of God does not stand against him for that transgression. And as it is the law of God that the civil law started out to enforce, the civil power also must forgive him, count him innocent, and let him go free. It can be seen at once that any such system would be utterly destructive of civil government; and this only demonstrates conclusively that no civil government can ever of right have anything to do with the enforcement of the commandments of God as such, or with making the Bible its code of laws. Any claim to legislate morality, or to be held legally accountable to a moral standard, requires a new morality that is separate from God, and is thus only anarchy indeed.

Only the government of God can be sustained by the forgiveness of the sinner to the uttermost, because by the sacrifice of Christ He has made provision “to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them;” but in civil government, if a man steals, or commits any other crime, and is apprehended and found guilty, it has nothing to do with the case if the Lord does forgive him; he must be punished. Thus the civil government can never operate under the Christian identity of “Simul justus et peccator”, of being

simultaneously just and sinner. It can never both justify man by the faith of Jesus, and sanctify man by the grace of God, for these operations belong wholly to God.

Let us end here with George Bancroft, “founder of American history”, on this principle as embodied in the words of Christ and in the American Constitution:-

“Vindicating the right of individuality even in religion, and in religion above all, the new nation dared to set the example of accepting in its relations to God the principle first divinely ordained of God in Judea. It left the management of temporal things to the temporal power; but the American Constitution, in harmony with the people of the several States, withheld from the Federal Government the power to invade the home of reason, the citadel of conscience, the sanctuary of the soul; and not from indifference, but that the infinite Spirit of eternal truth might move in its freedom and purity and power.”

Government Funding of Religious Duties Interferes with Man’s Right to Believe

When societies are formed, each individual surrenders the personal exercise of certain rights, and, as an equivalent for that surrender, has secured to him the fuller enjoyment of these, and all other rights pertaining to person and property, without the protection of which society cannot exist. But what condition of things can ever be conceived of among men that would justify any man in surrendering the personal exercise of his right to believe-which in itself would be the surrender of his right to believe at all? What could he receive as an equivalent? How could a society secure that which is in the heart and mind of man, that which houses his beliefs? When he has surrendered his right to believe, he has virtually surrendered his right to think. When he surrenders his right to believe, he surrenders everything, and it is impossible for him ever to receive an equivalent: he has surrendered his very soul.

Eternal life depends upon believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, and the man who surrenders his right to believe, surrenders eternal life. Says the Scripture, “With the mind I myself serve the law of God.” A man who surrenders his right to believe surrenders God. Consequently, no man, no association or organization of men, can ever rightly ask of any man a surrender of his right to believe. Every man has the right, so far as organizations of men are concerned, to believe as he pleases; and that right, so long as he still considers himself a man, he never can surrender, and he never will. To do so would be to surely die.

Now why is this mentioned here, as the Draft Report would surely agree with this?

“Guarantee faith-based institutions an equal opportunity to participate on an equal basis in funding opportunities without requiring them to renounce their religious identity; issue guidance that religious discrimination in federal funding programs is unconstitutional.”

Because the report also includes such consultation. But how does this example of the unity of church and state, before even considering the eventual outcome of moral legislation, conflict with an individual’s right to believe?

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

After January 1, 1777, a motion was made to levy a general tax for the support of “teachers of the Christian religion,” but it was postponed till a future Assembly. To the next Assembly petitions were sent by the Episcopalians and the Methodists, pleading for the general assessment. But the Presbytery of Hanover, still strongly supported by the Baptists and the Quakers, was again on hand with a memorial, in which it referred to the points previously presented, and then proceeded as follows:-

“We would also humbly represent that the only proper objects of civil government are the happiness and protection of men in the present state of existence, the security of the life, liberty, and property of the citizens, and to restrain the vicious and to encourage the virtuous by wholesome laws, equally extending to every individual; but that the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can only be directed by reason and conviction, and is nowhere cognizable but at the tribunal of the universal Judge.

“To, illustrate and confirm these assertions, we beg leave to observe that to judge for ourselves, and to engage in the exercise of religion agreeably to the dictates of our own consciences, is an unalienable right, which, upon the principles on which the gospel was first propagated and the Reformation from popery carried on, can never be transferred to another. Neither does the church of Christ stand in need of a general assessment for its support; and most certain we are that it would be of no advantage but an injury to the society to which we belong; and as every good Christian believes that Christ has ordained a complete system of laws for the government of his kingdom, so we are persuaded that by his providence he will support it to its final consummation. In the fixed belief of this principle, that the kingdom of Christ and the concerns of religion are beyond the limits of civil control, we should act a dishonest, inconsistent part were we to receive any emoluments from human establishments for the support of the gospel.

“These things being considered, we hope that we shall be excused for remonstrating against a general assessment for any religious purpose. As the maxims have long been approved, that every servant is to obey his master, and that the hireling is accountable for his conduct to him from whom he receives his wages, in like manner, if the Legislature has any rightful authority over the ministers of the gospel in the exercise of their sacred office, and if it is their duty to levy a maintenance for them as such, then it will follow that they may revive the old establishment in its former extent, or ordain a new one for any sect they may think proper; they are invested with a power not only to determine, but it is incumbent on them to declare, who shall preach, what they shall preach, to whom, when, and in what places they shall preach; or to impose any regulations and restrictions upon religious societies that they may judge expedient. These consequences are so plain as not to be denied, and they are so entirely subversive of religious liberty that if they should take place in Virginia we should be reduced to the melancholy necessity of saying with the apostles in like cases, 'Judge ye whether it is best to obey God or men,' and also of acting as they acted.

“Therefore, as it is contrary to our principles and interest, and, as we think, subversive of religious liberty, we do again most earnestly entreat that our Legislature would never extend any assessment for religious purposes to us or to the congregations under our care.”

At this same time in 1779, Thomas Jefferson anonymously prepared an adoption as part of the Revised Code of Virginia, “An Act for Establishing Religious Freedom,” which began as follows:-

“Well aware that Almighty God hath created the mind-free; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burdens, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the holy Author of our religion, who, being Lord both of body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was in his almighty power to do; that the impious presumption of legislators and rulers, civil as well as ecclesiastical, who, being themselves but fallible and uninspired men, have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinions and modes of thinking as the only true and infallible, and as such endeavoring to impose them on others, hath established and maintained false religions over the greatest part of the world, and through all time; that to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves, is sinful and tyrannical; that even the forcing him to support this or that teacher of his own religious persuasion, is depriving him of the comfortable liberty of giving his contributions to the particular pastor whose morals he would make his pattern, and whose powers he feels most persuasive to righteousness, and is withdrawing from the ministry those temporal rewards which, proceeding from an approbation of their personal conduct, are an additional incitement to earnest and unremitting labors for the instruction of mankind; that our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions, more than our opinions in physics or geometry; that, therefore, the proscribing any citizen as unworthy the public confidence, by laying upon him an incapacity of being called to the offices of trust and emolument, unless he profess or renounce this or that religious opinion, is depriving him injuriously of those privileges and advantages to which, in common with his fellow-citizens, he has a natural right; that it tends to corrupt the principles of that very religion it is meant to encourage, by bribing with a monopoly of worldly honors and emoluments those who will externally profess and conform to it; that, though indeed these are criminal who do not withstand such temptation, yet neither are those innocent who lay the bait in their way; that to suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion, and to restrain the profession or propagation of principles, on the supposition of their ill tendency, is a dangerous fallacy, which at once destroys all religious liberty, because, he being of course judge of that tendency, will make his opinions the rule of judgment, and approve or condemn the sentiments of others only as they shall square with, or differ from, his own; that it is time enough for the rightful purposes of civil government for its officers to interfere when principles break out into overt actions against peace and good order; and, finally, that truth is great, and will prevail if to herself; that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict, unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate, errors ceasing to be dangerous when it is permitted freely to contradict them”

George Washington, being asked his opinion on the question as it stood in the contest, answered that “no man's sentiments were more opposed to any kind of restraint upon religious principles” than were his, and further said:-

“As the matter now stands, I wish an assessment had never been agitated; and, as it has gone so far, that the bill could die an easy death.”

James Madison, the “founder of the Constitution”, the writer of the First Amendment, declared against the bill, that:-

“The assessment bill exceeds the functions of civil authority. The question has been stated as if it were, Is religion necessary? The true question is, Are establishments necessary to religion? And

the answer is, They corrupt religion. The difficulty of providing for the support of religion is the result of the war, to be remedied by voluntary association for religious purposes. In the event of a statute for the support of the Christian religion, are the courts of law to decide what is Christianity? and as a consequence, to decide what is orthodoxy and what is heresy? The enforced support of the Christian religion dishonors Christianity.”

The full response of Madison, which “embodied all that could be said” on the topic, is worthy of careful consideration and reading,

“Further still, the Court has set aside its ‘ambitious ... attempt to find a grand unified theory of the Establishment Clause’ rooted in the ‘wall of separation’ metaphor—opting instead for ‘a more modest approach that focuses on the particular issue at hand and looks to history for guidance.’”

and especially so since the Draft Report cites Jefferson’s “Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments” along with calls to look at history for guidance. As the writer of the First Amendment, he clearly demonstrates the function of the Establishment Clause, and plainly outlines the religious liberty that the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, were all written to establish and to ensure. Clearly differentiating the impersonal and inanimate tool of government from the inalienable rights of the people as a living creation, Madison says:-

“We, the subscribers, citizens of the said commonwealth, having taken into serious consideration a bill printed by order of the last session of General Assembly, entitled 'A Bill Establishing a Provision for Teachers of the Christian Religion,' and conceiving that the same, if finally armed with the sanctions of a law, will be a dangerous abuse of power, are bound as faithful members of a free State to remonstrate against it, and to declare the reasons by which we are determined. We remonstrate against the said bill:-

“1. Because we hold it for a fundamental and undeniable truth 'that religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence.' 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. This right is in its nature an unalienable right. It is unalienable, because the opinions of men, depending only on the evidence contemplated in their own minds, cannot follow the dictates of other men. It is unalienable, also, because what is here a right towards men is a duty towards the Creator. It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage, and such only, as he believes to be acceptable to him. This duty is precedent, both in order of time and in degree of obligation, to the claims of civil society. Before any man can be considered as a member of civil society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governor of the universe; and if a member of civil society who enters into any subordinate association, must always do it with a reservation of his duty to the general authority, much more must every man who becomes a member of any particular civil society do it with a saving of his allegiance to the universal Sovereign. We maintain, therefore, that in matters of religion no man's right is abridged by the institution of civil society, and that religion is wholly exempt from its cognizance. True it is, that no other rule exists

by which any question which may divide a society can be ultimately determined than the will of the majority; but it is also true that the majority may trespass upon the rights of the minority.”

“2. Because, if religion is exempt from the authority of the society at large, still less can it be subject to that of the legislative body. The latter are but the creatures and vicegerents of the former. Their jurisdiction is both derivative and limited. It is limited with regard to the coordinate departments; more necessarily is it limited with regard to the constituents. The preservation of a free government requires not merely that the metes and bounds which separate each department of power be invariably maintained, but more especially that neither of them be suffered to overleap the great barrier which defends the rights of the people. The rulers who are guilty of such an encroachment exceed the commission from which they derive their authority, and are tyrants. The people who submit to it are governed by laws made neither by themselves nor by any authority derived from them, and are slaves.”

“3. Because it is proper to take alarm at the first experiment upon our liberties. We hold this prudent jealousy to be the first duty of citizens, and one of the noblest characteristics of the late Revolution. The freemen of America did not wait till usurped power had strengthened itself by exercise, and entangled the question in precedents. They saw all the consequences in the principle, and they avoided the consequences by denying the principle. We revere this lesson too much soon to forget it. Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity, in exclusion of all other religions, may establish, with the same ease, any particular sect of Christians, in exclusion of all other sects? that the same authority which can force a citizen to contribute threepence only, of his property, for the support of any one establishment, may force him to conform to any other establishment in all cases whatsoever?”

“4. Because the bill violates that equality which ought to be the basis of every law, and which is more indispensable in proportion as the validity or expediency of any law is more liable to be impeached. 'If all men are by nature equally free and independent,' all men are to be considered as entering into society on equal conditions, as relinquishing no more, and, therefore, retaining no less, one than the other, of their natural rights. Above all, are they to be considered as retaining an 'equal title to the free exercise of religion according to the dictates of conscience.' Whilst we assert for ourselves a freedom to embrace, to profess, and to observe the religion which we believe to be of divine origin, we cannot deny an equal freedom to them whose minds have not yet yielded to the evidence which has convinced us. If this freedom be abused, it is an offense against God, not against man. To God, therefore, not to man, must an account of it be rendered. As the bill violates equality by subjecting some to peculiar burdens, so it violates the same principle by granting to others peculiar exemptions. Are the Quakers and Menonists the only sects who think a compulsive support of their religions unnecessary and unwarrantable? Can their piety alone be intrusted with the care of public worship? Ought their religions to be endowed above all others with extraordinary privileges by which proselytes may be enticed from all others? We think too favorably of the justice and good sense of these denominations to believe that they either covet preeminences over their fellow-citizens, or that they will be seduced by them from the common opposition to the measure.”

“5. Because the bill implies either that the civil magistrate is a competent judge of religious truth, or that he may employ religion as an engine of civil policy. The first is an arrogant pretension, fal-

sified by the contradictory opinions of rulers in all ages and throughout the world; the second, an unhallowed perversion of the means of salvation.”

“6. Because the establishment proposed by the bill is not requisite for the support of the Christian religion. To say that it is, is a contradiction to the Christian religion itself, for every page of it disavows a dependence on the powers of this world. It is a contradiction to fact; for it is known that this religion both existed and flourished, not only without the support of human laws, but in spite of every opposition from them, and not only during the period of miraculous aid, but long after it had been left to its own evidence and the ordinary care of Providence. Nay, it is a contradiction in terms; for a religion not invented by human policy must have preexisted and been supported before it was established by human policy. It is, moreover, to weaken in those who profess this religion a pious confidence in its innate excellence and the patronage of its Author, and to foster in those who still reject it a suspicion that its friends are too conscious of its fallacies to trust it to its own merits.”

“7. Because experience witnesseth that ecclesiastical establishments, instead of maintaining the purity and efficacy of religion, have had a contrary operation. During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less, in all places, pride and indolence in the clergy; ignorance and servility in the laity; in both, superstition, bigotry, and persecution. Inquire of the teachers of Christianity for the ages in which it appeared in its greatest luster; those of every sect point to the ages prior to its incorporation with civil polity. Propose a restoration of this primitive state, in which its teachers depend on the voluntary regard of their flocks-many of them predict its downfall. On which side ought their testimony to have greatest weight-when for, or when against, their interest?”

“8. Because the establishment in question is not necessary for the support of civil government. If it be urged as necessary for the support of civil government only as it is a means of supporting religion, and it be not necessary for the latter purpose, it cannot be necessary for the former. If religion be not within the cognizance of civil government, how can its legal establishment be necessary to civil government? What influence, in fact, have ecclesiastical establishments had on civil society? In some instances they have been seen to erect a spiritual tyranny on the ruins of civil authority; in many instances they have been seen upholding the thrones of political tyranny; in no instance have they been seen the guardians of the liberties of the people. Rulers who wished to subvert the public liberty may have found in established clergy convenient auxiliaries. A just government, instituted to secure and perpetuate it, needs them not. Such a government will be best supported by protecting every citizen in the enjoyment of his religion with the same equal hand which protects his person and his property, by neither invading the equal rights of any sect, nor suffering any sect to invade those of another.”

“9. Because the proposed establishment is a departure from that generous policy which, offering an asylum to the persecuted and oppressed of every nation and religion, promised a luster to our country, and an accession to the number of its citizens. What a melancholy mark is this bill, of sudden degeneracy! Instead of holding forth an asylum to the persecuted, it is itself a signal of persecution. It degrades from the equal rank of citizens all those whose opinions in religion do not bend to those of the legislative authority. Distant as it may be in its present form from the

Inquisition, it differs from it only in degree. The one is the first step, the other is the last in the career of intolerance. The magnanimous sufferer of this cruel scourge in foreign regions, must view the bill as a beacon on our coast warning him to seek some other haven, where liberty and philanthropy, in their due extent, may offer a more certain repose from his troubles.”

“10. Because it will have a like tendency to banish our citizens. The allurements presented by other situations are every day thinning their number. To super-add a fresh motive to emigration by revoking the liberty which they now enjoy, would be the same species of folly which has dishonored and depopulated flourishing kingdoms.”

“11. Because it will destroy that moderation and harmony which the forbearance of our laws to intermeddle with religion has produced among its several sects. Torrents of blood have been spilt in the Old World in consequence of vain attempts of the secular arm to extinguish religious discord by proscribing all differences in religious opinion. Time has at length revealed the true remedy. Every relaxation of narrow and rigorous policy, wherever it has been tried, has been found to assuage the disease. The American theater has exhibited proofs that equal and complete liberty, if it does not wholly, eradicate it, sufficiently destroys its malignant influence on the health and prosperity of the State. If, with the salutary effects of this system under our own eyes, we begin to contract the bounds of religious freedom, we know no name which will too severely reproach our folly. At least let warning be taken at the first fruits of the threatened innovation. The very appearance of the bill has transformed 'that Christian forbearance, love, and charity,' which of late mutually prevailed, into animosities and jealousies which may not be appeased. What mischiefs may not be dreaded, should this enemy to the public quiet be armed with the force of law?”

“12. Because the policy of the bill is adverse to the diffusion of the light of Christianity. The first wish of those who enjoy this precious gift ought to be that it may be imparted to the whole race of mankind. Compare the number of those who have as yet received it with the number still remaining under the dominion of false religions, and how small is the former? Does the policy of the bill tend to lessen the disproportion?—No; it at once discourages those who are strangers to the light of revelation from coming into the region of it, and countenances by example the nations who continue in darkness in shutting out those who might convey it to them. Instead of leveling, as far as possible, every obstacle to the victorious progress of truth, the bill, with an ignoble and unchristian timidity, would circumscribe it with a wall of defense against the encroachments of error.”

“13. Because attempts to enforce, by legal sanctions, acts obnoxious to so great a proportion of citizens, tend to enervate the laws in general, and to slacken the bands of society. If it be difficult to execute any law which is not generally deemed necessary or salutary, what must be the case where it is deemed invalid and dangerous? And what may be the effect of so striking an example of impotency in the government, on its general authority?”

“14. Because a measure of such singular magnitude and delicacy ought not to be imposed without the clearest evidence that it is called for by a majority of citizens; and no satisfactory method is yet proposed by which the voice of the majority in this case may be determined, or its influ-

ence secured. The people of the respective counties are,' indeed, 'requested to signify their opinion respecting the adoption of the bill, to the next session of the Assembly.' But the representation must be made equal before the voice either of the representatives or of the counties will be that of the people. Our hope is that neither of the former will, after due consideration, espouse the dangerous principle of the bill. Should the event disappoint us, it will still leave us in full confidence that a fair appeal to the latter will reverse the sentence against our liberties."

"15. Because, finally, 'The equal right of every citizen to the free exercise of his religion, according to the dictates of conscience,' is held by the same tenure with all our other rights. If we recur to its origin, it is equally the gift of nature; if we weigh its importance, it cannot be less dear to us; if we consult the declaration of those rights 'which pertain to the good people of Virginia as the basis and foundation of government,' it is enumerated with equal solemnity, or rather with studied emphasis. Either, then, we must say that the will of the Legislature is the only measure of their authority, and that in the plenitude of that authority they may sweep away all our fundamental rights, or that they are bound to leave this particular right untouched and sacred. Either we must say that they may control the freedom of the press, may abolish the trial by jury, may swallow up the executive and judiciary powers of the State; may that they may despoil us of our very rights of suffrage, and erect themselves into an independent and hereditary assembly, or we must say that they have no authority to enact into a law the bill under consideration."

"We, the subscribers, say that the General Assembly of this commonwealth have no such authority. And in order that no effort may be omitted on our part against so dangerous an usurpation, we oppose to it this remonstrance, earnestly praying as we are in duty bound, that the Supreme Lawgiver of the universe, by illuminating those to whom it is addressed, may, on the one hand, and their councils from every act which would affront his holy prerogative or violate the trust committed to them, and, on the other, side them into every measure which may be worthy of his blessing redound to their own praise, and establish more firmly the his liberties, the prosperity, and the happiness of the commonwealth."

The foregoing remonstrance was so thoroughly discussed and so well understood, and the will of the people on the subject was made so plain and emphatic, that "when the Legislature of Virginia assembled, no person was willing to bring forward the Assessment Bill; and it was never heard of more."

The benefit of it was immediately felt throughout the country; and "in every other American State oppressive statutes concerning religion fell into disuse, and were gradually repealed." This statute of Virginia is the model upon which the clause respecting religious right has been founded in the constitutions of all the States in the Union to this day. In every instance this statute has been embodied in its substance, and often in its very words, in the State constitutions. And when it is enforced as it stands, just as it was under the guidance of the very writers of the Constitution, then "oppressive statutes concerning religion" will fall into disuse.

A Text without a Context is a Pretext

"As George Washington put it in his famous Farewell Address, 'religion and morality

are indispensable supports' to a democratic republic."

This is the full text of what George Washington said:-

"Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports."

The support is not for "a democratic republic", but for "political prosperity". The former is specific and can be subtle in preventing "We the People" from understanding their natural right to "alter or abolish" government (as clearly written in the Declaration of Independence and worked through the Constitution), while the latter is general and can be used to increase knowledge. But let us continue with his entire thought:-

"In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked: Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

And with this, Washington agrees with the general sentiment of the Draft Report in regards to the importance of religious principle. This is why the Constitution was written, and why church and state have been separated ever since: to ensure that there will be no exclusion of religious principle.

"One belabored metaphor cannot support the view that the aim of the First Amendment was to exile the practice of religion from public life. And no Founding-era evidence supports that conclusion either."

"One belabored metaphor", whether true or not, does not make the First Amendment faulty, it makes the interpreter faulty. This is why many of the witnesses have been vindicated in the judicial system: because the Constitution was then interpreted as it stood. This is why Washington, shortly after, said the following:-

"Promote then, as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge."

But the Commission, along with seeking avenues of education, seeks to repudiate the Establishment Clause through the wrong education of Constitutional principle.

Just before these statements, Washington said:-

"It is important, likewise, that the habits of thinking in a free country should inspire caution in those entrusted with its administration, to confine themselves within their respective constitutional spheres, avoiding in the exercise of the powers of one department to encroach upon another. The spirit of encroachment tends to consolidate the powers of all the departments in one, and thus to create, whatever the form of government, a real despotism. A just estimate of

that love of power, and proneness to abuse it, which predominates in the human heart, is sufficient to satisfy us of the truth of this position. The necessity of reciprocal checks in the exercise of political power, by dividing and distributing it into different depositories, and constituting each the guardian of the public weal against invasions by the others, has been evinced by experiments ancient and modern; some of them in our country and under our own eyes. To preserve them must be as necessary as to institute them. If, in the opinion of the people, the distribution or modification of the constitutional powers be in any particular wrong, let it be corrected by an amendment in the way which the Constitution designates. But let there be no change by usurpation; for though this, in one instance, may be the instrument of good, it is the customary weapon by which free governments are destroyed. The precedent must always greatly overbalance in permanent evil any partial or transient benefit, which the use can at any time yield.”

Repudiation is functionally usurpation, is functionally the favour for one understanding over another. The method prescribed by Washington was correction “by an amendment in the way which the Constitution designates.” This we saw in the 13th and 14th amendments, which, alongside the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, and along with Amendments IX and X in particular, affirms the rocky foundation of religious liberty that the First Amendment builds through the separation of church and state. Again, the solution is not to challenge the Establishment Clause, but to affirm the Establishment Clause, to affirm the separation of church and state, through the enforcement of the Constitution as it is written.

“We are not ‘to consult popularity,’ but instead to rely on ‘nothing ... but the Constitution and the laws.’”

And the Draft Report agrees with this when quoting Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, yet in its recommendations argues otherwise.

“If Americans forfeit this fight, we will squander the magnificent inheritance of our Founders—and we will soon experience the consequences on an even more dramatic scale.”

And the magnificent inheritance was the Constitution as it stands. How can one report seem to clearly understand this, yet draw the wrong conclusion at the most fundamental, foundational level? When the Constitution is given as a rock, do not seek to turn it into sand.

“We could pretend our other American freedoms will not follow suit as religious liberty declines, despite history’s proof that total government control ‘begins with the individual ... seek[ing] to replace conscience with compliance, truth with ideology, and ultimately, God with the state.’”

And this is what the Establishment Clause protects from, for if religion and morality pertain to the duty of man towards God, then the only logical conclusion for a bridge between church and state, between moral authority and civil authority, is a scenario where the state becomes as gods. When Congress makes a law respecting an establishment of religion, that is a claim of authority of the state, for just as the lesser is blessed of the greater, the lesser is established of

the greater, just as the United States Nation, and its now 50 additional Nations, were established by “We the People”.

“Testimonies showed that religious liberty violations often result from gaps in knowledge or understanding of the law rather than inadequate legal protections. As Commissioner Kelly Shackelford explained, Americans often have the law on their side, but either government officials or individuals themselves frequently do not know the law or have an overly narrow understanding of it.”

Just as the report mentions, there is no issue in the legal protections offered by the Constitution. Just as has been repeated ad-nauseum, the solution already exists in upholding the “magnificent inheritance” of the Constitution.

“Their firsthand accounts of being silenced, punished, or isolated for their beliefs underscore the importance of making sure that families know their First Amendment rights and that schools no longer use the pretext of “separation of church and state” to unjustly relegate students’ faith to only the deepest recesses of their hearts.”

The “separation of church and state” is not exclusive to the First Amendment, for the principle of religious liberty which it embodies is found in the entirety of the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the Constitution of the United States. A school using a text as a pretext does not make the pretext wrong, it makes the school wrong. A commission that seeks to change the pretext does not make the pretext wrong, it makes the commission wrong, for in seeking to correct a pretext, its context must be understood.

“The concept of a ‘wall of separation between church and state’ can wrongly imply that church and state are opposed to one another and must remain completely separate.”

So let us look at the context:-

“Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building a wall of separation between church & state.”

In the words of Jefferson, in the context of his “wall”, the separation of church and state is the express purpose of the Establishment Clause, and is written to guarantee the religious liberty of the whole American people to worship according to the dictates of their conscious. He states that the reach of government only extends as far as civility (action), and not morality (opinion). He also rejects any notion that the church is to have authority over the reward or punishment of morality, let alone the church representing the “conscious of the state”, for “religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship.”

“For example, the school leaders who removed Coach Joe Kennedy from his role at Bremerton High School as a penalty for his private prayer, suggested that his termination was required by separation of church and state. The Supreme Court clarified that the Constitution neither permits nor requires such repression, but this clarity came only after Coach Kennedy suffered through years of litigation and related strife for himself, his family, and his community”

Every single testimony presents the same conclusion: the issue is not with a knowledge of religion and morality, it is an issue with a knowledge of the Constitution and legality. And as civil government may have authority in all things civil, it is then the duty to educate the public not in things moral, but in things civil. To take on the prerogative of God, to take on the education of the public in things moral, is to make a statement that He is inadequate in His appointed means. Morality has not failed the people, the Constitution has not failed the people, but the Nations of the United States and these United States have failed the people in its duty of the enforcement of civility.

Let us now summarily end this letter with another portion of Washington’s farewell address:-

“Profoundly penetrated with this idea, I shall carry it with me to my grave, as a strong incitement to unceasing vows that heaven may continue to you the choicest tokens of its beneficence; that your union and brotherly affection may be perpetual; that the free Constitution, which is the work of your hands, may be sacredly maintained;

“Towards the preservation of your government, and the permanency of your present happy state, it is requisite, not only that you steadily discountenance irregular oppositions to its acknowledged authority, but also that you resist with care the spirit of innovation upon its principles, however specious the pretexts. One method of assault may be to effect, in the forms of the Constitution, alterations which will impair the energy of the system, and thus to undermine what cannot be directly overthrown.”

From: Brenda Kis <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment - Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:48:22 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Commission on Religious Liberty,

Thank you for your desire to promote Christianity in our nation. However, I must object to the proposed means. The union of church and state is not the way to accomplish this!

I have read numerous accounts of the results of such a union, and these accounts all end with loss of religious and other liberties. The Dark Ages, the Inquisition, the Holocaust all leave a bloody and tortured trail originating in one church or state dominating the populace and denying the God-given right to choose our own religion and eternal destiny.

I beg of you to protect the freedom our forebears fought so valiantly to preserve. Do not allow their martyrdom to be eclipsed by any entity wishing to break down/bridge this protective wall of separation. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit" is the way to promote Christianity, not by tearing down a good and necessary wall.

I urge you to uphold the Johnson Amendment and withhold tax dollars from religious non-profit activities and religious education.

Sincerely,
Brenda Kis

From: James Eisnor <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Objections to the President's Religious Liberty Commissions Statement on Church and State Relationship

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:48:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the President's Religious Liberty Commissions,

Your conclusion regarding church and state relationship violates the First Amendment of the Constitution. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;". It is true there is no uses of the words "church and state ";however, the First Amendment statement is much stronger than the words "church and state".

The founders of our United States looked towards Europe witnessing religious wars between catholics and protestants. They didn't want any of that in their new nation. Sad to say, pilgrims, who left Europe and came to Boston, eventually persecuted those with religious differences in their colony. Providence was established due to persecution from pilgrims who had escaped European religious persecution.

Many oppose Sharia Law being enforced on Muslims and non-Muslims in the United States. We should not be surprised when Christians and on-Christian oppose Christian laws and beliefs being forced on the citizens of the United States.

Religion is too private and personal a thing for government to set rules and enforcements on its citizens. It best to stay close the wisdom and practice of the First Amendment of the Constitution. We need to keep the government out of the church and keep church out of the government.

Sincerely,
James Eisnor

Sent from my iPhone

From: Mary Kobler <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment-Religious Liberty-Mary Kobler

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:49:07 -0400

Importance: Normal

This country was founded on religious freedom. We say one nation under God, not one nation under government. I am a Christian. I made that choice at age 10. I also believe in the 7th day Sabbath. I made that choice in 1987. Government did not dictate that revelation to me, God did. Thankfully at that time in my life, the Government did not deny my choice nor interfere with my practice of worship. Nor should it!!

I support and agree with the comments expressed by Pillars of Freedom and ask please implement them.

I close with, This is my country, land that I love.

Mary Kobler

From: Cynthia Miller <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:49:20 -0400

Importance: Normal

Please keep church and state separate. I am a Christian and know from studying history, whenever church and state unite, there is always loss of liberty and persecution. - Cynthia Miller
Sent from my iPhone

From: Ismail Royers<[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >, "Bush, Mary Margaret (OASG)"
<[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] RLC draft report comments

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:50:10 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Religious_Liberty_Commission_Public_Comment_-_Ismail_Royer.pdf

Dear Mary Margaret,

As a member of the Lay Leaders Advisory Board of the Religious Liberty Commission and on behalf of the Religious Freedom Institute, I am submitting the attached written comments on the RLC's draft report. I hope that these comments are helpful and contribute to the Commission's excellent work.

Sincerely,

Ismail

--

Ismail Royer
Director, Islam and Religious Freedom
Religious Freedom Institute

[REDACTED] PII

www.rfi.org

Cell: [REDACTED] PII

<https://youtu.be/3oRNbD5gGjk?si=idX-3r52G9mXv2Sw>

July 13, 2026

Religious Liberty Commission
U.S. Department of Justice
Office of the Associate Attorney General
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

RE: Religious Liberty Commission's Draft Report Request for Public Comment

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Carson, and members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

The Religious Freedom Institute (RFI) is committed to achieving broad acceptance of religious liberty as a fundamental human right, the cornerstone of a successful society, and a source of national and international security. Our comments focus on the draft report's important contributions and its implications for human flourishing in fulfillment of the Religious Liberty Commission's (RLC) mandate. On behalf of RFI, and on behalf of myself as a member of the RLC's Lay Leaders Advisory Board, I respectfully submit this comment on the RLC's draft report.

1. We endorse the RLC report's framing of the problem, its conclusions, and its recommendations to expand religious freedom protections in America

Pursuant to Executive Order 14291, the RLC was tasked with investigating the current state of religious liberty in the United States and issuing a set of policy recommendations to address areas in which that fundamental right is under threat. With this report, the RLC has fulfilled its mandate, successfully identifying emerging threats to religious liberty and proposing recommendations to ensure that America is free from fear of unjustified government impingement on religious belief and practice, and from religious discrimination or persecution.

RFI strongly supports the findings of the RLC draft report and encourages the implementation of its policy recommendations as effective means of protecting religious liberty as envisioned by the Founders. We further endorse the Commission's framing of the Founders' vision of the relationship between government and religion, which achieves a golden mean

between ahistorical hostility to religion in the public square on the one hand, and impermissible government establishment of religion on the other.

2. Resolving potential ambiguity in proposed parental rights regulations

In its policy recommendations, the draft report appropriately advises that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issue guidance clarifying the correct interpretation of Supreme Court precedent and statutory provisions that safeguard the rights of parents. See RLC Draft Report at 218.

We endorse and applaud this recommendation but are concerned that those reading and relying on the report may not understand why the RLC recommends HHS for this task. Accordingly, we recommend that this policy recommendation include a footnote citation explaining to the reader that the Department of Education (ED) and HHS have established an interagency partnership under which HHS will assist ED in several areas, including many of those relevant to the RLC report's recommendations, such as implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). See U.S. Dep't of Education and U.S. Dep't of Health and Human Services, *Fact Sheet: Department of Education (ED) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Special Education and Rehabilitative Services Partnership* (2025), ed.gov.

In the interest of clarity and completeness, we further suggest that this recommendation also be amended to include, along with HHS, reference to the Department of Justice (DOJ). This amendment would be appropriate given that ED and DOJ have likewise recently entered into an interagency agreement under which DOJ will assist ED in many of the parental rights issues enumerated in the draft report's recommendation. See U.S. Dep't of Education and U.S. Dep't of Justice, *Fact Sheet: Department of Education (ED) and Department of Justice (DOJ) Student Privacy Protection Partnership* (2026), ed.gov.

Finally, regarding point one of the recommended regulatory guidance, it may be helpful to clarify (perhaps in a footnote) that indirect funding recommendations fall under the scope of HHS's existing services, including Early Head Start and Head Start programs, as well as the Child Care and Development Block Grants (CCDBG). These programs align with the draft report's recommendations, as they direct earmarked funding to support faith-based providers and families seeking faith-based child care, and better serve religiously pluralistic communities.

3. Further supporting a recommendation of updated religious liberty training standards for military leaders

The draft report appropriately recommends updating religious liberty training standards for military leaders. See RLC Draft Report at 118. Specifically, the draft report recommends that the Department of War ensure that annual training is provided to all levels of the military, including commanding officers, judge advocate generals (JAGs), chaplains, and recruiters.

We endorse and applaud this recommendation, which the report supports with citation to several in-person witnesses who testified at the RLC’s Fourth Hearing. We suggest that it be further supported by citation to the written testimony of Rev. Graham Glover, RFI Chaplain Fellow and a Chaplain in the U.S. Army Reserve assigned to the Army Office of the Chief of Chaplains at the Pentagon. See U.S. Dep’t of Justice, Religious Liberty Commission, *Witness Testimonies, Religious Liberty in the Military State and Local Religious Liberty Issues*, Dec. 10, 2025, at 61.

In his testimony, which was submitted to the RLC in connection with the Fourth Hearing and included in the hearing record, Rev. Glover stated: “I cannot emphasize enough how important it is that the DoDI continues to require Commanders, Chaplains, and JAGs to receive annual, updated training and instruction on religious liberty protections.” *Id.* This authority strengthens the RLC Report’s recommendation and, in conjunction with the other witnesses cited, demonstrates a broad consensus on the need for annual religious freedom training for U.S. military personnel.

4. Recognizing the R20 as part of G20 events this year

We recommend that the Commission include in its report a recommendation that the U.S. Government recognize the R20 as an official part of the U.S. Presidency of the G20 this year. The Trump Administration can also play a decisive role in securing formal recognition for the R20 as a Permanent Engagement Group of the G20. This will contribute to the success of the U.S. G20 Presidency by enshrining foundational American values and principles—including the fundamental right to religious liberty—within the very structure of future G20 events.

Promoting an R20 will help fulfill a key element of the Commission’s mandate. Executive Order 14291 provides: “Specific activities of the Commission shall include...identifying opportunities for the White House Faith Office to partner with the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom to further the cause of religious liberty around the world.” Official recognition of the R20 will also help achieve other key elements of the Religious Liberty Commission’s mandate, including the need to address “current threats to domestic religious liberty,” as well as to develop “strategies to preserve and enhance religious

liberty protections for future generations, and programs to increase awareness of and celebrate America's peaceful religious pluralism." *Id.*

5. Conclusion

RFI congratulates the RLC for discharging its responsibility in exemplary fashion. We pray that it will be acted upon by this and further administrations, and guide the restoration of the Founders' vision of a country that, uniquely among any other on earth, safeguards the fundamental rights of its people and the freedom to which all persons are entitled.

Sincerely,

Ismail Royer

Director, Islam and Religious Freedom, Religious Freedom Institute

Member, Lay Leaders Advisory Board, Religious Liberty Commission

From: Noel Browne <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- Separation of Church and State – Noel Browne

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:50:20 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was troubled to learn that the Commission wants to remove the protection provided to US citizens of all faiths through the separation of church and State.

As a Christian I believe that it is essential that we keep this separation of church and State.

Human nature says that when faced with deciding between two opposing views we will generally side with the ones that holds a view similar to us.

However Jesus showed us the example in the parable of the good Samaritan that we are treat all men equally, even those who disagree with us. This includes those of other religions and faiths.

If this separation is removed, since America is majority Christian nation there is bound to be a preferential shift towards benefits to Christians over non-Christians.

Even if one thinks there is no problem here. The next danger is that if the US Government will have to decide a case between two Christian groups the precedent will be set that the popular or favorite group can receive the benefits over the unpopular.

But this would go directly against the teachings of Jesus and the principles of the US government. Jesus taught that all men are equal. God is no respecter of persons. Also the principles of the United States of America that all men are created equal.

Therefore the separation of church and state through features such as the Johnson ammendment protects all men and keeps everyone on an equal level.

Let's keep the separation of church and State.

Sincerely,

Noel Browne

Seale. Alabama

From: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on Religious Liberty Commission Recommendations

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:50:33 -0400

Importance: Normal

[Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State & the Johnson Amendment](#) — Everyl, Rosemary, & Adriana Carper

Dear Friends at the Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ):

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the recommendations of the Religious Liberty Committee submitted to President Donald J. Trump on June 26, 2026. We appreciate the Committee's labors, which resulted in the 12 recommendations, while as Christians we agree with some, we have concerns and objections to the Committee's first and ninth recommendations.

To understand the dangers of lowering the wall of separation between church and state one only needs to read *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* by John Foxe. His original work, *Actes and Monuments*, about Christians who were persecuted by the church was famously an enormous **three-volume** set when published. However, with some unabridged scholarly collections spanning as many as **eight volumes**. **Millions of Christians were put to death during the period known as the Dark Ages by the church who had the support of the government.** And it was Madison who stated that, "In the Papal System (*any religious system*), **Government and Religion are in a manner consolidated**, & that is found to be **the worst of Governments**. In most of the Govts. of the old world, the legal establishment of a particular religion and without or with very little toleration of others makes a part of the Political and Civil organization and there are few of the most enlightened judges who will maintain that the system has been favorable either to Religion or to Govt." [1] The Christian faith is built on the Cross of Christ which is a demonstration of not only the love of God, but at the same time a demonstration of what happens when bridging the gap between Church and State. In the Ten Commandments the first four commands regard man's relationship with God, and the last six his relationship with his fellow man. The last six are the areas government can help keep a governed people safe and secure through law and order.

The pilgrims that came to the New World, and establishing Plymouth Plantation came here to escape prosecution in the Old World which was a direct cause of the bridge between church and state. Christians have been know to persecute Christians just because they don't agree on a particular issue. Roger Williams was the first in the New World to establish the first truly free state, Rhode Island, that recognized liberty of conscience. A brief search of past history clearly shows the cause and effect and dangers of a union between church and state. One may think it can't happen here, but history often repeats itself. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: ... " 1 Cor 10:13. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." 1 Cor 10:12. Bible prophecy indicates in Rev 13 that in the future it will happen again a bridge between church and state. Therefore we pray let not this administration be the one to fulfill that prophecy.

Our Founding Fathers saw the dangers of a union between church and state. Jefferson believed that the principle of separation of church and state were set out or built into the Constitution. Jefferson wrote: "Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature (*Congress*) should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion (*particular faith or teaching*), or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' **thus building a wall of separation between Church & State.**" [2]

Lastly, we object to the recommendation of the RLC that the Johnson Amendment be removed. No matter how godly a person or religious institution might be scripture tells us in 1 Timothy 6:10 that the "**love of money is the root of all evil**". Money itself is not evil, but the **love of money is the root of all evil**, and even godly men have been seduced by power and money. Time and time again history has shown that to be true, and the Johnson Amendment was put in place to protect this nation from that evil.

If the Johnson Amendment is removed, religious leaders and people who want civil power will publicly promise their votes and church dollars in exchange for political favors, and the politicians will no doubt reciprocate in the form of legislation that favors those voters and dollars, in order to help them get into or stay in office. We have enough special interest groups seeking favors already without creating another group of power hungry religious zealots.

We respectfully request, therefore, that the Department of Justice not adopt recommendations 1 and 9 of the Committee.

Sincerely,

Everyl, Rosemary, & Adriana Carper

Italicize words are added comments

[1] 1832 letter to the Reverend Jasper Adams https://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/amendI_religions68.html

[2] <https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html>

From: Odette Blackmore <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Guidance on the Establishment Clause and Separation of Church and State – [Odette Blackmore].

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:50:50 -0400

Importance: Normal

Hi,

As it relates to issuing guidance to the DOJ clarifying its understanding of the Establishment Clause and the relationship between church and state. It is my view that the separation of church and state should NOT be abolished.

Thanks

From: Bill Powell <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State- Bill Powell

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:50:57 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a citizen to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state — especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God — and that's bad for the church and the country alike. Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,

Bill Powell

Snowflake, AZ

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

From: Peter Thorwarth <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Stop Christian Nationalism - it's wrong!

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:54:27 -0400

Importance: Normal

The **Religious Liberty Commission report** is terrible and needs to be re-done with a proper focus on the **extremely important separation of church and state**.

Do not proceed with any...

Repealing of the Johnson Amendment

Funneling more public money into religious schools through vouchers

Backing state laws that force religious displays into public classrooms

Creating new federal enforcement schemes that would pressure public officials to favor religious expression.

They are all contrary to the constitution and to what the Founders intended!

Peter Thorwarth

Asheville NC [REDACTED] PII

From: Caroline Graves <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - PRESERVING THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:54:49 -0400

Importance: Normal

Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am submitting this comment because I strongly oppose any effort to dismiss the separation of church and state as though it were foreign to the Constitution or harmful to religious liberty.

The phrase "wall of separation between church and state" may not appear word for word in the Constitution, but the principle is plainly contained within the First Amendment. Government is forbidden from establishing religion, and the individual is protected in the free exercise of religion. These two protections belong together. One protects religion from government interference, while the other protects the conscience from religious coercion through government.

The separation of church and state does not mean the separation of religious people from society. Christians should be free to vote, hold office, speak publicly, organise, preach and advocate according to conscience. What must remain separated is the authority of religious institutions from the coercive authority of civil government.

That distinction is essential because the church and the state possess fundamentally different kinds of power. The church appeals to conscience through truth, conviction and persuasion. The state acts through law, taxation, penalties, regulation and force. Once the church seeks to accomplish spiritual aims through civil power, faith is no longer left free. Once the state begins supporting or advancing religion, it must decide which religious beliefs and organisations deserve recognition and which do not.

History gives repeated warning of the result.

When Christianity became closely joined with the Roman Empire, political influence entered the church and civil force entered religious controversy. Religious disputes were no longer settled only through Scripture and persuasion, but through imperial favour, legal penalties and exile. The church gained earthly power but lost spiritual purity.

The same pattern continued through medieval Europe, where church and state authority became intertwined. Religious dissent was treated as a crime, and those who differed from the established faith could face imprisonment, loss of property or death.

The Protestant Reformation exposed many abuses of the established church, but Protestant nations often repeated the same error by using civil power to enforce their own religious standards. Catholics persecuted Protestants, Protestants persecuted Catholics, and established churches persecuted dissenting Christians. The problem was not confined to one denomination. The problem was the union of religion with coercive government.

Even early America experienced this danger. Baptists, Quakers and other religious minorities were fined, jailed or excluded where established churches possessed legal privilege. The American system of religious liberty was created in response to that history. It recognised that conscience is safest when government has no authority to compel religious belief or favour one religious body over another.

The church is not strengthened by political power. It is weakened by it. When religion becomes dependent upon government recognition, funding, influence or protection, it becomes vulnerable to government control. The state

may support the church today, but tomorrow it may regulate its teaching, determine which beliefs are acceptable or withdraw favour from those who refuse to conform.

As a Christian, I also believe this issue carries a serious prophetic warning. Revelation 13 describes a future union of religious influence and civil authority in which worship eventually becomes enforced. The prophecy presents a progression from persuasion to pressure, from pressure to economic restriction and finally from economic restriction to persecution. People are compelled to worship the beast and its image, and those who refuse are threatened with the inability to buy or sell.

That prophecy shows why the boundary between church and state matters. The final crisis does not begin only when forced worship is openly announced. It begins when religious power is granted access to civil enforcement and when government is encouraged to become an active partner in advancing religious aims.

For this reason, the idea of replacing a wall of separation with a bridge of cooperation is deeply troubling. A bridge allows movement in both directions. It gives religious institutions access to governmental power, while giving government increased access to the affairs of religion. What may begin as friendly cooperation can gradually become preference, privilege, expectation and ultimately compulsion.

The protection of religious liberty requires more than good intentions. It requires firm constitutional boundaries. Freedom of conscience should never depend upon whether those currently holding power are benevolent. The purpose of constitutional restraint is to protect the minority, the dissenter and the unpopular believer even when the majority believes it is acting for a righteous cause.

The state should protect every person's right to worship, speak and live according to conscience, provided the equal rights of others are respected. It should not become an instrument through which any church, denomination or religious movement advances its spiritual mission.

I therefore urge the Commission to affirm clearly that the separation of church and state is not hostility toward Christianity or religion. It is a protection of genuine faith, because faith must be voluntary. It preserves the purity of the church by keeping it from dependence upon political power, and it preserves the liberty of the citizen by keeping government out of matters of worship and conscience.

A government that protects religion without directing it, and a church that influences society without controlling the state, provide the strongest safeguard for religious freedom.

Weakening that boundary risks repeating the failures of history and paving the way for both constitutional and religious apostasy.

Respectfully,

Caroline Graves

From: Bruzzese LisaAnn <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment- "Religious Liberty Commission Report"

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:54:55 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

This email comes in regards to the report on matters of unifying church and state.

The blending of matters involving religion and government bring forth trouble as seen in past history. Things may start out with a well meaning intent, but gradually evolves to more problems. For example, government funding will come with conditions which will limit the freedom of reaching the desired goal unless comprising, and comprising always leads to trouble in one way or another, especially when dealing in matters involving God. Encouraging worship for rest, will eventually lead to mandated worship. Mandated worship as Constantine enforced led to persecution as have all other instances of enforced worship. God never forces us to do anything, including worship. He set consequences, but left the decisions to rest upon each of us and our conscience. Thus, no one should force religion upon another. Government should solely abide to matters in which is in their jurisdiction and religious matters should be left to Individuals consciences and those organizations/afiliations they so choose to share their beliefs with and let God ultimately determine His justice in His timing.

In regards to the Johnson Amendment, I believe it should not be done away with as churches and religious entities should not be promoting or opposing political candidates or issues. Those are things that individuals on their own or together with others they associate with can decide on. Politics should not and is not the goal of a religious affiliation. That being said, I ask that the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced.

I am opposed to the funding of religious education, as well as funding of religious non-profit activities. Religious education and religious non-profit activities should be funded by their own religious affiliation/community, thereby preserving the integrity and nature of their goals without say from or restrictions of government. Religion and Government should not intermingle. One should not rule over or have say in the other. They are two very different things. Religious matters revolve around God. Government matters revolve around civil authority.

"And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Luke 20:25 NKJV

The role of the government's relationship in regards to religion should be neutral. Special treatment should not be given to any religious communities, affiliations, organizations, etc... Again, government and religious institutions and beliefs should not interfere with one another as they are each different in nature.

In conclusion, I ask you all to please not implement unification of church and state, but instead that they be completely separated. It is my sincere belief that such unification is NOT beneficial for anyone.

Thank you for your time and consideration. It is appreciated.

Signed Respectfully,
~Lisa Ann Bruzzese

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

From: Michael Dellene <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:55:26 -0400

Importance: Normal

Regarding the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission I disagree with the conclusion. Church and State must remain separated! If not it will ultimately produce more religious discrimination and less liberty!!!

Please do not recommend Church and State to be equal!!!

M Dellen

Sent from my iPhone

From: Trisha Mandigo <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:55:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them."

Trisha Mandigo

From: Morales Margaret <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] US Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:55:44 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with the Pillar of Freedom comments

Margarita Morales

Huntsville, AL [REDACTED] PII

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

From: Brian Heckethorn <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Executive Summary – Brian Heckethorn

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:56:47 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment regarding the Commission's draft report.

I write as a Christian who deeply values both religious liberty and the constitutional protections that have allowed people of every faith—and no faith—to worship according to conscience.

Religious liberty is strongest when government protects the free exercise of religion without becoming an advocate for religion itself. Throughout history, the union of civil authority and religious authority has consistently harmed both. Governments become tempted to regulate belief, while religion becomes vulnerable to political influence. The result is diminished freedom of conscience for everyone, especially those whose beliefs differ from the majority.

The First Amendment wisely protects two complementary principles: the free exercise of religion and the prohibition against governmental establishment of religion. These principles are not in conflict. Rather, they work together to ensure that every American enjoys the freedom to worship, or not worship, without coercion or favoritism.

For this reason, I am concerned by recommendations that appear to reinterpret the longstanding principle commonly described as the “wall of separation between church and state.” While that phrase does not appear in the Constitution itself, it has long expressed an important constitutional principle: government should not exercise authority over religion, nor should religion exercise governmental power.

Protecting religious liberty should never require diminishing the institutional neutrality of government toward religion. A government that remains neutral among faiths is not hostile to religion; it is the best protector of every person's religious freedom.

America has flourished because people of countless religious traditions have been free to follow their convictions without government preference for one belief over another. That protection is especially vital for religious minorities, whose freedoms depend upon impartial laws rather than the favor of those currently in power.

I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve the historic understanding that liberty of conscience is a fundamental, God-given right, and that the federal government should continue to safeguard both the free exercise of religion and the constitutional boundaries that prevent any union of church and state.

The strength of our nation is not found in government directing religion, but in government protecting the freedom of every citizen to seek and worship God according to the dictates of conscience.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Brian Heckethorn
Hedgesville, West Virginia

From: Kloe Hunt <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Rejection to Religious Liberty Commission Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:57:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

To The Religious Liberty Commission,

In regards to the separation of church and state I agree with Thomas Jefferson when he said:

“Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building a wall of separation between Church & State,”

I oppose the moves being made by the Religious Liberty Commission in their final report to unite church and state and strongly believe that every person should have the freedom to believe as he wishes and for the government to not be involved in any way, shape, or form, except to protect every individual’s choice as to how he chooses to worship and believe.

Sincerely,

Kloe J. Hunt

From: "Ellie A." <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Establishment Clause - ElliesAverion

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:57:13 -0400

Importance: Normal

Religion is heart-work, and coercion cannot reach the heart. A statute can compel the body into a pew; it cannot put worship in the man. This is not merely an observation about human nature--it is a statement about what religion is, and every author in this collection makes it independently.

"The State cannot teach morality or religion. It has not the credentials for it. The Spirit of God and the gospel of Christ are both essential to the teaching of morality, and neither of these is committed to the State, but both to the church."

- The Rights of the People

"Forcing men to remain in-doors, to refrain from labor, or to attend church on Sunday, will not make Christians of them; it is possible it might make hypocrites of many, but Christians of none."

- Scriptural Relation of Religion and the State, RLL No. 17

Jesus never used the government to support His religion and neither should we. We need to remember what happened during the dark ages when church and state were united. We do not want a repeat of past history.

Blessings,
Ellie Averion

From: "PII" <PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:57:25 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

I am in agreement with the Pillar of Freedom comments. Please implement them in order to maintain freedom of religion! It should continue to be my choice to worship God the way the Bible instructs me to do so. I choose to worship Him on the 7th day of the week, Saturday, God's Sabbath. If our country fails to keep a separation between church and state, this will lead to mandated legislation requiring citizens of this great land to worship God on Sunday, man's sabbath. This is not God's intended day to worship Him. For in six days God created the heavens and the earth and rested on the seventh day (Saturday) and sanctified it, setting it aside as holy. I want to continue to worship God on the day the Bible teaches. Worshipping Him on any other day would be to worship Him in vain. "In vain do they worship Me teaching for doctrine the commandments of man." (Matthew 15:8-9, Mark 7:7) I would rather continue to choose to keep God's commandments over man's commandments. Wouldn't you? "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six day shalt thou labour, and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." (Genesis 20:8-10). Thank you for honoring my rights as a U.S. citizen to serve and obey God.

Sincerely,
Todd Yost
Porterville, CA

From: johnnie jones <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty in the United States of America

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:57:36 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: RELIGIOUS_LIBERTY_2026.pages

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for considering my letter as a means to maintain and to foster religious liberty in America. Please find a letter attached.

Regards,
Johnnie Tucker

Johnnie Tucker

PII

Members of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
RLC United States Department of Justice

July 13, 2026

Re: Freedom of religion (i.e. to serve and practice whatever faith/religion—if I choose one or not— of my choosing, and the dictates therein, as a citizen or non-citizen), in/of the United States of America

Dear Department of Justice,

I pray that the term “justice” is not an oxymoron, because the term “justice” itself suggests, or, dare I say, that it derives itself from the Word of God, which in and of itself begins with the freedom to choose. What do I mean. I am confident that even the most vocal non-believer of whatever, (you get my drift), is aware of the book of Genesis, when the man and the woman were given the “freedom” to choose their station in life.

Knowing that, I choose not to write a dissertation on the Constitution, or the Bible, as both intelligently expound on the rights of just being alive, and the joy that comes from that, with its’ liberties in tow.

Thus, to summarize, the rights—and I literally mean, “the rights—” that were afforded in this American Experiment are still binding. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Regards,
Johnnie Tucker
Email: PII

From: Debra Murray <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:58:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone Dear Members of Religious Liberty Commision: I'm writing this brief statement of alarm to the fact that a proposal for joining Church and State. As a Christian who believes in a merciful and loving God it goes against everything God ordained for His children here on earth. This country (USA) was founded on religious liberty. Many of our ancestors fled countries that were suppressing their religious freedom, and sailed across the ocean to start a new world free of government suppression and control. Our God created us as free human beings with the right to choose and follow the dictates of our own hearts. I stand in opposition to the joining of church and state, for it will be the downfall of this country's original doctrine. It also would be a slap in the face to all the men and women that fought and are still fighting for freedom in the United States wars and conflicts with other countries. Please keep church and state separated. That's how we keep them both free. Debra M. Mifflinville PA.

From: Gmail <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and State, Johnson Amendment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:58:22 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a citizen of the USA and a Christian I am deeply concerned that church and state stay separated with a clearly defined line.

It is never good when the church has control over the people with the states authority and approval. Corruption and rot take place within the church, all we have to do is look at history and see the results. God doesn't force people to worship Him or to follow his ways, it is a choice whom we serve each and every day. God doesn't need the state to grant Him authority, because He is the authority.

Please reconsider the recommendations in your report that considerably weaken church and state separation, and repeal the Johnson Amendment.

Our founding fathers understood the importance of separation of church and state. It is how our country has maintained its greatness and freedoms we enjoy so much. They and countless others have bled for our nation to maintain this separation. Do not let those who have bled for us down.

Thank for taking the time to read this!

Sincerely,

Dakota Purvis

From: Gordon McGhee <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State– Gordon McGhee.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:58:39 -0400

Importance: Normal

RLC,

Thank you for all your hard work! I would expect my Government to uphold the last six Commandments of the 10 Commandments and to leave the first four Commandments to the freedom of conscious. As a Protestant, I have great fears of the unification of church and state in the light of the persecution that happened in Europe under the Roman Catholic Church that led Protestant to flee to this country. May our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ give you wisdom, my brothers and sisters.

Kind Regards,

Gordon McGhee

Speaker and Evangelist

Phone: [REDACTED] PII

Website: <https://www.gostandandpreach.org/>

Email: [REDACTED] PII



From: Shana Fairchild <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendations of Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:58:44 -0400

Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the recommendations of the Religious Liberty Committee submitted to President Donald J. Trump on June 26, 2026. While we are mindful of the Committee's labors, which resulted in the 12 recommendations released June 26, certain of which we agree with, we write to voice our concerns and objections to the Committee's first and ninth recommendations [1] and its obviously insufficient consideration of the warnings of the Founding Fathers of the dangers of a union of church and state or the many lessons of history regarding same.

The Committee recommended that the Department of Justice "issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state." [2] At the formal release of the Committee's recommendations on the same day, Committee Chair Dan Patrick publicly stated that "the separation of church and state is not in the constitution" and that the phrase "has no constitutional basis." [3]

As citizens and students of history, and as Christians, we are alarmed lest the flawed and unconstitutional view of the Chair of the Committee of the so-called "proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and the separation of church and state" prove influential or worse, instructive, to the Department of Justice. If the Committee's opinion of the so-called "proper understanding" of the Establishment Clause is the same as that of its Chair, it is apparent that its understanding is not proper, but rather improper.

Founding Father, "Father of the Constitution", and fourth President of the United States, James Madison, contradicted Chair Dan Patrick's claim that the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution. Madison stated that "Strongly guarded as is the separation between Religion & Govt in the Constitution of the United States, the danger of encroachment by Ecclesiastical Bodies, may be illustrated by precedents already furnished in their short history." According to James Madison, the separation of church and state is in the Constitution. As to whether James Madison, who is the principal author of the Establishment Clause, or Dan Patrick, is the greater authority on this subject, we think it not difficult for reasonably minded people to ascertain. Certainly, the Founding Fathers were all aware of the persecution of the Baptists, Quakers, Jews, and others in some of the colonies. They had seen firsthand the ear croppings, whippings, imprisonment, and hangings in Massachusetts and other colonies.

In Europe, the persecution of the martyrs is well documented. Today we take the Bible for granted but forget that William Tyndale was executed for translating the Bible into the English language, not by atheists but by religious bigots. It was a union of church and state that suppressed speech and the freedom of the press in England. It was a union of church and state that prohibited the work of translation of the Bible, which changed the world. It was a union of church and state that necessitated his flight to Europe. It was a union of church and state that killed him.

We respectfully ask that the Department of Justice, in considering the issue of public guidance of the separation of church and state, consider the history of William Penn, founder of

Pennsylvania and early Founding Father, who was repeatedly jailed for his religious faith in England. The Pennsylvania Colony became a haven, not from atheist persecutors but from religious persecutors who did not believe in the separation of church and state. The same is true of Roger Williams, founder of the colony of Rhode Island, who was ordered arrested for declaring that the civil magistrate cannot enforce the first table of the Decalogue. We ask that the Committee take into account the brutal public whipping of President Abraham Lincoln's five-time great-grandfather, Obadiah Holmes, in the Massachusetts colony, for the "crime" of religious dissent. Obadiah Holmes was not whipped by atheists. He was whipped by Puritan bigots who did not believe in the separation of church and state. We respectfully request that the Department of Justice consider this history in the issuance of public guidance on the subject.

We are concerned that the Committee neglected to take into account the impact of the separation of church and state on the other rights codified in the First Amendment. Free speech and freedom of the press, for example, owe their flourishing in the modern world in large part to the separation of church and state in America. Prior to the protections in the First Amendment, the Roman Catholic Church for centuries maintained a list of banned books called the Index Librorum Prohibitorum. The books were subject to confiscation, and the possession of them resulted in the punishment of the owner.

Unfortunately, the Committee makes no mention of the censorship in this context of Galileo and Kepler, Kant and Locke, John Milton and Maimonides, John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, David Hume and Edward Gibbon, and many others, all at the behest of the Roman Papacy, which is itself a union of church and state. Free speech in the Western world is the legacy of those who risked the wrath of a unified church and state, often at the cost of their lives. We would also ask that the Department of Justice consider the repeated modern calls from the papal power today for the censorship of the internet and the suppression of free speech, contrary to the First Amendment. [4] We have no doubt that the censorship of Galileo, Kepler, Milton, and others was prosecuted under the justification of the censorship of misinformation, also.

The Roman Church was not alone in this persecution, either. We would ask the Department of Justice in its formulation of public guidance on the separation of church and state to remember the religious persecutions carried out at the behest of John Calvin in Geneva against religious dissenters such as Michael Servetus, who paid with his life for his writings and teachings. Servetus was executed by a union of church and state. We are concerned at the public statements of those who would create such a system in America. [5]

Therefore, we respectfully ask, what proper guidance can the Department of Justice hope to give to the public on the "proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and the separation of church and state" if it is directed in its object by a Committee and a Committee Chair, who has neglected to more fully analyze the reasons for the separation of church and state, or the reasons why the United States codified the disestablishment of church and state in the First Amendment in the first instance?

The reference to the wall of separation between church and state is not only mentioned by President Thomas Jefferson in the letter to the Danbury Baptists, which, of course, it is. [6] What is often left out of the narrative is that Jefferson said that he personally believed that the principle of the separation of church and state is codified in the Constitution. Therein, Jefferson wrote: "Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a

wall of separation between Church & State.” [7]

James Madison wrote, “It is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties. We hold this prudent jealousy to be the first duty of Citizens and one of the noblest characteristics of the late Revolution. The free men of America did not wait till usurped power had strengthened itself by exercise and entangled the question in precedents. They saw all the consequences in the principle, and they avoided the consequences by denying the principle. We revere this lesson too much soon to forget it.” [8]

Lastly, we object to the recommendation of the Committee that the Johnson Amendment be removed. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are mindful of Our Lord’s words that we “render to Caesar what is Caesar, and to God the things that are God’s.” [9] Jesus Christ established the principle of the separation of church and state and taught that what belongs to God cannot be rendered to Caesar. The application of this teaching is that religionists, ambitious for civil power, and politicians, ambitious for their endorsement, are to be kept separate in the American system of politics, as the Constitution requires. The union of church and state results in the corruption of both, a result that neither should desire, and neither can afford.

Madison stated that “The number, the industry, and the morality of the Priesthood, & the devotion of the people have been manifestly increased by the total separation of the Church from the State.” [10] And he was right. If the Johnson Amendment is removed, religionists who want civil power will publicly stump and promise their votes and congregational dollars in exchange for political favors, and the politicians will be doubtless all too eager to reciprocate in the form of legislation that the religionists desire, provided they will aid their attempts to gain office.

In his anonymous treatise published in the Boston Gazette, John Adams, later the second President of the United States, wrote that canon law was a tyrannical form of government, as was feudal law, but that the worst of all forms of governments was a union of the two. [11] And it was Madison who stated that, “In the Papal System, Government and Religion are in a manner consolidated, & that is found to be the worst of Governments.”

We respectfully request, therefore, that the Department of Justice not adopt recommendations 1 and 9 of the Committee and that it adopt recommendation 1 of the Committee that it convene a public hearing, with written and oral submissions from the public, to more comprehensively study the question of the separation of church and state in history, and in American history in particular, a study which we would enthusiastically support.

Thank you,

Shana Fairchild

From: LaVinski Washington <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Concern!!

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:59:36 -0400

Importance: Normal

To: White House Religious Liberty Commission and all this may concern,

I spiritually submit this letter from a place of heartfelt concern for the future of religious liberty in the United States. I urge the Commission to reject any recommendation to end the principle of keeping religion and government institutionally separate, and any proposal to unify the two.

America's greatest contribution to the cause of religious liberty has not been the state's endorsement of religion, but the protection of every person's God-given right to worship according to conscience without government interference. This nation is a melting pot, blending cultures, faiths, and beliefs. This has been our greatest strength as a nation, giving all a voice and having everyone's way of life be respected.

I am a Seventh-day Adventists Christian, a teacher, musician, and a therapist and have appreciated the freedoms of all to practice their faith lead by the dictates of their own conscience. I am also aware of the possibility of persecution that will eventually commence upon those of many different walks who believe differently than any that may make decisions for all, favoring one belief over the rest. The past has served as a dire warning and it would be a drastic mistake if we dare not to learn from it. Often, the minorities are those that pay the immediate consequences, various persecutions, even their lives. But the warning is far more severe for those that push forth the agenda on how God has proclaimed He deals with those who rule unjustly. The main object is to spare all lives from actions that show a lack of wisdom.

The United States must continue to strive to be a nation where every individual is free to have freedom to practice their beliefs without governmental control.

Sincerely,

Elder LaVinski Washington, PLPC

From: Dianna Blue <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Dianna Blue

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:00:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a citizen to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state — especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God — and that's bad for the church and the country alike. Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,

Dianna Blue

Best Regards,

From: Lyn Glover <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Cc: Lyn Glover <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:00:37 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the religious liberty commission:

History tells us what happened in the past in Europe and most countries around the world with the mingling of religion and government. This lead to persecution and that was why Christians fled to the united states to have the freedom to worship. The founders of this country knowing the history of the past made the constitution to separate church and state and that have been the bedrock of this nation. Separation of church and state protects freedom. PLEASE keep church and state completely separate. The bible said give the Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. Mark 12:17. Bible teaches separation of church and state.

-Lyn Glover

From: BEN WIEDEMANN <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:00:49 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a citizen who believes the two religion clauses of the First Amendment are not in tension but are a single principle, and I ask the Commission to weigh that principle carefully as it considers proposals for government-sponsored religious activity.

The first thing I want the Commission to understand is that a law favoring religion is not a gift to believers; it is a trap that springs on them later. Any statute touching religion must define the religion it protects, and any definition draws a line that includes some worshippers and excludes others — leaving even the included practicing their faith by government permission rather than by right. As one nineteenth-century witness put it to a Senate committee, it is impossible to frame a law on the subject of religion that will not prohibit the free exercise of religion. That witness went further, and it is worth sitting with: no man can safely consent to legislation favoring the very faith he professes, because in doing so he resigns his right to change his mind later if conviction leads him elsewhere. Religious liberty includes the liberty to be persuaded. A commission that hands one faith today's advantage is building machinery that a different majority will operate tomorrow, quite possibly against that same faith.

Second, I ask the Commission to take seriously that coercion cannot produce genuine faith, only its counterfeit. The state has no credentials to teach morality or religion; that work belongs to the church and to the individual conscience, not to statute. Forcing outward observance breeds hypocrisy, not conversion, because love for God cannot be legislated into being. This is not merely a modern worry — Madison's own survey of fifteen centuries of established Christianity found the fruits of establishment to be pride and indolence in the clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, and in both, superstition and persecution. A religion not worth professing on its own merits is not made worthier by the state's support; it is only made dependent, and dependency corrupts. Even Grant counseled leaving religion to the family altar, the church, and private schools, keeping church and state forever separate. The churches most eager for state backing today are the ones with the most to lose from it.

Third, I ask the Commission not to treat separation as a modern imposition on an indifferent founding generation. The record shows the opposite: the Virginia struggle, Madison's Memorial and Remonstrance, Jefferson's Act for Religious Freedom, and the ratifying conventions were pushed forward largely by churches themselves, who had felt establishment from underneath. Madison told the Virginia convention there was not a shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion, and that its least interference would be a flagrant usurpation. The founders did not wait for full establishment before resisting it; they saw the consequences in the principle and denied the principle itself. A commission that reads the Establishment Clause as merely barring a national denomination bears the burden of explaining away Madison in Madison's own words.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Ben Wiedemann

From: " [REDACTED] PII " < [REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" < [REDACTED] PII >

Cc: "CAD - Kathy Purvis" < [REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:01:07 -0400

Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern:

The joining of church and state never ever works out as expected. It only results in persecution and exclusion of a smaller group. So to those in charge, this will not do what you think it will do, quite the contrary, it will do the opposite.

"Today in the religious world there are multitudes who, as they believe, are working for the establishment of the kingdom of Christ as an earthly and temporal dominion. They desire to make our Lord the ruler of the kingdoms of this world, the ruler in its courts and camps, its legislative halls, its palaces and market places. They expect Him to rule through legal enactments, enforced by human authority. Since Christ is not now here in person, they themselves will undertake to act in His stead, to execute the laws of His kingdom. The establishment of such a kingdom is what the Jews desired in the days of Christ. They would have received Jesus, had He been willing to establish a temporal dominion, to enforce what they regarded as the laws of God, and to make them the expositors of His will and the agents of His authority. But He said, "My kingdom is not of this world." John 18:36. He would not accept the earthly throne.

The government under which Jesus lived was corrupt and oppressive; on every hand were crying abuses,— extortion, intolerance, and grinding cruelty. Yet the Saviour attempted no civil reforms. He attacked no national abuses, nor condemned the national enemies. He did not interfere with the authority or administration of those in power. He who was our example kept aloof from earthly governments. Not because He was indifferent to the woes of men, but because the remedy did not lie in merely human and external measures. To be efficient, the cure must reach men individually, and must regenerate the heart." (Desire of Ages page 509)

Please do not pass this action.

Sincerely,

Tony Purvis, Spokane Washington.

From: "PII" <PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>

Cc: Ruth Scofield <PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment on your newly released draft report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:01:32 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Commission members:

I strongly agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them.

Thanks.

Ruth Scofield
State of Washington

From: Ryan Nelson <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- Separation of Church and State – Ryan Nelson

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:01:36 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Let it be known that, as a concerned citizen of the United States of America (State) and as a beneficiary of religious liberty, I do not want any “bridge” to be built between the State and any religious organization (Church). It is my firm conviction that the State is to remain disinterested and entirely neutral in the affairs of any religious body or church. The State oversteps its authority in legislating anything to do with matters of religious liberty except to provide legal protection of the same, regardless of the administration’s personal or corporate beliefs.

I fear, lest my country become the land of the creed and the home of the slave, should this “bridge” be built. There is no greater danger to our national freedom, heritage, or identity. No more effective means of dismantling this country could be invented. Our greatest danger as a nation is forgetting the mistakes of the past, and the evils that our nation was founded in opposition to. The people who founded this country did so in an effort to forge a nation that would be a safe-haven for those who face oppression on the grounds of religious liberty and freedom of conscience. The proposed “bridge” between Church and State destroys that safe-haven and is diametrically opposed to the very foundation of this country.

Please, for the sake of all the people of the United States of America, who shelter under its banner of religious liberty, do not recommend overturning the Johnson Amendment, do not recommend building this bridge!

From: Jazzmene Mitchell <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment - Religious Liberty - Jazzmene Sessoms

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:01:40 -0400

Importance: Normal

I do not think church and state should combine. Every human being has the right to worship who they want, when they want, and how they want. The government should not be able to tell anyone exactly how to live their lives in their own homes. This is supposed to be land of the free. People dream to come here to be able to live freely.

From: Cathy Marsh <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: Re: Automatic reply: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS - Separation of Church & State - Cathy Marsh

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:01:46 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sorry I didn't mean to send without a comment.

To members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

There are a few things I want to comment on regarding the commissions report. The first one is, the Johnson amendment should NOT be repealed. It restricts the church involvement in political activities & influence. It also keeps the churches from being influenced by the flow of money that would "(endorse political agendas)".

Secondly, you have stated there is no such thing as Separation of Church & State in the Constitution but you are wrong. Even the simplest understanding of history shows us that is the intent of the Constitution & it's amendments. Because of this you want to tear down the wall of separation between these two entities. I'm asking that you NOT do this. This goes against everything our country has stood for for 250 years. That's why many people came here to get away from the religious persecution.

Another item in your report that will be affected by these things if implemented is the funding of religious non-profit entities & activities. This should NOT be because it can create political favors to please politicians & not God.

Sincerely,
Cathy Marsh

Sent from my iPhone

On Jul 13, 2026, at 11:16 AM, RLC (OASG) <[REDACTED] PII > wrote:

Thank you for your email! Please be aware public comments to the Commission may be subject to public inspection. Please do not include personally identifiable information such as addresses, birth dates, or other details you may wish to keep private.

From: Jim Brown <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:01:56 -0400

Importance: Normal

Absolutely, I agree with the pillar of freedom Given to us by our creator
Sent from my iPhone

From: James Mecham <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Thank you

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:02:18 -0400

Importance: Normal

Thank you for your diligent work to restore the true Constitutional framework for religion in America.
May the lie which has been used against Christianity be removed.
God bless.
James and Katherine Mecham

From: "PII" <PII>

To: "PII" <PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Separation of Church and State- Sue Johnson

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:02:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

To members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

As a proud citizen of the United States of America, and a person of deep faith, I strongly believe in religious liberty which allows everyone to freely follow the dictates of their God-given conscious-to worship as they believe-no state established coerced universal faith or religious practice. I strongly believe the government should maintain neutrality in its relationship to any religion. History has repeatedly shown the detrimental, brutality, and persecution that occurred with people who did not "fall in line". Our own founding fathers came here from England to escape for this very reason- and wrote our U.S. Constitution with the whole idea of separation of church and state- allowing citizens to have religious freedom as they desired. That is why our country has been such a drawing beacon in the world.

Please reconsider this "bridge". There should be no government involvement in churches influencing funding or political influences. It greatly corrupts and competes with our first allegiance to God.

Please also, leave the Johnson amendment as it.. it was established for a good reason.

We have a great country - but it will only continue to be great- if you let the government stay in its lane and the churches stay in theirs

Thank you for your time and efforts with these important issues. I do hope you listen to the peoples voices as they share their concerns and views.

Sincerely,
Sue Johnson

From: Leslae Brewers <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Separation of Church and State-Leslae Brewer

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:02:39 -0400

Importance: Normal

the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I firmly disagree with the commission's suggestion as stated in the latest report to "alter" our religious liberty...our religious freedom...as we have known it since the founding of our country.

Roger Williams led the way, and was following by others of our founding fathers, creating a complete and unmistakable barrier between "church" and "state."

All my life I have appreciated...even taken for granted...the freedoms afforded me by The Constitution including the freedoms to chose my religion as well as practice it as I see fit. The idea that this freedom is in danger of "weakening"...crumbling...being abolished is very disturbing to me. I thought I would live out my life in America as an American citizen free to enjoy the freedoms I was born into and trusting my country would always fight to protect those freedoms.

This idea of building a "bridge" between church and state, as I understand the Commission's report to suggest, means to me that the "wall" built by our founding fathers would have to be torn down.

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone

Get [Outlook for Android](#)

From: Jim Perrizo <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comments on Religious Liberties Commission Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:03:15 -0400

Importance: Normal

Chairman Patrick, Vice Chairman Carson -

I am writing to address some of the concerns that I have found within your report which are inconsistent with or misrepresenting the intent of the writer's and signer's of the US Constitution and Bill of Rights. The separation of church and state was as important at the time of the signing of these documents as they are today. With agents of the government that have drawn a bias towards the Christian religion over that of any other religion perverts the intent of the founders. This can be clearly illustrated by examining the pathway to the Constitution and Bill of Rights as states had abandoned any previous establishment of state sponsored religions. In fact, by 1790 it was requisite for states to not have an established relationship with any religion if they wanted to be accepted into the Union of the United States. The reasons for this decree was illustrated on many levels. If any single religion had preferences over another, or any church had favor with a government comprised of men of many religious affiliations, it would tilt the scales of justice and not represent the people as a whole.

I Have read Jonathan Zirkle's well researched response to your report and its conclusions and agree with him on every point.

Jim Perrizo

From: berrymiles <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Cc: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:03:17 -0400

Importance: Normal

To All Concerned,

This is to urge you to embrace the benefits to religion and to religious freedom from the separation of church and state.

The separation of church and state was the clear original intent of the founders whose ideas formed both the Declaration of Independence (Jefferson) and 1st Amendment to The Constitution (Madison), itself. Separation of church and state is both the true conservative position and what allows religion to flourish in a free society.

As you know, the term "separation of church and state" comes from Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptists, advocating for a "wall of separation"— for the protection of the religious freedom of a (then) religious minority. Madison, "The Father of the Constitution," listed 15 reasons (in Madison's Remonstrances) why, in a free republic, church and state should remain separate. To state that church/state separation was not the intent of the founding fathers is dishonest, at best. The ideas of Jefferson and Madison were codified in our American creed, The Declaration of Independence, and in The Constitution. Further, the movement to integrate church and state is a dangerous return to the European model — which yielded centuries of bloody religious wars and a stifling of evangelism. There is no history where the integration of church and state worked well for free people. If fact, church and state integration is the catalyst to religious persecution. This is clear, currently, in theocratic countries like Iran.

I respectfully urge you to do what you know to be right. Political expedience in God's name, violates the 2nd Commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Resist the hypocrisy. God does not force compliance. Neither should the state. Do not politicize religion. It is ungodly.

Sincerely,

Shirley Miles
Woodstock, Ga

Sent from my Galaxy

From: Alec Sessoms <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment-religious liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:03:25 -0400

Importance: Normal

The separation of church and state is one of the main things our forefathers fought for. To combine the two would not only be unconstitutional but a slap in the face to the sacrifices they and so many others have made. As I veteran I fought to protect, uphold, and defend our constitutional rights and liberties. I would rather not see those battles and sacrifices squandered to unify two things that in no way shape or form should be put together.

From: Holly Jenkins <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:03:38 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to express my strong belief in the importance of maintaining a clear separation between church and state in our nation. It is my conviction that combining these two institutions can jeopardize the fundamental principles of religious freedom that our country was founded on.

I wholeheartedly stand behind the comments made by the Pillar of Freedom regarding the need to uphold these values. It is essential for the integrity and inclusiveness of our society that all individuals, regardless of their faith or beliefs, are able to practice their religion freely without government interference or favoritism.

I urge you to consider these perspectives and work towards implementing policies that honor the separation of church and state, thereby promoting true religious liberty for all citizens.

Thank you for your attention to this crucial matter. I look forward to seeing positive changes in our approach to religious freedom.

Sincerely,

Holly Jenkins
Auburn, CA

From: Lenee Booth <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Lenee Booth shared "AA RLC Letter" with you

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:04:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

Inline-Images: 06e42064-37c0-457a-a690-830493018e2c; a6a691c1-1892-42b3-8c45-2d823b0eaf84;
31f0fb4a-9eb3-4c1a-a820-865d54d71d65; 7f37e2c3-7d4b-40ee-a9f7-6bbd26521989



Lenee Booth shared a file with you

Here's the document that Lenee Booth shared with you.



AA RLC Letter



This link will work for anyone.

Open



[Privacy Statement](#)

From: Friday Linda <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Religious Liberty Commission (July 2026) — Linda Friday

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:05:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

It is with profound appreciation that I acknowledge the ongoing commitment to upholding and strengthening the principle of religious liberty. As a lifelong American citizen, with roots in New Mexico and currently residing in Maryland, I find myself seeking clarity regarding the practical application and true essence of the "establishment clause." I believe a comprehensive elucidation of its historical underpinnings and its enduring significance in preserving the cherished separation of church and state would be invaluable for citizens like myself.

My perspective is further shaped by personal experience; three members of my family dedicate their professional lives to teaching in private parochial schools. Their choice to forgo public funding stems from a deep conviction that such funding often introduces governmental mandates regarding curriculum, pedagogy, and staffing, which they believe would compromise their educational mission. This places a unique financial burden on parents who conscientiously choose these schools, as they contribute through taxes to public education while simultaneously bearing the full cost of private tuition and transportation. This investment is willingly made to ensure that their children receive an education, particularly in sensitive areas like sexual education, that is consistently aligned with family values and taught by educators who share those foundational beliefs, without external pressure to persuade students otherwise.

Furthermore, these educational environments provide a setting where children can navigate the complex journey of identity formation with less exposure to peer-driven pressures concerning gender. My conviction is that one's sexual identity is inherently biological, inscribed within every chromosomal cell, and not defined by superficial markers like clothing, mannerisms, or social preferences. The process of settling into one's personal identity is a natural, developmental phase that requires time and should not be misconstrued as an aberration. It is imperative that institutions and medical professionals refrain from interventions that could be perceived as premature or financially motivated, potentially hindering this natural maturation. Parents, too, bear the responsibility of supporting their children through this process without projecting external societal pressures or perceived "gender confusion" onto their developmental experiences.

Another pressing concern regarding religious liberty arose during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically concerning vaccine mandates imposed on healthcare workers and international travelers. My apprehension, shared by many, centered on the perception that these medical interventions were developed with undue haste and propelled to market amidst an atmosphere of fear, raising questions about potential financial motivations within pharmaceutical

industries. For individuals who conscientiously regard their bodies as sacred temples, a principle deeply rooted in their faith, the imposition of these mandates presented a profound crisis of conscience. Being compelled to choose between their sincerely held religious beliefs and their livelihood represented a severe infringement upon their freedom. This aligns with the biblical admonition to do all things to the glory of God, rendering decisions about one's body a matter of fundamental religious observance, not mere personal preference.

The public health discourse surrounding these mandates also gave rise to significant confusion. Initial assurances suggested the vaccines would primarily mitigate symptoms rather than prevent transmission. Yet, public spaces inconsistently applied masking guidelines, often requiring unvaccinated individuals to mask while allowing vaccinated individuals, who could still transmit the virus, to circulate freely. This created a perception of unfair targeting and further eroded trust.

In light of these challenges, I wholeheartedly commend the committee's initiative to restore the retirement and reenlistment eligibility, along with lost benefits such as health insurance and pensions, for service members whose careers were unjustly impacted by their religious objections to the COVID-19 vaccine.

Ultimately, I champion the fundamental right of every individual to follow their conscience in matters of faith, or no faith. This self-determination is a bedrock principle of our republic, a liberty we must vigorously protect. — Linda Friday

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

From: Zandi Beem <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:07:18 -0400

Importance: Normal

This is to whom it may concern, I would like to add another voice to the supporting of our religious freedom. We live in a fallen world and have to continue to fight for our right to worship Christ freely. God Bless you for the work you do in this area, Aloha

From: Wisdom Pearl <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:07:46 -0400

Importance: Normal

Inline-Images: TWP_Logo_-_Yellow.jpg

July 13, 2026

Via Electronic Mail to [REDACTED] PII

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty

U.S. Department of Justice

950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Room 5706

Washington, DC 20530

Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty (Hereinafter "RLC") Draft Report, Issued June 2026

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

The Wisdom Pearl is a ministry here in the USA that exists to bring the Everlasting Gospel to all nations, tribes, tongues, and peoples through the lens of Science, History, and The Holy Bible.

We have hosted important thought leaders such as Dr. Ben Carson (a member of this Commission), Charlie Kirk, Benny Johnson, Del Bigtree, and Dr. Peter McCullough to discuss societal concerns through the lens of Science, History and The Bible. Within that scope, we are devout Bible-believing Christians. We appreciate President Trump's stance on religious freedom since his first term.

We are concerned that the recommendation to repeal the Johnson Act will allow for the unnatural persuasion of thought in both directions—for conservatives and for liberals—and we don't believe that such assistance/power is needed in either direction. Americans, particularly conservative Americans, have already voted in 3 elections overwhelmingly for President Donald J. Trump.

We don't think that the influence gained by repealing the Johnson Amendment is worth the risk of power that will undoubtedly be gained by the other side.

In fact, we think the Johnson Amendment should be more strictly enforced:

Here in NYC, Mamdani literally campaigned in SEVERAL LIBERAL CHURCHES to gain his victory—this should not have been allowed and should be prosecuted under the Johnson Amendment.

The Churches that participated should lose their 501(c)(3) status.

Many Churches openly supported BLM-Black Lives Matter, and Antifa with their Marxist ideals. In our humble opinions, preventing and investigating this is where the focus should be, rather than giving more legal power to the Left.

The problem is that in the religious arena, any allowance or legislation for one side must also apply to the other. Citizens of faith have many other ways to support Biblical Christianity and lawmakers, rather than uniting the churches with politics.

We also believe that a "Separation of Church and State" at the legislative level and within the Executive Branches of Government is clearly provided for in the First Amendment of our Bill of Rights and Constitution, which states:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the

government for a redress of grievances."

James Madison wrote the amendments to limit government power and protect individual liberties through the Constitution. The Founders saw the ability to speak and worship freely as a natural right protected by the First Amendment:

Congress is prohibited from making laws establishing religion or abridging freedom of speech.

In the history of the world, every time Religion and Governments have united, it has led to persecution. God raised up the United States of America for Freedom, NOT Persecution.

In your final report, we humbly ask that you:

1. Remove the appeal to repeal the Johnson Amendment
2. Retract the statement on the Separation of Church and State and acknowledge the Separation between Religion/Church and State in our Legislative and Judicial Branches of Government, and Lawmaking, while maintaining and promoting faith and civil obedience to the laws of our land so long as they do not violate Liberty of Conscience within the Freedom of Religion and the free exercise thereof.

Thank you for your prayerful consideration in these matters,

Sincerely,

The Wisdom Pearl



From: Leslae Brewers <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fw: CONCLUSION PUBLIC COMMENT-Separation of Church and State-Leslae Brewer

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:08:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

PLEASE ADD MY CONCLUDING REMARKS TO PRECIOUS EMAIL (sent prematurely)v

Please do not tear down the "wall" that separates "church" and "state" by building your proposed "bridge." This will only lead to trouble down the road which, I believe, you are fully aware of.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Leslae Brewer
Milton Freewater, Oregon

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone
Get [Outlook for Android](#)

From: RLC (OASG) <[REDACTED] PII >

Sent: Monday, 13 July 2026 12:02:48

To: Leslae Brewer <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: Automatic reply: PUBLIC COMMENT-Separation of Church and State-Leslae Brewer

Thank you for your email! Please be aware public comments to the Commission may be subject to public inspection. Please do not include personally identifiable information such as addresses, birth dates, or other details you may wish to keep private.

From: Virginia Oliver <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:08:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

I'm writing to you in regard to the June 26 report. I agree with the Pillars of Freedom comments. Please implement them. I want freedom to worship God or to not worship him and give everyone else the same privilege.

Sincerely

V Oliver

From: Lynn Searles <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:09:15 -0400

Importance: Normal

Members of the Religious Liberty Commission, Respectfully, I am against the proposal of the Religious Liberty Commission, to bridge Church and State rather than Church and State remaining purposely separate. The separation of Church and State has been adapted and adopted since the very history of our earliest colonies through founding fathers such as Roger Williams. Without this continuation of separation of Church and State , our First Amendment rights could be easily eroded in many ways. This separation of the two entities has withstood the test of time. Please allow this to continue. Thank You

From: Dave Golden <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Chapter Two Separation of Church & State & Johnson Act – Dave Golden

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:09:17 -0400

Importance: Normal

I disagree with removing the wall between church and state. They should always be separated. Every time in history where they were joined, both became weaker and collapsed. Religious liberty must be protected. To protect the rights of future generations, church and state must remain separated.

I also do not agree with removing the Johnson act. Church and politics should never mix

From: thewholeofman <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

To: "[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]" <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:09:23 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to express my concern regarding the Commission's proposal to replace the longstanding principle of separation between church and state with what has been described as a "bridge." As a person of faith, I respectfully believe this approach moves in the wrong direction.

The separation of church and state was not established to diminish religion or restrict religious expression. Rather, it has served as an important safeguard for religious liberty by protecting faith communities from government influence and political control. This principle has helped ensure that churches remain accountable to their beliefs and congregations, rather than to changing political priorities.

A closer institutional relationship between government and religious organizations may appear beneficial at first, but history demonstrates that such arrangements can compromise both religious independence and governmental neutrality. When churches become dependent on government funding or political favor, they risk losing the autonomy that has long been essential to their mission and integrity.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve the principle of separation between church and state. In my view, it remains one of the strongest protections for both religious freedom and the independence of our faith communities. Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,
Joy Pesulima
Sandpoint, Idaho

From: Meg Smyths [REDACTED] PII

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:10:56 -0400

Importance: Normal

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

July 12, 2026

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I write to respectfully but firmly oppose any proposal that further blurs the constitutional separation of church and state.

History provides overwhelming evidence that whenever the government acquires authority over religion—or religion acquires authority over government—the result is the erosion of liberty, the suppression of minorities, and ultimately coercion of conscience. From the religious conflicts recorded in Scripture to the tragedies of the Dark Ages, the lesson has remained the same: civil government and religious authority must remain separate.

The First Amendment wisely protects both institutions by preventing the establishment of religion while guaranteeing every citizen the free exercise of faith—or no faith at all. This protection safeguards believers and nonbelievers alike.

Government has a legitimate role in enforcing laws that protect society from harm, such as prohibitions against murder, theft, and fraud. It has no legitimate authority to fund, promote, endorse, or advance religious organizations, schools, or ministries with public tax dollars. Religious work should be supported voluntarily by those who believe in it—not compelled through taxation of citizens whose convictions differ.

A person's relationship with God is a matter of conscience, not legislation. Government should remain neutral in matters of religion, allowing every individual the freedom to worship according to conscience without favor, coercion, or financial obligation.

For these reasons, I urge you to reject any recommendation that weakens the historic wall separating church and state, including efforts that would expand government involvement in religious institutions or repeal long standing protections such as the Johnson Amendment.

The genius of the American experiment has never been government-sponsored religion. It has been religious liberty. Let us preserve that legacy by keeping government out of religion and religion out of government.

Respectfully,

Meg Smyth

From: wilson morales <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] US Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:12:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of Freedom comments. Please implement them

Wilson Morales

Huntsville, AL [REDACTED] PII

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

From: Shirley <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment - Religious Liberty Commission Report- Shirley Clover

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:12:30 -0400

Importance: Normal

As a lifelong Christian I OPPOSE the policy recommendations in this report. Thank you, Shirley Clover

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone

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From: Linda Tuthill <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Linda Tuthill

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:13:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a private citizen who cares about both halves of the First Amendment's promise on religion, and I ask the Commission to consider three arguments that I believe should weigh heavily on its recommendations.

The first is this: government never received jurisdiction over religion, because the people never had such jurisdiction to give it. Our whole system rests on the idea that just powers come from the consent of the governed — powers the people delegate to their government. But no person can delegate his relationship to God. I can authorize someone to manage my property or speak for my interests, but I cannot authorize anyone to believe in my place, to worship in my place, or to answer for my soul. Since that power was never mine to hand over, it was never received by any government I helped create. This is why it will not do to argue that the Establishment Clause merely bars a single national church and leaves everything short of that fair game: the limit on government does not come from a clause that graciously withheld power, it comes from the plain fact that religious jurisdiction was never among the powers the people possessed to transfer in the first place. No government will ever stand before the judgment seat to answer for an individual's faith, so no government can rightly claim authority over it now.

The second argument concerns believers who imagine that a law favoring their own religion is a safe or even friendly thing. It is not, because any law that touches religion must define which religion, which practice, which observance counts — and that definition necessarily excludes someone, while even those included now hold their worship by permission rather than by right. A man who supports legislation establishing his own creed has, in that very act, given up his freedom to ever change his mind, should conviction lead him elsewhere. Religious liberty means the liberty to be persuaded, to keep following one's conscience wherever the evidence leads; a law that locks in today's belief forecloses tomorrow's search. And the trouble cuts both ways politically — the machinery built to favor one faith today will be inherited by whoever holds power tomorrow, with no guarantee of friendly hands.

The third argument is not philosophy but history. In 1829 and 1830, when petitioners demanded that Congress halt Sunday mail on religious grounds, committees of Congress — sitting while men who had lived through the founding were still present — ruled that it is not the legitimate province of the legislature to determine what religion is true or false, since ours is a civil and not a religious institution. They wrote that a representative is chosen to guard the rights of man, not to restrict the rights of conscience. They saw, too, that if government defines even one religious duty, it claims the power to define them all. Any commission proposing government-defined religious duties today must reckon with that precedent — not a modern court ruling, but Congress's own settled judgment on the limits of its power.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Linda Tuthill

From: Seth Sutherland <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] My Response

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:13:46 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a grateful citizen of the United States, and a lifelong Christian. I am writing to thank the Religious Liberty Commission for doing some good work in defending the Free Exercise Clause and express my concern with its dismissive approach to the Establishment Clause and the Separation of Church and State.

Today, I think it's important to remember that we can thank Christians for the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment of the US Constitution. The first person in the American colonies to keep the church out of government and the government out of church was Roger Williams, a devout Christian pastor. He fought for this new arrangement because of the religious persecution that he and millions of others experienced in Europe and the American colonies. He saw the results of churches who persecuted dissenters and he was committed to the example of Jesus who never forced anybody and declared, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

The disestablishment of church was an extraordinary achievement that has contributed significantly to America's success. As somebody who belongs to a religious minority, I am alarmed at the new willingness to redefine the Establishment Clause to accommodate a much closer union of church and state that will inevitably favor larger religions. The Founding Fathers gave us the Establishment Clause to protect against religious tyranny and the Free Exercise Clause to protect against secular tyranny. When the two are out of balance the future of religious liberty in America is threatened.

Specific areas of concern from your report include:

- * It sets a dangerous precedent when you openly oppose the separation of church and state.
- * Public funds should go to public schools, not private schools. A key part of disestablishment in America was to no longer use tax dollars to support religious institutions.
- * Sectarian religion should not be forced in school, such as the required posting 10 Commandments in classrooms, or required prayers.
- * Repealing the Johnson amendment removes safeguards that protect houses of worship from partisan politicking and preserves their spiritual purpose.

The Christian's commitment to religious liberty should be guided by God's character of love, his respect for human choice and free will, and the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12). I pray that God grants you discernment to understand the legacy of religious freedom in America and the courage to defend the eternal principles so important to us.

Thank you for receiving my feedback!

From: Gary Whitney <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Oppose the recommendations

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:13:54 -0400

Importance: Normal

As a citizen of the United States I support the separation of church and state. Please do not go forward with these recommendations.

The 1st amendment protects both Christians and other religions right to worship according to the dictates of their conscience. This government funding activities and repealing the Johnson amendment will create more divisions and fighting among churches.

With government involvement people won't be able to worship freely or choose not to at all. The founding fathers experienced persecution under Church and state power. They knew it was wise to separate them. It has worked for 250 years. Please do not undo what have worked for our country for so long. Unless you want to see another Dark Ages to happen again.

Sincerely,
Gary

From: Carolyn Pratt <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Carolyn and Barry Pratt

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:14:20 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: ReligiousLib1.docx

July 13, 2026

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
Washington DC 20530
Via electronic mail to [REDACTED] PII

Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing this letter with regards to the recommendation to overturn the Johnson Amendment which would further politicize American churches and increasing government funding of religious activities and religious education on public campuses.

As a psychiatrist (Carolyn) and marriage therapist (Barry), we value the freedom of choice and individuality of every person and have loved the American Constitution and Amendments for ensuring this freedom. we believe that the separation of church and state is at the foundation of our country with so many fleeing religious persecution to come to American for the freedom to live and worship without government interference. As the Christ says in Mark 12:17, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" which keeps government from intruding into church life and practices and keeps churches from influencing government policies and practices.

May we not return to enforced religious practices by the government which led to oppression and persecution around the world in the past and continue in certain countries in the present.

Sincerely,

Carolyn and Barry Pratt
Ventura, California

From: Patti Titus <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State - Patti Titus

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:14:37 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I want to commend your efforts to lessen the involvement of the government in religious affairs. However, I am very concerned about the proposition to build a bridge between church and state in place of the wall. This will result in more church involvement in government. We know from history that when the church controls the government it results in religious persecution. The period of time known as The Dark Ages, from 538-1798AD is a prime example, as is the harsh treatment Roger Williams received from the Massachusetts Bay Colony. I ask you to please preserve the wall, as it is the only way we can have lasting religious freedom.

I am also concerned about the proposed repealing of the Johnson Amendment. This could result in churches becoming political entities, the worship service being replaced by political rallies. The worship of God would become secondary to the political agenda. Whichever church is the most politically active or giving the most money to politics would be the church treated most favorably by the government, resulting in political competition between churches. The churches are meant to be places where people worship God and are taught truths from the Bible. Please keep the Johnson Amendment in place.

Lastly, I am concerned about the government funding of religious organizations. That opens the door for the government to control what that organization can do or say, further eroding religious freedom.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Patti Titus
Yakima, WA

From: Nicole Dinwiddie <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Nicole Dinwiddie

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:14:53 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I have been troubled by the increasing talk that "separation between church and state is not in the Constitution." This is disingenuous. The fact that the exact words are not found in the Constitution does not mean that the concept is not there. Indeed, it is stated quite plainly: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...." I am alarmed to read in the report that the RLC envisions replacing the "wall of separation" with a "bridge." The freedom we have in America to practice religion according to our own beliefs and conscience is of the greatest value, and we should not let it be eroded in the slightest.

I have read the Pillar of Freedom's comments regarding this matter and agree with them. Please implement them.

Sincerely,

Nicole Dinwiddie
Battle Ground, WA

From: Suja Perakathu <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:15:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

I respectfully urge you to preserve the strongest possible protections for religious liberty and the separation of church and state.

Throughout history, people have suffered when governments assumed authority over matters of conscience and religious observance. Religious freedom is best protected when government remains neutral in questions of worship and belief, safeguarding the rights of all citizens rather than favoring particular religious practices.

Our nation faces real moral and social challenges, but the solution is not to grant civil authorities power over religious observance. Governments can and should address harmful conduct through just laws, while leaving matters of faith to individual conscience.

I am especially concerned by proposals that would use civil authority to encourage, privilege, or compel religious observance, including laws that favor a particular day of worship. Religious liberty requires that government not decide which religious practices are correct or use legal pressure to promote them.

History demonstrates that the union of religious authority and civil power often leads to discrimination and persecution of those who hold different beliefs. Even when exemptions are offered, the underlying concern remains: once government claims authority to define and enforce religious observance, freedom of conscience is weakened.

True faith cannot be produced by coercion. Religious belief and worship must be matters of personal conviction, not legal compulsion. A free society protects the rights of all people—those of every faith and those of none—to live according to conscience without government interference.

I therefore respectfully ask that you oppose any law, policy, or interpretation that could allow government to favor, establish, or compel religious observance. Please continue to defend the principle that government protects freedom of conscience rather than directing it.

Religious liberty is not hostility toward religion; it is one of the strongest safeguards for religion in a free society. Our nation is strongest when it protects the rights of all people to worship—or not worship—according to conscience.

Thank you for your consideration.
Respectfully,
Suja Perakathu

Sent from my iPhone

From: Neil Hotchkiss <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Cc: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Separation of Church and State-Neil Hotchkiss

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:16:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

It was brought to my attention, only today, that the Commission is considering repealing the Johnson Amendment in an attempt to counter the separation of church and state. I am neither a lawyer or politician, but simply a concerned citizen sharing my response.

All my life it was instilled in me a sense of pride that as an American we had certain inalienable rights that allowed us to worship God without coercion from either Church or State. I was taught in the concept of "e pluribus, unum", in diversity, unity and that the government's role was to assure our freedom of liberty. I'm fearful of any attempt for the government to have any control over individual beliefs or creeds. Our country truly is a melting pot of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. I believe our forefathers knew what they were doing when they created a system of checks and balances which prevented any one branch of government to predominate over another.

I pray that members of the Commission would be very cautious in making any decisions that may undermine the intention of our forefathers to assure religious freedom.

I would recommend the words of Pilate's wife, found in Matthew 27:19, to the Commission: "When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day because of him."

I would advise as Jesus in Mark 12:17: "And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the thing that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him."

Finally, I would like to share the words of Peter found in Acts 5:29: "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."

I was informed of this Commission through pillaroffreedom.org. I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them.

Thank you for your consideration.

Neil Hotchkiss
Lakeport, California

From: chandra coffey <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, June 2026

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:16:11 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Commission,

I am writing to share my earnest concerns regarding two interconnected issues vital to the future of our nation: the preservation of the separation of church and state, and the precise definition of antisemitism.

The Separation of Church and State

While I do not doubt that this commission has the best interests of the American people at heart, history shows that uniting church and state invariably paves the way for government overreach. Setting a precedent of government entanglement with religion creates a dangerous framework. Even if current leadership acts with good intentions, a future administration with different members could easily weaponize that precedent to favor one faith over another, leading to the persecution of religious minorities. To protect believers of all faiths, we must learn from the past and preserve the distinct boundaries between church and state.

Defining Antisemitism and Protecting Free Speech

Regarding the rise of antisemitism, I urge the commission to clarify its operational definition of the term. Over the past year, "antisemitism" has frequently been used quite broadly. It is crucial to distinguish between genuine hatred and the peaceful exercise of free speech. Does the commission classify online commentary critical of the nation of Israel, or controversial videos discussing the Jewish people, as inherently antisemitic?

Like this commission, I hold a deep respect for the Jewish community and the people of Israel. However, we are called to show compassion to individuals of all faiths. My concern is that a vague or overly broad definition of antisemitism will be misused to censor or label individuals who are simply sharing opinions or disagreeing with a political agenda. Protecting freedom of speech means ensuring citizens can speak freely without fear of state-sanctioned repercussion.

It is my prayer that the commission seeks wisdom and guidance in these weightier matters, ensuring that liberty and justice are preserved for all Americans.

Respectfully,

Chandra Brondhaver

From: Teisha Gomez <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty commission response

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:16:23 -0400

Importance: Normal

Hello,

I am writing in response to religious liberty commission report. I believe in religious liberty for all and I do NOT agree to tearing down the separation between church and state. Please reconsider, thank you.

Noel G.

From: Chris Ebenezer <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:16:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

Please stop combining church and state. Our country was founded keeping these two entities separate so we have religious freedom.

Please continue to allow us to have these freedoms. May God bless our nation, that honors and exalts the creator of this beautiful universe.

Blessings,

Chris Ebenezer
Principal

[REDACTED] PII

From: Nick Meissner <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- Establishment Clause – Nicholas Meissner

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:17:07 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern,

What I support:

Regarding the Free Exercise Clause, as a devout Christian, I deeply appreciate your efforts to protect the free exercise of religion for all (whether Christian or not).

What I oppose:

Regarding the Establishment Clause, I am strongly opposed to any efforts to have government **enforce** any variety of religion. The government has no right to interfere in my relationship with God. Jesus said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." (Mat. 22:21). Our duty to God is between us and Him, and no government has the right to dictate in these matters.

Thank you for your service!

Nicholas Meissner

From: [REDACTED] PII

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty commission comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:17:41 -0400

Importance: Normal

Good Afternoon,

I am writing to express my protest for the religious liberty committees findings. I will not deny that Christianity has been under attack over the last few years and all the committees hearts, I am sure, are well meaning. I feel called to remind the commission of a few things. The human heart is the most deceitful of all things. We must test the challenges in this world not by what our hearts tell us, but by the Word of God. Jesus taught us that His kingdom was not of this world. If it were, His servants would fight. He also said to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. The concept of separation of church and state originates here by the Savior Himself. If we were founded under Christian values, shouldn't we practice what our Teacher instructed us to do? There must be a separation of church and state. Yes we have been under attack but we have not received instruction from our Master to fight in this world. The world attacked Him as well and no servant is above His master. We cannot take the chance of breaking down that wall of separation that, while may not be in the constitution itself, is enshrined in the First Amendment.

I earnestly ask that the commission prayerfully rethink the findings and withdraw their proposals.

With love

A fellow sister in Christ

Sent from my Galaxy

From: "PII" <PII>

To: "PII" <PII>, "PII" <PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment on separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:18:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Sir or Madam,

When I read the constitution and the first amendment: ***"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances;"*** I find that this amendment establishes separation of church and state.

This amendment prevents Muslims from passing a law (in the USA) requiring everyone (in USA) to go to a mosque on Friday.

This amendment prevents Jews from passing a law (in the USA) requiring everyone (in USA) to go to a temple on Saturday. This amendment would prevent Sabbath keeping Christians from passing a law (in the USA) requiring everyone (in USA) to go to a church on Saturday.

This amendment prevents Sunday keeping Christians from passing a law (in the USA) requiring everyone (in USA) to go to church on Sunday.

The first four of the Ten Commandments deal with man's relationship with God. The last six of the Ten Commandments deal with man's relationship with man. I believe that our government should have nothing to do with the enforcement of the first four commandments. It is the government's responsibility to enforce the last six commandments, by the use of force, to prevent killing, stealing, lying (under oath). To use force to enforce the first four commandments is evil.

Centuries ago, there were countries in Europe where church and state were integrated. People killed one another over religious beliefs. This is evil.

Some leaders of the 13 colonies used force to enforce their views of the first four commandments. Again this is evil. Great leaders, such as William Penn, allowed freedom of religion. He was a Godly man.

God has blessed our country because of the separation of church and state.

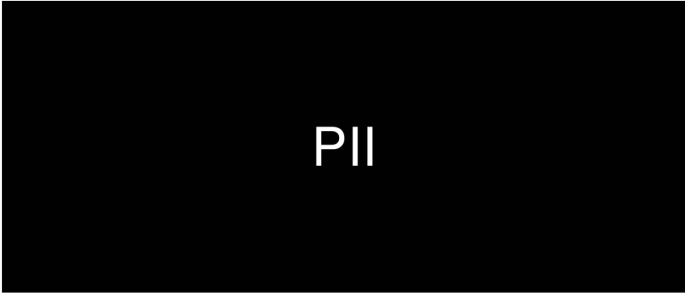
Keep church and state separate.

Currently churches are not allowed to endorse political leaders. I return 10% of my income to the church I attend and it is tax deductible. If my church endorses a certain candidate that I like, I might give 25% of my income to the church knowing that it will support the candidate of my choice. To get a tax deduction for a contribution that would support a particular candidate is highly immoral.

Of course, you could amend the tax returns so that religious contributions are no longer tax-deductible. Is that the intent of this commission?

Sincerely,

Charles and Elizabeth Geddes

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

PII

From: Nathaniel Nwankpah <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:18:29 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Gov.

I am writing to you today as a constituent to express my strong opposition to any efforts to repeal or weaken the Johnson Amendment. I firmly believe that maintaining this long-standing provision is essential to protecting the historic separation of church and state, as well as preserving the integrity of both our religious institutions and our democratic process.

For seven decades, the Johnson Amendment has served as a vital safeguard. By ensuring that 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations—including churches, temples, mosques, and charities—do not endorse or oppose political candidates, the law protects houses of worship from becoming battlegrounds for partisan politics.

Allowing houses of worship to engage in partisan electoral politics would be deeply damaging for several reasons:

- **Preserving the Integrity of Faith:** Religion is at its strongest when it relies upon spiritual persuasion rather than political power. Introducing partisan endorsements into sanctuaries risks dividing congregations along political lines and eroding the sacred, unifying role that houses of worship play in our communities.
- **Preventing Political Dark Money:** Repealing the amendment would allow political donors to channel untaxed, unaccountable "dark money" through religious organizations to influence elections. This would fundamentally distort the purpose of charitable tax exemptions.
- **Maintaining Government Neutrality:** True religious liberty depends upon the government remaining neutral in matters of faith. When civil authority and religious institutions become entangled through political endorsements and campaign finance, the historic boundary between church and state is dangerously diminished.

Government is at its best when it protects the free exercise of religion for all citizens, not when it seeks to integrate religious institutions into the machinery of political campaigns. The preservation of religious liberty depends entirely upon maintaining the proper boundaries between civil authority and matters of conscience.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to protect the Johnson Amendment and reject any legislative efforts or interpretations that would weaken it. Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your dedication to upholding the principles of the Constitution.

Respectfully submitted,

-Nathaniel

From: Josiah afk <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:18:35 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Senator

I am writing to you today as a constituent to express my strong opposition to any efforts to repeal or weaken the Johnson Amendment. I firmly believe that maintaining this long-standing provision is essential to protecting the historic separation of church and state, as well as preserving the integrity of both our religious institutions and our democratic process.

For seven decades, the Johnson Amendment has served as a vital safeguard. By ensuring that 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations—including churches, temples, mosques, and charities—do not endorse or oppose political candidates, the law protects houses of worship from becoming battlegrounds for partisan politics.

Allowing houses of worship to engage in partisan electoral politics would be deeply damaging for several reasons:

- **Preserving the Integrity of Faith:** Religion is at its strongest when it relies upon spiritual persuasion rather than political power. Introducing partisan endorsements into sanctuaries risks dividing congregations along political lines and eroding the sacred, unifying role that houses of worship play in our communities.
- **Preventing Political Dark Money:** Repealing the amendment would allow political donors to channel untaxed, unaccountable "dark money" through religious organizations to influence elections. This would fundamentally distort the purpose of charitable tax exemptions.
- **Maintaining Government Neutrality:** True religious liberty depends upon the government remaining neutral in matters of faith. When civil authority and religious institutions become entangled through political endorsements and campaign finance, the historic boundary between church and state is dangerously diminished.

Government is at its best when it protects the free exercise of religion for all citizens, not when it seeks to integrate religious institutions into the machinery of political campaigns. The preservation of religious liberty depends entirely upon maintaining the proper boundaries between civil authority and matters of conscience.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to protect the Johnson Amendment and reject any legislative efforts or interpretations that would weaken it. Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your dedication to upholding the principles of the Constitution.

Respectfully submitted,

Josiah Anderson, Charlotte, MI

From: jdwardein <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:18:43 -0400

Importance: Normal

Good Afternoon,

I am writing to express my protest for the religious liberty committees findings. I will not deny that Christianity has been under attack over the last few years and all the committees hearts, I am sure, are well meaning. I feel called to remind the commission of a few things. The human heart is the most deceitful of all things. We must test the challenges in this world not by what our hearts tell us, but by the Word of God. Jesus taught us that His kingdom was not of this world. If it were, His servants would fight. He also said to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. The concept of separation of church and state originates here by the Savior Himself. If we were founded under Christian values, shouldn't we practice what our Teacher instructed us to do? There must be a separation of church and state. Yes we have been under attack but we have not received instruction from our Master to fight in this world. The world attacked Him as well and no servant is above His master. We cannot take the chance of breaking down that wall of separation that, while may not be in the constitution itself, is enshrined in the First Amendment.

I earnestly ask that the commission prayerfully rethink the findings and withdraw their proposals.

With love

A fellow sister in Christ

Sent from my Galaxy

Sent from my Galaxy

From: Adam Tyler <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment – Religious Liberty Commission Report – Adam Tyler

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:18:47 -0400

Importance: Normal

Commission members,

I have been following the news of the report of the RLC with growing consternation and concern. As a Baptist pastor with a deep appreciation for the role of religion in American life, I know that our history is filled with people of faith making a significant contribution to our national life. However, from even before we were a nation, there has been an important thread that has bolstered both religious faith and the public identity of our people and our country.

Many who came to our shores in the colonial era came seeking freedom from governmental endorsement of or favor for particular religious expressions. Religious freedom and the separation of church and state was a core principle of many groups, especially including early American Baptists. Baptists knew what it had been like in England and elsewhere to suffer persecution at the hands of the established church, and their experience continued in America, including in my own state, Virginia. Those early Baptists didn't want anyone - Baptist, Christian, Muslim, Jew, or any other religious faith (or no faith) - to be compelled to worship or adhere to a religious sensibility. Religious liberty for all, and the separation of church and state, were hallmarks of the American approach, and those principles were incorporated into the First Amendment to the Constitution.

Thank God they were! Governments ever since have been able to accomplish their mission - to form a more perfect Union, to establish Justice, to ensure domestic Tranquility, to provide for the common defense, to promote the general Welfare, and to secure the Blessings of Liberty - in large part because they were not promoting a particular creed or faith; rather, all persons (of faith or no faith) were considered fairly and equally before the law. At the same time, religious groups - churches, mosques, synagogues, temples of all stripes - have been free to flourish and foster their own tenets of faith free from governmental interference or influence.

That is our heritage as Americans of all faiths and no faith. That heritage deserves to continue, as it is grounded in the core principles of our nation (and, I believe, in the core principles of God).

I hope and pray that more thought is put into the report of the commission; that perspectives outside those on the commission are considered, and that the final report will more closely align with the historic commitment in the United States to the values of religious freedom and separation of church and state.

Respectfully,

Pastor Adam Tyler

--

Adam Tyler

Pastor, Farmville Baptist Church

From: Karin Knowles <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Keep RELIGION out of GOV'T!

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:19:32 -0400

Importance: Normal

Please keep the government out of churches. Our forefathers LEFT Europe BECAUSE they wanted the FREEDOM to practice RELIGION (or to practice NO RELIGION) as they chose. When the government and the head of the church are the same, or when government mandates that people follow the teachings of the church, everything changes for the worse. (Think of how people in Muslim countries are treated. If they say anything that the Imams dislike, they are persecuted, ostracized, imprisoned, tortured and/or killed. Is this what you want for America?)

Please vote AGAINST removing the separation between Church & state, or YOU will be responsible for the outcome!

Sincerely,

Gary & Karin Knowles

Dave & Joanne Knowles

Wayne & Debbue Knowles

Merlin & Cheryl Knowles

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

From: Andrew Keil <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment for Religious Liberty and No Bridge

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:20:20 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Please keep the wall between church and state. We do not need a bridge. That wall protects both religious freedom and limited government.

I oppose using taxpayer money to fund religious activities. Keeping church and state separate helps protect everyone's freedom.

Thank you for your consideration.

From: Mark Hooper <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:21:09 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dr. Carson,

I love the way church and state are separate. I am totally against combining them.

Mark

From: Michelle De La Paz <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment/Michelle Fontenot

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:21:09 -0400

Importance: Normal

One of the main reasons that the United States of America is the best place in the world to live is freedom of religion. The government has no right to dictate how a person should worship God or if they should even worship God. God Almighty does not force His creation to worship Him but gives us free choice. As one of the apostles stated, I ought to obey God rather than man. The government has a right to enforce the last 6 commandments which has to do with our relations to one another but the first 4 commandments is between a person and God. The government nor anyone has the right to do the job of the Holy Spirit who guides us into all Truth, Who convicts us. We are to worship or not worship God according to the dictates of our own conscious.

If church and state unite we will have as never seen before horrors but a glimpse may be seen in the French Revolution.

In 1888, the Blair bill was proposed and rejected. That was a National Sunday Law proposal by Senator Blair. God in His mercy did not allow that to pass.

Again, the state should have no say in who or how a person chooses to worship.

We are intelligent created beings that were created with freedom of choice. Even in the Garden of Eden our first parents were given freedom. Even though they made the wrong choice it was theirs to make and that given by God for He wants worship out of love not force.

Thank you for your time and attention to this most serious matter,

Michelle Fontenot
Sent from my iPhone

From: Maira <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and members of the Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:21:50 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

We write to respectfully express our profound disagreement with the recommendation that the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment be reinterpreted to diminish the historic separation of church and state. Such a recommendation is inconsistent with the text of the Constitution, the intent of its principal architects, and the biblical principles that matters of conscience belong to God rather than civil government.

The First Amendment declares that: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". These two protections were designed to work together. The Establishment Clause prevents government from exercising authority over religion, while the Free Exercise Clause protects citizens rights to worship or not worship according to conscience. Together, they have made the United States one of the greatest examples of the religious liberty in human history.

Thomas Jefferson famously described this constitutional principle: "as a wall of separation between church and state". Contrary to modern claims that this phrase has no constitutional significance, Jefferson was not inventing a new doctrine. He was describing a principle already embedded within the First Amendment: that government possesses no rightful authority to establish, direct, or compel religious observance.

No founder articulated this principle more clearly than James Madison, often called the "Father of the Constitution". In his Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments declare that: "Religion or the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason any conviction, not by force or violence". "Religion, he argue, must remain beyond the jurisdiction of civil government because the duty owe to God precedes the authority of the state itself".

Decades later, Madison reaffirmed this conviction, writing in 1822, "Religion and Government will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together". This is not hostility toward religion. It was recognition that both faith and government are corrupted when either assumes the authority of the other.

Benjamin Franklin expressed the same principle in remarkably practical terms: "When a Religion is good...it will support itself...and when it's Professors are oblige'd to call for the help of the Civil Power..."tis a Sign...of its being a bad one. True religion persuades by truth and love, not by legislation or coercion.

This principles are not merely constitutional- they are biblical. When questioned about civil authority, Jesus Christ, declared: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Mathew 22:21). In those few words, Christ established a distinction between the jurisdiction of civil government and the jurisdiction of conscience. Government possesses legitimate authority over civil order and the protection of equal rights, but worship, doctrine and the relationship between an individual and God remain beyond its lawful reach.

History repeatedly confirms the wisdom of this distinction. Whenever church and state have been joined, both have suffered. Religious institutions have too often sought the power of the sword, while governments have attempted to regulate the conscience. The result has not be greater faith, but persecution, division, and the suppression of religious liberty.

Americans understood this lessons well. Many of the earliest settlers came to these shores precisely because they had fled governments that enforced religious conformity.

The Founders sought to break from that centuries-old pattern by denying the federal government any authority over religion.

Article VI prohibits religious test for public office, and the First Amendment forbids law respecting an establishment of religion. These provisions were not accidental. They were deliberate safeguards designed to preserve liberty of conscience for every citizen.

The dangers of abandoning these principles are not merely theoretical. During the late nineteenth century, proposal such as a Blair Sunday Rest Bill sought to use civil law to enforce what many considered a religious duty. At the same time, members of my own faith were imprisoned in Tennessee and sentenced to drain gangs simply for working on Sunday while observing the seventh-day Sabbath according to their convictions. Their experience serves as a reminder that sincere religious majorities, when empowered by civil authority, can unintentionally deny the very liberty they seek to preserve.

This is why contemporary calls to weaken the separation of church and state are deeply concerning. A government that possess the authority to favor one religious tradition necessarily possesses the authority to disfavor another. The same power that today may benefit one denomination could tomorrow be turned against it. Religious liberty cannot be secure if it depends upon which faith happens to hold political influence at a given moment.

The genius of the American experiment is that it protects the conscience of every person equally. Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, atheist, and every other citizen enjoys the same protection because the government is forbidden from deciding questions of religious truth.

That neutrality has not weakened religion in American- it has allowed it to flourish through conviction rather than compulsion.

Government is at its best when it protects the free exercise of religion, not when it defines, directs, or advances it. Likewise, religion is at its strongest when it relies upon persuasion rather than political power. The preservation of both depends upon maintaining the distinction the Founders carefully established.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge to Commission to reject any interpretation of the Constitution that diminishes the historical separation of church and state. The preservation of religious liberty depends upon maintaining the proper boundaries between civil authority and matters of conscience. That principle is faithful to the Constitution, consistent with the teachings of Scripture, affirmed by the architects of our Republic, and essential to preserving liberty for future generations.

We, the undersigned, adults residing on the territory of United States, twenty-one years of age or older, hereby respectfully but firmly request your honorable corporation, not to admit any Bill relating to the Sabbath or the Lord's day, as well as to any other religious or ecclesiastical institution or rite, or to favor in any way the adoption of any resolution for the Amendment of the national Constitution that could tend in some way, directly or indirectly, to give preference to the principles of any religion or religious body over others, or that in any way it approves the practice of legislating on religion, but to maintain forever as our Fathers established it, -the total separation between religion and the state as secure by the Constitution as its exist now.

Respectfully submitted

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

We write to respectfully express our profound disagreement with the recommendation that the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment be reinterpreted to diminish the historic separation of church and state. Such a recommendation is inconsistent with the text of the Constitution, the intent of its principal architects, and the biblical principles that matters of conscience belong to God rather than civil government.

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Americans understood these lessons well. Many of the earliest settlers came to these shores precisely because they had fled governments that enforced religious conformity.

The Founders sought to break from that centuries-old pattern by denying the federal government any authority over religion.

Article VI prohibits religious test for public office, and the First Amendment forbids law respecting an establishment of religion. These provisions were not accidental. They were deliberate safeguards designed to preserve liberty of conscience for every citizen.

The dangers of abandoning these principles are not merely theoretical. During the late nineteenth century, proposals such as a Blair Sunday Rest Bill sought to use civil law to enforce what many considered a religious duty. At the same time, members of my own faith were imprisoned in Tennessee and sentenced to hard labor simply for working on Sunday while observing the seventh-day Sabbath according to their convictions. Their experience serves as a reminder that sincere religious majorities, when empowered by civil authority, can unintentionally deny the very liberty they seek to preserve.

This is why contemporary calls to weaken the separation of church and state are deeply concerning. A government that possesses the authority to favor one religious tradition necessarily possesses the authority to disfavor another. The same power that today may benefit one denomination could tomorrow be turned against it. Religious liberty cannot be secure if it depends upon which faith happens to hold political influence at a given moment.

The genius of the American experiment is that it protects the conscience of every person equally. Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, atheist, and every other citizen enjoys the same protection because the government is forbidden from deciding questions of religious truth. That neutrality has not weakened religion in American- it has allowed it to flourish through conviction rather than compulsion.

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We, the undersigned, adults residing on the territory of United States, twenty-one years of age or older, hereby respectfully but firmly request your honorable corporation, not to admit any Bill relating to the Sabbath or the Lord's day, as well as to any other religious or ecclesiastical institution or rite, or to favor in any way the adoption of any resolution for the Amendment of the national Constitution that could tend in some way, directly or indirectly, to give preference to the principles of any religion or religious body over others, or that in any way it approves the practice of legislating on religion, but to maintain forever as our Fathers established it, -the total separation between religion and the state as secure by the Constitution as its exist now.

Respectfully submitted

Lucy Ávila [REDACTED] PII

Maira I. Feliciano Rosado [REDACTED] PII

From: Edgar Vyhmeister <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Edgar Vyhmeister

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:21:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Sirs:

Roger Wiliams left England to go to the new land because of Religious Freedom. Unfortunately, the Puritans had the same persecutions of those that believed in Freedom of Conscience, and found himself on the run. The "Christian Savager", the Native Americans, took him in. He helped him resolve their disputes with neighboring tribes. He was so successful that he founded Rhode Island on the principles of separation of church and state. It was so effective, that it was included in the Declaration of Independence and the American Constiotution. Saying that there is no separation of church and state is going back and destroying the effect of Roger Wiliams of the writing of those principles.

Christ himself drew the line: two jurisdictions, and the state holds only. He excluded the state from religion. That was what caused the persecution of the Waldenses, the French Huguenots and all the rersecution \during the dark ages of Europe. The Reformation began to change that. Roger Williams amazingly grasped the significance and influenced enough people that 150 years later the Constitution was inclusive of liberty of conscience. It is the only country where there is true liberty of consience.

The state has never been given power to believe, worship or answer to God. That has been for the individual.

There is no such thing as Generic Christianity. It does not exist as a legal object. Non-sectarian religion can not be. Today, the Liberal Godless ideology including Marxism is truluy a sectarian religion and should be treated as suc. I hope that you are wise enough to realize that a man's experience with God is very personal and cannot be legislated. The dark ages was a result of legislating one religion and destroyed those that did not agree. Liberty of Conscience must be mainitained as the world becomes more confused and divided. Thank you for your consideration.

Edgar Vyhmeister

[REDACTED] PII

From: Tara <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:22:27 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chairman,

I'm writing today to ask you to preserve our sacred & treasured right of Religious Liberty in the church, the public square, and in schools. Daily we Americans watch as this precious freedom is being persecuted and trampled on in other countries. We see police arresting pastors who share the Christian message in the public square.

Sadly, we saw this in our very own state of Texas just last week! I ask you take steps to hold secure our Christian values and the voices of those who speak publicly about them! This right is foundational in our first Amendment & confirms it is in tacked. Our schools should support this freedom, our sidewalks should be open to free speech and this includes pastors sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I think for your attention to this matter.

Be blessed,
Tara

From: David Donaldson <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Freedom of Faith at Risk

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:23:17 -0400

Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in regards to this most precious opportunity to voice our concern of this administrations endeavor regarding our religious liberty. While I am thankful that there is a push back against the anti-Christian sentiment that has prevailed in our nation for the last decade and a half, I am deeply concerned about the way we are choosing to respond. A careful reading of our nation's foundational documents makes evident that our founding fathers were well versed not only with history, but also in Scripture. In both the second and final paragraphs of our declaration of Independence there is a reference to our Creator, which at that time would have been the God of Christianity. Thomas Paine, the statesman, writing in his immortal work, common sense, cited in multiple places the Word of God. Yet as the amendments to the Constitution were being written, that generation saw them of such importance that it first addressed religion before speech or the press. We enshrined Plymouth Rock in our American History as the place the Pilgrims first landed and gave thanks that they successfully escaped religious persecution. This clearly had it's affect upon the mindset and culture of those who formed the government we now enjoy. If we pass this into law, I believe that this would a move backwards rather than forward. It is because we have such deep protestant Christan roots that we established such a firm wall of separation between the church and our government. We cannot forget the atrocities of the dark ages when the church of Rome and the Church of England used the government as the sword to cut down their political and theological opponents. If we allow this to pass, it sets a fearful precedent for us to end up in the same position the pioneers suffered so deeply and worked so hard to escape from. It is because of these present concerns and personal convictions that I stand against this.

Sincerely

David Donaldson

From: Dave Griffith <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:23:54 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear [Religious Liberty Commission,Recipient Name],

I am writing to express my strong support for maintaining Thomas Jefferson's wise counsel regarding the separation of church and state.

It is vital that we continue to uphold and protect this fundamental principle to ensure liberty and fairness for all.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and continued dedication to this matter.

Best regards,

Dave Griffith

From: "PII" <PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] I agree with the Pillars of Freedom please implement them

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:24:33 -0400

Importance: Normal

Lori Williams

PII

Sent from my iPhone

From: Gayland Hagys <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Draft report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:24:34 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with pillar of freedom's comments. Please implement them!

--

Gayland

From: John Gardners <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:24:34 -0400

Importance: Normal

Thank you for serving on the Presidential Committee on Religious Liberty. It's encouraging to see thoughtful people taking on a topic that's both foundational and often overlooked.

With the country marking its 250th anniversary, I've been thinking a lot about how fortunate we are to live in the United States, I'm genuinely grateful to live in a place where I can follow my faith without worrying about government stepping in. Out of all the freedoms we enjoy, the ability to worship or not according to conscience is the one I hold closest.

My faith teaches two big things: conscience matters, and history matters. And history has a pretty consistent message when governments start mixing themselves into religious decisions, people lose the ability to follow their convictions. The Protestant Reformation and plenty of other chapters make that painfully clear. Those lessons are why I appreciate the wisdom of the founders in protecting religious liberty for everyone, regardless of belief. Once government starts defining or directing matters of conscience, freedom stops being freedom.

Looking around today, I worry that we're slowly drifting away from the principles that helped build this country. My hope is that our leaders remember that faith has to remain a personal conviction, not something shaped or enforced by the state.

I'm hopeful that your work protects every American's God-given right to worship freely or not at all based on conscience.

Kindfully,

John

From: "L.Lane" <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:24:35 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members if the Religios Liberty Commission

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Please reconsider your recommendation in your report to tear down the wall of separation between Church and State. History regarding the wall was established back in the 1600's with Roger Williams. People came to this country to flee persecution knowing what it is like when church and state are united. Lets keep that big beautiful wall between church and state separate. If it doesn't, it will, according to Bible procehcy unleash our lamb-like nation into a powerful beast power as stated in Revelation 13.

From: Ron <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to Religious Liberty Commission Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:25:38 -0400

Importance: Normal

Respectfully to the members of the Religious Liberty Commission (RLC).

We affirm and agree with the Commission Report response letter submitted by Jonathan Zirkle, JD (July 6, 2026).

We believe in the principle of separation of church and state, and support upholding the separating "wall" to continue to allow complete religious freedom in this great Nation.

We believe that Almighty God, Jehovah and His Son, Jesus The Christ and The Holy Spirit always operate on the basis of true love and freedom, therefore The Godhead gives mankind the freedom to choose to love and worship according to their own conscience. To compel, coerce, or tend toward enforcement of worship to the Creator is not supported in Scripture and is not a godly tactic.

"When the Scriptures are suppressed, and man comes to regard himself as supreme, we need look only for fraud, deception, and debasing iniquity. With the elevation of human laws and traditions was manifest the corruption that ever results from setting aside the law of God."

--Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, p.55.1

"In the movements now in progress in the United States to secure for the institutions and usages of the church the support of the state, Protestants are following in the steps of papists. Nay, more, they are opening the door for the papacy to regain in Protestant America the supremacy which she has lost in the Old World. And that which gives greater significance to this movement is the fact that the principal object contemplated is the enforcement of Sunday observance—a custom which originated with Rome, and which she claims as the sign of her authority. It is the spirit of the papacy—the spirit of conformity to worldly customs, the veneration for human traditions above the commandments of God—that is permeating the Protestant churches and leading them on to do the same work of Sunday exaltation which the papacy has done before them."

--Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, p.573.1

We are not to be a society like Afghanistan where the head of the official state religion tells the civil government and the citizens of the state what the must do or not do. Only true, personal, individual love for God will actually motivate each of us to keep His commandments. See John 14:15.

Please prayerfully consider this.

Ron & Jeri Pride

[REDACTED]

PII

PII

From: EP Lair <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:25:49 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am concerned about the conclusions of the Religious Liberty Commission. Our country was founded to allow freedom from the tyranny of church/ state union. The Dark Ages witnessed the persecution and martyrdom of millions of religious dissidents. These dissidents are the forerunners of the Evangelical churches that are now wanting to reunite church and state. James Madison, Roger Williams, and Thomas Jefferson publically espoused separation in the 1st amendment.

My training as a legal assistant included the principle of looking to the original intent of legislation when determining interpretation and enforcement. The founding fathers knew the dangers inherent when church rules override civil liberties. A cursory reading of their writings are counter to the opinions of the Religious Liberty Commission.

America is traditionally called the land of the free. Let's keep it that way!

Esther P. Lair

[REDACTED]
PII DII

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

From: Reena Chos [REDACTED] PII

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:26:19 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a citizen to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state — especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God — and that's bad for the church and the country alike. Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Reena Cho

From: "C St.John" <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment- Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report- Jerry & Catherine St. John

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:26:53 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern,

We do not agree with the Religious Liberty Commission's suggestions for ensuring religious liberty listed in their draft report.

We strongly believe that a healthy separation of church and state is necessary for our country to continue to be the free and welcoming country she has always been. From the 1600s onward, this continent has been a place of refuge for those fleeing religious persecution from those countries having no wall of separation between church and state. History shows that where there is a union between church and state, one religion quickly becomes the state favorite. Persecution of all other religions soon follows. Although the draft report states the country will not "officially" choose one religion over another, it does leave the door open for the state to unofficially choose a religion. We have seen in these United States the religious persecution that happens even under a country who has no official religion.

Bridging the gap between church and state opens the door for our beloved Constitution to be changed. Once the Constitution has begun to be changed, what is to prevent it from being changed further? Although our Founding Fathers were not perfect, the Constitution they set up has lasted 250 years. Proper upholding of the current religious liberty laws is sufficient to maintain and ensure religious liberty for all without taking away from any other first amendment rights granted to all of us in the U.S. Constitution.

We also disagree with making federal funding easily accessible to religious organizations and educational institutions. We have nothing against these institutions. But we have an issue with the state funding them. Once the state is able to give monies, the state soon begins to require these organizations and institutions to teach, preach, and conduct their ministries and business according to the dictates of the state or be closed. Thus the religious organizations and educational institutions lose the freedoms they originally fought to keep. This is not new. This has happened in other countries.

In summary, we ask that you stop persueing a relationship between the churches and the state. It will be a better, freer country for all.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jerry & Catherine St. John

From: Bible Questions <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:27:39 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the US Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a healthcare provider in Virginia and, for more than 20 years, have requested a religious exemption from receiving the annual influenza vaccine and, more recently, the COVID-19 vaccine. Due to my longstanding and consistent record of declining these mandated vaccines based on sincerely held religious beliefs, I have been granted a permanent exemption within my healthcare organization. I am writing primarily to express my sincere gratitude for your efforts in protecting and preserving the religious freedom of individuals to make healthcare decisions in accordance with their deeply held faith convictions. I am thankful for the ability to decline medical interventions that I believe would violate my understanding of God's laws regarding health and moral conduct. My beliefs are rooted in Scripture, including 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 (KJV), which states: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." This passage, along with other biblical principles, guides my conviction that I am called to care for my body as a temple of God and to make healthcare decisions that align with my faith and conscience. I am grateful for those who work to ensure that individuals can continue to exercise these religious freedoms without compromising their sincerely held beliefs.

Secondly, I hope to continue my freedom to not receive vaccinations in the future. The Bible is clear that any substance that goes into our bodies is a religious choice. And our nation has historically protected the rights of its citizens to make religious choices. To put it another way, our health choices are spiritual choices. For the Christian, we believe we are a whole being: physical, spiritual and mental. One affects the other. Every decision we make is to be for God's glory (Colossians 3:17) and to force or compel a believer to go against his conscience is a high crime in the eyes of God.

Thanks again for all that you are doing to protect the religious freedom of our country.

May God continue to bless each of you and your families.

Sincerely,

Frederick Minor

From: Brenda's Air <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Brenda Adams

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:28:51e0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a concerned citizen and person of faith to ask that you reconsider any action that would weaken the wall of separation between church and state. I consider this wall a protection to the freedom of religion which I prize above all other freedoms in the United States.

Although it appears faith-friendly to do so, funding religious non-profit activities and religious education or clubs on public education campuses is actually very dangerous to religion in America. Any time a government intends to support religion, it must necessarily define it. This leads to two alarming outcomes. Religion that fits the government definition becomes accountable to human beings, rather than to God—which corrupts it. Religion which does not meet the definition becomes subject to persecution. For our nation's founders, it was experiential knowledge of persecution that led to a recognition that this wall must be erected to protect faith.

People of strong faith envisioned, implemented, and defended this separation for reasons that we have forgotten because we have lived comfortably in its protection for 250 years. Please do not overturn their wise provision.

Respectfully,

Brenda Adams
Linden, TN

From: Brenda Adams <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Proposed Bridge Between Church & State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:29:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attn: Religious Liberty Commission

I am very concerned to hear that the Commission wants a “bridge” to replace the wall of separation between church and state. With all due respect, that is completely opposite of what should happen and quite disturbing to me as a fellow believer. That wall gives believers freedom of choice and keeps nefarious actions by political entities in check. Let all answer to God according to their conscience, and God alone! History has taught us what happens when church and state converge and that should give us serious pause and terminate such discussion.

Please reconsider any thoughts of establishing a bridge—a wall of protection is far more needed!

Sincerely,

Brenda Adams
College Place, WA

From: Sherry Garzas <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:30:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Response_-_Religious_Freedom_Report.pdf

Please see attached letter.

Thank you for your attention in this matter.

Sherry

July 13, 2026

Via Electronic Mail to [REDACTED] PII

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

First – regarding the Pillar of Freedom’s Response, I DO AGREE with the response and would like for you to implement it!

Second – in 1620, Chrisian’s fled England and other countries to go to America because of persecution of their religion.

Examples:

1. in 1620 King James I of England wanted a state religion because the Catholic church would not give him a divorce. Therefore, that religion had the king as of the religion. (One person who was government).
2. Also, when the Roman Papacy was in control, and also known as a government within itself, the persecution of Christians happened in 1233 through 1250 and 1478 through 1834. Also, other years that were not consistent as the noted years.

The Bible clearly states in Matthew 22:21, Mark 12:17, and Luke 20:25 – “Render therefore unto Ceasar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s”

God wants a free loving relationship with an individual not through a government forced worship. To me God was clear that the government (state) and the freedom to worship is to be kept separated. So, if government were to get involved with the freedom of worship for the individual, that to me is how the government will have the opportunity to “FORCE” people to worship the way the government wants, not the God intended.

I request that the Johnson Amendment to be fully forced.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.


Sherry Garza

From: Alvin Ortiz <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Stop the church and state coming together

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:30:18 -0400

Importance: Normal

The principle of separating church and state exists to protect both religious liberty and civil government. Throughout history, whenever government has exercised authority over matters of faith, or religious institutions have controlled civil power, the result has often been coercion, persecution, and the loss of individual freedom of conscience.

Faith is most meaningful when it is embraced voluntarily rather than compelled by law. Civil governments are established to maintain public order, administer justice, and protect the rights of all citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs or lack thereof. Religious organizations, on the other hand, exist to guide individuals in matters of faith, worship, and spiritual conviction.

When these two institutions become intertwined, government may begin favoring one religious tradition over others, while religious bodies may become influenced by political interests rather than their spiritual mission. This weakens both institutions. A government that remains neutral in matters of religion preserves equal treatment under the law, while religious communities retain the freedom to practice, teach, and govern according to their sincerely held beliefs without political interference.

The separation of church and state is therefore not intended to diminish religion, but rather to safeguard religious freedom for everyone. It ensures that individuals are free to worship according to their conscience, change their beliefs, or choose no religion at all, while allowing government to serve all people impartially.

For these reasons, maintaining a clear distinction between the responsibilities of church and state remains essential to preserving liberty, justice, and freedom of conscience.

From: blanca i ibarra <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] On separation of church and state.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:30:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair, Dr. Carson
and members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I believe in the separation of church and state. The first amendment of the constitution tells us and guarantees us the right to religious beliefs!

We as Americans deserve that freedom!

I definitely agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them!!

Sincerely,

Blanca I.

From: David Segals <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>

Cc: David Segals <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – RELIGIOUS FREEDOM – BAPTIST JOINT COMMITTEE

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:30:42 -0400

Importance: Normal

[REDACTED] PII

July 13, 2026

To the Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on your June 2026 draft report.

Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC) is an organization that, for 90 years, has supported faith freedom for all. Rooted in a Baptist commitment to soul liberty, we work to cultivate and expand religious freedom for everyone. We believe religion must be freely exercised and that the government should refrain from promoting or denigrating religion.

With nearly a century of experience advocating for these principles, we are deeply concerned that the draft report misunderstands and misrepresents the foundation of religious freedom upon which this country was built, and it offers recommendations that would harm rather than help the cause of religious freedom. In that spirit, we offer the following comments.

Separation of Church and State

The draft report describes the “wall of separation” between church and state as a “myth” perpetuated by the Supreme Court. To be sure, that language does not appear in the First Amendment or elsewhere in the Constitution. But a number of essential constitutional concepts do not appear in the Constitution's text, such as the separation of powers and the right to a fair trial.

The idea of church-state separation is a way of expressing the spirit and structure of the Constitution, which mentions religion only to ban religious tests for office, and protects religious freedom through the First Amendment's guarantees of free exercise and no establishment. That “separation” language is shorthand for the structure created by our wise Founders in our Constitution.

That's how Thomas Jefferson, one of the First Amendment's champions, understood it. He wrote about a “wall of separation between church and state” in his famous 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptists to emphasize the Constitution's protection of religion from government interference. A century and a half *earlier*, Baptist pioneer Roger Williams advocated for a “wall of separation between the garden of church and the wilderness of the world” to protect religion from government's corrupting influence.

James Madison, “Father of the Constitution,” made several arguments for separation and disestablishment in his “Memorial and Remonstrance,” written in 1785 in opposition to a Virginia bill that would provide government

funding for teachers of the Christian religion. His reasoning touched on the harms to both pluralistic society and the flourishing of Christianity if the state endeavors to support or otherwise involve itself with religion.

The idea of separation is not a historical fluke that the Commission can dismiss as merely a “belabored metaphor.” Church-state separation is the basis for demanding that the government cannot coerce religious activity or favor one religion over another. It means that houses of worship remain free from government interference, and the government treats all people fairly, regardless of their religion. It lets religion thrive in this country, as it has done for centuries.

We agree with the Commission that the Constitution supports the right of “people of faith [to] exercise their religious liberty by living that faith.” Church-state separation is a fundamental principle undergirding that very freedom. Our Founders recognized that religion thrives when untouched by the state, and the state functions best when divorced from religious preferentialism.

We ask that the Commission’s final report not degrade church-state separation as a fringe theory or myth but recognize it as vital to protecting the religious freedom we all hold dear.

The Johnson Amendment

The Commission misguidedly calls for the outright repeal of the tax code provision known as the Johnson Amendment. BJC has a longstanding commitment to defending this law because it protects houses of worship from divisive partisan political pressure. We are deeply concerned by the Commission’s explicit call to undermine this law through IRS guidance, legal challenges, and legislative repeal.

Current law protects nonpartisan political speech from the pulpit, and clergy may contribute to or participate in electoral politics in their individual capacity. The Johnson Amendment preserves the nonpartisan character of the entire 501(c)(3) charitable sector, including religious institutions. Tax-deductible contributions should support only tax-deductible purposes, not partisan activities. Faith leaders and nonprofits consistently support the law as it is, and the [majority](#) of worshipers in the pew do not want religious leaders telling them how to vote or funneling faithful donations into partisan candidates’ coffers.

Under the guise of “freeing the pulpit,” those advocating for abolishing the Johnson Amendment ignore the free speech rights and wide berth for influence in political debate that religious institutions and clergy already possess – not to mention the most favorable tax treatment they enjoy. If churches and clergy want to be foot soldiers for political parties, there’s an easy answer: stop claiming the special tax-exempt status that presumes charitable purposes. No one is preventing that from happening.

We urge the Commission to avoid finding a “fix” for something that’s not broken. Repealing the Johnson Amendment invites charitable donations to be misdirected for electioneering and congregations to be fractured along partisan faultlines.

Religion in Public Schools

The Commission’s draft report cherry-picks anecdotal evidence to suggest that religious freedom is broadly under attack in public schools. But existing law and policy protect students’ rights to prayer and other religious expression while at public school. The specific grievances catalogued in the Commission’s report can and should be addressed – and, where appropriate, redressed – through existing legal protections and procedures.

The Commission's recommendations go well beyond necessary solutions and instead propose expanding school vouchers, affirming release-time programs for religious instruction, and pursuing litigation to support the display of Ten Commandments posters in schools. Rather than securing students' First Amendment rights, these recommendations undermine public schools and threaten religious freedom.

Voucher – or so-called “school choice” – programs funnel public money to private, often religious schools, without protections against religious discrimination. They result in even worse underfunding of public schools, which educate nearly 90% of American students and uniquely protect their First Amendment rights. Under the guise of helping public school students, the vast majority of this funding goes to students already in private schools, effectively offering a handout to private school families rather than a hand up for public school students.

Release-time for religious instruction places administrative burdens on educators and social burdens on students resulting from peer pressure. Although students can opt out, that choice can carry a stigma that ostracizes students who aren't part of the majority religion being taught. The program fosters religious divisiveness on campuses, not an environment that embraces religious freedom for all.

Worse yet, state-mandated Ten Commandments displays do exactly what the Commission itself says the Establishment Clause forbids: “officially prefer one religion over another.” By choosing a foundational religious text and, importantly, a Protestant Christian translation (the King James Version), the state governments that require Ten Commandments displays are selecting one religion for official preference. Rather than ensuring religious freedom, these mandates trample on the Establishment Clause and threaten the very religious freedom that the Commission claims to support.

We ask the Commission to avoid overreaching by suggesting unnecessary solutions to problems that can be resolved under existing laws and policies protecting students' First Amendment rights.

Religion in the Military

BJC has long supported military chaplaincy because it supports the free exercise of service members who are disconnected from their usual faith community resources during training and deployment. This is a great example of the government using its power and resources to meet various religious needs. The Commission's emphasis on shoring up chaplains' rights is misplaced and in tension with the Commission's concern for the religious exercise of service members.

Chaplains recognize that ministry in the military takes place in a pluralistic setting. They know their focus should be on the armed service members and the soldiers' freedom to freely express their faith. Under current law and regulations, military chaplains are permitted to pray in a manner fitting their individual religious tradition in the voluntary worship services they lead for armed services members. On the occasion a prayer is called for in a large-group setting or “command ceremony” where attendance may not be voluntary, chaplains should pray in a more inclusive manner. If a chaplain does not feel comfortable offering a non-sectarian, inclusive prayer in such a setting, he or she may refuse to participate without negative consequences.

The Commission's recommendations would turn this approach on its head, prioritizing chaplains' personal faith over the service members they're called to serve. Minority faiths would suffer the most, since they are less likely to have access to a chaplain of their same tradition.

We ask the Commission to reaffirm existing laws and regulations defining military chaplains' roles and responsibilities with regard to the spiritual care of service members.

Conclusion

From the start, the Religious Liberty Commission has been tainted by religious chauvinism in its makeup and selective grievances aired during its hearings. The final draft report embodies those problems. As outlined above regarding our particular concerns, Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC) strongly opposes the Commission's analysis and recommendations.

Thank you for considering this input as part of the public comment process.

Sincerely,

Amanda Tyler
Executive Director
Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
www.BJConline.org



Rabbi David Segal, JD
Policy Counsel

PII [REDACTED] ext.303

[Instagram](#) • [YouTube](#) • [Facebook](#) • [TikTok](#)

From: Candyce Doles <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:30:5d -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Leaders of the Religious Liberty Commission,

My position on the Church and State separation is that it should remain as our founding fathers intended it to be.

In the past, we have seen horrible persecution when the church and state are one.

The pilgrims escaped Europe coming to America for freedom from the church; desiring to worship as they desired.

God has given us freedom; He has also told us to "render unto Caesar (government) the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." Matthew 22:21

The United States of America is a Christian Nation, founded on Christian principles.

In Isaiah 33:22 you will find the three branches of government, judicial, legislative and the office of the president; notice that church was not included. It needs to be separate, as it has been in our Country for the last 250 years.

Thank you for considering my stance on the decision of this Commission.

My prayers are with each one of you as you research this change to our Beautiful Constitution and the freedom for all it provides.

Candyce Doles

From: Alex Manea <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Freedom of conscience matters, keep church and state separate!

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:31:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty U.S. Department of Justice Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC

Dear Chair Patrick, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Respectfully and by God's Grace I lift up my voice to proclaim a truth which have always been and should be continuing from now on too, and that is the freedom of conscience of each citizen and human being, and particularly the freedom to choose one's religion. United States of America was founded on this freedom and as church and state were separate at the foundation of it, it should remain the same. It is unjust to impose one's religion/worship day through official reglementations, these two matters should remain separate, church and state, otherwise, the whole society will collapse and chaos and havoc will be the result.

I am a true believer in God, and I do believe religion is good for any nation, but it needs to be voluntary, chosen by the individual, and not imposed by any coercitive means, may them be politically correct.

Each individual should have the freedom to worship according to his own conscience, as God is giving us free will and choice, the same we should respect for our fellows brothers and sisters.

Thank you for your consideration,
With respect, Alexandru Manea

From: John N. <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- Separation of Church and States- John Neumann

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:31:27 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I have been hearing talk of how the separation between church and state is being weakened and / or removed. I was able to review the Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report. As a citizen, I want to voice my concern and disapproval of anything that weakens the separation of church and state, particularly through repealing the Johnson Amendment and government funding of religious non-profit activities.

I recently had the privilege of visiting several different countries in Europe where for hundreds of years people suffered under a unified church and state, being persecuted for their sincerely-held beliefs simply because they didn't hold the same beliefs as those in power.

Upon returning to the United States, I went through the passport control line and looked around. Some people looked like me, but most did not. There was such a vast diversity of backgrounds represented, but we each held an American passport. The principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are what have made this nation such a safe-haven and coveted destination for many (including my family) to immigrate to because of the freedom this country has afforded. None of this would have been possible without the separation of church and state.

Please do not bring church and state together. While I would love for everyone to hold my same dearly and sincerely-held beliefs, what makes this country so great is that we each have the freedom to decide what to believe and be respected and treated with dignity, even when there is a difference of beliefs. This freedom of choice benefits those of different faith and secular backgrounds.

From what I understand about the Johnson Amendment, it makes it so that charitable non-profit organizations (including religious) may "not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office." Do not repeal it, and please continue to enforce it.

Also, I am opposed to government funding of religious non-profit activities as this appears to be a slippery slope. Generally, when money is involved, people are tempted to do what would benefit them financially rather than what is right.

Thank you for taking the time to read my objections and concerns.

Sincerely,

John Neumann

From: Jeanine Kablanow <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

To: [REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Comments

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:32:31 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: RLC_Comment.docx

July 13, 2026

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

All due respect to you all for your work regarding religious liberty. You have spent many hours discussing and trying to come up with workable solutions for our country. However, I have some major concerns with your draft and I understand that I, as a citizen of the United States, am allowed to comment concerning your solutions.

1. It is my understanding that you do not believe that our constitution has the concept of separation of church and state. I cannot agree. Knowing American history, our forefathers came to America to get away from state- controlled religion, to be able to worship according to their consciences without interference by the state. The fact that the constitution says that the civil leaders were not to make any laws for or against any religion and that men should be able to follow their consciences is what made this nation great in the first place. Churches also were not to try to control the state. They were not allowed to say that only Christians could run for civil leadership. You are wanting to make it great again, am I right? So, why destroy what made it great?
2. I am also concerned with the talk of enforcing blue laws again. All that has been accomplished in the past has been to trample on the consciences of millions of people who are unable to conscientiously go along with Sunday observance. What about the Jews, the Seventh-day Baptists, the Seventh-day Adventists, those who believe in the Biblical Saturday Sabbath that the Lord made at creation? Genesis 2:1-3. The Seventh-day Sabbath has always been for mankind, NOT for Jews! There is no scripture that says Sunday is Sabbath. Jesus did not change it! The catholic church claims to have changed Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday through the power they claim was given to them by Christ, but the Bible says that God does not change and His word stands forever. If you have Sunday blue laws again, you will force millions of your people to either go against their consciences or go against the laws of the land. I do not believe that Saturday Sabbath should be enforced either. God does not coerce. He allows us to make our own decisions whether or not to obey Him. The Bible teaches that we are to be exemplary citizens, obeying all laws EXCEPT those that go against the laws of God. Romans 13:1, 7 = "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers....Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom is due; fear to whom fear...." In the book of Acts, Peter and John were arrested because they were preaching about Christ, not because they had done any crime. They were threatened that to continue speaking about Christ would bring further punishment. Their answer was what all true Christians believe. "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge you."
3. I am also extremely concerned with the thought of the government funding churches. When Jesus was on this earth, He made sacrifices to save and to help others. He often gave needy people His own meal. Christians, if they are true Christians, will sacrifice to help others. If the government starts funding our charities, programs, etc., the churches would not be the ones helping, the government would be the helper. We would end up with millions of people who call themselves Christians, but who are not actually living as their Lord lived. Are you really wanting to gain control over everything that happens in this world and make people believe that you are their Savior rather than God? Talking of Jesus, Paul wrote in Acts 4:12 = "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." You cannot be a Savior to anybody, only Jesus can. And, if you think you are a savior to men, you are putting yourself above God which will lead you to eternal death, not eternal life.

May the Lord be with you as you continue to talk of these things. May the Lord's will be done, NOT man's!!

Sincerely,

Jeanine Kablanow

From: Teresa Kodimer <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation between church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:32:38 -0400

Importance: Normal

I believe in the separation between church and state. There should be a wall between the two. I believe in the right to have freedom of conscience when it comes to religious matters.

I believe we are to receive God's Word as a supreme authority. We are to recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment, and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty, within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men. God's word must be recognized as above all human legislation. A "Thus saith the Lord" is not to be set aside for a "Thus saith the church" or a "Thus saith the state." The crown of Christ is to be lifted above the diadems of earthly potentates.

The Ten Commandments given by God are my religious duty to God and man. There is a duty to God and a civil duty to my fellow man within it. My duty to God should not be forced upon any man but to be responded too with the love that God gives to do such.

Thank you for considering my rights to religion according to the freedom we have enjoyed here in the United States of America, the greatest of nations!

Teresa Kodimer

Sent from my iPhone

From: Humble Sheep <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation Of Church And State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:33:36 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

I respectfully submit this comment to urge the Commission to defend the historic principles of religious liberty and the separation of church and state. I oppose any recommendation to the Department of Justice or another government agency that would do away with these constitutional safeguards or encourage greater unity between religious institutions and civil institutions.

The government should protect public order, individual rights, and equal treatment under the law. Religious institutions should advance their beliefs through teaching, persuasion, and voluntary faith. True religion does not need the state to compel belief or observance.

I therefore respectfully urge the Commission to reject any proposal that want to do away with the constitutional separation of church and state. Every church should remain free to proclaim its beliefs, and every citizen should remain free to accept or reject those beliefs without the interference of government.

Respectfully submitted,
Mrs. Brown

From: TJ Knutsons <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >, MaryAnn Knutson <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:33:42 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Sir or Madam,

My wife and I would like to go on record as being opposed to uniting church and state. We believe having this separation is the only condition where true religion can flourish. When a nation's civil government has become a proponent of a religion, it always becomes an opponent of another religion. Our country was founded by people who were fleeing nations where church and state were combined.

My wife is quadriplegic and Wheelchair dependent and our time is limited, but we wanted to take this opportunity to speak...let the separation remain. Roger Williams, founder of Rhode Island understood this well.

When our nation started to impose blue laws in the 1880s where citizens were fined and imprisoned for worshiping on the "wrong day" or refusing to worship on the "right day", it was a tragedy. Let's not return there.

Sincerely,

TJ Knutson &
Marianne Knutson

From: Holly Terei <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment: Support For Religious Liberty Commission Recommendations--Holly Terei

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:34:23 -0400

Importance: Normal

Inline-Images: image.png

Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Carson, and Members of the Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments regarding the protection of religious liberty in America. Throughout Georgia, I have worked with parents seeking answers about school district policies affecting religious expression, parental rights, curriculum transparency, and constitutional freedoms. Through Georgia's Open Records Act, I have investigated district policies, reviewed instructional materials, examined compliance with state law, and helped families navigate concerns involving the rights of students and parents. These experiences have shown that many school districts would benefit from clearer guidance regarding the constitutional rights of students, teachers, staff, and community members.

And as someone who has spent years advocating for educational freedom, parental rights, and constitutional governance in Georgia, I have seen firsthand that many disputes arise not from intentional hostility toward religion, but from uncertainty about what the Constitution actually protects. Clear guidance and education can prevent unnecessary conflict while ensuring that the rights of every American are respected.

My experience has demonstrated that religious liberty is not a theoretical constitutional principle but a fundamental freedom that requires continual vigilance and meaningful enforcement. While the First Amendment guarantees the free exercise of religion, many Georgia families remain uncertain about how those protections apply in public schools and other government institutions. Too often, confusion surrounding the law results in unnecessary restrictions on religious expression or inconsistent application of constitutional protections.

I strongly support the Commission's recommendations encouraging stronger protections for religious expression in public education.

Specifically, I encourage the Commission to recommend:

- Clear federal guidance explaining the religious liberty rights of students, parents, teachers, coaches, and school employees.
- Development of accessible "Know Your Rights" resources that families and educators can easily understand and reference.
- Professional development and training for school administrators regarding the constitutional protections afforded by the First Amendment.
- Stronger accountability and enforcement mechanisms when public institutions unlawfully restrict protected religious expression.
- Accessible reporting systems and legal resources for individuals whose religious liberty rights have been violated.

Religious liberty does not end when individuals leave their places of worship. Students should be free to pray individually, discuss their faith with classmates, participate in religious student organizations, and express

sincerely held beliefs consistent with constitutional protections. Parents should have confidence that schools respect both their fundamental role in directing the upbringing of their children and their family's religious convictions. Teachers and public employees should understand both their own constitutional rights and the legal boundaries governing religious expression in public institutions.

Thank you for your service and for undertaking this important work. I respectfully urge the Commission to adopt recommendations that provide clear guidance, meaningful enforcement, and practical resources that will help ensure every American can freely exercise their faith both inside and outside of our public schools.

Holly Tereí

Georgia Education Director

Citizens Defending Freedom

Email: [REDACTED] PII

Phone: [REDACTED] PII

Website: citizensdefendingfreedom.com



"We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done." - Psalm 78:4

From: ".Monica Uwajeh" <[REDACTED] P|| [REDACTED]>

To: [REDACTED] P|| [REDACTED]

Subject: [EXTERNAL] RLC Comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:34:29 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear distinguished commission members,

My name is Monica Uwajeh. I was born and currently reside in iMaine. The best way to find out the intent of the founders is to read what they wrote on the first amendment. As such, to dismiss Jefferson's to the Baptist of Danbury Connecticut is intellectually dishonest. Augustine of hippos is quoted as saying We should never judge a philosophy by its abusers. I dec@yo with you the atthesic interpretations of this idea that have a chilling effect on Christian speechther while fo@ms of speech must be tolerated. During covid, the lack of available ca@egiers invmy forced me into a hospital and nursing twice twice. On the first occasion, I overheard a nurse stating that quoting the bible loudly was a violation of other residence's @ight ' rights in her opinion. People seem to think freedom of religion means freedom from it. Although he was not a christian Jefferson's letter expressed profound respect for the idea of worship and a desi43 to protect it for government interference. He used the phrase wall of separation to describe how it did (and still does just that

With a Godly concern for of conscience,
Monica

From: Daniel Schwick <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission -

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:35:21e0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Sir or Madam,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to contribute a comment to this important topic.

In the history of Christianity we find many examples that speak against a connection between church and state. Many people have been harmed and have lost their lives because they wanted to live out their faith freely according to their conscience.

In particular, I would like to cite our Lord Jesus Christ himself as an example at this point. The leadership of the church at that time handed our Lord over to the Roman authorities as the state and demanded the death penalty due to different interpretations of religion and how it should be lived out. Pressure was exerted on Pontius Pilate as a representative of the state, and so he sentenced our Lord to death.

This principle can also be found in the period of the Middle Ages. People who read the Bible and believed according to their knowledge and also wanted to live out the faith were often persecuted by the established churches using the state, sometimes also by putting pressure on the rulers over the different States. As we know, this happened not only in Catholic but also in Protestant territories.

I hope and pray that my modest contribution will help you to find a decision on how to deal with the topic of church and state.

Kind regards.

Daniel Schwick

From: phillip bears <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Draft report on Religious liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:35:23 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear [Recipient Name],

I am writing to share my thoughts on a matter of great importance regarding our nation's foundational principles.

I strongly agree with the principles of Roger Williams concerning the wall of separation between church and state. As a man of faith, I see the Constitution of the USA as having been a light to other countries. Historically, those nations that have mingled church and state became countries of tyranny to those who did not believe as the state church dictated.

We need to protect liberty of conscience in order not to fall into this abyss. I believe it is vital that we continue to uphold these values to preserve freedom for everyone.

Best regards,

Phillip Bear

From: "WISE: Walking In the Savior's Example" <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church & State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:36:04 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I write to respectfully express my profound disagreement with the recommendation that the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment be reinterpreted to diminish the historic separation of church and state. Such a recommendation is inconsistent with the text of the Constitution, the intent of its principal architects, and the biblical principle that matters of conscience belong to God rather than civil government. The First Amendment declares that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." These two protections were designed to work together. The Establishment Clause prevents the government from exercising authority over religion, while the Free Exercise Clause protects every citizen's right to worship or not worship according to conscience.

Together, they have made the United States one of the greatest examples of religious liberty in human history. Thomas Jefferson famously described this constitutional principle as a "wall of separation between church and state." Contrary to modern claims that this phrase has no constitutional significance, Jefferson was not inventing a new doctrine. He was describing a principle already embedded within the

First Amendment, that government possesses no rightful authority to establish, direct, or compel religious observance. No founder articulated this principle more clearly than James Madison, often called the "Father of the Constitution." In his 1785 memorial and remonstrance against religious assessments, Madison declared that "religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence." Religion, he argued, must remain beyond the jurisdiction of civil government because the duty owed to God precedes the authority of the state itself.

Decades later, Madison reaffirmed this conviction, writing in 1822, "Religion and government will both exist in greater purity the less they are mixed together." This was not hostility toward religion. It was the recognition that both faith and government are corrupted when either assumes the authority of the other.

Benjamin Franklin expressed the same principle in remarkably practical terms, "When a religion is good, it will support itself, and when its professors are obliged to call for the help of the civil power, tis a sign of its being a bad one. True religion persuades by truth and love, not by legislation or coercion." These principles are not merely constitutional, they are biblical. When questioned about civil authority, Jesus Christ declared, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." In those few words, Christ established a distinction between the jurisdiction of civil government and the jurisdiction of conscience. Government possesses legitimate authority over civil order and the protection of equal rights, but worship, doctrine, and the relationship between an individual and God remain beyond its lawful reach. History repeatedly confirms the wisdom of this distinction.

Whenever church and state have been joined, both have suffered. Religious institutions have too often sought the power of the sword, while governments have attempted to regulate the conscience. The result has not been greater faith, but persecution, division, and the suppression of liberty.

Americans understood this lesson well. Many of the earliest settlers came to these shores precisely because they had fled governments that enforced religious conformity. The founders sought to break from that centuries-old pattern by denying the federal government any authority over religion. Article 6 prohibits religious tests for public office, and the First Amendment forbids laws respecting an establishment of religion. These provisions were not accidental, they were deliberate safeguards designed to preserve liberty of conscience for every citizen. The dangers of abandoning these principles are not merely theoretical.

During the late 19th century, proposals such as the Blair-Sunday Rest Bill sought to use civil law to enforce what many considered a religious duty. At the same time, members of mine own faith were imprisoned in Tennessee and sentenced to chain gangs simply for working on Sunday while observing the 7th Day Sabbath according to their convictions. Their experience serves as a reminder that sincere religious majorities, when empowered by civil authority, can unintentionally deny the very liberty they seek to preserve. This is why contemporary calls to weaken the separation of church and state are deeply concerning.

A government that possesses the authority to favor one religious tradition necessarily possesses the authority to disfavor another. The same power that today may benefit one denomination could tomorrow be turned against it. Religious liberty cannot be secure if it depends upon which faith happens to hold political influence at a given moment. The genius of the American experiment is that it protects the conscience of every person equally, Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, atheist, and every other citizen enjoys the same protection because the government is forbidden from deciding questions of religious truth. That neutrality has not weakened religion in America. It has allowed it to flourish through conviction rather than compulsion.

Government is at its best when it protects the free exercise of religion, not when it defines, directs, or advances it. Likewise, religion is at its strongest when it relies upon persuasion rather than political power. The preservation of both depends upon maintaining the distinction the founders carefully established. For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to reject any interpretation of the Constitution that diminishes the historic separation of church and state. The preservation of religious liberty depends upon maintaining the proper boundaries between civil authority and matters of conscience. That principle is faithful to the Constitution, consistent with the teachings of Scripture, affirmed by the architects of our Republic and essential to preserving liberty for future generations. Respectfully submitted,

From: Diana Chambers <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedoms

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:36:57 -0400

Importance: Normal

Good Afternoon,

I am writing to you as a proud citizen of the USA for all of my life. I was born and raised in the Midwest with a religious background. What I have loved about our country is the ability to live out and worship in my preferred choice of faith without fear of prosecution or persecution, such as exist in other countries.

Therefore, I am deeply concerned with some verbiage that has come up where the government might choose to step into the area of some religions and make demands that would hamper the freedom that we so rightly have in this beautiful country. I believe that this country was founded and exists because people of faith in God have lived a life of leadership, servanthood and existing together peacefully. I do not believe in so-called "religions" that kill people in the name of their respective "god/gods" nor do I believe in anarchy over governments. But I do believe that there should be separation of church and state in all areas of religion.

I respectfully ask that you uphold the standards that Thomas Jefferson had put into place and keep our religious freedom intact and out of the control of the government.

Sincerely,

Diana Chambers

[REDACTED] PII

From: me 2u <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:37:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

I strongly support the fundamental principle of the separation of church and state, which is a cornerstone of our nation's values. Historical evidence demonstrates that the amalgamation of church and state has often led to acts of persecution, which is a profoundly unjust occurrence.

Julie M. From Oregon

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

From: K Keiths [REDACTED] PII

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Karmen Keith

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:37:48 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission Members:

As a citizen of the United States of America, I have been quite deeply alarmed and concerned regarding multiple attempts to the repudiation of various points of our U. S. Constitution and its Amendments. With this latest report and recommendations by your Religious Liberty Commission, things have truly gone too far.

I personally do not believe that we need to be building "bridges" between church and state and that they should remain separate. I do not agree with utilizing public funds for church use for any reason. I also do not believe in public funds being utilized to support religious education, religious clubs or any such thing on public or private campuses. This would also apply to funding religious charter schools, etc.

Furthermore, I do not believe the Johnson Amendment should be repealed. Churches, their clergy and church members should not be allowed to endorse, promote or encourage the voting for any political candidate and expessionally not from the pulpit. Religion and politics should remain separate. I therefore request that the Johnson Amendment remain fully enforced. The body of Christ is not for sale. Other religions outside of Christianity should also be excluded from endorsing, promoting and encouraging the voting for any political candidate. This opens the door for corruption, blackmail, wrongful influence, unnecessary persuasion, etc. Let the people think and decide for themselves. Those who are Christians and attend church are there to further their relationship with God, not to hear about politics. Other religious groups have similar reason for assembly. Religion and politics should not be mixed.

Lastly, there should be no special treatment or exceptions given for Jewish people, the state of Israel or any other religious group. Let religion be religion and politics/government be and remain separate. Please don't try to build a "bridge" between church and state. Keep them separate as it protects both church and government. We should be unbiased and not favor any religion, not even Christianity above another.

Sincerely,

Karmen Keith
Allons, Tennessee

From: Ronald Rasmussen <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:38:06 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a citizen of the United States of America.

I am registering my support for religious liberty - separation of church and state.

I believe that the government has no authority to tell its citizens and residents what to believe or how to worship. Government does not have authority over religion.

Sincerely,

Ronald Rasmussen

[REDACTED] PII

From: Janean Mason <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Separation of Church and State-Janean Mason

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:39:26 -0400

Importance: Normal

July 13, 2026

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and all members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I only recently became aware of the recommendations being made by the RLC and am writing as a person of faith to share my concerns. In my understanding of our history as a nation, I see that the rich blessings God has granted to this country for the past 250 years directly flowed from the foundation of separation of church and state, allowing liberty of conscience, especially in the area of worship. Those who came to this country, often came due to religious persecution in pursuit of a place where they could follow the dictates of conscience undisturbed to worship God.

There has already been far too much collaboration and compromise as far as the wall between church and state. I would urge you not to recommend repealing the Johnson Amendment, which would further politicize American churches and promote more direct funding of religious activities with government monies.

I also appeal to you to strengthen the Free Exercise clause and not to remove the Establishment Clause. Building a bridge, as your committee suggests, between church and state will open the gates for corruption as well as potential for persecution of minority religions. Any time political and religious power were combined in government, persecution followed and the results were disastrous.

So please, KEEP THE WALL and reinforce it to protect the churches and allow the citizens to worship freely within the dictates of conscience. This wall will protect government, churches and citizens alike.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Janean Mason
Deeply concerned American citizen

From: Billie Augustine <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Bildade Augustin

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:39:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a citizen to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state — especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God — and that's bad for the church and the country alike. Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,
Bildade Augustin
Boston, Massachusetts

Sent from my iPhone

From: Jeff Oster <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comments on the Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:39:37 -0400

Importance: Normal

Hello,

The Religious Freedom Task Force of the League of Women Voters of Colorado wishes to comment on the Religious Liberty Draft Report.

Thank you.

Jeffrey Oster, DPM
Chair, Religious Freedom Task Force
The League of Women Voters of Colorado

Public Comments on the Religious Liberty Commission's Report Draft

From the Religious Freedom Task Force, League of Women Voters of Colorado

Jeffrey Oster, DPM, Chair

Submitted to the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

July 13, 2026

Executive Summary

The League of Women Voters of Colorado (LWVCO) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission.

The Colorado League shares the Commission's conviction that religious liberty is among the most fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. The free exercise of religion has enriched American civic life since the nation's founding and continues to protect the rights of individuals and communities to live according to their deepest convictions.

Our agreement, however, ends where the Commission proposes that religious liberty is best preserved by narrowing the constitutional meaning of the Establishment Clause and redefining the relationship between religion and government.

The First Amendment contains two complementary protections: the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause. Neither exists independently of the other. Religious liberty is secured not simply because

government protects religious exercise, but because government is constitutionally prohibited from favoring one religion over another, religion over nonreligion, or one interpretation of faith over competing interpretations.

The League of Women Voters of Colorado recently completed a multi-year study of religious freedom culminating in the adoption of the Colorado Religious Freedom Position, which was subsequently adopted by the League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) through the concurrence process. That position reflects broad consensus that government best protects religious liberty by remaining neutral toward matters of religion while vigorously defending every person's right to worship, not worship, change beliefs, express conscience, and participate equally in public life.

The Commission's report correctly recognizes that Americans of many faiths have experienced discrimination and that government should vigorously protect their constitutional rights. The League strongly supports robust enforcement of the Free Exercise Clause, protection against religious discrimination, reasonable religious accommodations, and equal treatment of religious organizations under the law.

However, the report repeatedly characterizes the constitutional principle of separation of church and state as a historical mistake and recommends replacing it with what it describes as a "bridge between church and state." It proposes significant changes in federal policy intended to reshape Establishment Clause jurisprudence, expand governmental partnerships with religion, repeal the Johnson Amendment, and direct federal agencies to adopt a particular constitutional understanding of religion in public life.

LWVCO respectfully disagrees.

Our nation's remarkable religious diversity—including Christians of many traditions, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Native American religions, Humanists, atheists, agnostics, and countless others—has flourished because government has generally refrained from deciding which religious beliefs deserve official preference. The constitutional promise of religious liberty belongs equally to those who profess faith and to those who profess none. This is a fundamental truth of our democracy.

LWVCO is also concerned that the composition of the Commission and the testimony emphasized throughout the report do not adequately reflect the breadth of America's religious and philosophical diversity. Although the report states that religious liberty exists for all Americans, most of its examples, witnesses, and policy recommendations focus on issues affecting particular Christian communities. Future commissions addressing religious liberty would benefit from broader participation by representatives of minority faiths, Indigenous religions, secular organizations, constitutional scholars representing multiple perspectives, and organizations dedicated to protecting civil liberties for all Americans.

Finally, LWVCO questions whether an advisory commission charged with recommending significant reinterpretations of constitutional law is most appropriately situated within the Department of Justice, the nation's chief law-enforcement agency. Public confidence in the impartial administration of justice depends upon the Department's demonstrated neutrality toward religion.

LWVCO submits these comments in the belief that America's religious liberty has endured not because government has promoted religion, nor because government has excluded religion from public life, but because our Constitution protects every person's freedom of conscience equally. That constitutional balance remains one of the nation's greatest achievements and deserves careful preservation for future generations.

II. The Colorado League's Constitutional Understanding of Religious Liberty

The League of Women Voters of Colorado believes that religious liberty is not merely a protection for religion. It is a protection for human freedom of conscience.

The First Amendment recognizes that every individual possesses the inherent right to determine the deepest questions of belief according to conscience. For many Americans, those convictions are expressed through religious faith. For others, they are expressed through nonreligious moral or philosophical beliefs. The Constitution protects both.

The Religion Clauses of the First Amendment establish two complementary guarantees:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Neither guarantee is complete without the other.

The Free Exercise Clause protects individuals and religious communities from governmental interference with sincerely held religious beliefs and practices. It affirms that faith may be lived openly, individually and collectively, without fear of governmental punishment or discrimination.

The Establishment Clause protects that same freedom by preventing government from exercising religious authority or favoring particular religious beliefs, institutions, or traditions. It ensures that government remains the protector of religious liberty rather than its arbiter.

These two clauses are not competing constitutional commands. They are mutually reinforcing safeguards that together preserve freedom of conscience for every American.

For more than two centuries, this constitutional balance has allowed an extraordinary diversity of religious communities to flourish. The United States today is home to Christians representing hundreds of denominations, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Baha'is, Native American religious traditions, Humanists, atheists, agnostics, and many others. Americans regularly change religious affiliations, embrace new faith traditions, or choose no religious affiliation at all. This remarkable pluralism is itself evidence that government neutrality has strengthened, rather than weakened, religious liberty.

LWVCO therefore rejects the premise that protecting religious liberty requires government to elevate religion generally or particular religious traditions specifically. Government lacks both constitutional authority and institutional competence to determine which religious beliefs are true, which theological understandings best promote civic virtue, or whether religious belief is superior to nonreligious systems of moral conviction.

Those questions belong to individuals, families, religious communities, and voluntary associations—not to the state.

The Commission correctly observes that religious organizations have made extraordinary contributions to American society through education, healthcare, disaster relief, charitable service, refugee assistance, civil rights advocacy, and countless other endeavors. LWVCO readily acknowledges these contributions and supports the right of religious organizations to continue serving their communities consistent with their sincerely held beliefs.

At the same time, American history also demonstrates that many of our nation's greatest advances have resulted from cooperation among people holding widely differing religious and philosophical convictions. The abolition of slavery, the movement for women's suffrage, labor reform, civil rights, scientific advancement, public education, and countless humanitarian efforts have drawn support from people motivated by diverse religious

traditions as well as secular ethical commitments. The Constitution wisely protects this diversity by ensuring that government neither privileges nor disadvantages any particular source of moral conviction.

The Colorado League's Religious Freedom Position reflects this constitutional understanding. Religious liberty means more than protecting worship. It encompasses the equal dignity of every person's conscience and the equal right of every individual to participate fully in civic life regardless of religion, denomination, or absence of religious belief.

Accordingly, LWVCO supports:

- vigorous protection of the free exercise of religion;
- equal treatment of religious organizations under the law;
- reasonable accommodations for sincerely held religious beliefs when consistent with the rights of others and compelling governmental interests;
- robust enforcement of laws prohibiting religious discrimination;
- governmental neutrality among religions and between religion and nonreligion;
- preservation of the constitutional separation of governmental authority from religious authority.

This constitutional equilibrium has served the Nation well. It has not produced hostility toward religion. Rather, it has produced one of the most religiously diverse societies in human history while protecting the liberty of every citizen to believe, worship, question, dissent, convert, or refrain from religious belief altogether.

LWVCO believes that this balance remains the Constitution's greatest safeguard of religious liberty.

III. Religious Liberty Requires Both Religion Clauses

The League of Women Voters of Colorado agrees with the Commission that the Free Exercise Clause occupies a central place within the American constitutional tradition. Government should neither punish nor unnecessarily burden the sincere exercise of religion. Religious communities should be free to worship, educate, assemble, serve others, and organize their institutions according to their beliefs, subject only to those compelling governmental interests recognized under constitutional law.

Where the Colorado League respectfully departs from the Commission is in its understanding of the Establishment Clause.

Throughout the report, the Commission argues that the constitutional principle commonly described as the "separation of church and state" has been misunderstood and should be replaced by what it characterizes as a more historically accurate "bridge between church and state." The report contends that excessive reliance upon the Establishment Clause has unnecessarily excluded religion from public life and recommends that the Department of Justice adopt new guidance reflecting this interpretation.

LWVCO believes this presents a false constitutional choice.

The Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause were not written to compete with one another. Together, they establish the constitutional framework within which religious liberty has flourished for more than two centuries. Neither clause should be interpreted in isolation from the other.

The Establishment Clause is frequently misunderstood as protecting government from religion. It does not. Rather, it protects religion from the government. History demonstrates why this distinction matters.

Many of the earliest European settlers came to North America not because religion was absent from public life, but because governments favored one church over another, compelled religious conformity, imposed religious taxes, restricted dissenting congregations, or punished those whose beliefs differed from those of the established church. The Founders inherited these experiences and sought to prevent the federal government from acquiring similar authority.

James Madison warned that religion "can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence." Thomas Jefferson argued that civil government has no authority over the human mind. Although they differed in theological outlook, both recognized that authentic religious belief cannot be created, sustained, or judged by governmental power.

For this reason, the Constitution deliberately withholds from government the authority to determine religious truth or to favor one religious tradition over another. This constitutional restraint has produced one of the greatest achievements in American history.

Unlike many nations that maintained established churches well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the United States became home to extraordinary religious diversity. Thousands of congregations representing hundreds of Christian denominations coexist alongside Jewish synagogues, Muslim mosques, Hindu temples, Sikh gurdwaras, Buddhist communities, Native American spiritual traditions, and countless other religious communities. Millions of Americans also identify with no religious tradition while participating fully in civic life.

This remarkable pluralism did not arise despite the Establishment Clause. It arose because of it.

Government neutrality has allowed religious communities to compete freely in what Justice Hugo Black once described as the marketplace of ideas—not through governmental preference, but through persuasion, example, service, and voluntary association.

LWVCO is therefore concerned that the Commission's repeated criticism of the constitutional principle commonly described as the separation of church and state risks misunderstanding both its historical development and its continuing importance. The phrase itself does not appear in the Constitution, as the Commission correctly observes.

Neither do the phrases "judicial review," "executive privilege," or "one person, one vote." Yet each describes constitutional principles that have developed through generations of judicial interpretation and constitutional practice.

"Separation of church and state" is best understood not as a constitutional slogan but as a shorthand description of governmental neutrality in matters of religion. Properly understood, it does not require hostility toward religion. It does not require removing religion from public life. It does not require citizens to abandon religious convictions when participating in democratic debate. Instead, it requires that government itself refrain from exercising religious authority or favoring particular religious beliefs.

This distinction is essential. Citizens may bring religious convictions into public discourse. Religious organizations may advocate for public policy. Faith traditions may inspire charitable work, civic engagement, and moral leadership. But government must remain the institution that protects the equal liberty of every citizen regardless of religious belief.

LWVCO therefore believes that strengthening religious liberty does not require weakening the Establishment Clause. On the contrary, preserving both Religion Clauses as complementary constitutional guarantees remains

the most effective means of protecting religious liberty for Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Native Americans, Humanists, atheists, agnostics, and every other American.

The Constitution protects religion most effectively when government protects everyone equally.

IV. Government Neutrality Is the Constitutional Foundation of Religious Liberty

The Commission repeatedly argues that the constitutional principle commonly described as the separation of church and state has been misunderstood and that the federal government should instead embrace a closer partnership between religion and government. It describes religious liberty as a "bridge between church and state" and recommends that the Department of Justice issue formal guidance adopting this understanding of the Establishment Clause.

LWVCO respectfully disagrees with this proposed constitutional shift.

The Constitution does not require government to be hostile toward religion. Nor does it require government to promote religion. Rather, it requires government to remain neutral in matters of religion so that every individual is free to determine questions of conscience without governmental influence, preference, or coercion. Government neutrality should never be confused with governmental indifference.

The federal government has an affirmative obligation to protect every person's right to worship freely, assemble peacefully, establish religious institutions, educate children according to sincerely held beliefs, and participate fully in civic life regardless of religious affiliation. It must vigorously enforce laws prohibiting discrimination based upon religion and provide reasonable accommodations where required by law.

At the same time, government must refrain from deciding which religious beliefs are correct, which religious traditions contribute most to society, or which theological understandings deserve official encouragement. The Constitution assigns those judgments to citizens, not to government.

Religious Liberty Protects Believers Because Government Is Limited

Throughout the report, the Commission argues that religion is indispensable to American freedom and that government should recognize religion's unique contributions to civic life. LWVCO acknowledges the profound contributions that religious communities have made—and continue to make—to education, healthcare, disaster relief, poverty relief, refugee resettlement, civil rights, and humanitarian service. Those contributions deserve recognition. They do not, however, justify governmental preference.

Religious liberty exists because government lacks constitutional authority to determine whether religion is socially superior to nonreligious belief, whether one faith tradition contributes more than another, or whether religious belief is necessary for responsible citizenship. The Constitution wisely removes these questions from governmental authority altogether. That constitutional restraint protects religion itself.

History demonstrates that religious communities flourish most fully when their beliefs are embraced voluntarily rather than encouraged or validated by governmental power.

The Equal Liberty of Every Conscience

LWVCO believes that every American enters the public square with equal dignity. Some citizens understand their moral obligations through Christianity. Others through Judaism. Others through Islam. Others through

Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Native American spiritual traditions, or countless other faiths. Still others understand their moral obligations through secular ethical traditions, philosophy, humanism, or personal conscience. The Constitution does not distinguish among them. Its protection extends equally to every person because liberty belongs to individuals—not to institutions, denominations, or majorities.

Accordingly, government should never place itself in the position of determining whether religious belief is more valuable than nonreligious conviction or whether one religious tradition more accurately reflects the nation's history or identity than another.

The Colorado League's Religious Freedom Position recognizes that protecting freedom of conscience necessarily protects both religious exercise and freedom from governmental establishment of religion. These constitutional guarantees are inseparable.

Religious Pluralism Is America's Constitutional Success Story

The Commission correctly celebrates America's extraordinary religious diversity. LWVCO joins in that celebration. But LWVCO reaches a different conclusion about why that diversity exists.

America has become one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world precisely because government has generally refrained from establishing an official religious identity. No denomination receives governmental preference. No church enjoys official legal status. No citizen must profess a particular faith to participate fully in public life.

Religious communities succeed through persuasion rather than governmental endorsement. This constitutional arrangement has benefited majority and minority faiths alike.

Indeed, many religious communities that today enjoy broad constitutional protection—including Catholics, Jews, Latter-day Saints, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and numerous others—have, at different moments in American history, depended upon governmental neutrality to protect them from discrimination by religious majorities. LWVCO believes this history should guide future constitutional interpretation.

The proper question is not whether religion should influence individual citizens. Of course it should. Religious conviction has inspired abolitionists, advocates for women's suffrage, leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, humanitarian organizations, refugee ministries, hospitals, schools, and countless acts of compassion and justice. The proper constitutional question is whether government itself should favor, promote, or institutionalize religious belief. LWVCO believes the Constitution answers that question in the negative.

Religious Liberty Belongs Equally to the Religious and the Nonreligious

Perhaps the most important constitutional principle underlying religious liberty is that it protects not only religious believers but also those who profess no religion. The Supreme Court has long recognized that the First Amendment safeguards freedom of conscience itself. That protection extends to believers, doubters, seekers, and those who reject religious belief entirely. This is not hostility toward religion. It is equality before the law.

A Christian's freedom to preach depends upon an atheist's freedom not to attend. A Muslim's freedom to worship depends upon a Jew's freedom to disagree. A Hindu's freedom to build a temple depends upon a

Christian's freedom to build a church. Each freedom reinforces the others. Government protects all by preferring none.

That constitutional insight has allowed the United States to become a nation in which extraordinary religious vitality coexists with extraordinary religious diversity. LWVCO believes that this remains one of America's greatest constitutional achievements and should remain the guiding principle for interpreting both Religion Clauses.

V. Religious Equality Is the Measure of Religious Liberty

The League of Women Voters of Colorado welcomes the Commission's repeated affirmation that religious liberty belongs to Americans of every faith. The report expressly states that religious liberty exists for Christians, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and others, and acknowledges America's religious pluralism as one of the nation's defining strengths. LWVCO shares that commitment.

We respectfully suggest, however, that religious liberty is measured not simply by the protection afforded to the religious majority, but by the security experienced by religious minorities and those who profess no religion at all.

Throughout American history, minority faith communities have depended upon the Constitution's guarantees to worship freely without governmental preference for another faith tradition. Catholics once faced widespread discrimination in many states. Jewish Americans confronted exclusion from civic and educational institutions. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints experienced both governmental persecution and mob violence. Native American religious practices were suppressed through federal policy for generations. Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and numerous other communities have likewise encountered discrimination at various moments in our nation's history.

The constitutional promise of religious liberty has protected each of these communities not because government endorsed their beliefs, but because government was prohibited from preferring another religion instead. That remains the central insight of the First Amendment.

Religious Liberty Must Include the Freedom Not to Believe

LWVCO believes that religious liberty also protects Americans whose moral convictions are not grounded in organized religion. The First Amendment protects freedom of conscience itself. That protection extends to those who embrace religious faith, those who are questioning, those who change religious traditions, and those who conclude that no religion expresses their understanding of the world.

A government that protects only religious belief cannot fully protect liberty of conscience. LWVCO therefore believes that constitutional neutrality between religion and nonreligion is not hostility toward faith. Rather, it is the mechanism through which every individual enjoys equal citizenship regardless of personal belief. This principle is particularly important in an increasingly diverse nation.

Today, Americans include members of hundreds of religious traditions, individuals who identify with more than one faith tradition, those who practice Indigenous spiritual traditions, Humanists, atheists, agnostics, and many whose beliefs do not fit traditional categories. Their equal citizenship depends upon a government that neither rewards nor disadvantages any worldview.

Diversity of Perspective Strengthens Constitutional Deliberation

LWVCO recognizes the distinguished public service of the members of the Religious Liberty Commission and appreciates the many hours devoted to preparing this report. At the same time, LWVCO believes that future commissions addressing questions of religious liberty should more fully reflect the religious and philosophical diversity of the United States.

The Commission includes respected representatives of several religious traditions, but its membership is predominantly Christian, and its advisory boards similarly emphasize Christian institutions and legal organizations, with more limited representation from other faith communities. The report likewise devotes substantial attention to disputes involving Christian schools, churches, ministries, educators, and healthcare providers.

This observation is not a criticism of those participants. Rather, it reflects the constitutional principle that deliberations concerning religious liberty are strengthened when they include voices from the full spectrum of American belief. Questions concerning the Religion Clauses affect every American equally.

Accordingly, future commissions should include meaningful participation by representatives of:

- Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and other minority faith communities;
- Native American religious traditions;
- historically Black churches and other Christian traditions representing the full diversity of American Christianity;
- secular constitutional scholars;
- Humanist, atheist, and other nonreligious organizations;
- civil-rights organizations with expertise in First Amendment protections;
- scholars of American religious history representing a range of constitutional perspectives.

Such participation would not dilute religious liberty. It would strengthen public confidence that recommendations affecting the constitutional rights of all Americans have been informed by the lived experiences of all Americans.

Equal Citizenship Requires Equal Constitutional Concern

One of the Colorado League's principal concerns is that public discussion of religious liberty can unintentionally become focused upon the constitutional interests of whichever religious community currently experiences conflict with government. Those concerns deserve careful attention. But constitutional liberty requires a broader perspective. A constitutional principle that protects today's majority should also protect tomorrow's minority. A rule adopted to safeguard one faith tradition must also preserve the equal liberty of every other faith tradition.

Likewise, constitutional protections designed to accommodate religious practice should not inadvertently communicate governmental endorsement of religion itself. LWVCO therefore encourages the Commission to evaluate every recommendation by asking a simple constitutional question:

Would this recommendation provide the same protection to every religion—and to those who profess none?

If the answer is yes, the recommendation is likely consistent with the First Amendment's guarantee of equal liberty. If the answer depends upon the popularity, historical influence, or theological content of a particular faith

tradition, then further constitutional reflection is warranted. LWVCO believes that equal liberty—not governmental preference—is the enduring constitutional promise of the Religion Clauses.

Public Funding for Religious Education

Recent Supreme Court decisions have recognized that generally available public education benefits may not exclude otherwise eligible religious schools solely because they are religious. At the same time, the expansion of public funding for private religious education raises broader questions about governmental neutrality and the long-term strength of public education. Because public schools serve students of every faith and of no faith, policymakers should carefully consider how funding decisions affect both religious liberty and the state's responsibility to maintain a strong, accessible public education system for all children.

Public education illustrates the tension between religious liberty and democracy

The Commission's recommendations regarding religious education provide a concrete example of the challenges between religious liberty and the full exercise of democracy. If tax dollars increasingly support religious schools under the banner of religious liberty:

- public schools lose resources,
- citizens increasingly educate children in separate religious systems,
- children have fewer opportunities to learn alongside classmates from different faiths and backgrounds,
- civic identity becomes weaker while religious identity becomes politically stronger.

Democracy requires citizens capable of deliberating across differences. Public education has historically been one of the principal institutions where that civic formation occurs. Policies that substantially weaken public education while directing public funds toward religious education may unintentionally weaken one of democracy's most important civic institutions.

VI. Response to Recommendation One:

The Department of Justice Should Protect Religious Liberty Through Governmental Neutrality

The Commission's first recommendation asks the Department of Justice to issue guidance "clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state." Throughout the report, the Commission argues that the constitutional principle commonly described as the separation of church and state has been misunderstood and should be replaced with a closer relationship between religion and government.

The League of Women Voters of Colorado respectfully urges the Commission to reconsider this recommendation.

LWVCO agrees that the Department of Justice plays an essential role in protecting religious liberty. The Department should vigorously enforce constitutional protections for religious exercise, prosecute religious discrimination where authorized by law, defend the rights of religious minorities, and ensure that governmental institutions neither inhibit nor punish sincerely held religious belief. The Department's responsibility, however, is

not to promote a particular theological understanding of the relationship between religion and government. Its responsibility is to enforce the Constitution impartially.

The Constitution Limits Government—Not Religion

Throughout American history, religious liberty has flourished because constitutional limits were placed upon governmental power rather than upon religious belief. The Religion Clauses do not authorize government to determine which religious teachings are socially beneficial, historically authentic, or morally superior. Nor do they authorize government to determine that religion generally deserves greater constitutional favor than nonreligious systems of conscience.

Instead, the Constitution removes those questions from governmental authority. By doing so, it leaves churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, religious schools, voluntary associations, families, and individual citizens free to answer them according to conscience. This constitutional restraint has been one of the nation's greatest strengths.

Government protects religion best when it refrains from becoming an advocate for religion.

Governmental Neutrality Is Not Secularism

The Commission frequently contrasts what it describes as "separation of church and state" with a more cooperative relationship between religion and government. LWVCO believes this framing presents a false choice. Governmental neutrality is not secular ideology. It is not hostility toward religion. It is not the exclusion of religious voices from democratic debate.

To the contrary, governmental neutrality permits religious Americans to participate fully in public life precisely because government does not decide whose religious convictions deserve official preference. Religious citizens remain entirely free to advocate legislation inspired by their faith.

Religious organizations remain free to educate, worship, serve their communities, and participate in public discourse. Public officials remain free to hold religious convictions. The constitutional limitation applies to governmental authority—not to religious expression. This distinction preserves liberty for everyone.

Religious Diversity Has Changed the Constitutional Landscape

LWVCO recognizes that the United States of 2026 differs significantly from the United States of 1789. America has become one of the most religiously diverse nations in human history. Our communities include hundreds of Christian denominations alongside Jewish congregations, Muslim communities, Hindu temples, Sikh gurdwaras, Buddhist centers, Native American religious traditions, Baha'i communities, Humanists, atheists, agnostics, and many others. Government serves them all.

Precisely because of this extraordinary diversity, government must exercise exceptional care to avoid actions that reasonably communicate official preference for one religious tradition or one understanding of religion. The broader our religious diversity becomes, the more important governmental neutrality becomes. Neutrality is no longer simply a constitutional doctrine. It is a practical necessity for governing a pluralistic democracy.

The Department of Justice Must Remain a Neutral Guardian of Constitutional Rights

LWVCO is particularly concerned because this recommendation would be implemented through the Department of Justice. The Department occupies a unique constitutional position. It prosecutes violations of federal law. It defends civil rights. It represents the United States before federal courts. It investigates discrimination.

Its legitimacy depends upon public confidence that constitutional protections will be administered impartially. For that reason, any Department-wide guidance concerning the Religion Clauses should emphasize equal protection for all religious traditions and for those who profess no religion.

Department guidance should avoid language that could reasonably be interpreted as endorsing particular theological understandings or suggesting that government views religion itself as constitutionally preferred over nonreligious belief. The Department's constitutional mission is not to define religion. Its mission is to protect liberty and nurture democratic governance.

Democracy depends on a government that belongs equally to every citizen. Religious liberty protects that democracy when it safeguards freedom of conscience for all. It undermines democracy when government uses its power to privilege particular religious beliefs, direct public resources toward religious institutions, or reinterpret constitutional protections in ways that favor some faiths over others. The Department of Justice should enforce the Constitution impartially—not become an advocate for any religious vision. Religious liberty and democracy flourish together only when government remains neutral among religions and between religion and nonreligion.

The Colorado League's Recommendation

LWVCO respectfully recommends that the Commission modify Recommendation One to emphasize the Department of Justice's historic responsibility to:

- protect the free exercise rights of every individual and religious community;
- enforce the Establishment Clause with equal concern for believers and nonbelievers;
- safeguard governmental neutrality among religions and between religion and nonreligion;
- protect minority faiths with the same vigor afforded majority faiths;
- ensure that constitutional protections are administered without regard to theology or religious affiliation.

The Constitution has succeeded not because government has chosen one understanding of religion, but because government has protected the equal liberty of every conscience. LWVCO believes that this constitutional balance should remain the guiding principle of Department of Justice policy.

VII. The Department of Justice Must Protect Religious Liberty Without Becoming Its Arbiter

One of the Colorado League's principal concerns is institutional rather than ideological. The Religious Liberty Commission was established within the Department of Justice and directed to recommend executive actions, litigation strategies, agency guidance, and legislative priorities concerning religious liberty. The report further recommends creation of a Department of Justice Religious Liberty Task Force to prioritize litigation and develop government-wide guidance interpreting the Religion Clauses.

LWVCO respectfully questions whether this institutional structure best serves the constitutional values the Commission seeks to advance.

The Department of Justice occupies a unique place in American government. Unlike advisory commissions established to study policy questions from multiple perspectives, the Department exercises the sovereign authority of the United States. It prosecutes criminal violations. It enforces federal civil rights statutes. It appears before the federal judiciary on behalf of the United States. It investigates discrimination. It defends the Constitution on behalf of all Americans.

These responsibilities require not only fairness but the appearance of fairness. Public confidence in the Department depends upon the belief that constitutional protections will be enforced equally regardless of religion, political affiliation, or philosophical conviction.

For this reason, LWVCO believes the Department should exercise particular caution before adopting official guidance that embraces one constitutional philosophy regarding religion when reasonable constitutional debate continues regarding the proper interpretation of the Religion Clauses.

Constitutional Neutrality Strengthens Public Confidence

LWVCO recognizes that every administration appropriately establishes enforcement priorities. Those priorities, however, should remain rooted in protecting constitutional rights rather than advancing particular theological understandings of religion's role in public life.

The Commission repeatedly celebrates religion as indispensable to American society and recommends that federal agencies encourage broader public appreciation for religion's civic contributions. LWVCO readily acknowledges the extraordinary contributions that religious communities have made throughout American history.

The federal government, however, occupies a different role. Its responsibility is not to evaluate the relative social value of religion. Its responsibility is to ensure that every American enjoys equal protection under the Constitution regardless of religious belief. The distinction is subtle but profound. Churches may proclaim theological truth. Synagogues may teach religious law. Mosques may interpret sacred tradition. Humanist organizations may advocate secular ethics. The Department of Justice must protect the liberty of every one of those communities without adopting the perspective of any. That institutional neutrality is not a limitation upon religious liberty. It is one of religious liberty's strongest protections.

Representation Matters

LWVCO also believes that public confidence in advisory commissions addressing constitutional rights depends upon meaningful representation of the communities affected by those recommendations. The Commission includes accomplished public servants, religious leaders, and legal scholars whose dedication to religious liberty is evident throughout the report. The League appreciates their willingness to undertake this important work.

At the same time, the composition of the Commission and its advisory boards illustrates the importance of broader representation in future efforts. While the Commission includes representatives of several faith traditions, its membership is predominantly Christian, and its advisory boards similarly reflect a limited range of religious and constitutional perspectives.

This observation is offered not as criticism of those appointed. Rather, it reflects the constitutional reality that recommendations affecting every American's freedom of conscience are strengthened by participation from the full diversity of American belief.

Future commissions considering religious liberty should include meaningful representation from:

- Christian traditions reflecting the diversity of American Christianity;
- Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and other minority faith communities;
- Native American religious leaders;
- Humanist, atheist, agnostic, and other nonreligious organizations;
- constitutional historians representing multiple schools of interpretation;
- civil-rights organizations with extensive experience litigating First Amendment questions;
- scholars of religion, sociology, and American pluralism.

Such diversity would not produce weaker recommendations. It would produce recommendations that more fully reflect the constitutional promise of equal liberty.

Religious Liberty Is Strengthened Through Dialogue

One of the strengths of the American constitutional tradition is that no single institution possesses a monopoly on constitutional understanding. Courts interpret the Constitution. Legislatures enact laws. Executive agencies enforce those laws. Religious communities contribute moral perspectives. Universities produce scholarship. Citizens participate through democratic deliberation. The continuing dialogue among these institutions has allowed the Nation's understanding of religious liberty to mature over generations.

LWVCO believes future commissions should embrace that tradition by actively seeking participation from communities whose experiences with religious liberty differ significantly from one another. Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Native Americans, Humanists, atheists, and many others all experience religious liberty through different historical and cultural lenses. Listening to each of those experiences enriches constitutional understanding.

The Colorado League's Recommendation

LWVCO respectfully recommends that future federal initiatives concerning religious liberty emphasize institutional neutrality, broad public participation, and constitutional equality. The Department of Justice should remain the nation's impartial guardian of the Religion Clauses—not their theological interpreter.

America's constitutional commitment is not to a particular understanding of religion. It is to the equal liberty of every conscience.

VIII. Religious Institutions, Political Independence, and the Johnson Amendment

Among the Commission's recommendations is a proposal that Congress repeal the Johnson Amendment or otherwise eliminate restrictions on partisan political activity by tax-exempt religious organizations. The report argues that the Johnson Amendment improperly chills the First Amendment rights of religious leaders and allows the government to regulate sermons and spiritual guidance.

LWVCO respectfully reaches a different conclusion.

LWVCO fully supports the right of clergy and religious leaders to preach, teach, advocate, and address moral questions from the perspective of their religious traditions. Houses of worship have long served as centers of moral reflection, civic engagement, charitable service, and social reform. Religious voices have played

indispensable roles in movements to abolish slavery, expand women's rights, advance civil rights, welcome refugees, care for the poor, and promote peace and justice.

Nothing in the Colorado League's position suggests that religious institutions should withdraw from public life.

The constitutional question is different. It is whether tax-exempt charitable institutions—including churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, and other houses of worship—should become participants in partisan electoral campaigns while continuing to receive the public benefits associated with charitable tax exemption.

LWVCO believes they should not.

Religious Independence Is Strengthened by Political Independence

One of the greatest strengths of American religious life has been the remarkable independence of religious institutions from governmental control. Unlike established churches in many nations, American congregations have generally remained free to criticize elected officials regardless of political party, challenge public policy on moral grounds, and minister to their communities without becoming formal participants in partisan campaigns. That independence has strengthened both religion and democracy.

The Johnson Amendment has helped preserve that independence by drawing a distinction between moral witness and partisan endorsement.

Religious leaders remain free to address public issues, encourage civic participation, educate their congregations about matters of public concern, and advocate for legislation consistent with their religious convictions.

What tax-exempt organizations may not do is intervene or participate in campaigns on behalf of or in opposition to candidates for public office. This limitation applies broadly to charitable organizations, not solely to religious institutions. LWVCO believes this distinction has served the Nation well.

Repeal Would Create New Constitutional Tensions

Repealing the Johnson Amendment would not eliminate government involvement with religion. It could increase it.

If houses of worship became active participants in partisan campaigns while retaining tax-exempt status, government would inevitably face difficult questions regarding campaign finance, political expenditures, disclosure requirements, charitable deductions, and enforcement of tax law. Rather than reducing interaction between church and state, repeal could require more extensive governmental oversight of political activity conducted by religious organizations.

LWVCO believes that outcome would be contrary to the goal of preserving institutional independence. Equally important, repeal could place religious communities under increasing pressure to align themselves publicly with political parties or candidates.

Congregations that today unite members across political differences could become identified with particular electoral movements. Clergy could experience pressure—from within or outside their congregations—to endorse candidates as demonstrations of religious commitment.

Such developments would risk diminishing the prophetic independence that has historically allowed religious communities to speak truth to power regardless of which political party governs.

Moral Leadership Is Different from Partisan Advocacy

LWVCO recognizes an important constitutional distinction. Religious institutions have every right to proclaim moral principles rooted in their faith traditions. Those principles frequently influence public policy debates.

Indeed, democratic self-government depends upon citizens bringing their deepest moral convictions—including religious convictions—into public discourse.

Partisan electoral endorsement, however, serves a different purpose. It seeks to influence the selection of particular candidates for public office. The League believes that charitable tax exemption carries with it a responsibility to remain institutionally independent of partisan campaigns.

That principle protects the integrity of religious institutions while preserving public confidence that tax-exempt charitable resources are devoted primarily to religious, educational, and charitable purposes.

Equal Treatment for All Religious Communities

The Colorado League's position also reflects concern for the extraordinary diversity of American religion.

If repeal of the Johnson Amendment encouraged houses of worship to become increasingly identified with partisan politics, minority faith communities could face heightened pressure to demonstrate political allegiance in order to protect their interests.

The constitutional promise of religious liberty is better served when every congregation remains free to determine its own mission without governmental encouragement to participate in electoral politics.

LWVCO therefore believes that preserving institutional independence benefits majority and minority faiths alike.

The Colorado League's Recommendation

LWVCO respectfully recommends that the Commission reconsider its recommendation concerning the Johnson Amendment. Religious liberty is strengthened when houses of worship remain free to speak prophetically without becoming instruments of partisan political campaigns.

Government, likewise, is strengthened when it neither encourages nor discourages partisan political activity by religious institutions beyond the generally applicable rules governing all tax-exempt charitable organizations. The enduring strength of American religion has rested not upon political privilege but upon moral authority.

LWVCO believes that preserving that distinction continues to serve both religious liberty and constitutional democracy.

IX. Religious Liberty Flourishes When Religious Institutions Remain Independent of Political Power

The history of American religious liberty demonstrates that religion has often exercised its greatest moral influence when it has remained institutionally independent of government and political parties. Religious communities have repeatedly challenged injustice not because they possessed governmental authority, but because they stood outside governmental power and spoke with moral conviction.

The abolitionist movement drew strength from churches willing to challenge laws that protected slavery. The Social Gospel movement called attention to poverty, labor conditions, and economic justice. The Civil Rights Movement was led in large measure by clergy and congregations whose moral authority rested not upon political office but upon their willingness to confront entrenched systems of injustice.

Jewish congregations, Catholic charities, Muslim organizations, Protestant denominations, Native American spiritual leaders, and countless other religious communities have likewise shaped American public life through service, advocacy, education, and moral witness.

Their influence has depended upon credibility. Credibility depends upon independence.

Moral Authority Cannot Be Legislated

The Commission correctly recognizes that religion has made extraordinary contributions to American society. LWVCO fully agrees.

Those contributions, however, have not resulted because government encouraged religion to become more closely aligned with political authority. Rather, they have resulted because religious communities have remained sufficiently independent to challenge government whenever conscience required. History offers many examples. Religious leaders have opposed slavery. They have opposed segregation. They have opposed war. They have opposed abortion. They have defended immigrants. They have defended labor rights. They have defended religious minorities. They have defended free speech.

Often, they have disagreed sharply with one another. That diversity of moral witness is itself evidence of religious liberty.

The Constitution protects that diversity by ensuring that government neither rewards nor penalizes particular theological or political positions.

Government Should Protect the Independence of Religious Institutions

LWVCO believes one of government's highest constitutional responsibilities is preserving the institutional independence of religious communities. That responsibility extends beyond protecting the freedom to worship. It includes protecting the ability of religious institutions to govern themselves, select their leaders, define their doctrines, organize their ministries, educate their members, and carry out charitable work consistent with their beliefs.

Equally important, it includes protecting religious institutions from becoming extensions of governmental or partisan political authority. Throughout history, governments that have sought close institutional relationships with dominant religious traditions have often weakened both. Religion becomes vulnerable to political influence. Government becomes vulnerable to religious favoritism. Public confidence in both institutions declines.

The American constitutional tradition has generally rejected that model. Instead, it has protected religious institutions precisely by leaving them free from governmental control and governmental dependence.

LWVCO believes that this institutional independence remains one of the great achievements of the First Amendment.

Religious Diversity Requires Institutional Humility

The Commission repeatedly celebrates America's religious heritage. The League celebrates something even broader. America has no single religious heritage. It has many.

The constitutional promise of religious liberty has enabled successive generations of immigrants and citizens to establish churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, meeting houses, meditation centers, and countless other communities of faith.

It has likewise protected Americans who organize their moral lives outside religious institutions altogether. This remarkable diversity counsels humility.

No government commission can determine which theological understanding best promotes democracy. No administration can define the proper relationship between God and government for every citizen. Those questions belong to individual conscience. The Constitution wisely leaves them there.

The Prophetic Independence of Religious Communities

Perhaps the most important lesson of American history is that religious communities are often at their strongest when they are least dependent upon political power. When churches become identified with political parties, they risk dividing congregations whose members share religious commitments but differ politically.

When government appears to favor particular religious institutions, minority faiths may reasonably question whether they stand on equal constitutional footing. When political movements seek religious validation, both politics and religion risk becoming instruments of one another.

LWVCO therefore believes that government best protects religion not by encouraging closer institutional partnership but by preserving the independence that allows every religious community to speak freely according to conscience. This principle benefits every tradition. It protects evangelical churches that challenge government policy. It protects Catholic bishops who advocate for immigrants. It protects rabbis confronting antisemitism. It protects Muslim organizations defending religious freedom. It protects Native American spiritual leaders preserving sacred traditions. It protects Humanist organizations advocating secular ethics. It protects every community whose moral voice remains independent of governmental power.

A Constitutional Vision for the Future

LWVCO respectfully suggests that the future of religious liberty lies not in choosing between religion and government. It lies in preserving the constitutional distance that allows both institutions to fulfill their distinct responsibilities.

Religious communities exist to pursue truth as they understand it, to form conscience, to serve others, and to bear moral witness. Government exists to secure the equal rights of all persons under law. When each

institution respects the proper role of the other, both are strengthened. The Constitution has sustained that balance for more than two centuries.

LWVCO believes it remains the surest foundation for religious liberty in a nation of extraordinary religious diversity.

Principles for Religious Liberty in a Constitutional Democracy

League of Women Voters of Colorado

Religious liberty is among the Nation's first freedoms. It protects the dignity of every individual by safeguarding freedom of conscience and ensuring that government neither compels belief nor suppresses it. The League of Women Voters of Colorado therefore affirms the following principles:

1. Freedom of conscience belongs equally to every person.

Every individual possesses the equal right to determine matters of religion, belief, philosophy, and conscience without governmental coercion or discrimination. Religious liberty belongs equally to people of every faith and to those who profess no religion.

2. The Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause are complementary guarantees.

Neither clause is complete without the other. The Free Exercise Clause protects religious practice. The Establishment Clause protects the equality that allows religious freedom to flourish. Together they secure liberty for everyone.

3. Government exists to protect religious liberty, not to define religion.

Government has neither constitutional authority nor institutional competence to determine religious truth, theological correctness, or the relative value of religious and nonreligious belief. Those questions belong to individual conscience.

4. Government must remain neutral among religions and between religion and nonreligion.

Neutrality is not hostility. Neutrality is the constitutional principle that ensures every person stands equal before the law regardless of faith or belief.

5. Religious diversity is one of America's greatest constitutional achievements.

The flourishing of hundreds of religious traditions alongside those who profess no religion demonstrates the success of constitutional liberty. America's diversity should be protected, celebrated, and preserved.

6. Religious institutions strengthen democracy through their independence.

Religious communities best serve society when they remain free to worship, teach, serve, and speak according to conscience without governmental control or partisan dependence. Their moral authority rests upon freedom rather than political power.

7. Religious liberty and civil rights are mutually reinforcing.

Protecting religious liberty must never become a justification for denying the equal dignity, civil rights, or constitutional protections of others. Likewise, protecting civil rights must not become a pretext for suppressing legitimate religious exercise. The Constitution calls us to protect both.

8. Religious liberty requires equal justice.

Government should vigorously protect every individual and every religious community from discrimination, violence, intimidation, and unlawful interference. No faith community should receive greater constitutional protection than another.

9. Constitutional institutions should reflect the diversity of the American people.

Public bodies addressing questions of religious liberty should include meaningful participation from America's many religious traditions, minority faiths, Indigenous religions, and nonreligious communities. Equal liberty is strengthened when every voice is heard.

10. Democracy depends upon informed citizens acting in good faith.

The protection of religious liberty requires more than courts and legislatures. It requires citizens willing to respect differences, defend the rights of others, engage in civil dialogue, and recognize that freedom of conscience belongs equally to all.

11. Religious liberty is strongest when no one must fear government because of belief.

The measure of religious freedom is not how securely the majority worships. It is whether the smallest minority—and the individual standing alone—enjoys the same constitutional protection.

12. The Constitution's promise is equal liberty of conscience.

The American experiment has succeeded because government has generally protected the equal freedom of every person to believe, worship, question, change, or reject religious belief according to conscience. That constitutional promise remains one of our Nation's greatest achievements and one of its highest responsibilities.

Conclusion

The League of Women Voters of Colorado believes the United States has achieved something extraordinary. For more than two centuries, Americans representing countless religious traditions—and those professing no religion at all—have lived together under a Constitution that protects every person's freedom of conscience while denying government authority to decide religious truth. That achievement remains unfinished. Every generation must determine anew how best to preserve both religious liberty and religious equality in an increasingly diverse society.

The Commission's report reminds us that Americans continue to care deeply about these questions. The League welcomes that conversation. We respectfully encourage the Commission to ensure that its final recommendations preserve the constitutional balance that has served the Nation so well: vigorous protection of the free exercise of religion, equal treatment of every faith and every individual, and steadfast adherence to the constitutional principle that government protects religion best when it protects every conscience equally.

LWVCO believes the future of religious liberty does not depend upon government becoming more religious. Nor does it depend upon religion becoming less visible in public life. It depends upon government remaining faithful to its constitutional role. The Constitution entrusts government with the protection of liberty. It entrusts citizens with the exercise of conscience. America flourishes when each honors the proper role of the other.

LWVCO therefore respectfully recommends that the Commission strengthen its final report by reaffirming a constitutional principle that has protected generations of Americans:

The measure of religious liberty is not how securely the majority worships. It is whether the smallest minority—and the individual standing alone—enjoys the same freedom of conscience under the law.

From: Kim Busl <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:41:15 -0400

Importance: Normal

Good afternoon friends and fellow citizens.

Having been born in Massachusetts and raised in New England the history, subject and understanding of religious liberty was part and parcel of the culture. All those years I was an atheist, a devout evolutionist and essentially free from any “religious beliefs” that included the concept of a God, a Creator.

Be that as it may, later in life and looking back I grew to understand more clearly that regardless of my atheistic views “formal religious beliefs” played a very significant role in forming me into the person I grew into and have become. Despite the reality that the recording of all history is biased—history comes down to us nonetheless. It’s been said, “The only thing that we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history.” The thought being that humanity continues to make the same mistakes over and over. Even though we know the history of human travesty and should be aware to avoid repeating it—we end up repeating it. Convincing ourselves of the illusion—This time the outcome will be different.

Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts has a noble place in American history. Pilgrims fleeing religious persecution in Europe departed to the New World. Their desire, indeed their conviction to worship God according to their conscience lead them to part everything they had ever known. Leaving family and friends behind, taking the risk of sailing across a huge expanse only to embrace unknown dangers and tragedies. Religious freedom. Religious Liberty was the reward to be grasped. As an atheist it was a point of interest to me that no sooner did they arrive and get themselves settled that they too started to establish civil laws that restricted the religious liberties of those who did not understand, accept or worship God in the manner that the Pilgrim Fathers deemed was appropriate. Which lead to Roger Williams leaving the colony in Massachusetts and establishing a new settlement where people would be free to worship God according to their conscience. How quick humanity is to impose on others that which they do not wish to have imposed on themselves. All the while reading the passage that admonishes us to, “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

In the records of human history that I have had opportunity to study or merely glance through it is revealed that whenever the influences and powers of church and state are merged someone, some very fine people end up being persecuted, marginalized, ridiculed, belittled and looked down upon. They are pressured to give up their religious convictions, submit to the law or suffer the consequences.

Having lived and worked outside of the United States for some 30 plus years. Many of which were spent in Africa and Europe. While engaging with entities and projects all over the world I have had the underserved privilege of observing many governments, cultures and people groups. Iraq is a country that I visit on a regular basis. What I experience in Iraq is a far cry from what most Americans perceive about the country and the people. I freely walk the streets of Baghdad or Erbil at midnight enjoying the ambiance and activities. Not once have I ever sensed that anyone would wish to harm me. I cannot say that about the cities in the US that I am familiar with. That being said, not for a moment would I recommend that Islamic Law be imposed in the US or anywhere else in the “free world”.

Be assured that no matter what you may think or hope—the uniting of church (religious legislation) and state has always and will always result in oppression and persecution. No matter how you wish to do the math, $2 + 2$ will always equal 4. When you vote to unite church and state you are voting to eventually oppress and persecute some one.

As a matter of conscience I am opposed to any steps in government that lead toward strengthening ties between religion, any religion and the government.

Wishing everyone all the best.

From: Jennell <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:43:53 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a citizen to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state — especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God — and that's bad for the church and the country alike. Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,

Jennell Ifill
Windsor Locks, CT

From:JansRays<[REDACTED] PII >

To:"[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Concerns

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:43:57 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am respectfully writing to express my concerns about the recommendation you have made concerning building "bridges" between church and state and reversing the longstanding constitutional principle that government should remain neutral toward religion—neither promoting nor prohibiting the free exercise of faith in America.

While your approach is framed as supporting religious freedom, I am deeply concerned that, in practice, it may actually undermine the very liberties it claims to protect. America is known for protecting the God-given rights of each citizen to worship according to their conscience and beliefs without government interference. That is what our nation was founded on! It allows each person to worship or not to worship according to each individual's beliefs. We are a diverse nation with people from many countries and cultures. Our nation's job is to protect and preserve civil peace, not to place laws into place governing spiritual matters.

Our country was born partially because America offered a place where the government did not control the church or individual's conscience. History shows that when we err on the side of control, whether it is forced worship or instead forced abstinence, the outcome is horrendous with persecution of churches and individuals who do not comply. The mission of the state is to preserve freedom, protect individual rights, and secure equal treatment under the law. The government is not to direct spiritual lives. The mission of the church is to preach the gospel, emphasize truth and love through persuasion, but never through coercion. Faith is voluntary.

I urge the Commission to recommend policies that preserve the constitutional barriers between church and state. Our government should neither advance nor inhibit religion of any kind. Yes, I do believe in the words written on our coins (in God we trust) and contained in our Pledge of Allegiance (one nation under God). But Jesus never forced Himself on anyone. It is a choice to worship or not worship God. We as a country should in no way have policies that could bring about intolerance or injustice.

Respectfully submitted,

Jan Ray from Arkansas

From: [REDACTED] PII

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] A Word For Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:44:02 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom it May Concern,

Good afternoon and may this email find you well.

Please stand up for religious liberty. America has been highly favored to have enjoyed religious liberty and other freedoms for as long as she has. Please do your part to keep it that way. God sets people in certain positions of trust for certain times and He requires us to do our duty to preserve the liberty that has been won at such an awgul price! Nothing of value is to be gained by breaking down the wall of separation between church and state. Only turmoil. If you truly want to see a change in this nation for the better then be the change you wish to see in this world. Be kind, be loving, be honest, have integrity and good morals. Don't be bigoted and hateful. Don't be easily provoked. Don't be greed or manipulative. In a word: be like Jesus. And Jesus NEVER forced anyone to follow Him or believe on Him and we can do no less. Keep church and state separate!

Thank you,

Warm Regards,

A Concerned Citizen

From: Isalia Osorio <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

To: "[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]" <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Isalia Osorio

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:44:30 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a citizen and believer in Christ to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state. Some points that I found concerning are using government money to fund religious activities, forcing our school systems to incorporate religious acts and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption and influence of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God — and that's bad for the church and the country alike. The church is to be led by God alone, not money or the government. Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,

Isalia Osorio

Magnolia, MS

From: Jeser Alejo <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Preserving Religious Liberty According to the Principles of The Scriptures

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:45:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Religious_Liberty_Letter_JA_07-13-26.pdf

July 13, 2026

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty

U.S. Department of Justice

950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Room 5706

Washington, DC, 20530

Re: Preserving Religious Liberty According to the Principles of The Scriptures

Dear Chairperson Patrick, Vice Chairperson Dr. Carson, and Members of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty,

My name is Pastor Jeser Alejo, and I write to you with a deep burden on my heart and a sincere concern for the future of our nation and the preservation of one of its most precious blessings, Religious Liberty.

As both a minister of the gospel and an American citizen, I believe that true religious freedom is a constitutional principle and a God given right. It safeguards the liberty of every person to worship according to the dictates of their conscience, or not to worship at all, without coercion, or interference from civil authority. Throughout history, whenever, governments have assumed authority over matters of faith, both religion and liberty have suffered. For this reason, I respectfully submit the following thoughts for your consideration as the Commission continues its important work.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit comments regarding the Commission's work on *Religious Liberty*. Long before nations adopted constitutions, Scripture established a principle that remains essential to every free society: Christ alone is head of the Church and Lord of the conscience. Civil government has an important role in preserving justice, maintaining order, and protecting the rights of its citizens, including the minority. It has never been commissioned by God to govern the religious convictions of any men or women.

When questioned concerning the relationship between civil authority and divine authority, Jesus Christ declared: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21, KJV) Christ did not erase the distinction between the civil and the sacred; He affirmed it. Caesar possesses legitimate authority within the sphere assigned to civil government, but worship, conscience, and obedience to God belong exclusively to our Creator and his only begotten Son.

The New Testament consistently upholds this distinction. The apostle Paul instructed believers: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." (Romans 13:1, KJV) Yet when earthly rulers demanded what belonged only to God, the apostles answered with equal clarity: "We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29, KJV)

These two passages are not contradictory. Together they establish the biblical balance. Christians are called to be faithful citizens, respecting government, including paying taxes, praying for rulers, and seeking the peace of society. At the same time, government itself is subject to moral limits. It may regulate civil conduct, but it cannot rightfully command faith, prescribe worship, or compel religious observance.

The Scriptures reveal that God's own government operates upon the principle of freedom. Moses appealed to Israel: "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live." (Deuteronomy 30:19, KJV) Joshua likewise declared: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." (Joshua 24:15, KJV)

In the closing work of the Bible, the invitation remains unchanged; "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Revelation 22:17, KJV) In harmony throughout Scripture, God invites, persuades, teaches, and convicts, but He never compels worship. Genuine faith cannot be created by civil legislation because it is the response of one's heart convicted by the truth. For this reason, the state exceeds its authority whenever it attempts to enforce religious acts, or grant civil preference to one religious body over another.

Again, history demonstrates that whenever political power becomes the guardian of religion, both religion and civil liberty suffer. Government is strongest when it protects every person's freedom of conscience equally, including the minority. Religion is strongest when it depends upon the transforming power of God's Word, rather than the authority of the state.

The First Amendment reflects this enduring principle by protecting both the free exercise of religion and prohibiting governmental establishment of religion. These constitutional protections are not expressions of hostility toward faith. Rather, they preserve an environment in which faith remains voluntary, sincere, and free from governmental coercion.

America has become home to people of many religions and convictions. Such diversity can flourish peacefully only when government remains impartial to matters of religion, protecting the equal rights of every citizen without favoring or disadvantaging any individual or religious community.

As the Commission continues its important work, I respectfully encourage its members to reaffirm that *Religious Liberty* is best preserved when civil government faithfully performs its own responsibilities while refraining from exercising authority over the individual conscience. Every American should remain free to worship God according to the dictates of the conscience or to refrain from religious practice without fear of governmental pressure or legal discrimination.

A free government honors the dignity that God has bestowed upon every human being by recognizing that faith must be the voluntary response of the individual's conscience, never the product of civil authority.

Thank you for your service and for your careful consideration of these comments.

Respectfully,

Pastor Jeser Alejo

July 13, 2026

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC, 20530

Re: Preserving Religious Liberty According to the Principles of Scripture

Dear Chairperson Patrick, Vice Chairperson Dr. Carson, and Members of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty,

My name is Pastor Jeser Alejo, and I write to you with a deep burden on my heart and a sincere concern for the future of our nation and the preservation of one of its most precious blessings, Religious Liberty.

As both a minister of the gospel and an American citizen, I believe that true religious freedom is a constitutional principle and a God given right. It safeguards the liberty of every person to worship according to the dictates of their conscience, or not to worship at all, without coercion, or interference from civil authority. Throughout history, whenever governments have assumed authority over matters of faith, both religion and liberty have suffered. For this reason, I respectfully submit the following thoughts for your consideration as the Commission continues its important work.

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A free government honors the dignity that God has bestowed upon every human being by recognizing that faith must be the voluntary response of the individual's conscience, never the product of civil authority.

Thank you for your service and for your careful consideration of these comments.

Respectfully,

Pastor Jeser Alejo

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeser Alejo', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

From: Beverly Collins <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:45:12 -0400

Importance: Normal

To who it May concern:

Church and state should remain separate. We do not want the government dictating religion in whatever form. Our country was founded on freedom of religion.

Our country will begin her downfall if this happens.

Thank you for your time.

Sent from my iPhone

From: Mykhaylo Malakhov <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATEs-
MYKHAYLO MALAKHOV

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:45:19 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to submit my formal public comment expressing complete opposition to the recommendations put forward in the June 2026 draft of the Religious Liberty Commission Report. Religious liberty is an important and salient issue, but rather than protecting it, this document outlines a dangerous blueprint to systematically break down the constitutional wall between church and state, while simultaneously narrowing the religious liberties of everyday Americans.

As a United States citizen and a Christian, I am fundamentally opposed to the recommendations and arguments made in the draft report. I urge the Commission to completely reject the following recommendations before a final report is issued:

1. The subversion of the Johnson Amendment. The recommendation to eliminate or weaken the Johnson Amendment directly threatens the independence of both our political system and our houses of worship. Allowing tax-exempt religious institutions to funnel money into political campaigns and endorse candidates turns sacred spaces into partisan tools. This narrows religious liberty by forcing churchgoers into politically divided congregations and inappropriately subsidizes political speech through tax-exempt dollars.
2. The diversion of public funds to religious education. The report's push to expand federal voucher programs and direct public tax dollars to private schools is a direct violation of the Establishment Clause. Public funds must support public education, which serves all children equally. Forcing taxpayers to fund religious instruction, including schools whose doctrines they may fundamentally disagree with, is a severe infringement on individual freedom of conscience.
3. The weaponization of "conscience protections" to discriminate. The report seeks to radically expand "Free Exercise" rights for corporations, government-funded agencies, and healthcare providers at the direct expense of individual citizens. The report's recommendations undermine, rather than support, the freedom of conscience. In healthcare, expanding medical refusal clauses would allow providers to deny essential care to patients based on religious dogma, compromising patient safety and autonomy. In social services, allowing taxpayer-funded adoption and foster care agencies to reject qualified families based on sexual orientation or religion would be state-sanctioned discrimination. And in the workplace, broadening corporate religious rights would enable private business owners to override federal labor protections, stripping employees of their reproductive healthcare benefits and civil rights.
4. The exclusion of minority faiths and non-religious Americans. Religious liberty must be absolute and equal for all people. The draft report focuses almost exclusively on protecting majority Christian institutions while largely ignoring the documented rise of discrimination against Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist Americans, as well as the rapidly growing secular population. By favoring one religious tradition, the report inherently narrows the freedom of all others.

In summary, the recommendations in this report do not defend liberty. Rather, they attempt to create a dangerous bridge between church and state that historical precedent proves will lead to oppression, division, and the erosion of minority rights. I demand that the Commission uphold the strict separation of church and state—the very framework that has allowed diverse religious expressions to thrive peacefully in America for over two centuries.

Sincerely,

Mykhaylo M. Malakhov
Palo Alto, California

From: Rudy Alvarez <[REDACTED]>

To: "[REDACTED]" <[REDACTED]>

Cc: Aleksandar Popovski <[REDACTED]>, [REDACTED]

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Rudy Alvarez

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:45:23 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a citizen of McAllen, Texas, who believes both religion clauses of the First Amendment stand together or fall together. My first concern is that any law touching religion, even one meant kindly, ends up strangling the very freedom it claims to protect. Once a legislature defines which religion or observance deserves favor, it has already decided that religion is a proper subject for lawmaking, and that decision does not stay fixed. Majorities change, and whoever writes the law today hands the pen to whoever governs tomorrow. The old Senate testimony on this point still cuts cleanest: "No man can ever sanction legislation in favor of the religion in which he believes without robbing himself of the free exercise of that religion." A believer who welcomes state sponsorship of his own convictions has traded his liberty to keep growing in faith for a precedent that a future government, unfriendly to him, will be free to use.

My second concern goes deeper than policy. Our whole system rests on the idea that government holds only the powers the people delegated to it. But no person can delegate his relationship with God to anyone else, not even to a government he trusts. A man can assign his property or his vote; he cannot assign his soul. That is why the Declaration's logic, followed honestly, excludes religion from government's reach entirely: "Under the Declaration of Independence, therefore, the government of the United States can never have anything to do with religion." The First Amendment did not invent this limit. It simply recorded a limit that was already there.

Third, I do not believe rights of conscience can be settled by counting heads. If a majority vote can grant religious liberty, a majority vote can revoke it, which means it was never a right to begin with, only a permission on loan. Our Constitution exists to protect the minority precisely because the majority never needed protecting from itself. As it was put to a Senate committee weighing whether popular sentiment could justify religious legislation: "the majority has no right to say what we shall render to God; nor has it any right to say that we shall render to Cesar that which is God's." Popular support can justify a highway bill. It cannot justify a religious one.

Finally, history teaches that the first law is never separate from the last consequence, because the principle conceded at the start already contains what follows. Nobody proposing today's measures intends an Inquisition, but nobody ever did at their own first step either. "If the first step be taken, the last step is then as certainly taken; for the last step is in the first." I ask the Commission to refuse that first step, not because I doubt anyone's good intentions, but because good intentions have never been what made the mechanism dangerous.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Rudy Alvarez
McAllen, Texas

From: Sue Peugh <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty (PRLC) Draft Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:45:29 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: My_Comments_concerning_Presidential_Commission_on_Religious_Liberty_PRLC_Draft_Report.docx

Attached are My Comments concerning Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty (PRLC) Draft Report

Thank you,

Sue Peugh
Mineola, TX

July 13, 2026

Sent by Electronic Mail to: [REDACTED] PII

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty (PRLC) Draft Report

PUBLIC COMMENT – Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty (PRLC) Draft Report

To the Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

I respectfully submit this public comment concerning the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty and the effect it could have on religious liberty in the future of the United States.

People began to move to the new land (which later would become the United States) in 1620 to escape religious persecution. In the new land, some people wanted to mandate religion, but this caused problems. It was still religion where people were controlled concerning worship. After Roger Williams was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, he fled to find a new safe place for dissenters who wanted freedom to worship in the way they personally chose. Providence was founded by Williams (which would become Rhode Island), the first government in the Western world that guaranteed separation of church and state.

When our country came together to become The United States of America, the men who forged our Constitution chose to have a government that would give people liberty to worship as they were led by God, not dictated by the government. The first amendment of the Constitution states "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

The most critical issue by far is the Commission's effort to weaken and dismantle the separation of church and state.

Throughout the history of the USA, this amendment has been an especially important part of our Constitution. In the history of the world, there have been numerous times that government chose to mandate religion and people suffered and many were put to

death while others escaped and went into hiding or escaped to a different country. For our country to begin to weaken or dismantle separation of church and state can lead to the loss of religious liberty. The government has the job of preserving order, protecting its citizens, upholding the law, and making sure that everyone is treated fairly under the law. The mission of the church is different. It is to teach the gospel, love the people by allowing them to follow their convictions with no coercion but freely follow their faith just as Jesus taught when He was here on earth. The government and the church can do their work the best when they are each in their own realm.

I am a Seventh-day Adventist who worships on the Biblical Sabbath on the seventh day of the week. Because I live in the United States of America where there has been a separation of church and state all my life, I have had some positive experiences where my belief was honored. Here are a few examples. When I was in the high school band, our band director made it clear that should we miss band programs, we would receive a failing grade in Band. Although we loved band, my sister and I immediately dropped band off our schedules. When our band director was helping pass out schedules, he saw that Band was not on our schedules, he asked us why. We explained our belief in the seventh day Sabbath. He talked to our parents asking them to provide information about our belief. He helped my sister and me change our schedules and allowed us to miss performances during the Sabbath hours.

Another example is when it was time to take the ACT test during my senior year. My sister and I were given the option to take the test on Sunday at a different venue instead of taking the test on Saturday for the same reason of our belief in keeping the Sabbath.

Another time, I was taking a class at a public university. When the Final Test was announced to be on Saturday, I asked my professor for an appointment to speak with him. When I explained that I could not take the test on Saturday because of my religious beliefs, but that I was willing to take it a day earlier, he honored my request.

If I had lived in a country that did not allow religious freedom, I could have had great difficulty in finishing my classes or even graduating from high school or college, or I could have had to move to a different country to be able to keep my faith and complete my education.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to the Commission my view on the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty.

Respectfully,

Sue Peugh from Mineola, Texas

From: meiquey <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:45:35 -0400

Importance: Normal

I commend the commission for their thoughtful report and agree with much of what is presented. Liberty and freedom of religion is what has made America a great nation. I do plead for caution, however, in repealing the Johnson amendment. In Christ's own words, "Render to Ceaser the things that are Ceaser's and to God, the things that are God's" tells me that politics and religion do not mix. Such a bridge would eventually lead to one having leverage over the other.

My humble thoughts.

Rhonda Cho

From: Melanie Dale <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment regarding the draft document that addresses separation between church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:45:58 -0400

Importance: Normal

I believe that separation between church and state has been a key part of America's government and should continue as such.

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. **Please** implement them.

Sincerely,
Melanie J. Dale

From: Jerry Winchell <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:46:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the commission:

Please remember what Thomas Jefferson said, "Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that the act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; this building a wall of separation between Church and State."

I request that you recommend continued Separation of church and state. Please do not change the current freedom we as Americans have had for 250 years.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Winchell

From: Robert Hooper <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:46:35 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Mr. Carson

Under the constitution my rights will be destroyed if the state and church is combined . I am totally against the merger.

Sincerely,
Robert from Oregon

From: Tamara May <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:47:06 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Time_is_Running_Out.docx

I cannot print this attachment to sign. Please accept this as my official request. Tamara May

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [REDACTED] PII <[REDACTED] PII >

Date: Sun, Jul 12, 2026, 7:49 PM

Subject: Fwd: Religious Liberty

To: [REDACTED] PII <[REDACTED] PII >

Hi Tamra,

Here's the letter about religious liberty that's due on Monday, July 13, 2026.

It was good to catch up with you on the phone tonight.

Have a wonderful week :)

- Laurina

Time is Running Out: You have Until July 13, 2026, to Make Your Voice Heard

The time to act is now. Submit your concerns to the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission by July 13, 2026, and make your voice heard. Express your objections to the Commission's draft report, which recommends building "bridges" between church and state and reversing the longstanding constitutional principle that government should remain neutral toward religion—neither promoting nor prohibiting the free exercise of faith in America.

Did you know that our freedom of speech is based on our understanding of religious liberty? For instance, the freedom to pray and share the Bible. This type of speech may soon be defined as hate speech.

I am not sure if you are aware that the Dept of Justice's Religious Liberty Commission will be meeting soon. They wish to essentially tear down the wall between the separation between church and state as put forth in the 12 point program released in a Fox News Briefing June 26.

The major issue is that The Wall of Separation between Church and State will be re-interpreted by this group of people.

<https://share.google/sZ7CPLnATCmI8Z8Dt>

<https://www.justice.gov/.../president-trumps-religious...>

The intention is that these points, particularly 1 & 9 are most concerning, will inform Department of Justice policy. You can read that here in the executive summary directly from the DOJ. <https://www.justice.gov/religious.../media/1450071/dl..>

Send your email to the Religious Liberty Commission at PII

Here are three different approaches in letter writing for commenting:

<https://pillaroffreedom.org>

<https://adventmessenger.org/urgent-appeal-defend.../>

<https://www.historians.org/.../action-alert-submit.../>

Below is my letter to the Commission:

To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

I respectfully submit this public comment out of deep concern for the future of religious liberty in the United States. I urge the Commission to reject any recommendation directed at the Department of Justice or any other branch of government that would weaken the historic constitutional principle of keeping religion and government institutionally separate, as well as any proposal that encourages greater unity between the two.

America's greatest contribution to the cause of religious liberty has not been the state's endorsement of religion, but the protection of every person's God-given right to worship according to conscience without government interference. This principle has allowed religious communities of every tradition to flourish in freedom while preserving civil peace.

As a Bible-believing seventh-day Sabbath keeper, I write from the perspective of a religious minority whose spiritual ancestors experienced firsthand the dangers that arise when government aligns itself with the religious majority. During America's colonial period,

Baptists, Quakers, Jews, seventh-day Sabbath keepers, and many other religious minorities endured discrimination, imprisonment, fines, and civil persecution because certain established churches enjoyed the support of the state. These injustices were among the very reasons the Founders rejected religious establishments and adopted the First Amendment.

The experience of Seventh-day Adventists provides another historical warning. During the late nineteenth century, Adventists who faithfully observed God's seventh-day Sabbath were prosecuted under Sunday laws that were imposed, once again, by the religious Christian majority. Some of our fellow believers were fined, imprisoned, and even forced into chain gangs because they chose to honor Saturday as the biblical Sabbath rather than conform to popular Blue Law Sunday observances. Their only offense was obeying the dictates of conscience and remaining faithful to their religious convictions. Their experience stands as a warning that whenever civil authority is used to enforce religious beliefs or practices, freedom of conscience is inevitably endangered, and religious minorities are often the first to endure discrimination and persecution.

The medieval Inquisition demonstrated how religious institutions armed with civil authority suppressed dissent through torture, punishment, and even death. Various forms of religious extremism, including movements that have justified violence in the name of Islam, have shown how state-backed religious ideology can deny liberty of conscience. Likewise, communist regimes that officially embraced atheism illustrate the opposite side of the same error: when government suppresses religion altogether, believers are again persecuted. Though these different oppressive systems differed in ideology, they shared one common characteristic—the concentration of civil power over matters of conscience. The strength of the American constitutional system is that it avoids these extremes. Government was never commissioned to direct the spiritual lives of the people. The mission of the state is to preserve order, protect individual rights, and secure equal treatment under the law. The mission of the church is altogether different: to preach the gospel, emphasize truth and love through persuasion, not coercion, and call people to a voluntary faith, as Jesus did. These two institutions are strongest and remain uncorrupted when each remains within its proper sphere.

Our nation has become home to a diverse group of churches, synagogues, mosques, and religious communities because government has generally refrained from controlling or establishing religion. This constitutional heritage has protected both the majority and the minority alike. I, therefore, respectfully urge the Commission to recommend policies that reinforce—not diminish—the constitutional barriers separating ecclesiastical authority from civil government. Religious liberty is best preserved when government neither advances nor inhibits religion but instead protects the equal rights of all people to follow their own conscience.

The United States must remain a nation where every church is free to proclaim its beliefs without governmental control and where every citizen is free to worship—or not to worship—without governmental pressure. History has already taught us the consequences of abandoning this principle. We should not repeat mistakes that countless generations have paid dearly to overcome. For if we do, we would once again be fanning the flames of intolerance, religious bigotry, and injustice.

Respectfully submitted,
Andy Roman from Oklahoma

From: Sheila Mahnken <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment -- Religious Liberty in Education -- Sheila Mahnken

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:48:29 -0400

Importance: Normal

Chair Patrick
Vice Chair Carson
Members of the Commission

Thank you for allowing the public to add to the report to the President.

Religious liberty is the most important liberty We the People can rely on. Without religion, liberty is meaningless. Religion has afforded We the People the opportunity to think about others and how we can help them become free sovereigns.

Religious liberty in education is important. Many ideologies are taught in schools, but it seems that Christianity is touted as a bad thing to have taught in public institutions. Yet, other ideologies are accepted under tolerance. Christianity began tolerance with the old definition of tolerance (let everyone be her/his manager, but don't feel afraid about presenting the Gospel because that's allowed like the other ideologies are accepted under religious liberty).

Religious liberty is important in our community because people need Jesus, in all places. Our community hasn't had much violence or danger related to religious expression. I live in a small town of 5,000 or so. We had a George Floyd protest (the main town shopping street was blockaded for the display), but I haven't heard of any incidents of maltreatment or damages.

I haven't had a chance to read the report; I just saw the email about public comments today. I have no recommendations, except to pray, pray, pray.

PRAYers and God's Blessings in Jesus Christ!

--
Have a Great Day!
Sheila M. Mahnken

From: traviseurbin <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendations regarding religious freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:48:39 -0400

Importance: Normal

I respectfully disagree with the recommendations made by the RLC... in particular the removal of the Johnson ammendment will result in a dangerous trend toward lobby from the church who has the most money... we all know how lobby affects our representatives and we need to protect our first ammendment.

Thank you,

Keep America free by allowing free choice, not choice coerced by churches who have money to manipulate...

Thank you and God bless,

Travis Eurbin

Barton, Vt

Sent from my iPhone

From: Jerry Winchell <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:49:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Commission:

Please do not recommend any changes to the current separation of church and state. This freedom has been a safeguard for the American People as Roger Williams and others chose.

Let congress make no law regarding the establishment of religion.

Please vote against any changes in how our government has dealt with the separation of church and state.

Thank you,

Gerald Winchell

From: Gigi Is Forever Blessed <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] ANDREA BONALDE

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:50:43 -0400

Importance: Normal

I AGREE WITH PILLAR OF FREEDOM'S COMMENTS. PLEASE IMPLEMENT.

GOD IS LOVE, AND DOES NOT FORCE. HE WILL NEVER TAKE AWAY OUR RIGHT TO CHOOSE, NEVER. YOU CANNOT LEGISLATE MORALS.

GOD REQUIRES WILLING OBEDIENCE, LOVING OBEDIENCE. THAT TAKES A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.

If God Forced us to Obey, that would NOT BE LOVE! When we stop at a red light, we won't get a ticket, because we kept the law of the land and will not have to face the consequences under the law, we would be FREE, because we obeyed "kept" the law.

But if we ran through the red light and broke the law, then we would have to pay the price. Or we would receive MERCY (forgiveness), Grace (a second chance that we did nothing to deserve).

None of this is by force, it is by doing right or wrong based on choice. God's law is LOVE, and he causes us to obey if we are willing.

God's Kingdom is not of this world. We are pilgrims in a foreign land and our responsibility as Christians is to do what Jesus did.

And He NEVER FORCED.

Church and State Combined goes against that!

MATTHEW 22: 20 & 21:

20 And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?

21 They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

Sent from my iPhone

From: "David G. Shipowick" <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >, s"[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Public Comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:51:16 -0400

Importance: Normal

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From: RLC (OASG) <[REDACTED] PII >

Sent: Sunday, 12 July 2026 22:50:45

To: David G. Shipowick <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: Automatic reply: Public Comment

Thank you for your email! Please be aware public comments to the Commission may be subject to public inspection. Please do not include personally identifiable information such as addresses, birth dates, or other details you may wish to keep private.

From: Shaw Deiago <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT: Separation of Church and State: Deiago Shaw

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:53:23 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am not a citizen of the United States, but I am an admirer. As a citizen of another country, I must state how disappointed I am in this move by the U.S. government. The U.S. is a trendsetter; whenever it does something, the rest of the world follows. This move can be dangerous for Christians overseas, as well as for fellow Americans who reside in non-Christian countries such as China, India, the Middle East, and Muslim nations. For instance, a Christian Saudi citizen living in Saudi Arabia would not survive if his country were to carry out such a thing, given the beliefs of the Muslim leaders there. For over 70 years, the U.S. has been a beacon of freedom. To see this change implies that freedom, both in the States and worldwide, will become reminiscent of a bygone era—when freedom was only a fragment of the imagination.

The bridge to unite church and state should not be encouraged. Looking back at early U.S. history, the Puritans who fled Europe to escape persecution tried to create a society that favored their own religion. Yet, with the arrival of Christians from other denominations, they began to persecute their fellow Christian brothers and sisters. The once-persecuted became the persecutors. This is what happens when you unite church and state, because there will always be beliefs and views that those in power do not share with Christians of different denominations. If we are to be frank, it was Jesus who said that we are not to strike others, but rather turn the other cheek; thus, to strike someone else for their views is considered a sin.

Whenever governments have a stake in churches, they usually put their own best interests first, which more often than not goes contrary to the words of God. Furthermore, when leaders have a change of heart upon receiving office and a favor is owed, they may be required to go against their conscience and the word of God.

Please keep church and state separate. Today, I trust your intentions are hopefully pure, but this move in the hands of the wrong person—over whom we have no control over who that will be in the future—will decimate the world and the freedoms we enjoy today.

Sincerely,
Deiago Shaw

Kingston, Jamaica

From: Frances Johnson <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendation of religious liberty commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:54:11 -0400

Importance: Normal

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the recommendations of the Religious Liberty Committee submitted to President Donald J. Trump on June 26, 2026. While we are mindful of the Committee's labors, which resulted in the 12 recommendations released June 26, certain of which I agree with, I write to voice my concerns and objections to the Committee's first and ninth recommendations and its obviously insufficient consideration of the warnings of the Founding Fathers of the dangers of a union of church and state or the many lessons of history regarding same.

At the formal release of the Committee's recommendations on the same day, Committee Chair Dan Patrick publicly stated that "the separation of church and state is not in the constitution" and that the phrase "has no constitutional basis."

I respectfully request, therefore, that the Department of Justice not adopt recommendations 1 and 9 of the Committee and that it adopt recommendation 1 of the Committee that it convene a public hearing, with written and oral submissions from the public, to more comprehensively study the question of the separation of church and state in history, and in American history in particular, a study which I would enthusiastically support.

Matthew 6:24 (NKJV) "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other."

Sincerely,

Frances Johnson

From: Byron Misseggers <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comments on the RLC Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:54:56 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I appreciate the time, effort, and thought that all contributors of this report took to explore this issue of religious liberty. The report is extensive and covers many aspects of religious liberty. The report is broad and it would be a stretch to suggest that I critically analyzed all of it for approval or disapproval, and I hope that I would not be so arrogant to assume that a singular opinion on the content should over-rule the sincere efforts of those involved in this report. In fact, there is much (maybe even most) that I would approve of from a societal perspective. **I am in favor of promoting the idea of religion having a voice in the public square and public life. But I am not in favor of any policy that would tend to blur the line between the distinctive role and realm of religion (the fostering of a person's relationship with their God) with the equally distinctive role and realm of state government (the fostering of civil relationship between fellow citizens).** And I think it is valid to be concerned about how this report may ultimately be used to influence government policy that may reach beyond the intent of this report.

As an example, the report was intended to provide recommendations that would permit government to protect religious liberty, liberty for all religions. In the report's conclusion on page 21 it states,

“In practical terms, [the First Amendment] means that the government may not officially prefer one religion over another, take over the functions of a church, or coerce religious observance.”

And yet, in the recommendations on page 80, the framers of the report single out the Christian religion for special notice in schools. I am a Christian, but it would be awfully close to, if not in actuality, the essence of supporting one religion, that is to say “establishing a religion”, by recommending that publicly funded schools be encouraged or allowed to post “10 Commandment Posters” (or unique religious content from any "faith group").

This is but one example that serves to show how easily and quickly the laudable goal of protecting religious liberty can transform into something that is in fact the establishment of a “type of religion”, in this case, the Christian religion. There may be other recommendations made that similarly suggest things that are contrary to the express goal of this report. This is one of the dangers of tinkering with a healthy separation between Church and State.

There was also some mention on issuing guidance with respect to the Johnson Amendment. “Guidance” by who, and in what form (legislation?). Again, this is where things could go sideways very quickly with respect to conflict of interest. While every individual person has the right to freedom of speech and expression of their own beliefs, the Johnson Amendment was essentially designed to ensure that religious personalities and entities do not have undue influence in the political arena. The reason is obvious. Those religious entities (and this should include secular humanism as a “religion”) with the most power (money, size, etc.) could then inappropriately apply persuasion to lobby for policy friendly to its own interests. While we do want religious moral input into policy making (and as it currently stands religious leaders are already free to comment publicly on policies and trends in society and government), tinkering with the Johnson Amendment raises the dangerous possibility for religious leaders and entities to have undue influence on policy if they make recommendations regarding parties and political persons. It would be wise to always keep in mind that religious liberty is **both** the freedom to practice the religion of your choice without persecution and also the freedom to NOT practice any religion without imposition by government.

With respect to the Johnson Amendment, the report rightly points out that it already has provision that still allows religious leaders to comment and caution on political and social policies. The fact that some choose to "self-censor" and others do not is not a reflection of inadequacies of the Johnson Amendment as it already exists.

To further comment on the Johnson Amendment portion of the report, it included a testimony by Dr. Robert Jeffress (page 123) regarding an annual "Celebrate Freedom" event. The information provided within the report says that the church did not "officially endorse" any particular candidate, but it seems apparent that that church was not prudent in its selection of speakers for that years event (they invited a single standing candidate). Simply saying that they did not "officially" endorse a candidate, but then inviting a candidate to speak from only one party smacks of partisanship that may well have placed them outside of their 501 (c) (3) limits. They did not show wisdom and they paid the price with investigation. But the narrative created by the report suggests a "witch hunt". Maybe, but maybe not entirely. And I am conservative.

I have already addressed the importance of maintaining a clear separation between Church and State to prevent government from interfering in religious matters (the State has no business dictating my relationship with God), and my comments regarding the Johnson Amendment simply highlight the other important reason for maintaining a clear separation between Church and State, that is, to prevent undue or inappropriate influence of "the Church" on State-craft (one specific Church or faith influencing the State to dictate my relationship with God contrary to my conscience).

Lastly, as I read through the report, what struck me as alarming, was the number of times I read litigation type language as part of the report. Almost every recommendation list included something to the effect of "support litigation of infringements of such and such violation". This degree of litigious language is disturbing in the absence of any sort of basis for defining and qualifying these infringements. As a comparison I would direct you to the "hate speech" laws that have developed, and are developing, in the country of our liberal neighbors to the North (my wife is Canadian). They began with "anti-hate-speech" laws and then later started to define what constituted "hate speech". It has gotten to the point that if you say anything the "offends" someone else's lifestyle, religion, or personal conduct could be interpreted as "hate speech" and leave citizens reluctant to, or even paralyzed from, expressing themselves and their view-points freely. As Jordon Peterson once famously stated, *"in order to be able to think, you have to risk being offensive."* And I would dare say you could add, *"in order to be able to express a concern, you have to risk being offensive."* On this same challenge and danger, Roan Atkinson, in his address to the British Parliament, stated, *"the clear problem with the outlawing insult [ie. litigation] is that too many things can be interpreted as such. Criticism is easily construed as insult by certain parties. Ridicule, easily construed as insult. Sarcasm, unfavorable comparison, merely stating an alternative point of view to the orthodoxy can be interpreted as insult."* Who gets to decide where someone's religious freedom begins and ends and someone else's liberty of conscience begins and ends. To create language within this report that suggests that any time someone feels that their religious liberties have been "infringed upon" litigation is the appropriate recourse sets a very bad tone to those who are not of any religious persuasion, or possibly even those who are not of the majority religion.

And this concern over the litigious language in the report can be extended into the portion of the report that talks about anti-semitism. Who gets to decide what is anti-semitic vs. simply "an alternative point of view." What if my religious belief is in conflict with someone else's religious belief. Will the more "powerful" religion prevail in its litigation on religious liberty. In order to have truly equal religious liberty and not have the appearance that government is preferring one religion over another, the language addressing the problem of anti-semitism should be universal, not singling out Jews only.

I could go on making more personal observations, but I think my point is made. This report may need to be scrutinized further, view-points other than those who were invited to participate included, and then some of the points and language possibly revised in order to avoid internal inconsistencies and contradictions before being submitted.

Thank you for reading and considering my observations,

Byron Misseghers

From: Jonathan Dombrowski <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT Separation of Church and State from Jonathan Dombrowski

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:55:32 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Jonathan_Dear_Members_of_the_Religious_Liberty_Commission.docx

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a citizen and young adult. I would really appreciate if you would all take time and consider ways to build walls between church and state. When we look back in history we can all see how it has always ended badly, not only for those living during those times but for generations to come. If we want this nation to succeed as long as possible we must take this into deep consideration: our country was founded on religious freedom and to do anything that goes against it would be a fatal wound against this country's founding doctrines.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Dombrowski

Manchester, CT

From: Charles <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:58:09 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Please continue the protection of all our liberties (including freedom of speech and all others) in this great country by keeping church and state separate so that all people, religions/philosophies, as well as the state can thrive. Our country's founders separated them in order to protect them and to ensure equality and liberty for all with no exceptions/preferential treatment, regardless of any faith or non-faith background, so we could all have a chance to prosper in this great nation.

Thank you for your time and willingness to hear the people.

Respectfully,
Charles Neumann

From: Jeri Prides <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to the report from the Religious Liberty Commission...

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:59:40 -0400

Importance: Normal

"The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of spiritualism; they will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience." GC 588.1

Jeri A. Lee-Pride, OTRL
Ron J Pride.

From: The Understanding <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and State RESPONSE

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:00:22 -0400

Importance: Normal

Personally, I believe the Constitution is clear that church and state should remain separate. The First Amendment protects religious freedom by preventing the government from establishing religion or favoring one faith over another, while also protecting each person's right to worship freely.

Also, "I strongly believe that our government should not establish religion or give preference to any one faith, because true religious freedom depends on neutrality and the free exercise of conscience.

From: Jane Hartsfield <[REDACTED] PII >

To: Religious Liberty Commissions <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Draft Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:00:25 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Religious_Liberty_Commission_7-13-26.docx

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Attached please find my letter requesting that you reconsider replacing the wall that separates church and state with a bridge.

Sincerely,

Jane F. Hartsfield

[REDACTED] PII

July 13, 2026

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U. S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

This letter is to inform you that I agree with the Pillar of Freedom's comments in reference to your Religious Liberty Draft Report.

In reading scriptures from The Holy Bible (Deuteronomy 6:5; Proverbs 10:12; Matthew 24:12; John 3:16-17; John 15:13; Ephesians 5:2; 2 Timothy 4:3-4; etc. ~ King James Version), I am reminded that God is LOVE, and He does not force us to love and obey Him. The commission's report may cause more people to oppose God's Biblical guidelines and commandments rather than obey them.

God desires that we freely choose to love and obey Him. Please reconsider your desire to build a bridge to replace the wall that separates church and state. May God's Holy Spirit impress all of you of what His plans are for His country!

Thank you in advance for your time and considerations of my request.

Sincerely,

Jane F. Hartsfield

Jane F. Hartsfield

PII

From: Felicia Clarke <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:00:31 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission: Please know that I am not in support of the tearing down of the wall between church and state.

Should this wall be taken down, religious freedom as we know will disappear. We cannot afford to lose this very most important portion of the 1st Amendment.

Please be advised that a change in this wall of separation will be a change in America and its freedoms....forever.

Courageously,

Felicia Clarke

From: Weston Adams <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Weston Adam's

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:00:43 -0400

Importance: Normal

Hello,

I am writing as a committed Christian and as a United States citizen who is very concerned about the efforts that are underway to lessen the separation of church and state in our country. Specifically I'm asking that you seriously reconsider your efforts to appeal the Johnson Amendment and to use government money for religious activities. Even though this seems like a small thing, it is a step in tearing down the wall between church and state.

The United States has been a rarity in history because unlike so many nations before us and even around us, we have recognized that the separation of church and state is the foundation of freedom. There is no need for me to recount the history of nations who have mingled church and state—we all know it well—and partly because of this history our founders saw the need to keep church and state separate. Largely because of this, America has been a land of freedom.

However, when we enjoy freedom it's easy to forget what gave us that freedom in the first place. I truly believe that America as a nation is at risk for losing the freedom that she worked so hard hard to gain, because the new generations do not realize what it took to lay the foundation for freedom.

Freedom is not a secular idea. Jesus himself said that his kingdom is not of this world. And he also predicted that His followers would be persecuted by those who thought they were doing a "holy service for God" (John 16:2, NLT). I believe that the greatest true service we can do for God is to allow freedom.

On my behalf, and on the behalf of many others who have concerns, please reconsider what you are seeking to do. Please do not begin to tear down the separation between church and state.

Thank you very much.

Respectfully,
Weston Adams

A. Weston Adams

[REDACTED] PII

"Blessed is the one...whose delight is in the law of the Lord...That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers." -- Psalms 1:1-3, NIV

From: Carol Lea Gill <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment on church and state. Carol Lea Gill

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:01:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

I understand that the Commission wants to make a bridge between church and state. It seems to me that we need to continue to have a separation of church and state. The church needs to be able to operate without government involvement and/or their money.

Please don't build a bridge but keep the wall. Thank you.

Carol Lea Gill

[REDACTED] PII

Sent from my iPhone

From: 1517freedom <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

To: "[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]" <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Religious Liberty Commission Report – Anonymous

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:01:11 -0400

Importance: Normal

I believe America's commitment to religious liberty is one of the greatest safeguards of freedom ever written into law.

This is not a partisan issue. It is an American issue.

The freedom of conscience protected by the First Amendment has benefited believers of every faith—and those of none—for generations.

Before we redefine religious liberty, we should carefully consider what history has taught us about the dangers of government involvement in matters of conscience.

The principles of religious liberty and freedom of conscience embodied in the First Amendment have stood the test of time. We should be very cautious before weakening or redefining them. Our freedoms are worth preserving.

America is a remarkable exception in much of human history. The principle of religious liberty did not arise in a vacuum. It was shaped by men and women who knew the painful history of religious establishments and understood from both Scripture and experience that faith cannot be compelled.

History repeatedly demonstrates the danger of merging religious authority with civil power. Imperial Rome persecuted those who refused to acknowledge the divinity of Caesar. In medieval Europe, religious and political authority became intertwined, often resulting in persecution of dissenters and suppression of conscience. Various state religions throughout history—whether Christian, Islamic, or otherwise—have at times used civil authority to enforce religious conformity. The details differ, but the recurring lesson is that when the state assumes authority over conscience, liberty suffers. I do not believe public funding should support religious organizations. Christian charity should be just that, Christians giving from their own means.

America's constitutional protections did not emerge because religion was considered unimportant. Quite the opposite. They arose because religion was considered too sacred to be controlled by the state and because civil government was considered too powerful to be entrusted with the care of conscience.

The genius of the American experiment was not hostility toward religion, but the recognition that genuine faith must be freely chosen. The government protects the free exercise of religion, but it does not determine religious truth, approve doctrine, favor groups, or compel belief.

This principle reflects one of Scripture's deepest truths: God Himself appeals to the conscience but never forces it. Throughout the Bible He says, "Choose." He invites, He reasons, He convicts by His Spirit, but He never coerces. Love cannot be commanded by force, nor can worship be genuine when compelled by civil authority.

The separation of church and state therefore protects more than political liberty—it protects the sacred freedom of conscience that God Himself has granted to every human being.

America is one of history's rare gems because it recognized, however imperfectly practiced, that the conscience belongs first to God, not to the state.

Sent with [Proton Mail](#) secure email.

From: MariasJuris<[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] TO THE RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION:

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:01:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

TO THE RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION:

"Protecting freedom of conscience is a duty of the State and the limit of its authority in matters of religion"

"Congress shall make no laws to establish a religion, or to interfere the free exercise thereof."

That this be fulfilled is the most important request I can make of whoever directly or indirectly governs my life in this world.

Thank you very much for considering my request

May God bless and prosper the nations and the rulers or leaders who uphold these principles.

From: " [REDACTED] PII " < [REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" < [REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Draft

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:01:38 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone
7/13/2026

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I know that your intentions are well meaning and sincere, and I agree that the state of society is becoming increasingly corrupt, but as a United States citizen and Christian, I urge you to please refrain from tampering with the separation of Church and State by building a bridge between the two and to not appeal the Johnson Amendment to prevent the politicization of churches and nonprofits.

As you stated in your Draft, you know the consequences of the Church running the State and visa-versa.

Therapy Founders did believe in the principle of the separation of Church and State. Here are some examples:

* "The purpose of the separation of church and state is to keep forever from the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries." James Madison, Letter objecting to the use of government land for churches, 1803.

* "Erecting the wall of separation between church and state is absolutely essential in a free society."
Thomas Jefferson, 1808.

* Treaty of Tripoli, signed by John Adams, "As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion."

* "Persecution is not an original feature in a religion, but it is always the strongly marked feature of all religions established by law." Thomas Paine.

* "When a religion is good, I conceive it will support itself; and when it does not support itself, and God does not take care to support it so that it's professors are obliged to call for help of the civil power, 'tis a sign, I apprehend, of it's being a bad one." Benjamin Franklin in a letter to Richard Price, October 9, 1790.

The Holy Spirit alone can change a person's heart and relationship to God and They work in Their time, not man's.
I stand in agreement with The Pillar of Freedom.

Sincerely,
Diane Eddy

From: Diane Bast <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT -- Chapter 13 (Barriers to Religious Liberty in the Public and Private Sectors) -- Diane Bast

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:01:46 -0400

Importance: Normal

During so-called Pride Month (June 2026), the Outagamie County (Wisconsin) Courthouse flew a Pride Flag along with the United States and State of Wisconsin flags.

A citizen objected, lowered the Pride Flag, and doused it with gasoline. He was prevented from setting it on fire by law enforcement officials at the courthouse. The county executive, Tom Nelson, proudly proclaimed on social media that the flag had been restored. "We want to continue to assure people that we are a welcoming and inclusive community that is open to everyone," he said.

Given that Outagamie County claims to be a "welcoming and inclusive community," I submitted a request to the county executive's office, asking about the procedures for flying other flags at appropriate times. For example, the Christian flag could be flown during the Easter and Christmas holiday seasons. POW flags are often flown by communities as well.

My question about flying other flags received a prompt, curt, and ultimately unsatisfactory reply from Anne Van, Executive Operations and Public Relations Specialist in the Office of the Outagamie County Executive. She wrote:

"We received your question regarding a special flag. The county does not take special requests for flag flying. The only flags we fly are the American Flag, the Wisconsin State Flag and the Pride Flag from June 1 – June 30."

No county-specific data are available to quantify the number of people in Outagamie County who identify as LGBTQIA+. According to the Williams Institute, roughly 5.5% of the national population identifies as LGBTQIA+. Applying that percentage to the county's population of roughly 195,000 means there are roughly 10,725 people in the county who identify as LGBTQIA+.

According to the 2020 Census, nearly SIX TIMES as many people in Outagamie County are Catholic: 62,763 Catholics versus an estimated 10,725 LGBTQIA+. Add in the numbers who belong to other Christian faiths, and you can see how many more people in Outagamie County are Christian than LGBTQIA+.

So why is the Pride Flag being flown at the County Courthouse, but the Christian flag cannot be?

Racial discrimination in the public square, that's why.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Bast

[REDACTED]
PII
PII

From: Ashwin Sukumaran <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:02:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern:

I'm thankful for our leaders in this great country. I am a patriot who loves the United States and have pledged my allegiance proudly to this country of my birth and have served this country most of my life doing benevolent work. Thank you for taking the time to consider input from We The People!

I believe that Christian principles always lead to a better society, however, to force Christianity upon the nation goes against the very Biblical principle of religious liberty that our nation was founded on. For this reason, I humbly and respectfully ask that you consider maintaining the separation of Church and state as outlined by our founding document.

Believe me, I see the damage that extremism in religion has done to other countries and how people are trying to bring this into the USA.

Bringing church and state together will only bring more damage and will eliminate a check that God has put on power in this country. Many of the settlers literally came to this land to flee from religious persecution. Bringing the union of church and state together again will only lead to persecution as in times of old.

I know this is not the intention of our honest leaders. For this cause I reach out believing that there are good men and women willing to do the right thing no matter what political affiliation.

Thank you for your consideration! May God bless you richly and may God continue to bless America the Great! The land of the free and home of the brave.

Sincerely,

Ashwin Sukumaran
An American Patriot

From: 1517freedom <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

To: "[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]" <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- Presidential Religious Liberty Commissions-
Anonymous

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:03:48 -0400

Importance: Normal

"I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please
implement them."

Sent with [Proton Mail](#) secure email.

From: Karen Bryant <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:05:13 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission

I am respectfully submitting this comment on religious liberty out of deep concern for the future of the United States. I strongly urge the Commission to reject any recommendation directed to the Department of Justice or any other branch of government that would weaken the historical constitutional principle of keeping religion and government institutionally separate, as well as any proposal that encourages greater unity between the two.

America is known as the Land of Freedom and that especially means the right to choose one's own religion and how and when they observe it.

Karen Leach

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

From: "(null) (null)" <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Kimberley Brown

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:06:36 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a citizen to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state — especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God — and that's bad for the church and the country alike. Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,

Kimberley Brown
Bloomfield, Connecticut

From: Milisa Hunt <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendations of Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:06:42 -0400

Importance: Normal

To: The Department of Justice

SEPARATION OF CHURCH & STATE

(Mon., July 13, 2026, 1:20p)

On Friday, June 31, 2026 the White House hosted the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission chair and Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, who said "The separation of church and state is not in the Constitution. And from this day forward, if anyone says that to you and they're in public office or serve in any agency, in any official capacity, they have to point out exactly where you have violated the Constitution, because you have not. And from this day forward, that phrase should have no power over people of all faiths ever again in America."

In order to discern whether or not this is accurate, we must review the etymology and subsequent Root Meanings of the words "**Separation of Church and State**", how they correlate with the Founding Words of the United States of America, along with the Constitution of the Church being The Bible;

(I've underlined key portions that I will address in upon my commentary conclusion);

*Since this Commission is advocating to assure "Liberty" which fundamentally means "unrestrained"

"Separation"

- The approximate date of c. 1400 A.D. is given for English language usage (per *Etymology*) as "separacioun", Rooted from Latin "separationem" as a compound word from "se-" meaning "apart" + "parare" meaning "make ready"; Although the present meaning is accepted as "disconnecting one thing from another", the Root Meaning can also be "*make ready apart*";

- Whereas the meaning that is used by the U.S. Courts (per *Black's Law Dictionary, 11th edition, 2019*) is given the approximate date of 1700c, with the meaning of "3. Cessation of a contractual relationship";

The word "Separation" is also used and defined within the entry:

"Separation of powers. (1896) *Constitutional law*. **1.** The division of governmental authority into three branches of government ... which neither of the other branches can encroach. • The first tentative formulation of the proposition that this is the most desirable form of government appeared in John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) and ...elaborated ... in Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws* (1748). Cf. DIVISION OF POWERS. **2.** The doctrine that such a division of government authority is the most desirable ... because it establishes checks and balances designed to protect the people against tyranny. Cf. SEPARATION OF PURPOSE.

"The doctrine of the separation of powers was adopted by the convention of 1787 ... to save the people from autocracy." *Myers v. U.S., ... (1926)* ...o

“ ... In an ideal state we might imagine...an administrative body ... making ... rules of law that it could not change. ...”
George Whitecross Paton, *A Textbook of Jurisprudence* (...4th ed. 1972).

- Where else in The Bible KJV the word “Separation” is used in Ezk. 42:20,

“He measured it by the four sides: it had a wall round about, five hundred [reeds] long, and five hundred broad, to make a

» *separation « between the Sanctuary and the profane place.”

Which is defined (*per Strong's Dictionary*) as:

(*914) badal [baw-dal']

a *primitive root;

to divide (in variation senses literally or figuratively, ... distinguish, differ, select, etc.);-- (make, put) difference ... a

~Showing that where The Word is, holds Authority needs to be SEPARATE from the “profane, common (place)”, which definition is:

(2455) chol [khole]

from ‘chalal’; properly exposed; ...common, profane (place), unholy.

~Now to review the meanings of:

“CHURCH”

- The approximate time of Old English [1066 A.D.] is given for English language usage (*per Etymology*) as “cirice, circe” meaning “place of assemblage” derives from Greek “kyriakon” meaning “the Lord’s”; The use of this Greek word has been since c. 300 A.D. The Phonetic spelling is from c. 1200 established by 16c. After the Protestant Reformation “church” was used for any particular Christian denomination agreeing on doctrine and forms of worship.

- Whereas the meaning that is used by the U.S. Courts (*per Black's Law Dictionary, 1st edition, 1891*) states:

“...the religious society founded and established by Jesus Christ, to receive, preserve, and propagate [H]is doctrines and ordinances.

The term may denote either a society of persons who, professing Christianity, ... or the building in which the persons habitually ASSEMBLE for public worship.”

“A congregational church is a VOLUNTARY association of Christians united for discipline and worship, ... having a legal existence. 3 Me. 248.”

“In English ecclesiastical law. An institution established by the law of the land in reference to religion. 3 Steph. Comm. 54. The word “church” is said to mean, in strictness, not the material fabric, but the cure of souls and the right of tithes. 1 Mod. 201.”

~However,

the legal meanings were edited by removing “VOLUNTARY association” (per *Black’s Law Dictionary, 11th edition, 2019*) to now be:

[p. 304, 11th Edition]

“(bef. 12c.) 1. A building dedicated to worship, esp. Christian worship; loosely, a building dedicated to any type of religious worship <a church erected in the 12th century>. 2. An organization or ASSEMBLY of worshippers, esp. Christian ones having a distinct history, liturgy, and ecumenical practice; a particular division or sect of Christian believers; ...

· “A church in law is a mere fraternal organization. It may or may not have a written constitution, but it must have a central doctrine as its foundation or constitution. ... All revealed truths may be said to be the constitution of the *Catholic Church*, and when a doctrine concerning faith or morals is authoritatively declared by the Church to be a truth, it becomes dogma. ... The code of the Church is the Ten Commandments. A few sects, by a majority vote, make and change their constitution at will.” Charles M. Scanlan, *The Law of Church and Grave* 23 (1909).

~{Charles M. Scanlan was a Roman Catholic, who in same book just quoted from also wrote on page 32, under Chapter III. *Constitutional Law* “35. Religious Tests. – The constitution of the United States provides that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” Which is a summary of Article VI, §3 of the U.S. Constitution:

“The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious Test shall ever be requires as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.”}

► **established church.** (17c) An official church or religion in a particular country; a governmentally sanctioned church of a nation. SEE ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGION.

4. The entire body of Christian believers <the Christian church worldwide>. – Also termed *church catholic; universal church*.o... 6. Ecclesiastical authority or power, as opposed to the powers of a civil government ...”;

~Since the legal meanings of ‘CHURCH’ now include “established church” the following Black’s Law entry definitions must be reviewed and compared to the 1st Edition Original meanings vs the 11th edition, to discern the real intentions of the U.S. Legal System:

[p. 433-434, 1st Black’s Law edition, 1891]

ESTABLISH. This word occurs frequently in the constitution of the United States, and it is there used in different meanings: (1) To settle firmly, to fix unalterably; as to establish justice, which is the avowed object of the constitution. ... (4) To found, recognize, confirm, or admit; as: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." (5) To create, to ratify, or confirm; as: "We, the people, etc., "do ordain and establish this constitution." 1 Story, Const. § 454.

Establish ordinarily means to settle certainly, or fix permanently, what was before uncertain, doubtful, or disputed. 49 N. H. 230.

Vs.

[p. 688, 11th edition, 2019]

establish, *vb.* (14c) **1.** To settle, make, or fix firmly; to enact permanently <one_object of the

Constitution was to establish justice>. ... **4.** To make (a church or religion) an official, governmentally sponsored institution.

established, *adj.* (17c) **1.** Having been brought about or into existence <newly established courts>. **2.** Having existed for a long period; already in long-term use <an established legal rule>. **3.** Proven; demonstrated beyond doubt <an established fact>. **4.** Known to do a particular job well because of long experience with good results <an established legal author>. **5.** (Of a church or religion) officially recognized and sponsored by the government.

established church. **1.** SEE CHURCH (2). **2.** SEE *state religion* under RELIGION.

established religion. SEE *state religion* under RELIGION.

Establishment Clause. (1959) *Constitutional law.* The First Amendment provision that prohibits the federal and state governments from establishing an official religion over another. U.S. Const. Amend. I. Cf. FREE EXERCISE CLAUSE.

establishment of religion. (16c) A government's acts officially recognizing a church as a national institution supported by the government. Cf. DISESTABLISH.

[p. 808, 11th edition]

Free Exercise Clause. (1950) *Constitutional law.* The constitutional provision (U.S. Const. Amend. I) prohibiting the government from interfering in people's religious practice or forms of worship. – Also termed *Exercise Clause*. Cf. ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE.

[p. 1545, 11th edition]

religion. (13c) A system of faith and worship usu. Involving belief in a supreme being and usu. Containing a moral or ethical code; esp., such a system recognized and practiced by a particular church, sect, or denomination. • In construing the protections under the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause, courts have interpreted the term *religion* broadly to include a wide variety of theistic and nontheistic beliefs.

► **state religion.** (16c) A religion promoted, taught, or enforced by a government's act to the exclusion of other religions. – Also termed *state church*; *official religion*; *established church*; *established religion*.

Religion Clause. *Constitutional law.* In the Bill of Rights, the provision stating that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." U.S. Const. Amend. I.

- Some writers use the plural form, “Religion Clauses,” to mean both the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause, thus emphasizing the asserted common purpose of the two provisions.

“With [its] wording, the religion clauses set aside a particular realm of beliefs and practices – those classified ‘religious’ – as an area of special constitutional significance. One might think that ... courts and scholars would have reached an understanding of the clauses’ effect or, at least, a consensus on the meaning of religion itself. Nevertheless, few areas of constitutional law lie in greater confusion. Particularly, agreement on the proper interpretation of ‘religion’ has proven highly elusive.” Stanley Ingber, *Religion or Ideology: A Needed Clarification of the Religion Clauses*, 41 Stan. L. Rev. 223, 233 (1989) (citations omitted). (p. 688, 2019 edition)

- Where else, in The Bible KJV the word “Church” in the original Greek New Testament is translated “ekklesia”, which means "assembly" or "the called-out ones", which is used in Matthew 16:18,

"18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my 《church》 ;
and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Which is defined (per Strong’s Dictionary) as:

(1577) εκκλησια, ekklesia [ek-klay-see’-ah]

from a compound of

《*εκ - ek εκ》 and a derivative of

《καλεω - kaleo καλεω》 ;

a calling out,

i.e. (concretely) a popular meeting, especially a religious congregation (Jewish synagogue, or Christian community of members on earth or saints in heaven or both):--assembly, church.

《*εκ - ek εκ》

(1537) εκ, ek [ek]

or ex ex

a primary preposition

denoting origin (the point whence action or motion proceeds), from, out (of place, time, or cause; literal or figurative; direct or remote):--after, among, X are, at, betwixt(-yond), by (the means of), exceedingly, a⁺ abundantly above), for(- th), from (among, forth, up), a⁺ grudgingly, a⁺ heartily, X heavenly, X hereby, a⁺ very highly, in, ...ly,

(because, by reason) of, ...

° 《καλεω - kaleo καλεω》

(2564) καλεω, kaleo [kal-eh’-o]

akin to the base of

《κελεω - keleuo κελεω》 ; to "call" (properly, aloud, but used in a variety of applications, directly or otherwise):--bid, call (forth), ...

*° 《κελεω - keleuo κελεω》

(2753) κελεψω, keleuo [kel-yoo'-o]

from a primary *kello

(to urge on);

"hail"; to incite by word, i.e. order:--bid,(at,give) command(-ment),

Vs.

When the word “church” is derived from a different Greek word “synagogue” in Matthew 4:23,

“23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their » synagogues »,

and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.”

Which is defined (per Strong’s Dictionary) as:

(4864) συναγωγη, sunagoge [soon-ag-o-gay’]

from (the reduplicated form of)

συναγω - sunago συναγω;

an assemblage of persons; specially, a Jewish "synagogue" (the meeting or the place); by analogy, a Christian church:--assembly,...

«συναγω - sunago συναγω»

(4863) συναγω, sunago [soon-ag'-o]

from

*συν - sun συν and

*αγω - ago αγω;

to lead together, i.e. collect or convene; specially, to entertain (hospitably):--+ accompany, assemble_(selves, together), bestow, come together, gather (selves together, up, together), lead into, resort, take in.

«*συν - sun συν»

(4862) *συν, sun [soon]

a primary preposition denoting union; with or together (but much closer than μετα - meta μετα or 3844), i.e. by association, companionship, process, resemblance, possession, instrumentality, addition, etc.:--beside, with. In composition it has similar applications, including completeness.

+

«*αγω - ago αγω»

(71) *αγω, ago [ag'-o]

a * primary verb;

properly, to lead; by implication, to bring, drive, (reflexively) go, (specially) pass (time), or (figuratively) induce:--be, bring (forth), carry, (let) go, keep, lead away, be open.

~ "Synagogue" is simply the Greek translation of the Hebrew term *beit kneset* (בית כנסת), which means "house of assembly". Its earliest mention in the 1st century Theodotos inscription in Jerusalem. The inscription contains ten lines of Koine Greek text, paleographically dating it to the Herodian or early Roman periods (1st century BCE–70 CE). It commemorates the construction of a synagogue complex by Theodotos, son of Vettenu, who is identified as a priest and a synagogue leader (*archisynagogos*).

~Now to review the meanings of:

“STATE”

• The approximate date of c. 1200 A.D. is given for English language usage (per *Etymology*) as

stat, "circumstances, position in society, temporary attributes of a person or thing, conditions," from Old French *estat* "position, condition; status, stature, station," and directly from Latin *status* "a station, position, place; way of standing, posture; order, arrangement, condition," figuratively "standing, rank; public order, community organization."

This is a noun of action from the past-participle stem of *stare* "to stand" (from PIE root 《*sta-》

"to stand, make or be firm"). Some Middle English senses are via Old French *estat* (French *état*;

see 《estate》). The Latin word was adopted into other modern Germanic languages (German, Dutch *staat*) but chiefly in the political senses only.

The meanings "physical condition as regards form or structure," "particular condition or phase," and "condition with reference to a norm" are attested from c. 1300. The meaning "mental or emotional condition" is attested from 1530s (the phrase *state of mind* is attested by 1749); the specific colloquial sense of "an agitated or perturbed condition" is from 1837.

The meaning "splendor of ceremony, etc., appropriate to high office; dignity and pomp befitting a person of high degree" is from early 14c. Hence to lie in state "be ceremoniously exposed to view before interment" (1705) and keep state "conduct oneself with pompous dignity" (1590s).

He [the President] shall from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient. [U.S. Constitution, Article II, Section iii]

Sense in quantum physics is by 1913.

》 STATE (v.) 《

1590s, "to set in a position, fix (a date, etc.)," from *state* (n.1) "circumstances, position." The sense of "declare, recite, set down in detail in words" is attested by 1640s from the notion of "placing" the words on the record. Related: *Stated*; *stating*.

》 STATE (n.2) 《

"political organization of a country; supreme civil power, the government; the whole people considered as a body politic," 1530s, from special use of *state* (n.1); this sense grew out of the meaning "condition of a country" with regard to government, prosperity, etc. (late

13c.), from Latin phrases such as *status rei publicæ* "condition (or existence) of the republic."

The sense of "a semi-independent political entity under a federal authority, one of the bodies politic which together make up a federal republic" is from 1774. The British North American colonies occasionally were called states as far back as 1630s.

State rights in U.S. political sense is attested from 1798 (the form *states rights* is recorded by 1824): the doctrine that states retain all rights and privileges not delegated to the federal government in the Constitution, in its extreme form including the power and right of sovereignty.

Often contrasted with ecclesiastical power in phrase *church and state* (1580s). State socialism attested from 1850 as "a scheme of government favoring enlargement of state functions as the directest way to achieve socialist goals."

Sense of "property" is late 14c., from that of "worldly prosperity;" specific application to "landed property" (usually of large extent) is first recorded in American English 1620s. A native word for this was Middle English *ethel* (Old English *æðel*) "ancestral land or estate, patrimony." Meaning "collective assets of a dead person or debtor" is from 1830.

- Whereas the meaning that is used by the U.S. Courts (per *Black's Law Dictionary*, 1st edition):

- (v.) "To express the particulars of a thing in writing or in words; to set down or set forth in detail.

To set down in gross; to mention in general terms, or by way of reference; to refer. 6 Hill, 300."

- (n.) "A body politic, or society of men, united together for the purpose of promoting their mutual safety and advantage, by the joint efforts of their combined strength. Cooley, Const. Lim. 1.

One of the component commonwealths or states of the United States of America.

The people of a state, in their collective capacity, considered as the party wronged by a criminal deed; the public; as in the title of a cause, "The State vs. A. B."

The section of territory occupied by on of the United States.

(*Black's Law Dictionary*, 11th edition, 2019, p.1697)

state, *n.* (16c) **1.** The political system of a *body* of people who are politically organized; the system of rules by which jurisdiction and authority are exercised over such a body of people <separation of church and state>. – Also termed *political society*. Cf. NATION.

"... an association of human beings established for the attainment of certain ends by certain means. ...a the most important of all the various kinds of society in which men unite being indeed the necessary basis and condition of peace, order, and civilisation. In what does the state differ from such ... societies as a church ... ? ... The difference is ... of function. The state must be defined by its activities and purposes as are essential and characteristic." John Salmond, *Jurisprudence* ... (10th ed. 1947).

“...an institution, ... a system of relations which men establish ... as a means of securing ... the most fundamental ... system of order ... the whole of the habitable world is divided between ... seventy ... states. ...it is among ... other institutions, such as churches ...it is not, ... an all embracing institution, many institutions, e.g. the Roman Catholic Church, transcend(s) the boundaries of any single state.” J. L. Brierly, *The Law of Nations* 118 (5th ed. 1995).

• Where else in The Bible KJV the word is used in Philippians 2:19-20,

“19 But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort when I know your » state «.

20 For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for youra» state «.

KJVSD — Philippians 2:19 - KJVSD — Philippians 2:20

» state «

(4012) περι, peri [per-ee'] from the base of

« περιαν - peran περιαν » ;

properly, through (all over), i.e. around; figuratively with respect to; used in various applications, of place, cause or time (with the genitive case denoting the subject or occasion or superlative point; with the accusative case the locality, circuit, matter, circumstance or general period):--(there-)about, above, against, at, on behalf of, X and his company, which concern, (as) concerning, for, X how it will go with, ((there-, where-)) of, on, over, pertaining (to), for sake, X (e-)state, (as) touching, (where-)by (in), with. In comparative, it retains substantially the same meaning of circuit (around), excess (beyond), or completeness (through). SGD PERGE.2 - SGD PERI.2

« περιαν - peran περιαν »

*(4008) περιαν, peran [per'-an]SGD PERAN.1

apparently accusative case of an obsolete derivative of

*peiro (to "pierce");

through (as adverb or preposition), i.e. across:--beyond, farther (other) side, over.

SGD PER.2 - SGD PERAN.2

» STATE «

13 So the workmen wrought, and the work was perfected by them, and they set the house of God in his

» state «, and strengthened it.

KJVSD — 2chronicles 24:13

» state «

(4971) mathkoneth [math-ko'-neth]

SHD MATHKONETH.4

or mathkuneth {math-koo'-neth}; from «' takan' (takan)»

in the transferred sense of measuring; proportion (in size, number or ingredients):--composition, measure, state, tale.

* 《' takan' (takan)》

(8505) takan [taw-kan']

SHDāTAKAN.ā

a primitive *root;

to balance, i.e. measure out (by weight or dimension); figuratively, arrange, equalize, through the idea of levelling (ment. estimate, test);-- bear up, direct, be ((un-))equal, mete, ponder, tell, weigh. SHD TKELETH.2 - SHD TAKAN.2

- in the IntrLnr. Bible 2 Ch. 24: 13 is translated as "its original condition" :

Strong's h4971

- Lexical: מִתְכַּנֶּת
- Transliteration: mathkoneth
- Part of Speech: Noun Feminine
- Phonetic Spelling: math-ko'-neth
- Definition: measurement, tally, proportion.
- Origin: Or mathkuneth {math-koo'-neth}; from takan in the transferred sense of measuring; proportion (in size, number or ingredients).
- Usage: composition, measure, state, tale.

~ My point in reviewing and sharing all these different Meanings of each of the words in the phrase "Separation of Church and State" is to show that though earthly temporary governments are given allowance to think they can change definitions that constitute laws, to allegedly honor "In the beginning was The Word", they at the same time forget that The Word NEVER CHANGES per Malachi 3:6; and furthermore when The Word led His people from bondage to form His nation and after 300-350 years the nation advocated to SEPARATE from The Word as their Supreme Leader, and be like the other nations and have a man lead instead is a warning against rejecting God's Blessing; Because it was a Uniting of Church and State that took place in 1 Samuel 8:5-7, 9;

It's obvious that the Constitutional Law will be eventually amended per the edited Black's Law Dictionary 11th edition; Which is predicted to happen in Revelation; And just because God allows a False Prophecy to come to be, doesn't mean it coincides with God's Heavenly Kingdom being on earth for a temporal 1,000 years;

As I stated before, God's Word NEVER CHANGES; For He is The Root and The Offspring; and all who prefer to believe that words' fundamental meanings can change have been duped by the enemy of The Word when he first succeeded in that very deception at the beginning of The Book, The Bible by saying that going against God's Words' Meanings won't lead to death.

My prayers is for anyone who reads this, that they not be deceived;

Sincerely,

Milisa M. Hunt

From: Dale Rottacker <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:06:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

Whether it's specifically stated or not, separation of church and state, because of how poorly it was working elsewhere.

We don't want to go back to that. We always hear, "show us a country where communism or socialism has worked" and we're told it hasn't... but the same can be said for the joining of church and state. Iran and Islam, Rome and the Catholic Church should be proof enough what a bad idea this would be.

Respectfully thank you for reconsidering this.

Dale

From: "Richard R. Schultz" <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:09:02 -0400

Importance: Normal

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – [Your Name]

Date: 13-07-2026

From: Richard R. Schultz

Dear Members of Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as an American Citizen (also descendant of those on Mayflower) to inform as to where my stance be on several of your line items/recommendations to President Trump so there might be reconsiderations of afore mentioned recommendations in your report that will not serve our Nation in our walks of Faith as this historically "Protestant Nation" has in centuries past, in alignment with our founders. I have read other's responses, so my prayers are not to over-duplicate their sentiments in excess.

To your recommendation's, please note these to which I do NOT consent:

#5- "NO CONSENT" This item regards "civil political" manipulation opening that door of corruption, our elected ought to be abiding by "Truth" with justice in all matters, not picking "favorites", quite simply.

#7 "NO CONSENT" There isn't any place in American governance to "pick-n-choose" what ideological groups/sects, etc. get rights over others, all are equal (read our Declaration/Constitution).

#9 "NO CONSENT" "Repeal of Johnson" Again, repealing this opens that proverbial "pandora's box" to underhanded political, with other corruptions, to contrary, it needs to be enforced NOW more stringently folks, pray tell.

*Note: In addition of note to mention, by those eleven souls on your religious consultants (so called) there appears quite disparagement in balance of denominational influencers. This creates troublesome considerations for my mind, personally speaking, creating very questionable credibility considerations for this entire "ball-of-wax"...

"Wall"/"Bridge" (so called):

Jefferson's letter of 1802 in no way, shape, or form suggests any wall that was meant to work both ways. Quite contrary as he refers to "that act of these whole American people which declared that their legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting their free exercise thereof,"... In short, to keep civil authority out of Faith (God's work) yet to KEEP God in governance of America. This has been that standard until recent decades, so time to bring God back, Hallelu-JAH 🙏...

This wall intended to be erected has been to keep civil power out of all American's matters of "Faith", otherwise we will be led into another [religiopolitical] power such as Roman popery, which they all had practically first-hand experience/knowledge of... There exists already that "bridge" (so called) in this Countries Legislative branch via our Declaration of Independence in our Constitution by "enumerated powers", which I believe to have been guided by Devine Providence since our inception as this "Protestant Christian Nation.". As descendant to one of those which landed here on that sailing vessel Mayflower, also Divinely guided, then self governed for-a-time under God, we are Nation Of, By, For Her People with God Almighty. We "consent" or "deny" what happens with our governance, remember? Also of note to mention, by those eleven souls on your religious consultants (so called) there appears quite disparagement in balance of denominational influencers. This creates troublesome considerations

Additionally, church groups (so called) that have opted for 501c3 tax exempt status have submitted themselves to civil governance already, sadly, becoming prime examples, for now they must submit to government mandates to maintain this 501c3 status. So many have joined hands with rome long ago having left founding "Fundamental Protestant Principles" while creating "books of new order", as well as abandoning their own established primary contributing "Light Bearers". Essentially "falling away" to becoming "daughters of babylon"... When/as churches take government money/privileges or step into partisan politics, that corruption heart with mind of politics enters with it. Churches end up competing for funding, answering to politicians instead of to God Almighty through Christ — that's bad for all true ministry of that Gospel of Christ along with this country alike, as national apostacy brings national ruin. America's people of faith built this country guided by that hand of God to protect faith; this be why True Ministries have stayed strong in America. Please keep civil anything out of matters of Faith between our God with our conscience while restoring God's Commandments over man's. God's Word of Power has shown through-out millennia what He has for His own. This be that true Lamp unto our feet so light of Truth unto our path into future as one under God indivisible with Liberty so Justice in all for all, Hallelu-JAH 🙌🌱🙌.

God Bless you as you are in my prayers for guidance in all Truth 🙌, Sincerely,
Richard R. Schultz

PII

From: Patrick Benner <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Johnson Amendment – Patrick Benner

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:09:10 -0400

Importance: Normal

Greetings,

I am writing to express my concern for any diminishing of the role of the Johnson Amendment by any government organization. I am a person of faith, I read and study the Bible daily, attend worship services regularly, and serve in various leadership roles within my local church. However, I would count it a sad, sad, day when it becomes ok for any religious leader representing their organization to overstep the restrictions to non-profits and begin officially telling members who to vote for. Organizations of faith, especially, should lose their non-profit status when they start campaigning for or against political candidates. End of story. When I walk into a place of worship, it should be for the purpose of celebrating my faith and fellowshiping with fellow believers, not for attending a political rally. Politics outside of my place of worship. That is the essence of religious integrity in this country. Let's not devolve into a pseudo-theocracy. We need to keep organized religion separate from organized politics.

Thank you for listening,
Patrick Benner
Angwin, CA [REDACTED] PII

From: Debbie Angs<[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Debbie Ang

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:09:32 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a citizen of United States, I'm reaching out to you to ask you to keep the government and the church separate.

As a devout Christian, I believe in the freedom to practice my religion as God would like me to do without the government's involvement and control, whether through funding of religious activities or other governmental and political influences. I also think that US citizens should have the freedom to exercise their religious beliefs whatever that may be. Religious beliefs are personal and the government involvement in it will destroy the freedom that we have enjoyed all these years from the time this country was founded.

Keeping the wall up between the government and the church will protect the church. And will keep both the government and the church free from each other's control.

Thank you for considering my comment.

Sincerely,

Debbie Ang
Diamond Bar, California

I'm writing as a citizen to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state — especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God — and that's bad for the church and the country alike. Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[City, State]

From: Danny Ingram <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:10:07 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am a practicing Roman Catholic. My beliefs are central to who I am as a human being. But I would not force my religion on anyone. I don't want anyone else's religious beliefs shoved down my throat, and that is what I feel is happening. Our nation was founded on the separation of church and state precisely because of the 2,000 years of religious warfare that destroyed Europe. Our founders didn't want to repeat that terrible mistake. I am a US Army veteran. I took an oath to defend the Constitution of the United States. I am deeply concerned that the constitution is being undermined by religious zealots who believe their religious beliefs overrule the constitution. I love my country. I volunteered to defend her. No religion should rule our nation.

Danny Ingram

From: Lucia <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:10:16 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Church and State are two separate entities and have two different agendas. The church is the institution wherein God reigns supreme. It is His government ordained by Him and allows Christian men, women, boys, and girls everyday freedom from hostile state-sanctioned oppression that reared its ugly head during the 1600's! God forbid that we have a repeat of that catastrophic event. Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things are God's.

From: " [REDACTED] PII " < [REDACTED] PII >

To: " [REDACTED] PII " < [REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:10:54 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the US DOJ and US Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing you today to voice my support for separation of church and state, and to reject the Commission's directive to the DOJ to redefine the Establishment Clause to build a "bridge" between church and state. We need a wall, not a bridge. The government has no business dictating anything to do with religious practice.

Sincerely and patriotically,

Michele Denny
May God Bless America

From: spencer scott <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Cc: spencer scott <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:13:37 -0400

Importance: Normal

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty US Department of Justice 950 Pennsylvania NW Room 5706
Washington DC 20530

Greetings, Chair Patrick, and Vice Chair Dr Carson, also members of the Commission on Religious Liberty.

I became aware of the Commissions work very late. However, I wanted to send a note you all.

President Trump and those of you, that flank him as a matter of privilege and duty we pray for you'all, continually that the LORDS will be done in all that you do.

As a US citizen born in this great country, and a person that has a appreciation for History, especially U S, History. Also the moving beginnings of this Great country and the driving force that caused the first settlers to flee from England.

In order to separate themselves from a nation ruled by a King, in direct tutelage and alignment with a powerful church directed by a Pope.

Religious tyranny was the fuel that initially ignited an convulsive exodus from England to many places beyond and eventually to eventually to this fair land, as you know.

At any point that matters of conscience are coerced and overriding tension is applied to direct traffic with in preset guide lines beyond focused conscious morality of right and wrong and those principles that maintain and build foster the framework of cohesive communities with respect to life and property, history has penned disastrous results.

Especially subjective areas of a particular days or tenants that are polished by certain sects or creeds or extraneous doctrinal views of popular religious bodies all these are preset to violate by force and mechanisms of conscience.

Separation of Church and State was never written in these specific words in the Constitution of The United States.

However it's doctrines are replete within its pages. Evidenced in its actions and articles and bills and impetus of applied checks and balances.

All to thwart the disaster that cause the exit from England earlier the recoil resulting in the vehement expressions surroundings French Revolution .

Please in a desire to gain advantage ground over what has suffered neglect due lack of corrective restraining boundaries to freedom of choice, and conscience

Please do not cause a greater disaster of compelling corroborated hypocritical behavior as religious matters of conscience as a corrective measure

History has already written the results for all who would attempt such in the guise of an imagined different outcome

Concerned citizen
Spencer Scott.

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

From: Jeff Sampson <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:15:33 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a citizen and a person of faith, I am deeply troubled by the Commission's proposal to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge."

This wall was built by believers to keep the church free, not by secularists to restrict religion. A bridge opens the door for government funding and political influence, forcing churches to compete for grants and answer to politicians instead of to God. History demonstrates that the blending of church and state is detrimental to both.

I urge you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken this separation—specifically, using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment. When churches engage in partisan politics or accept government funding, they inherit political corruption. Separation protects faith, which is precisely why religion has remained strong in our country.

I also urge the commission to remove the recommendation to "Nominate and confirm federal judges with the courage to decide religious liberty cases on the merits where warranted, rather than engage in improper judicial avoidance." Judges should be selected based on their ability to decide all cases on their merits, we should not try and single out and target particular cases.

In summary, I ask the commission to please maintain the separation of church and state - that's how we keep both free.

Respectfully,

Jeff and Charla Sampson

From: Joyce Burkeen <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Freedom of religion

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:15:35 -0400

Importance: Normal

Please do not allow the wall between church and state to be removed. Freedom of religion is too important.

Thank you-
Joyce Burkeen

"This is my prayer for you: that your love will grow more and more; that you will have knowledge and understanding with your love; that you will see the difference between the good and the bad and choose the good...." Philippians 1:9&10a (ICB)

From: Robert Mason <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment-separation of church and state-Robert Mason

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:17:08 -0400

Importance: Normal

July 13, 2026

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and all members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to express serious concern over the Commission's reported recommendation to build a "bridge" between church and state and to repeal the Johnson Amendment.

History offers a consistent warning: whenever the church has gained the power of the state to enforce its aims, persecution of religious minorities has followed. It may be tempting to believe that free, modern America is immune to this pattern — that here, corruption and persecution could never take root. But history suggests otherwise, and this proposal, however incremental it may seem, moves us in that direction.

God has blessed this nation, and even as we witness a steady erosion of morals and standards, the solution is not government-funded promotion of Christianity. Enlisting the state to advance religion may appear to strengthen the church in the short term, but it ultimately invites government control over religion — and undermines the very freedoms that have allowed faith to flourish here. The wall of separation between church and state is not a threat to the church; it is one of its greatest protections, and it deserves to be reinforced, not dismantled.

The Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses of the First Amendment exist precisely to prevent this outcome — protecting people of faith both from government interference and from the coercive power a state-aligned church could wield, and preserving every citizen's right to worship according to the dictates of their own conscience.

I respectfully urge the Commission not to open the door to government support of religion. Please reconsider this recommendation and reaffirm the constitutional separation that has long safeguarded religious liberty for all Americans.

Respectfully,

Robert Mason

Idaho

From: Lorinda Hoffmann <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Religious Liberty Commission Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:18:45 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Ben Carson and members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing to respectfully express my disagreement with the recommendation that the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment be reinterpreted to diminish the historic separation of church and state. Such a statement is inconsistent with the text of our Constitution, the intent of its principal architects and the biblical principle that matters of the conscience belong to God rather than civil government.

I respectfully request that you go back to history and revisit what happens when church and state work together. One will cause the other to do its bidding and religious freedoms are removed.

The 1st Amendment declares that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. The Establishment Clause prevents the government from exercising authority over religion, while the Free Exercise Clause protects every citizen's right to worship, or not to worship, according to conscience.

If these are not kept separate, what religion is the State going to follow? Will it be yours, will it be mine??

For this reason, I respectfully urge the Commission to reject any interpretation of the constitution that diminished the historic separation of church and state. The preservation of religious liberty depends upon maintaining the proper boundaries between civil authority and matters of conscience. That principle is faithful to the Constitution, consistent with the teaching of Scripture, affirmed by the architects of our Republic, and essential to preserving liberty for our future generations.

Respectfully,

Lorinda Hoffmann

From: Tyler Ricks <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Tyler Rick

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:19:08 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

Religious liberty is the most fundamental of liberties because it protects the conscience itself. It is among the inherent rights our constitutional system was designed to recognize and protect. I therefore urge this Commission to hold the two Religion Clauses of the First Amendment together rather than treating one as an obstacle to the other. Free exercise is secure only when government refrains from prescribing religion, and government remains religiously neutral only when it protects the free exercise of every person.

Consider first the logic of the Declaration of Independence. The federal government possesses limited powers delegated by the people. But no person can delegate his relationship with God. I can authorize another person to manage my property, represent my civil interests, or speak on my behalf, but I cannot authorize anyone to believe for me, worship for me, or answer for my soul. Because authority over conscience was never mine to give, it was never government's to receive.

It follows from the structure of delegated government that religion lies outside civil jurisdiction—not merely because the Constitution prohibits an established national church, but because authority over religious faith and duty is not among the “just powers” that can arise from the consent of the governed. No government will stand at the judgment seat to answer for a citizen's soul. It therefore cannot rightly claim authority over that soul now.

Some will argue that a policy is justified because most Americans support it. But majority approval cannot be the measure of an inherent right. Whatever exists only by permission of the majority can be withdrawn by a later majority; it is therefore a privilege, not a right. Rights are independent of the consent of others, which is precisely why constitutional government places certain matters beyond an ordinary vote. Constitutional protections are especially necessary for minorities because the majority can ordinarily defend its interests through the political process.

This is not merely a civic argument. It is also a Christian one. Christ's command to render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God recognizes two distinct jurisdictions. Civil government may regulate conduct according to its civil consequences—including harm, coercion, fraud, and threats to the rights or safety of others—but it has no competence to decide religious truth, prescribe worship, or enforce duties owed solely to God.

Religious duty is rendered to God; civil duty is rendered to the state. When a government commission endorses a religious text as authoritative, promotes a religious observance, or urges citizens to perform a religious duty, it does more than risk offending secular sensibilities. It crosses the jurisdictional line Christ himself drew by assigning to Caesar authority that belongs to God alone.

This understanding is not a recent invention. In 1829 and 1830, congressional committees considered petitions asking the federal government to stop transporting mail on Sunday in recognition of the day's religious character. Senator Richard M. Johnson, who later became Vice President, presented the Senate report. The reports were received and ordered printed during the first half-century of government under the Constitution, while James Madison was still alive.

The 1829 Senate report declared:

“It is not the legitimate province of the legislature to determine what religion is true or what false. Our government is a civil and not a religious institution.”

The 1830 House report stated the corresponding duty of government:

“It has been regarded as the proper business of Government to protect all and determine for none.”

Those reports were committee documents, not constitutional amendments or judicial holdings. Nevertheless, they are powerful early evidence of how federal legislators understood the boundary between civil authority and religious duty. They did not regard government neutrality as hostility toward religion. On the contrary, they understood that government protects religion by refusing to determine religious questions for the citizen.

The House report also explained why a representative’s personal faith does not give him authority to legislate doctrine:

“He is chosen to represent their political, and not their religious, views; to guard the rights of man, not to restrict the rights of conscience.”

Most importantly, the committee recognized where the official definition of even one religious obligation must lead:

“If a solemn act of legislation shall, in one point, define the law of God, or point out to the citizen one religious duty, it may with equal propriety, proceed to define every part of divine revelation, and enforce every religious obligation, even to the forms and ceremonies of worship, the endowment of the church, and the support of the clergy.”

That warning remains decisive. Once government claims authority to identify and promote one religious duty, it has claimed the jurisdiction necessary to identify and promote every religious duty. The danger does not depend upon whether the first duty is widely accepted, apparently harmless, or consistent with my own beliefs. The question is whether government possesses that power at all.

The reports also recognized that civil coercion cannot produce genuine religious conviction:

“If Congress shall declare the first day of the week holy, it will not convince the Jew nor the Sabbatarian. It will dissatisfy both, and, consequently, convert neither. Human power may extort vain sacrifices, but the Deity alone can command the affections of the heart.”

The Senate report expressed the American principle in a particularly memorable sentence: “What other nations call religious toleration, we call religious rights.” Toleration is a favor granted by those who possess power. A right requires no such permission.

To the extent that this Commission proposes official endorsement of a religious text, observance, or duty, it should confront these early congressional warnings. Doing so would not merely depart from a modern judicial doctrine. It would reject an understanding expressed by congressional committees in 1829 and 1830: that the federal government’s proper business is to protect every person’s religious exercise while determining religious duty for no one.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of defining or promoting religion. These commitments do not compete with one another. They stand or fall together.

Respectfully,

Tyler Rick
Walla Walla, Washington

From: Terry Martin <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] The Need for Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:19:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern:

This letter is written to urge the Commission to take no action in combining Church and State. We believe that the First Amendment gives all citizens the INDIVIDUAL right to choose their own place and form of religious observance (or even the option to abstain!). The foremost concern with a "state mandated" is - Who decides the exact form? Who decides which doctrines are "approved" and which are not? Nowhere does the Constitution establish a "national religion" - quite the opposite, we are guaranteed freedom of choice.

As Christians, we concur with the Apostle Paul (Romans 13) and his admonition to be subject to higher powers, as they are ordained by God Himself. But no authority short of God can dictate the form of religious observance. Dictates contrary to Scripture are NOT ordained by God. To force, by governmental authority, religious observances (such a day of worship) are an affront to God and His followers. To ATTEMPT TO DO SO unnecessarily makes citizens of this great county outlaws.

We urge you to refrain from taking any action that would unite Church and State in any form. Keep the Johnson Amendment in force (churches need to keep "state" outside their areas of influence as well); governmental (public) funding should be to PUBLIC schools, not private schools - and public schools should not overtly or covertly push ANY religious (or lack thereof) positions or faiths on students or faculty.

Respectively,
Terry and Judy Martin
Eagle Point, OR.

Sent from my iPad

From: Freddy Scar <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:19:34 -0400

Importance: Normal

I stand behind the Pillar of freedom and demand church and state stay seperated. Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion. Please uphold the oath you took to protect the US constitution.

- Tom Riffle

From: Terri Horner <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:20:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

America is a Republic, not a democracy. Although we elect leaders in a democratic way, yet an important difference in a Republic vs a democracy, is that: in a democracy, the majority rules. In a Republic, the views and beliefs of minority groups is protected. When government puts its funds into church coffers, it has the say as to how those funds are used. This may conflict with the beliefs of minority groups. This, if the minority group refuses to accept the conditions, they will be left behind in funding. This will either result in putting blinders on beliefs or persecution of minorities. I oppose the merging or compromise of the church with the State. The book of Revelation calls such relations—harlotry.

Teresa Horner

From: Micah Barkers [REDACTED] PII

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Repealing the Johnson Amendment – Micah Barker

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:21:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a young person, a citizen of the US in the state of TN and an earnest Bible believing Christian. While I appreciate all the time and research spent on this commission and all you have to bring to light some of the issues facing freedom of religion today like the COVID-19 vaccine mandates, public school issues and workplace persecution issues among others, I must respectfully disagree with the recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment.

While I agree that the churches should be able to speak on the issues and moral problems of the country, to favor a specific candidate or party is not the business of the church. If the religious institutions are allowed to support specific candidates for public office there are several issues we could face and it seems like we are already facing because the Johnson Amendment is not being fully enforced:

Church Corruption: If churches can support specific candidates, then candidates could use the churches and their leaders to promote them for office if they favor the specific church and their leaders or give them other incentives.

Money Issues: This could create a huge problem if political parties use religious entities and functions for funding and could create pathways for tax exempt donations for political support.

Political Warzone: It could make our churches and other religious institutions a warzone between political parties and opinions instead of focusing on the mission of knowing God. This is especially important for Christians, who should be focused on the doctrines of the Bible and the Bible only. Instead they would be focused on loyalty to a specific political figure the pastor or religious leader is promoting.

For these reasons and more, I respectfully request that you do not recommend the repealing of the Johnson Amendment. Instead please recommend that we enforce it to help make our churches free from political wars and misuse. Then there can be a refocusing on the real goal: to know God and to transform the country, through the power and love of God without the influence of human enterprises and politics.

Respectfully,
Micah Barker
from Tennessee

From: Janice McKenzie <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Janice McKenzie

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:21:10 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for taking the time to analyze the important issue of the separation of church and state and for hearing testimonies on this topic. In my reading of the constitution, it is clear that the separation of church and state was intended. That is what has primarily made this country distinct and superior from other nations. I object to much of the content of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report, which undermines this historic separation and the Johnson Amendment.

One of the violations of this separation of church and state that has caused much suffering is the lack of neutrality in Palestine, including Gaza, Iran, and elsewhere. The strong support for Jewish objectives does not align with our constitutional history. Looking back over the dark ages of European history, one can see how the union of religion and political systems took away liberty and human rights. Please don't allow us to travel that path again. Please uphold the constitution of the United States that has made our nation the example of freedom in the world. Please maintain the separation of the church and state and reconsider much of the content of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report.

Thank you,
Janice McKenzie

From: eunicelvidal <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- establishment cause -EUNICE VIDAL

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:21:16 -0400

Importance: Normal

Enviado do meu iPhone

Religious Legislation Injures Religion First

Based on: J. H. Waggoner, "Evils of Religious Legislation," Sentinel Library No. 3 (1889)

Subject: Public Comment — Government Sponsorship Is a Danger to the Churches It Would Favor

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write in support of the draft report's free-exercise protections — and against its establishment-side recommendations, for a reason the Commission may find unexpected: they endanger religion itself.

Civil law reaches outward conduct only. As an 1889 pamphlet put it: "It cannot sway the convictions; it cannot reform the conscience; it cannot renew the heart. If it attempts to coerce the conscience it usurps authority which belongs only to God, the supreme moral Governor."

When government undertakes to display, teach, or sponsor religion, it must first decide whose religion. "But there are several hundred religions professedly based on the Bible. Which shall be enforced as the true one? Whose religion shall be suppressed?" The outcome is inevitable: "Not the Bible, but somebody's construction of the Bible, will be adopted as the religion of the land. It will be a religion based altogether on human judgment and human authority, and not at all on the authority of the word of God." A mandated Ten Commandments display is exactly this — one tradition's numbering and translation, stamped with state authority.

Nor does the favored church escape harm: "It is always unsafe to intrust the control of civil government to the church—to any church—because it is contrary to the institution of the Head of the church. It is an unauthorized, and, therefore, an unhealthy, combination. It leads to churchly worldliness and worldly ambition. It is subversive of true piety and spirituality in church service."

Religion in America is strong precisely because it has been voluntary. I respectfully ask the Commission to recommend robust protection for free exercise — and nothing that makes any American's faith a project of the state.

Respectfully submitted, Eunice Vidal, Kansas City, MO, USA

From: Ivor Myers <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:21:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

I would like to voice my concern about the erosion of the wall between Church and State, and instead create a bridge. I believe this goes against the principles of "Protestantism" upon which our country was founded, namely that government would neither interfere with nor promote any religion while also allowing for no religion to be held by all. This direction is a slippery slope and could and will result in disaster if followed through. Please reconsider.

Ivor Myers

From: Julia Kernss [REDACTED] PII

To: "RLC (OASG)" [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - [Chapter 5] - Cru, Christian Legal Society, Intervarsity, Navigator's and FCA.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:22:45 -0400

Importance: Normal

July 13, 2026

Religious Liberty Commission
Office of the Associate Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

[REDACTED] PII

Dear Members of the Commission on Religious Liberty,

We are thankful for the Draft report of the Religious Liberty Commission delivered on June 26, 2026. We particularly appreciate that the report included acknowledgment of the unique challenges that religious students face on public college campuses today. Highlighting these issues is a vital step toward ensuring that public higher education remains a space that respects diverse expressions of faith and conscience. The undersigned are faith-based organizations with student-led chapters that operate on college campuses. The presence of these groups is beneficial to both the students and the universities. Religious groups have been shown to contribute positively to students' mental and emotional well being as well as their academic success.

Our chapters serve *any* student seeking fellowship, support and a chance to worship with other students. Our chapters' *membership* is open to all students regardless of their religious beliefs or lack thereof; however, our chapters expect our student *leadership* to agree with the chapters' core religious beliefs. Too frequently, our chapters are threatened with exclusion from campus because of our requirement that our chapters' leaders agree with our defining religious beliefs. But it is commonsense for a religious group to want leaders who agree with its distinguishing religious beliefs. Yet groups from diverse faith traditions—including Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian groups—have been threatened with exclusion from campus because of their religious leadership requirements.

We are thankful that the report highlights numerous experiences and challenges faced by individual students on college campuses. We believe it would be helpful to also specifically emphasize the need to protect student associations as having their own distinct identities with free speech and religious exercise rights, in addition to individual students' rights. A religious student organization possesses its own unique personhood, mission, and institutional identity; it provides a critical part of the religious experience of many students and is uniquely vulnerable to derecognition, and unconstitutional marginalization or total exclusion from equal campus access and benefits.

During her testimony before this Commission, Kim Colby, Senior Counsel for Christian Legal Society's Center For Law & Religious Freedom, highlighted the significant obstacles religious communities have encountered for decades. Drawing upon Benjamin Fleshman's analysis in "How Do You Solve a Problem Like *Martinez?*," she emphasized the precarious

position of groups denied formal institutional recognition. Lacking this recognition, these communities are effectively marginalized - excluded from free use of campus spaces, denied representation on the campus website and barred from participation in student recruitment events. For most groups, derecognition is fatal to their mission. Fleshman states that since the *Martinez* precedent was established, 195 religious organizations have required legal or national intervention to secure their status, while 119 have suffered complete derecognition. These figures likely underrepresent the true scope of the issue, as they do not account for those who silently abandoned their applications upon facing restrictive registration requirements.

Since the publication of the article, religious groups, including chapters of the undersigned organizations, have continued to face rejection based on their religious identity and religious leadership standards. For example, just this spring, a Cru chapter at a public university in New Jersey was told it could not be recognized because its club constitution stated criteria for leadership selection of student leaders including a commitment to uphold the religious beliefs and religious mission of the group. A resolution has not yet been reached there. In February of 2026, a community college in New York also denied recognition to an InterVarsity chapter there because it requires student leaders to affirm InterVarsity's Statement of Faith. In addition, a community college in Colorado has denied an InterVarsity chapter recognition twice in the last four years, each time relenting only when legal representatives reminded it of the federal regulations protecting religious student organizations at 34 C.F.R. 75.500(d) and 76.500(d).

Regarding the specific recommendations outlined on pages 89–90, we agree with the Commission's direction but respectfully suggest a few critical adjustments to maximize clarity and impact:

1. Clarify that religious requirements should be allowed just for religious student clubs in the suggested "religious liberty guidance for higher education."

We suggest adding the word "religious" in the third point under suggestions for religious liberty guidance for higher education so that it says students at public institutions have the right to "Require *religious* club leaders and members to meet religious requirements.". This clarification is important because while it is clearly invidious discrimination for non-religious groups to use religious criteria for leadership, it is not unlawful discrimination for a religious group to do so; it is consistent with the commonsense expectation all groups have that their leaders will advance their group's identity, beliefs and expressive purpose,.

To support the Report's recommendation, it would also be helpful to include a clear rationale within the text preceding the recommendations. We propose incorporating the following reasoning into the Report's analysis in Chapter 5:

"For a religious organization to maintain its distinct identity, mission, and expressive purpose, it must be guided by individuals who sincerely share and adhere to its core tenets. Forcing a religious group to have leaders who do not subscribe to its faith fundamentally undermines its foundational right to freedom of association. Ensuring that these groups can maintain faith-based standards is not a matter of exclusion, but of basic fairness; it preserves the authentic pluralism of a campus by allowing unique religious communities to exist and remain true to their defining principles."

2. Adjust the language in the "Support Expansion of the Equal Access Act" Recommendation on p.90 to improve clarity.

The current report recommends expanding the Equal Access Act of 1984, 20 U.S.C. §§ 4071-74. However, the Equal Access Act and the introduced Equal Campus Access Act of 2026, H.R. 5505 & S. 2859, are distinct legislative mechanisms that differ significantly in language, scope, and operational detail. Rather than conflating them, we suggest splitting this into two distinct, targeted recommendations:

- **Uphold the Equal Access Act at the High School Level:** Encourage the equal, consistent application of Equal Access Act principles across the country for all secondary school students, without any ideological litmus test for any of the groups.

- **Encourage Protections at the Higher Education Level via the Equal Campus Access Act:** Strongly encourage the passage of the Equal Campus Access Act to establish clear protections for religious student organizations in higher education. This introduced legislation would allow students across the entire religious spectrum to form, maintain, and protect authentic religious student organizations centered around their shared beliefs and religious exercise, ensuring broad and equitable protection for all faiths.

We believe these refinements will sharpen the report's precision and enhance its ability to protect the vital fabric of religious student communities. Thank you once again for your invaluable leadership on this issue and for considering these recommendations.

Sincerely,

Mark Gauthier
US National Director
Cru

Steve McFarland
Director
Christian Legal Society, Center for Law & Religious Freedom

Gregory L. Jao
Senior Assistant to the President
InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA

Wanda G. Anderson
General Counsel
Senior Vice President of Governance, People & Culture
The Navigators

Dan Carter
Executive Vice President of Campus
Fellowship of Christian Athletes

From: Priscilla Der <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation between church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:22:46 -0400

Importance: Normal

I would like to maintain the separation between church and state as it has been for the last 250 years

Sincerely,

Priscilla Der

From: RitasDeSouzas <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

To: "[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]" <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Freedom of Religion

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:23:01 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick and members of Religious Liberty Commission:

The separation of church and state has always been a cornerstone of the Constitution. To undermine it would be an affront to the very liberties that Americans have enjoyed and cherished throughout the generations. To see any religion take precedence over any other is incredibly unAmerican, and furthermore appears to be a deliberate attempt to deny another freedom to the American people and why?

Because of some political agenda that serves a minority of people over the respect for the Constitution and representing every American, not just the ones who support this present Administration.

Please stay the Guardians and Protectors of our incredible and sacred Constitution and don't disrespect or amend our Constitution for political or expedient reasons. Keep our Constitution the way it has worked well for all Americans for over 250 years!

Marita DeSouza
California Resident

From: Michael Schrader <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Freedom from government legislating religion

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:23:57 -0400

Importance: Normal

I believe we have the right to be free from the government legislating how God is obeyed or worshiped.

Mike Schrader

[REDACTED] PII

From: Tammie Hagan <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:24:37 -0400

Importance: Normal

As a Christian all of my life, I want to make an appeal to maintain separation of church and state.

World History and Bible History alike tell of some of the ugliest errors of governments who did not maintain that protection. The Founders of our country worked hard to maintain it while still protecting the free exercise of religion. We are a great country and blessed by God. While we depend on Him, we must operate according to the principles of Heaven which allow folks to exercise religion freely according to conscience or not at all. Free will is necessary for love - and which is the basis of true worship and obedience as Jesus cited in John 14:15 "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

Thank you!

From: Tammy LaTiers <[REDACTED] PII>

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:25:41 -0400

Importance: Normal

As a Bible-based Christian, actively involved in my local congregation, I beseech you to reconsider the report drafted by the [Religious Liberty Commission](#).

Invoking **any** level of government involvement in America's churches, even with the right intentions at heart, is an egregious move away from the intents of our Founding Fathers as defined in the Constitution and is contradictory to Thomas Jefferson's response to the Danbury Baptist Church Association on January 1, 1802, when similar concerns were raised (quoted below from the [Library of Congress](#) official website).

God has so richly blessed our country- indeed, we would not be a country were it not for His mighty hand. We must trust that, as we honor Him in the first four (4) commandments, He will continue to guide and provision our churches to advance the cause of heaven without the need for government interference, and entrust only the enforcement of moral law (the last six (6) commandments) to our government entities.

Gentlemen

*The affectionate sentiments of esteem and approbation which you are so good as to express towards me, on behalf of the Danbury Baptist association, give me the highest satisfaction. My duties dictate a faithful and zealous pursuit of the interests of my constituents, & in proportion as they are persuaded of my fidelity to those duties, the discharge of them becomes more and more pleasing. **Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship,** that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "**make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,**" thus building a **wall of separation between Church & State**. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.*

I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection & blessing of the common father and creator of man, and tender you for yourselves & your religious association, assurances of my high respect & esteem.

Th Jefferson

Jan. 1. 1802.

From: Mike Coy <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:26:29 -0400

Importance: Normal

I realize the morals of this country have gone south for over the past 6 decades, but unifying church & state isn't necessarily the answer. Putting a focus on the spirituality of the answer is better than bringing politics into it. A true revival w reformation is what is needed.

From: maureen anderson <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:26:36 -0400

Importance: Normal

This nation is not a was not a Christian nation. Christ said "if you love me keep my commandments. It's a voluntary thing, not forced. We should be able to choose for ourselves whom to follow. It's called freedom to choose whether we want to follow Jesus or mammon, the Devil.

From: Jose Guzmans <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separate gov and church

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:26:48 -0400

Importance: Normal

The government should not interfere with church. Just as these church should not in government issues. The Vatican has no right to be involved either. They've killed millions. They do not judge correctly. Nor do they speak for real Christians.

The bible tells us that Jesus said what belongs to God is God's, what belongs to Caesar is caesars.

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

From: Alyce Kelsey <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Draft Report of Presidential Religious Liberty Commission - Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:28:55 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chairman Patrick, Vice Chairman Carson, and Members of the Commission:

I am writing as a life-long citizen of the United States to express my concern over the Commission's recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment (Number 9 on the Summary) and, by its implication, any attempt to remove the "wall of separation" between church and state.

I believe any efforts to weaken the separation of church and state should be avoided. The Johnson amendment has served us well and helps to ensure that both entities say "in their lane". The principles of Religious Liberty are Constitutional and were affirmed by our founders.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,
Alyce Kelsey
Maryland Heights, Missouri

From: Gina Milka <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Preserving separation between church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:29:18 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this public comment.

I appreciate the Commission's desire to protect the free exercise of religion. Religious liberty is one of America's greatest blessings because it recognizes that faith is a matter of conscience and that every person is accountable to God for his or her own beliefs.

Scripture teaches that civil government has an important role in maintaining justice and order. It also teaches that worship belongs to God alone. Jesus Himself distinguished between the responsibilities of government and the responsibilities of faith when He said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). This principle has served as a foundation for religious freedom throughout our nation's history.

I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve this distinction. Government best fulfills its role by protecting every citizen's freedom of conscience rather than promoting, endorsing, or compelling any form of religious practice. The rights guaranteed by the First Amendment protect not only those whose beliefs are popular, but also those whose convictions differ from the majority.

History repeatedly demonstrates that whenever civil authority becomes closely joined with religious authority, liberty of conscience is eventually weakened. The strongest safeguard for religious freedom is a government that neither interferes with sincere religious practice nor uses its authority to advance religious observance. Faith is most genuine when it is embraced freely, never through pressure or coercion.

As the Commission develops its recommendations, I encourage you to continue strengthening protections for the free exercise of religion while also preserving the constitutional principles that prevent government from establishing or favoring religion. In doing so, you will help ensure that Americans of every faith—and those of no faith—remain free to follow the dictates of conscience without fear of discrimination or compulsion.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and for your service to our nation.

Respectfully,

Gina Milka

From: Ray C <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State - Essential for Religious Liberty!

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:29:20 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Commissioners

This great nation was founded upon: LIBERTY: Freedom of choice, Freedom of religion and Freedom of thought. These freedoms come from none other than the government of Heaven, the cornerstone of which is: Liberty and Freedom of choice.

1644 Roger Williams a Christian Pastor was banished into the New England winter by a "Christian" magistrate wrote, of a "hedge or wall of separation standing between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world". It was the churches wall, to keep the states hands off the church's garden. Just like Jesus when they asked him about paying taxes, Jesus held up a coin with the image of Caesar then He said: "Give to Caesar that which is Caesar, but to God that which is God's. The State must only legislate on duties between man and man, but the duties between man and God should be left to the individual. The Sate has no right to this area that should be regarded as sacrosanct. In 1888 an editor named Alonzo Jones agued this before the Senate to oppose the National Sunday Bill.

It is simply remarkable to me, that government officials and commissions are so ignorant of the history and founding of this great nation. The founding fathers were fully aware of the dangers of having church and state linked, not only this, but they were aware of the great dangers that both the Vatican and their army of Jesuits, that have moved with stealth and deception to achieve their ultimate goal of once again: dominating the world of religion and forcing homage to the Pope and the religion of Rome.

Pope Pius the ninth in his encyclical letter of August 15, 1854 said: "The absurd and erroneous doctrine or ravings in defense of liberty of conscience are a most pestilential error - a pest of all others, most to be dreaded by a state". The same pope, in his encyclical letter of December 8 1864, anathematized "those who assert liberty of conscience and of religious worship," also "all such as maintain that the church may not employ force."

Bishop O'Connor said: "Religious liberty is merely endured until the opposite can be carried into effect without peril to the Catholic world."

"Every Cardinal, Archbishop, and Bishop in the Catholic Church takes an oath of allegiance to the pope in which occur the following words: "Heretics, schismatics, and rebels to our said lord (the pope) of his aforesaid successors, I will do to my utmost to persecute and oppose." Josiah Strong "Our Country" ch.5, pars.2-4

This great United States as a nation, was formed largely by people fleeing religious persecution from Europe, this after many protestants were massacred and plundered, purely because they would not yield to Papal power, precepts and the traditions of man in favor of their Biblical truths they had come to understand. This persecution can be discovered in history and in such as the books as: "Foxes Book of Martyrs". This terrible persecution was at the hand of "The Roman Church" that was united with "the world governments" of the day. It was the Biblical teachings that began the great "Protestant Reformation". This reformation began the great age of enlightenment, industrial development and great cultural advances we enjoy today.

This same institution responsible for so much persecution and suffering (The pope and the Roman Church) now sits on ill-gotten wealth and the cost of many innocent protestant lives that were snuffed out and their land and wealth plundered because they were labeled as heretics. The dangers of uniting church and state are obvious for all who will study and familiarize themselves with history.

I find it quite laughable that the Pope Leo (the Fourteenth) got honored with the "religious Liberty Medal" how absolute

ironic and absurd. It is also not right that the State put one religion on a pedestal at the expense of others. The ignorance of the Protestant world to the scriptures and history underscores the importance of INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY OF THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE AND RELIGION.

I therefore humbly appeal to you all, that you take a close look at history, and do not for any reason link church to state... THIS WILL BE ABUSED AS IT HAS BEEN HISTORICALLY.

Sincerely
R Cloete'
Descendant of the French Huguenots

From: Tim Goodman <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Christine Goodman

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:29:55 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

The principle of the phrase "Separation of Church and State" is that Liberty of Conscience is protected rather than being eliminated. To get rid of the phrase Separation of Church and State is like throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The founders were clear that Liberty of Conscience came from God, not the State. The State is not to show favoritism to any particular denomination nor push religion out of the private or public arena. Because certain people have misapplied and misused the meaning of Separation of Church and State we have seen Christians harassed by that term, but that does not mean the phrase is wrong, but rather those who used it incorrectly. The correct definition protects faith and Liberty of Conscience rather than eliminating it. People seem to want to overreach and swing the pendulum too far the other way. The following video shows what the founding fathers meant by protecting Liberty of Conscience through the use of Separation of Church and State .

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgaVjksOo70>

From: "Carmen C. Santiago Gonzales" <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:30:33 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and members of Religious Liberty Commission,

I believe in the separation of church and state.

This country was founded on the Freedom of Religion and the principles to worship our Creator God with are own free will and not coercion. His desire is rendered Him love, devotion, and worship.

The First Amendment declares that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of or prohibiting the free exercise thereof ". Our Founding Fathers of our Constitution made sure to include this in our Constitution.

Remember that our early settlers came to this country because they had to fled government that enforced religious conformity.

This has made the USA one of the greatest religious liberty country in the world.

I, respectfully urge the Commission to reject any interpretation of the Constitution that diminishes the historic separation of church and state.

Psalm 46:10

Be still and know that I am God.

God Bless America 🙏

Respectfully,

Ms. Carmen Santiago Gonzales

From: Roger Stone <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] I very Strongly support Church and State being separated!!!

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:33:00 -0400

Importance: Normal

From: "[REDACTED PII]" <[REDACTED PII]>

To: [REDACTED PII]

Subject: [EXTERNAL] The President's Commission for Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:33:36 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern

I am writing about the recommendations of the President's Commission on Religious Liberty that will be presented to President Trump.

I would like for the wall of separation between church and state to continue as it has in the past. While not exactly written in the constitution, the concept has been practiced for over 200 plus years recommended by Roger Williams, founder of Rhode Island.

Thank you for your consideration and in accepting responses/comments.

Elizabeth

From: nicole jones <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII, nicole jones <[REDACTED] PII >, Nicole <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE- NICOLE JONES

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:33:40 -0400

Importance: Normal

Greetings Religious Liberty Committee,

I support the SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE because of lessons learned from the history of persecution in the old world of Europe where civil bodies were able to persecute the church due in large part to the nonexistence of separation of church and state. Individuals were persecuted for their decision to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience. Over 100 million Christians lost their lives because of the Roman Catholic Church's power to bridge the gap between church and state.

PLEASE DO NOT ABOLISH THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE. Please maintain this separation.

Church and State Should REMAIN SEPARATE as it was designed by God. Should the Justice Department proceed forward to with repudiating the separation of Church and State in these United States of America, GOD WILL REMOVE the BLESSINGS, FAVOR, MERCIES AND PROTECTION OF GOD FROM THIS NATION!!! And the USA will FALL AS A SUPERPOWER NATION! Go read prophecy in the bible. If you are not spiritually connected to God, you will NOT DISCERN THE ORACLES OF GOD IN HIS HOLY WORD.

I AM PLEADING WITH YOU, PLEASE DO NOT MOVE FORWARD WITH REMOVING THE WALL OF SEPARATION FROM CHURCH AND STATE. This is Not Communism China or Russia. WE, THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA RECEIVED BLESSINGS FROM GOD ALMIGHTY IN PART, DUE TO THIS LIBERTY & FREEDOM TO WORSHIP GOD ACCORDING TO OUR OWN CONSCIOUS. PLEASE! PLEASE! PLEASE LISTEN!....

Blessings,

Nicole Noa Jones

"GOD CAN DO ANYTHING BUT FAIL"

*"God has a reason for allowing things to happen. We may never understand His wisdom, but we must simply, trust His will.
" Psalm 37:5*

From: "Ms.sM" <[REDACTED]>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED]>

Cc: "[REDACTED]" <[REDACTED]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Monique

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:35:12 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a citizen to ask that you stongly reconsider and remove the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state - especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When we look back at history and when churches take government money and step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funds and answering to politicians instead of God, and that's bad for both country and church alike.

Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and its the reason religion has stayed strong here. Everyone has a God given right to decide for themselves based on the Liberty of Conscience.

Please do not tamper with this as this will affect every living soul!

It's important to keep both church and government free!

Sincerely,
Monique
Springdale, Washington

From: cynthia r doles <[REDACTED] PII >

To: Religious Liberty Commission <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:36:01 -0400

Importance: Normal

To The Commission:

The joining of church and state in history has always resulted in religious persecution not religious liberty. I pray these two entities will remain separate.

Respectfully,
Cynthia Doles

From: Megan George <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Keep separation of church and state intact!

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:36:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern,

This is a formal request to PLEASE keep separation of church and state intact! This is imperative!

Sincerely,

Megan M. George

From: Milton Adams <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - W. Milton Adams

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:37:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a citizen and person of faith, I am writing regarding the recommendations in your recent report, to ask that you reconsider those recommendations that tend to weaken the wall of separation between church and state. I believe that this wall of separation is in the best interest of both church and state.

Examples of religious persecution have been cited. And specific attention is given in recommendation #7 to combating anti-Semitism. The problem is that there are many other "anti-ism's" that need equal protection. Realizing that it is impossible for the government to equally support all religious interests, our founding fathers wisely chose instead to have the government support none of them—in the best interest of all of them. Please do not undermine this important principle.

Respectfully submitted,

W. Milton Adams, D.Min.
Linden, TN

From: Sheri Darrough <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] URGENT MATTER

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:37:41 -0400

Importance: Normal

July 13, 2026

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

The separation of church and state is a cornerstone of American freedom, rooted in the Constitution. The Commission's report raises important questions about the balance between religious liberty and government involvement.

The first amendment guarantees us the right to our religious beliefs without privileging one religion over another in state office. No one should be harassed for their religion. To see one religion taking precedence over another is just as bad even if the majority see it as the one religion that our country was founded on. This is not true. Many of the founders did not want a state religion dictating how funds are used in the country.

The history of church-state separation in America is complex. Roger Williams' 1644 work on the "wall of separation" and the colonies' experiments with disestablishment shaped early American thought. The First Amendment reflects this principle, protecting faith and preventing government overreach.

The Commission's recommendations on funding and the Johnson Amendment warrant careful consideration. How can we ensure religious freedom without entangling church and state? The impact on diverse communities and the role of education in promoting mutual understanding are also crucial.

Please consider our dissent before pursuing striking the phrase "separation between church and state" from public discourse.

Sincerely,
Sheri Darrough from California

From: Rebecca Triplett <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Rebecca Triplett

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:38:16 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I have read in your recently released draft report concerning replacing the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge," and it is very alarming. Of great concern to me is the recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment, as well as the recommendation to expand government funding to religious organizations and activities. Both of these recommendations are counter to the separation of church and state as provided for by the Constitution. Our forefathers came here to escape the religious persecution they were subjected to in the old world. Since that time, many of military men and women have given up their lives to protect the freedoms we all have come to cherish as the privilege of living as United States citizens. This so-called "bridge" that is being proposed will not strengthen the church, nor our country, but only eventually open the door to the tearing down of the religious freedoms we now hold dear, and inevitably lead to persecution of those who will not accept the state enforcement of religious doctrine.

Therefore, I wholeheartedly agree with the response which has been submitted to you by Pillar of [Freedom.org](https://www.freedom.org), which addresses in detail the relevant American history and the recommendations that are of concern.

Sincerely,
Rebecca Triplett
Cleveland, TN

From: Linda Learned <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:38:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr Carson and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission

I would like to speak concerning your report that addresses numerous critical issues that could concern many citizens of the United States.

1. I object to the funding of religious education and religious clubs on public campuses. This is the responsibility of the churches and should not be put in the hands of the government that has pledged to keep government and religion separated.

2. I object to repealing the Johnson Amendment which puts a safeguard in restricting Churches from being involved in political activities.

I request that the Johnson Amendment to be fully enforced.

3. I object to special treatment given to individual groups for example the Jewish People and the State of Israel and whether you desire complete neutrality in the government relationship with religion.

My husband's ancestor came on the Mayflower risking his life to have freedom to worship according to his conscience. He left children and family back in England never to see them again. All this to leave the religious oppression striving for a better life, free to worship according to the dictates of his conscience.

I pray that you will keep America free. Where government and religion are clearly separated.

Sincerely,
Linda Learned

Sent from my iPhone

From: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:38:30 -0400

Importance: Normal

Separation of Church and State - Essential for Religious Liberty!

Dear Commissioners

This great nation was founded upon: LIBERTY: Freedom of choice, Freedom of religion and Freedom of thought. These freedoms come from none other than the government of Heaven, the cornerstone of which is: Liberty and Freedom of choice.

1644 Roger Williams a Christian Pastor was banished into the New England winter by a "Christian" magistrate wrote, of a "hedge or wall of separation standing between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world". It was the churches wall, to keep the states hands off the church's garden. Just like Jesus when they asked him about paying taxes, Jesus held up a coin with the image of Caesar then He said: "Give to Caesar that which is Caesar, but to God that which is God's. The State must only legislate on duties between man and man, but the duties between man and God should be left to the individual. The Sate has no right to this area that should be regarded as sacrosanct. In 1888 an editor named Alonzo Jones agued this before the Senate to oppose the National Sunday Bill.

It is simply remarkable to me, that government officials and commissions are so ignorant of the history and founding of this great nation. The founding fathers were fully aware of the dangers of having church and state linked, not only this, but they were aware of the great dangers that both the Vatican and their army of Jesuits, that have moved with stealth and deception to achieve their ultimate goal of once again: dominating the world of religion and forcing homage to the Pope and the religion of Rome.

Pope Pius the ninth in his encyclical letter of August 15, 1854 said: "The absurd and erroneous doctrine or ravings in defense of liberty of conscience are a most pestilential error - a pest of all others, most to be dreaded by a state". The same pope, in his encyclical letter of December 8 1864, anathematized "those who assert liberty of conscience and of religious worship," also "all such as maintain that the church may not employ force."

Bishop O'Connor said: "Religious liberty is merely endured until the opposite can be carried into effect without peril to the Catholic world."

"Every Cardinal, Archbishop, and Bishop in the Catholic Church takes an oath of allegiance to the pope in which occur the following words: "Heretics, schismatics, and rebels to our said lord (the pope) of his aforesaid successors, I will do to my utmost to persecute and oppose." Josiah Strong "Our Country" ch.5, pars.2-4

This great United States as a nation, was formed largely by people fleeing religious persecution from Europe, this after many protestants were massacred and plundered, purely because they would not yield to Papal power, precepts and the traditions of man in favor of their Biblical truths they had come to understand. This persecution can be discovered in history and in such as the books as: "Foxes Book of Martyrs". This terrible persecution was at the hand of "The Roman Church" that was united with "the world governments" of the day. It was the Biblical teachings that began the great "Protestant Reformation". This reformation began the great age of enlightenment, industrial development and great cultural advances we enjoy today.

This same institution responsible for so much persecution and suffering (The pope and the Roman Church) now sits on ill-gotten wealth and the cost of many innocent protestant lives that were snuffed out and their land and

wealth plundered because they were labeled has heretics. The dangers of uniting church and state are obvious for all who will study and familiarize themselves with history.

I find it quite laughable that the Pope Leo (the Fourteenth) got honored with the “religious Liberty Medal” how absolute ironic and absurd. It is also not right that the State put one religion on a pedestal at the expense of others. The ignorance of the Roman Church together with the ignorance and capitulation of Protestant world to both history and the scriptures underscores the importance of INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY OF THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE AND RELIGION.

I therefore humbly appeal to you all, that you take a close look at history, and do not for any reason link church to state... THIS WILL BE ABUSED AS IT HAS BEEN HISTORICALLY.

Sincerely

R C

Descendant of the French Huguenots

From: PeopleFor <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment On June 2026 RLC Draft Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:39:44 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Comment_on_Religious_Liberty_Commission_letterhead.pdf

Good evening.

Please accept the attached comment by People For the American Way on the June 2026 draft report of the Religious Liberty Commission. We welcome any follow-up questions you may have.

Sent on behalf of People For by Jen Herrick

Comment by People For the American Way

On June 2026 Draft Report of the Religious Liberty Commission

July 10, 2026

People For the American Way is a national progressive advocacy organization that inspires and mobilizes Americans to defend freedom, justice, and democracy from those who threaten to take them away.

We are writing to comment briefly on the draft report published June 26, 2026 by the Religious Liberty Commission that was created by President Donald Trump's May 1, 2025 executive order.

We note that an interfaith coalition has [challenged](#) the legality of the commission, whose membership does not come close to reflecting the breadth and diversity of America's religious landscape. Like the Christian nationalist ceremony to "rededicate" America to God as part of the Freedom 250 celebrations, the Commission is made up almost entirely of Trump-aligned conservative Christians.

Undermining Separation of Church and State

For more than 45 years, People For the American Way has promoted religious freedom and defended the separation of church and state, which advances peaceful pluralism and protects religious liberty for all Americans. Church-state separation has fostered a vibrantly diverse flourishing of religious practice in the U.S

Unfortunately, the make-up of the Commission, the comments of its leadership, and the recommendations in its report make it clear that a primary purpose of the commission has been to undermine church-state separation in line with the goals of the Christian nationalist movement that is politically aligned with the president. Journalist and author Sarah Posner has [called](#) the Commission's report "at once an homage to Christian nationalism and a roadmap for the United States Department of Justice to embrace."

The [American Historical Association](#) has noted that the Commission's report "relies on distorted accounts of American religious history to advance a constitutional interpretation that challenges long-established understandings of the First Amendment and the separation of church and state."

That purpose has been clear since the White House event celebrating the Commission's creation, at which the president stated that church-state separation "may not be a good thing."

At the commission's April 13 hearing, Commission Chair Dan Patrick, Lt. Governor of Texas, [asked](#), "Would it not be a good recommendation that every school, every university, every business, has to have that one sheet on the bulletin board about protecting people's religious liberty, and that the separation of church and state is the biggest lie that's been told in America since our founding?"

That comment has been given form in multiple recommendations by the Commission that schools and workplaces be required to post information about the religious rights of students, educators, and employees. In theory, informing people of their legal rights is not a problem, but in practice, as the saying goes, the devil is in the details. The rhetoric and actions of the administration and commissioners are cause for concern that any such materials created by the administration would include misleading propaganda that privileges one particular religious worldview.

The Commission urges the Justice Department to defend communities that "adopt laws, policies, or practices reflective of their religious cultures and are consistent with the historical practices and understandings underlying the Establishment Clause." It is all too easy to imagine the ways that phrases like "reflective of their religious cultures" could be used by local government bodies to benefit a dominant religious group and marginalize and stigmatize religious minorities.

The Commission calls for overturning the Johnson Amendment, which restricts churches and other nonprofit organizations from using tax-exempt contributions for electoral politicking. Eliminating the Johnson Amendment is a goal of religious-right political organizers keen to turn conservative churches into even more aggressively partisan voter turnout operations; doing away with the Johnson Amendment was a campaign promise Trump made to win the support of religious-right leaders in his first run for the presidency.

Undermining Public Education

Public education has been a major target of the Christian Right political movement in the U.S. The Commission's report advances two of the movement's strategies: to undermine and defund public schools by diverting education funds to private religious schools; and to use public schools as venues for religious indoctrination. The Commission's use of "government-run schools"—a term used as a pejorative by groups hostile to public education—is a clear sign of an ideological agenda at work.

The Commission argues that "universal school choice" is a religious liberty and parental rights issue; in reality, it is a mechanism for diverting billions of dollars from public schools into unregulated and unaccountable religious schools. Arizona's universal voucher program has become a budgetary sinkhole, with the benefits going [disproportionately](#) to wealthy families whose children were already attending a private school. According to U.S. Sen. Mark Kelly, universal school vouchers "have been a bad deal for education in Arizona."

The Commission's report is disingenuous when it comes to parental rights. It calls for policies requiring maximum deference to parental wishes over what is taught in the classrooms—including the means to opt out of “any school instruction, activity, policy, or practice that substantially interferes with the authority of the parents to direct the religious upbringing of their child.”

At the same time, in the name of preserving “national religious heritage,” the Commission urges the Justice Department to engage in “strategic litigation” to uphold laws that require schools to post the Ten Commandments in classrooms. A recently enacted law in Texas requires every public school classroom to post an official government-edited and government-approved version of the King James Version of the Ten Commandments, which is clearly interfering with the authority of parents to direct the religious upbringing of their children.

Anti-public-education forces in Texas recently passed a school voucher law there, with the intention of using tax dollars to fund private Christian schools. The state initially refused to allow Muslim parents to use vouchers to send their children to Islamic schools; it took a lawsuit and court order for the state to stop discriminating on the basis of religion.

Despite its deployment of “parental rights” as a means of controlling classroom content, the commission calls for policies that allow teachers and school officials to ignore and override the wishes of parents who are supportive of their transgender kids.

The report repeatedly calls for punishment of school districts that disagree with Trump administration guidance. The American Historical Association [concluded](#) that the report “recommends policies that would encourage states to expand religious instruction and displays in public schools while creating new mechanisms to investigate and sanction educators and institutions accused of violating students’ religious liberty.”

Weaponizing the Courts

The religious-right legal movement has taken advantage of their success in gaining ideological domination of the Supreme Court to redefine religious liberty and undermine the Establishment Clause.

We have referred to this reactionary legal movement as turning religious liberty from a shield meant to protect everyone's exercise of religion into a sword to be wielded against anti-discrimination laws and other efforts to promote the common good. Religious studies professor Charles McCrary, having assessed the commission's draft report, [concluded](#), “Religious liberty is a banner under which the administration and its allies will continue to undermine other civil rights, dismantle public goods, and insulate certain favored citizens from public accountability.”

The report repeatedly calls for the nomination and confirmation of judges with the “courage” to continue the ideological crusade to dismantle separation of church and state, and for the

Justice Department to push the Supreme Court to overturn multiple precedents upholding church-state separation.

Rhetoric vs. Reality in the Trump Era

Given the increasingly aggressive and exclusionary Christian nationalism that is flourishing on the Right, it is good that the Commission's report includes language recognizing that religious liberty applies to all people and that religious pluralism is a defining aspect of American law and culture. The report includes welcome denunciations of antisemitism and religious bigotry, and calls for promoting a cultural "recommitment to peaceful pluralism."

At one point the report summarizes the First Amendment's religious liberty protections by saying, "In practical terms, that means that the government may not officially prefer one religion over another, take over the functions of a church, or coerce religious observance." We agree, though we would add that it also means the government must not privilege people of any faith over the growing number of Americans who claim no religious affiliation. And we undoubtedly disagree with some of the ways the Commission and administration would apply those principles in the real world.

Notably, in its zeal to portray secularism as a threat to religious liberty, the report fails to acknowledge the exclusionary and discriminatory goals of influential right-wing activists who insist that the U.S. is and must remain a "Christian nation" and who call for the government to privilege their preferred forms of Christianity.

The Religious Liberty Commission could provide a valuable public service, and make it clear that the report's praise for pluralism and religious liberty is more than lip service, by challenging Christian nationalist leaders who call for overt religious discrimination against Muslim, Hindu, and Jewish Americans, and in some cases against Catholics or liberal Protestants. But that might run afoul of the White House and its Office of Faith, which provide those leaders with access to the Oval Office, the Pentagon, and other national platforms, giving their discriminatory positions credibility they do not deserve.

From: Ron Villegas <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] KEEP CHURCH AND STATE SEPARATE

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:40:54 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Committee,

PLEASE, keep church and state completely separate. Do not replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. Also, do not use government money for non-profit religious activities.

Why should a tax payer that believes in one thing have to support an organization that believes another?

History repeatedly shows that when churches become closely aligned with state power, the rights of religious dissenters are often diminished, leading to their persecution.

This happened in medieval Europe when the Catholic Church aligned with the state; thousands were killed as a result. The Church of England also followed in the Catholic Church's footsteps. Don't let history repeat itself.

It is in the best interest of all to not try to fix what is not broken.

Deeply concerned citizen of the USA,
Ron Villegas

From: Marie <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment- Separation of Church and State- Marie Ricablanca

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:41:15 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the recommendations of the religious liberty committee submitted to President Donald J Trump on June 26, 2026.

I am writing as a citizen of this great country, United States of America, to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state, especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God, and that's bad for the church and the country alike. Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. This is also the reason I chose to have my citizenship here in the USA because of the religious freedom it stood for.

Please keep church and state separate as it has always been since our founding fathers created the Constitution. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,

Jonam Marie Ricablanca

Rancho Santa Margarita, CA

From: The chosen <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State Donovan Hanna

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:42:34 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I respectfully submit this public comment to urge the Commission to preserve the historic principle of separation between church and state. As a Christian, I do not view this principle as hostile to faith. Rather, I believe it is one of the greatest safeguards ever established to protect the freedom of conscience and the purity of Christ's church.

History repeatedly demonstrates that when civil power and religious authority become closely intertwined, both are diminished. The church gains political influence but often loses its prophetic voice, while the state begins to favor one set of religious convictions over others. The result has too often been coercion, division, and the erosion of genuine religious liberty.

James Madison wisely observed, "Religion and government will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together." His words reflect a lesson learned through centuries of religious conflict before the founding of our nation.

Thomas Jefferson likewise wrote of "a wall of separation between Church and State," not to exclude religion from public life, but to protect the free exercise of religion from government control and political manipulation.

Roger Williams, who founded Rhode Island as a refuge for religious liberty, warned that when the church becomes entangled with civil authority, it risks becoming spiritually corrupted. He described the separation as a protective "hedge or wall" that preserves both institutions from harming one another.

For Christians, Scripture teaches that Christ's kingdom "is not of this world" (John 18:36). The church fulfills its mission through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the gospel—not through political privilege or government funding. Whenever the church has relied upon the power of the state, history has shown that the independence of the church and the freedom of conscience of its members have suffered.

I therefore urge the Commission to reject recommendations that would weaken the separation of church and state, including policies that encourage government funding of religious ministries or increase partisan political involvement by churches. Such changes may appear beneficial in the short term, but they risk creating long-term dependence on government favor and diminishing the church's ability to speak truth without political influence.

Please preserve the principles that have protected religious liberty for generations. A free church and a limited government have served our nation well. Let us not abandon those safeguards.

Thank you for your time and careful consideration of these comments.

Respectfully,

Donavan Hanna
Fayetteville, TN

From: Casey Bolick <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Casey Bolick

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:43:58 -0400

Importance: Normal

On Friday June 26, 2026 the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty releases a draft report which President Trump accepted in the Oval Office. I was informed that comments regarding the 'Separation of Church and State' matter were being accepted until July 13, 2026.

Here is my stance:

I agree with the Pillar of Faith's comments. Please implement them.

Casey D Bolick

[REDACTED] PII

From: Gina Ray <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:44:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree. No one should be forced to serve God or believe in Him. Which I do. The first gift God gave to man is free will. The government has no right to force people's conscience.

From: willdave <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Draft Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:44:46 -0400

Importance: Normal

To: **Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission.** This is to express my opposition to your recommendations contained in your June 2026 draft report. Rather than protecting religious freedom, these recommendations detail steps to break down the constitutional wall between Church and State; while simultaneously narrowing the religious liberties of everyday Americans.

True religious liberty requires the government to remain strictly neutral. By attempting to elevate a singular, preferred religious viewpoint to a position of federal backing, this report undermines the First Amendment. I urge the Commission to reject the following recommendations before a final report is issued.

1: The Subversion of the Johnson Amendment. The recommendation to eliminate or weaken the Johnson Amendment threatens the independence of both our political system and our houses of worship. Allowing tax exempt religious institutions to funnel money into political campaigns and endorse candidates turns our sacred houses of worship into partisan tools. It forces church attendees into attending politically divided congregations and inappropriately subsidizes political speech with tax-exempt dollars.

2 Diversion of Public Funds to Religious Education. The report's recommendation to expand Federal voucher programs or give public tax funds directly to religious private schools is a violation of the Constitution's Establishment Clause. Using taxpayer taxes to finance religious schools whose doctrines the payer may fundamentally disagree with, is a severe infringement on an individual's freedom of conscience

3. Weaponization of Conscience Protections to Discriminate. The report seeks to radically expand "Free Exercise" rights for corporations, government-funded agencies, and health care providers at the expense of individual citizens. In Health Care, expanding medical refusal clauses allows providers to deny essential care to patients based on religious beliefs, compromising patient safety and autonomy. In Social Services, allowing taxpayer-funded adoption and foster care agencies to reject qualified families based on sexual orientation or religion is state-sanctioned discrimination.

4. Exclusion of minority faiths and the non-religious rights. The draft report focuses almost exclusively on protecting majority Christian institutions, while largely ignoring discrimination against Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and secular Americans. By favoring one religious tradition over others, the report narrows the freedom of all others.

The recommendations in this report do not defend liberty. Instead they attempt to create a union between Church and State that history proves will lead to oppression, division and the erosion of minority rights. I urge the Commission to uphold the strict separation of Church and State.

Sincerely yours,

David C. and Willetta M Baker

From: Sandee Wavecable <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:45:01 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone

I agree with "pillars of freedom stance.

From what I glean from a study of my families history, my ancestor was Juliene Herring was a Presbyterian Minister in Wales. He went to the Nethelands for religious freedom. His son John Herring his son and my ancestor came instead to America to the Isle of Wight county VA. Freedom is a big part of my family history. I have 2 ancestors that fought in the Revolutionary war.

I am a Christian and the God I know is Love. Love cannot be coerced and Love does not demand its own way. My God desires freedom of choice and not a God of force, fear or coercion.

I respect freedom of conscience and separation of the government from religion. I respect the right to reject God or have a different belief than I as I know He does too. Since as a Christian I believe we all are in different and personal relationships and knowledge with and of God and that we will be learning for eternity more about Him, it is arrogant to think that we have all the truth and the only way to do His will and be in relationship with Him. All relationships are personal and different. God made us all unique and our relationship with God is unique.

Sincerely,
Sandee Crane

From: Harry LaTier <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:45:45 -0400

Importance: Normal

I disagree with report drafted by religious liberty commotion

Harry C.LaTier III

From: SRP <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Shawn R. Peasley

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:45:48 -0400

Importance: Normal

I have been amazed at the level of first amendment right violations that have been brought to light by these sessions (I watched all videos in the seven sessions in two days). So much work needs to be done to guard against these abuses! I'm concerned however that in an effort to fight against the abuses of the government violating these freedoms of conscience we need to also be sure to not allow one abuse of religious liberty to be replaced by another. The "wall" of separation of church and state most all of my life I have been taught and I have (I think sensibly and appropriately) interpreted not as a wall disallowing the free exercise of religious convictions by an individual in a government role in which one could perform one's public service duties to the government without violating one's conscience and without foisting such views on others, but rather the intentional separation of government involvement in non-protective and non-coercive roles.

It certainly seems wise to me to have a policy of separation of government from religion (separation of church and state) which I believe in that interpretation would safeguard liberties and freedoms that deserve to be protected. In fact guarding against the abuse of one sect against another is the only sense this separation even makes sense to me would have been intended originally. It would protect one's right to religion and to have no religion as one chooses. This separation interpretation would not forbid people from religious expression so long as such exercise did not infringe on the rights of others nor interfered with their duties.

If however we mean to interpret a separation of church and state as something that disallows a person to follow religious beliefs that don't prevent the individual performance of their government job that would be the exact kind of wall that should be antithetical to the principles of liberty.

I think more is gained by construing a wall of separation as a good thing in the first sense of essentially saying the government's job is not to endorse nor preclude any religious exercise that doesn't threaten its limited duties of essentially maximizing freedoms of citizens while providing also for defense. By viewing the wall as a good thing for the preservation of freedoms we are more in line with the original intent and also don't lose the metaphor's imagery which is the subtler point which might be more easily lost sight of which is that anytime religious freedom is threatened it is almost certainly because people have lost sight of the unintended consequences associated with its demise. Also future people that need from time to time be reminded of the best of our founding father's notions and need a review they will be able to plainly see more easily. Since laws out live the makers of the laws this also helps people to be careful to have a legacy perspective on this.

Sent with [Proton Mail](#) secure email.

From: Charles Burkeen <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Support for Wall of Separation Between Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:46:18 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom it May Concern at the Religious Liberty Commission:

I strongly support the Constitutional separation of church and state, and I reject the Commission's directive to the DOJ to redefine the Establishment Clause to build a "bridge" between church and state. We need a wall, not a bridge.

Regards,

Charles Burkeen
Estacada, OR

Sent from my iPhone

From: George Hoppers <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment on Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:46:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

Since the Religious Liberty Commission has solicited public comment on its upcoming report, I am writing you some apparently much-needed and strongly-worded cautions. When I hear participants on the commission make statements like "separation of church and state is a lie," or that separation of church and state is not in the U.S. Constitution, I tremble for the future of our country, and I feel compelled to do a facepalm and sigh deeply. Are people truly so ignorant of history? Yes, the exact words "separation of church and state" are not there, but the principle IS there, enshrined in the first amendment.

There is much more I could say, but I will focus here only on the impropriety of public funding of religious institutions. By funding religious organizations, whether openly or covertly, directly or indirectly, you will open the floodgates of fraud. You will have so many individuals and groups claiming to have a share of this new source of public largesse, which will make necessary some sort of vetting process whereby the government determines what is or is not a true religion or religious group worthy of receiving funds. Whatever determinations end up being made in this matter, doubtless there will be some groups who feel left out and discriminated against and litigation will inevitably result. Do we need another source of contention in our body politic? Even as a practical concern, surely you are aware that the U.S. government already cannot meet its existing financial obligations, let alone take on new ones. And once government funds start being distributed to religious organizations, those groups will develop a dependency on them to the point where some feel pressured to compromise their beliefs to obtain those funds. Thus will the churches be corrupted, for there are always strings attached to government money. Even if those funding conditions seem common-sense and reasonable to those religious groups now, they can be altered in undesirable ways at any future moment by hostile political forces.

Nothing is forever in Washington D.C., and policies favorable to your preferred religious group can be utterly overthrown in the next administration. I think back to 16th and 17th century England, when control of the throne seesawed back and forth between Catholics and different stripes of Protestants, and we could very well end up importing the same kind of acrimony and strife, where you're safe one day and in peril the next because different people are in charge. In no way, shape or form do I want our government picking winners and losers in matters of religion, whether by funding distributions or by favorable policies. The best course is for government to stay neutral in these matters, neither establishing religion nor hindering it. In this way, both church and state have flourished in America for 250 years. Please do not try to fix what isn't broken.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
George Hopper

From: Jennifer Semmler <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- Separation of Church and State – Jennifer S

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:46:37 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was troubled to read that the Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." With respect, that is exactly backwards — and as a person of faith, I find the idea alarming.

That wall wasn't built by secularists to keep religion down. It was built by believers to keep the church free. A bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it opens the door for government money and political favors to march right in, until churches are competing for grants and answering to politicians instead of to God. History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, and it isn't good for either one.

Please don't build that bridge. Keep the wall. It protects the church far more than it constrains it.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Semmler
Hudson, WI
[City, State]

From: Carmen N. Rivera Detrés <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] stablishment Clause of the First Amendment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:47:35 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

We write to respectfully express our profound disagreement with the recommendation that the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment be reinterpreted to diminish the historic separation of church and state. Such a recommendation is inconsistent with the text of the Constitution, the intent of its principal architects, and the biblical principles that matters of conscience belong to God rather than civil government.

The First Amendment declares that: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". These two protections were designed to work together. The Establishment Clause prevents government from exercising authority over religion, while the Free Exercise Clause protects citizens rights to worship or not worship according to conscience. Together, they

have made the United States one of the greatest examples of the religious liberty in human history.

Thomas Jefferson famously described this constitutional principle: “as a wall of separation between church and state”. Contrary to modern claims that this phrase has no constitutional significance, Jefferson was not inventing a new doctrine. He was describing a principle already embedded within the First Amendment: that government possesses no rightful authority to establish, direct, or compel religious observance.

No founder articulated this principle more clearly than James Madison, often called the “Father of the Constitution”. In his Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments declare that: “Religion or the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason any conviction, not by force or violence”. “Religion, he argue, must remain beyond the jurisdiction of civil government because the duty owe to God precedes the authority of the state itself”.

Decades later, Madison reaffirmed this conviction, writing in 1822, “Religion and Government will both

exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together”. This is not hostility toward religion. It was recognition that both faith and government are corrupted when either assumes the authority of the other.

Benjamin Franklin expressed the same principle in remarkably practical terms: “When a Religion is good...it will support itself...and when it’s Professors are oblige’d to call for the help of the Civil Power...’tis a Sign...of its being a bad one. True religion persuades by truth and love, not by legislation or coercion.

This principles are not merely constitutional- they are biblical. When questioned about civil authority, Jesus Christ, declared: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Mathew 22:21) In those few words, Christ established a distinction between the jurisdiction of civil government and the jurisdiction of conscience. Government possesses legitimate authority over civil order and the protection of equal rights, but worship, doctrine and the relationship between an individual and God remain beyond its lawful reach.

History repeatedly confirms the wisdom of this distinction. Whenever church and state have been joined, both have suffered. Religious institutions have too often sought the power of the sword, while governments have attempted to regulate the conscience. The result has not be greater faith, but persecution, division, and the suppression of religious liberty.

Americans understood this lessons well. Many of the earliest settlers came to these shores precisely because they had fled governments that enforced religious conformity.

The Founders sought to break from that centuries-old pattern by denying the federal government any authority over religion.

Article VI prohibits religious test for public office, and the First Amendment forbids law respecting an establishment of religion. These provisions were not accidental. They were deliberate safeguards designed to preserve liberty of conscience for every citizen.

The dangers of abandoning these principles are not merely theoretical. During the late nineteenth century, proposal such as a Blair Sunday Rest Bill sought to

use civil law to enforce what many considered a religious duty. At the same time, members of my own faith were imprisoned in Tennessee and sentenced to drain gangs simply for working on Sunday while observing the seventh-day Sabbath according to their convictions. Their experience serves as a reminder that sincere religious majorities, when empowered by civil authority, can unintentionally deny the very liberty they seek to preserve.

This is why contemporary calls to weaken the separation of church and state are deeply concerning. A government that possess the authority to favor one religious tradition necessarily possesses the authority to disfavor another. The same power that today may benefit one denomination could tomorrow be turned against it. Religious liberty cannot be secure if it depends upon which faith happens to hold political influence at a given moment.

The genius of the American experiment is that it protects the conscience of every person equally. Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, atheist, and every other citizen enjoys the same protection because the government is forbidden from deciding questions of religious truth.

That neutrality has not weakened religion in American- it has allowed it to flourish through conviction rather than compulsion.

Government is at its best when it protects the free exercise of religion, not when it defines, directs, or advances it. Likewise, religion is at its strongest when it relies upon persuasion rather than political power. The preservation of both depends upon maintaining the distinction the Founders carefully established.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge to Commission to reject any interpretation of the Constitution that diminishes the historical separation of church and state. The preservation of religious liberty depends upon maintaining the proper boundaries between civil authority and matters of conscience. That principle is faithful to the Constitution, consistent with the teachings of Scripture, affirmed by the architects of our Republic, and essential to preserving liberty for future generations.

We, the undersigned, adults residing on the territory of United States, twenty-one years of age or older, hereby respectfully but firmly request your honorable corporation, not to admit any Bill relating to the

Sabbath or the Lord's day, as well as to any other religious or ecclesiastical institution or rite, or to favor in any way the adoption of any resolution for the Amendment of the national Constitution that could tend in some way, directly or indirectly, to give preference to the principles of any religion or religious body over others, or that in any way it approves the practice of legislating on religion, but to maintain forever as our Fathers established it, -the total separation between religion and the state as secure by the Constitution as its exist now.

Respectfully submitted

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

We write to respectfully express our profound disagreement with the recommendation that the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment be reinterpreted to diminish the historic separation of church and state. Such a recommendation is inconsistent with the text of the Constitution, the intent of its principal architects, and the biblical principles that matters of conscience belong to God rather than civil government.

The First Amendment declares that: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". These two protections were designed to work together. The Establishment Clause prevents government from exercising authority over religion, while the Free Exercise Clause protects citizens rights to worship or not worship according to conscience. Together, they have made the United States one of the greatest examples of the religious liberty in human history.

Thomas Jefferson famously described this constitutional principle: "as a wall of separation between church and state". Contrary to modern claims that this phrase has no constitutional significance, Jefferson was not inventing a new doctrine. He was describing a principle already embedded within the First Amendment: that government possesses no rightful authority to establish, direct, or compel religious observance.

No founder articulated this principle more clearly than James Madison, often called the "Father of the Constitution". In his Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments declare that: "Religion or the duty which we owe to our Creator and the

manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason any conviction, not by force or violence”.

“Religion, he argue, must remain beyond the jurisdiction of civil government because the duty owe to God precedes the authority of the state itself”.

Decades later, Madison reaffirmed this conviction, writing in 1822, “Religion and Government will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together”. This is not hostility toward religion. It was recognition that both faith and government are corrupted when either assumes the authority of the other.

Benjamin Franklin expressed the same principle in remarkably practical terms: “When a Religion is good...it will support itself...and when it’s Professors are oblige’d to call for the help of the Civil Power...’tis a Sign...of its being a bad one. True religion persuades by truth and love, not by legislation or coercion.

This principles are not merely constitutional- they are biblical. When questioned about civil authority, Jesus Christ, declared: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things

that are God's" (Mathew 22:21) In those few words, Christ established a distinction between the jurisdiction of civil government and the jurisdiction of conscience. Government possesses legitimate authority over civil order and the protection of equal rights, but worship, doctrine and the relationship between an individual and God remain beyond its lawful reach.

History repeatedly confirms the wisdom of this distinction. Whenever church and state have been joined, both have suffered. Religious institutions have too often sought the power of the sword, while governments have attempted to regulate the conscience. The result has not be greater faith, but persecution, division, and the suppression of religious liberty.

Americans understood this lessons well. Many of the earliest settlers came to these shores precisely because they had fled governments that enforced religious conformity.

The Founders sought to break from that centuries-old pattern by denying the federal government any authority over religion.

Article VI prohibits religious test for public office, and the First Amendment forbids law respecting an establishment of religion. These provisions were not accidental. They were deliberate safeguards designed to preserve liberty of conscience for every citizen.

The dangers of abandoning these principles are not merely theoretical. During the late nineteenth century, proposal such as a Blair Sunday Rest Bill sought to use civil law to enforce what many considered a religious duty. At the same time, members of my own faith were imprisoned in Tennessee and sentenced to drain gangs simply for working on Sunday while observing the seventh-day Sabbath according to their convictions. Their experience serves as a reminder that sincere religious majorities, when empowered by civil authority, can unintentionally deny the very liberty they seek to preserve.

This is why contemporary calls to weaken the separation of church and state are deeply concerning. A government that possess the authority to favor one religious tradition necessarily possesses the authority to disfavor another. The same power that today may benefit one denomination could tomorrow be turned against it. Religious liberty cannot be secure if it

depends upon which faith happens to hold political influence at a given moment.

The genius of the American experiment is that it protects the conscience of every person equally. Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, atheist, and every other citizen enjoys the same protection because the government is forbidden from deciding questions of religious truth.

That neutrality has not weakened religion in American- it has allowed it to flourish through conviction rather than compulsion.

Government is at its best when it protects the free exercise of religion, not when it defines, directs, or advances it. Likewise, religion is at its strongest when it relies upon persuasion rather than political power. The preservation of both depends upon maintaining the distinction the Founders carefully established.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge to Commission to reject any interpretation of the Constitution that diminishes the historical separation of church and state. The preservation of religious liberty depends upon maintaining the proper boundaries between civil authority and matters of conscience. That principle is

faithful to the Constitution, consistent with the teachings of Scripture, affirmed by the architects of our Republic, and essential to preserving liberty for future generations.

We, the undersigned, adults residing on the territory of United States, twenty-one years of age or older, hereby respectfully but firmly request your honorable corporation, not to admit any Bill relating to the Sabbath or the Lord's day, as well as to any other religious or ecclesiastical institution or rite, or to favor in any way the adoption of any resolution for the Amendment of the national Constitution that could tend in some way, directly or indirectly, to give preference to the principles of any religion or religious body over others, or that in any way it approves the practice of legislating on religion, but to maintain forever as our Fathers established it, -the total separation between religion and the state as secure by the Constitution as its exist now.

Respectfully submitted

Carmen N Rivera

Detres

From: Joseph Bergeon <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Cc: Joseph Bergeon <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Joseph

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:47:44 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a private citizen from Raymondville, Missouri. I have thought a great deal about how a person's convictions are actually formed, and I keep coming back to a simple observation: we become like what we behold. What fills our eyes and ears over time reshapes our thinking from the inside, for better or worse. That is precisely why I believe the government cannot manufacture genuine faith or morality by law. It can offer permission, or it can offer punishment, but it cannot put belief into a person's heart. Only conviction, freely arrived at, can do that. This is the lens through which I ask you to consider four points.

First, any law touching religion, even one meant to help religion, ends up controlling it. A law must define which religion it favors, and that definition includes some believers while excluding others; even the favored group is no longer practicing freely but by permission of whoever holds power that year. As one writer of that era put it before a Senate committee, it is impossible to frame a law on the subject of religion that will not prohibit the free exercise of religion. A believer who welcomes government backing for his own faith today is handing a tool to whatever administration comes next, friendly or hostile.

Second, the founders' separation of church and state was not an oversight or a modern invention layered onto their work. It was deliberate, and done out of respect for religion, not hostility to it. Madison himself told the Virginia ratifying convention that there is not a shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion, and that its least interference would be a most flagrant usurpation. The churches of that founding generation were the very people pressing for this separation, having felt establishment from underneath. A commission that wants to credit the founders with favoring state-sponsored religion has to explain away Madison's own words.

Third, force cannot produce Christians, only hypocrites. Attendance compelled by statute is not worship; it is theater. As one of these old writers observed, any attempt to enforce religious observances only enforces hypocrisy and multiplies sin, because love for God is essential to every act of religious duty. Worse, state sponsorship corrupts the favored religion itself over time, breeding complacency rather than devotion. Madison, reviewing fifteen centuries of established Christianity, found the fruits to be pride and indolence in the clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, and in both, superstition, bigotry, and persecution.

Fourth, this country has already run this experiment more than once, and the results were not abstract. Salem's judges were sincere and devout, yet they stand condemned for the plainest violence to morality. And in 1892, in Paris, Tennessee, three Sabbath-keeping farmers were marched through the streets in a chain gang for plowing their own fields on Sunday, having already rested on Saturday, while trainloads of other workmen passed the jail unbothered every week. Good intentions did not save the victims of either episode.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Joseph
Raymondville, MO

From: " [REDACTED] PII " < [REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" < [REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- Separation of Church and State- Constantine E. Hudson, Jr.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:50:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a concerned citizen to ask you to reconsider the recommendations that were made in your report that was released on Friday, June 26, 2026. The recommendations made, in my estimation, would weaken the separation of church and state as it has existed up until this present time which to my understanding is falsely being refuted. A particularly bothersome idea is the proposed use of government money to fund religious activities and the repealing of the Johnson Amendment. Churches receiving money from the government as well as allowing religious organizations to engage in partisan politics will most certainly lead to corruption on both ends of the spectrum. Certainly, by natural progression, the larger religious institutions with the highest membership counts will have an unfair impact and advantage given a majority rules application. Churches will most certainly end up in competition for government funds as well as having to give account to politicians, when in fact, they need only to give an account by right in faith unto God. Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's. Separation of church and state is not a secular idea; people of faith established this foundation to protect faith and tampering with this foundation will decimate the strong pillars of religion that for two and a half centuries have stood. Please, I implore you, keep church and state separate. The amalgamation of both entities will only cause bondage and not freedom which both so rightly enjoy and deserve.

Sincerely,

Constantine E. Hudson, Jr.
Valley Stream, N.Y.

[Sent from the all new AOL app for iOS](#)

From: Shaun Brooks <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:54:02 -0400

Importance: Normal

Please maintain the separation of church and state as this is extremely important to democracy.

Shaun

Sent from my iPhone

From: Michael Wolford <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:55:40 -0400

Importance: Normal

Greetings,

I am adding my appeal that the first step would not be taken toward lessening the wall of separation of church and state that has protected this country from religious persecution and kept the U.S. a free country for centuries now! Please honor and reaffirm the first amendment!

God bless you deeply in your responsibilities and work!

Pastor Michael Wolford

From: Natasha LaTier <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Disagreement

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:55:59 -0400

Importance: Normal

I disagree with the report drafted by the Religious Liberty Commission.

We are always told to keep church and state seperate. Giving the state control of or any kind of "say" in our churches is wrong.

From: Rich Sutton <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] A Plea Keep America's Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:56:51e0400

Importance: Normal

July 13, 2026

The report from the Religious Liberty Commission showed the dedication of this committee to protect the sacred rights of individuals for religious liberty.

We are grateful for all the effort and dedication and hard work that you put forth to preserve religious liberty for all of us!

We have a deep concern that on June 26, 2026, Dan Patrick, Chairman of President Donald Trump's Religious Liberty Commission; from the Oval Office; made the statement that "the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution". This is very concerning!!

The exact wording of "separation of church and state" is not present in the Constitution, but the very important principle is definitely there.

The Constitution has placed a limit on the government's involvement with religion. It is there in the first Amendment of the Bill of Rights stating the powerful words "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof"

This establishes a protection for every citizens' right to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience, or not to be forced to worship. It also prohibits the government for establishing, favoring, endorsing; or entangling itself with religion. Religious liberty cannot exist where government assumes the power to make any policies or laws that interfere with religion.

Article VI also adds the protection that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States."

Your report also brought out the importance of the extended Constitutional protections of the Fourteenth Amendment that "prohibits any states from depriving any person of liberty without due process or denying equal protection under the law."

These Constitutional provisions; the First amendment and Article VI and the Fourteenth Amendment; provide a legal foundation that has provided protection for all religions as well as those who have no religious interests.

When civil power links itself with religious authorities; history has shown that governments will use their power in matters of conscience; the power that belongs to God alone; and then there would be no safety or justice.

We earnestly and with all due respect appeal to the Religious Liberty Committee to continue to protect the Constitutional safeguards written by the founding fathers of our country.

These have been the strength of our government and brought God's blessings on America; because of the Religious Liberty that we have been ensured.

If these principles are allowed to be changed or altered by Constitutional interpretation; and/or allowed - to remove the principle of "separation of church and state" then the barrier that prevents persecution and maintains justice for all; will be gone.

America alone of all countries; has strove to maintain for 250 years; the Constitution; that has kept us:

"... one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

May God help and bless you,

From: Samuel Loredo <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:57:45 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty
Commission:

Please address the recommendations in your report as my vote is to have a strong divide between church and state. If you don't guard this constitutional right, we will have problems for both church and country. I am asking that the government not get involved with the religious affairs. They should be two separate entities and I am asking that you please maintain freedom of choice. As the bible says I believe that we should "give unto the government the things that belong to the government and unto God, the things that belong to God".

In summary, I strongly support the separation of church and state.

Respectively submitted,
Beth Loredo
Merced, CA

From: Andrea and Dale Northrop <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- Separation of Church and State - Andrea Northrop

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:57:56 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I object to the conclusion that separation of church and state does not exist and think that this separation should be upheld and is what keeps religious liberty a possibility in the USA.

From: Ron Ringering <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] "I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them."

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:00:16 -0400

Importance: Normal

Please implement what the Pillar of Freedom has sent you.

Ronald Ringering,

[REDACTED] PII

[REDACTED] PII

From: henry der <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:02:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

Do not violate our First Amendment Rights. I fully support the separation of church and state. The government has no authority to impose a specific religion on the citizens of the USA. It would be unconstitutional.

Henry Der

From: Jean Handwerk <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT: COMM. on RELIGIOUS LIBERTY- JEAN HANDWERK

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:03:16 -0400

Importance: Normal

It is obvious to many that the effort to reinterpret the first amendment that has served this nation well is ultimately an attempt to legislate and then enforce (establish) a particular "version" of Christianity, if you will. I'm referring to legislation limiting certain behaviors on the first day of the week, or portions thereof. European history informs us that when the civil state enforces religious dogma, tyranny inevitably results. Such tyranny is the reason this nation was founded in the first place as a nation of refuge--and shall this nation now become what its forebears fled? Will it "speak as a dragon"?

The first day of the week has an undeserved honor in most Christians' minds. Post-resurrection, there is no biblical record of any of the apostles ever gathering for worship on the first day. Those who "keep Sunday" have been told the day was changed from the seventh day (God's specific fourth commandment) to the first day (a common working day) because Christ rose from the dead on that day and because Pentecost occurred then, too. What needs to be asked is WHO changed the day and ON WHAT AUTHORITY? It's important to know, because Jesus said, "IN VAIN do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of MEN." Matt 15:9

Daniel 7:25 warns that an entity would "**think** to change times and laws." In other words, the change would never really occur, but the entity would try to make it appear so. And the lie has been quite successful. And now, many people are more loyal to "custom and tradition" than they are to biblical principles and God's commandments. They make a fearful mistake.

The Roman Catholic Church is the only entity that has ever claimed to have changed God's commandments, and rightly so. Not only has it attempted to change the day of worship, but the second commandment has been entirely removed, as well. One can read in that church's own catechisms, and in some of the papal letters, statements admitting to the changes.

So we know WHO. But WHAT AUTHORITY was given for that church's leadership to do so? The very word "think" in Daniel 7:25 indicates that no change would occur. God is perfect in wisdom and justice and love, and His commandments need no improvement nor alteration. No earthly entity has the wisdom or purity or foreknowledge or righteousness to make changes in any divine law. Besides that, Daniel 7:25 exposes that entity as one that hates God. It "speaks great words against the Most High" and "wears out the saints of the Most High." Do you really think Father or Son would give permission for such an entity to change a sacred divine law?

The Commission on Religious Liberty does not seem to realize where its steps are headed. If a human-devised "Sabbath" is legislated and enforced on a national level, this privileged nation will have departed from a "thus saith the Lord" and its rebellion against the divine Lawgiver will result in religious tyranny and national ruin.

To members of the Commission: PLEASE—Uphold the obvious meaning of the plainly-worded first amendment. Do not play games with God. You will lose, and so will every citizen of this great nation.

From: Jose Bosque <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment – Religious Liberty Commission Report – Jose Bosque

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:03:23 -0400

Importance: Normal

Thank you for the time the commission put into their work.

But I oppose the report and its recommendations.

Here are some points on why I oppose it. These points were from an excellent article from “The Church State Council News”

- The separation of church and state is an idea that originated with persecuted Christians like Roger Williams, who wrote that Civil magistrates only have jurisdiction over civil matters and are not “judges, governors, or defenders of the spiritual, or Christian, state and worship... Christ Jesus never directed his disciples to the civil magistrate for help in his cause.” - Roger Williams

- Jesus Himself never built His Kingdom with political power. He declared to the Roman governor that “My kingdom is not of this world, if it were my servants would fight.s.” John 18:36. Instead, Jesus calls His followers to seek justice for the oppressed and fulfill the Great Commission through loving words and acts.

- Roger Williams wrote that “The unknowing zeal of Constantine and other emperors, did more hurt to Christ Jesus’s crown and kingdom, than the raging fury of the most bloody Neros.” This reminds us that using the force of government to promote Christianity never advances the true kingdom of God.

- The separation of church and state is good for both. It’s a constitutional principle that explains how our religious liberty is protected by the First Amendment.

-The Johnson Amendment protects houses of worship from partisan politicking and ensures fair play in our campaigns. It reminds churches that they are not mere political machines but embassies of the Kingdom of Heaven.

-Public funds should go to public schools, not private schools.

- Public schools should not be pushing sectarian faith, like forcing the posting of the Ten Commandments or pushing official prayer. This misrepresents the character of a God of love, who never forces in matters of faith.

-Institutions receiving public funding should not be allowed to discriminate against individuals but instead should treat all people fairly and equally. Christians, of all people, should support this idea which originates in the Golden Rule.

Thank you for your time.
Jose Bosque, MD

From: Anita McGhee <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Committee

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:04:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with the Pillars of Freedom comments! Church and state should be separate!

Anita McGhee

From: Chris Lewis <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to Religious liberty commission report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:05:47 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the United States Department of Justice:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment regarding the recommendations of the Religious Liberty Commission submitted on June 26, 2026.

I write as an American citizen, a Christian, and someone who deeply values both religious liberty and the Constitution of the United States. I appreciate the Commission's work and agree with several of its recommendations. However, I respectfully urge the Department of Justice to reject Recommendation 1, regarding guidance on the Establishment Clause, and Recommendation 9, calling for repeal of the Johnson Amendment.

My concern is not that religion should be excluded from public life. To the contrary, I believe faith has made immeasurable contributions to our nation. My concern is that history consistently demonstrates the dangers that arise whenever civil government and ecclesiastical authority become intertwined.

The Founders understood these dangers because they had witnessed them firsthand. James Madison, the principal architect of the Constitution and the First Amendment, wrote of the "strongly guarded" separation between religion and government in our Constitution and warned that even in America's early history there were signs of ecclesiastical encroachment. Thomas Jefferson likewise described the First Amendment as building "a wall of separation between Church & State," not to exclude religion from society, but to preserve liberty of conscience for every citizen.

This principle was not born from hostility toward religion. Rather, it grew from painful historical experience.

William Penn endured repeated imprisonment in England because of his faith. Roger Williams was banished from Massachusetts for insisting that civil government has no authority over matters of conscience. Obadiah Holmes was publicly whipped for religious dissent. Across Europe, William Tyndale was executed for translating the Bible into English. These were not acts committed by secular governments hostile to religion, but by governments acting in concert with dominant religious institutions.

History repeatedly teaches the same lesson: when church and state unite, both religious liberty and civil liberty suffer.

The protections of the First Amendment have also safeguarded free speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of inquiry. Many of the greatest scientific, philosophical, and theological advances in Western civilization were opposed by religious authorities exercising civil power. The American experiment deliberately rejected that model by limiting the authority of government in matters of religion.

For these reasons, I am concerned by public statements suggesting that the constitutional principle of separation of church and state lacks constitutional foundation. While the exact phrase does not appear in the Constitution, the principle is firmly rooted in the Establishment Clause and in the writings of those who drafted and ratified it. Few authorities are better qualified to explain the Constitution's meaning than Madison and Jefferson themselves.

I am also concerned about the recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment. Churches should remain free to preach biblical truth without governmental interference. At the same time, churches should not become political organizations whose influence is exchanged for legislative favors. Such arrangements risk corrupting both government and the church.

Jesus Himself distinguished between the proper spheres of civil government and religious obligation when He taught, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Throughout history, attempts to merge those spheres have too often resulted in coercion rather than genuine faith.

I respectfully urge the Department of Justice to carefully consider the historical reasons that the Founders adopted the Establishment Clause and to preserve the constitutional safeguards that have protected religious liberty for nearly two and a half centuries. Rather than weakening these protections, I encourage the Department to invite broad public participation and scholarly input before issuing any guidance that could alter the long-standing understanding of the relationship between church and state.

Thank you for considering my comments and for your continued commitment to defending the constitutional liberties of all Americans.

Respectfully,

Chris Lewis, MD

From: Allison Ogbonna <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Concerns

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:05:59 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

I am concerned about the urge to tear down the wall separating church and state. I strongly inquire you to please maintain the strongest protections possible for religious liberty.

Our history is littered with examples of why this separation between church and state is necessary. Persecution always follows and ends in a blood bath. This is not how Christ wants us to be.

I agree there are some legitimate concerns of our moral and social standards in this country, but legislating these concerns I don't believe is the answer. For example, suicide is illegal, however it has not stopped suicidal ideation. In my work at the hospital I have observed myself an uptick in this very problem. Education, rather than law; love, rather than oppression, ultimately wins the day.

I pray that religious rights will be safeguarded, rather than trodden upon, even for those whose religion we do not understand and/or don't agree with.

Thank you for your consideration in this important matter.

Sincerely,
Allison Ogbonna

From: Anita McGhee <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Committee

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:06:04 -0400

Importance: Normal

Hello,

I agree with the Pillars of Freedom comments .

Anita McGhee

From: Kerwin Jones <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:06:20 -0400

Importance: Normal

A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom

Well aware that the opinions and belief of men depend not on their own will, but follow involuntarily the evidence proposed to their minds; that¹ Almighty God hath created the mind free, and manifested his supreme will that free it shall remain by making it altogether insusceptible of restraint;² that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments, or burthens, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion,³ who being lord both of body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was in his Almighty power to do, but to extend it by its influence on reason alone;⁴ that the impious presumption of legislators and rulers, civil as well as ecclesiastical, who, being themselves but fallible and uninspired men, have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinions and modes of thinking as the only true and infallible, and as such endeavoring to impose them on others, hath established and maintained false religions over the greatest part of the world and through all time: That to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors,⁴ is sinful and tyrannical; that even the forcing him to support this or that teacher of his own religious persuasion, is depriving him of the comfortable liberty of giving his contributions to the particular pastor whose morals he would make his pattern, and whose powers he feels most persuasive to righteousness; and is withdrawing from the ministry those temporary⁵ rewards, which proceeding from an approbation of their personal conduct, are an additional incitement to earnest and unremitting labours for the instruction of mankind; that our civil rights have no dependance on our religious opinions, any more than⁶ our opinions in physics or geometry; that therefore the proscribing any citizen as unworthy the public confidence by laying upon him an incapacity of being called to offices of trust and emolument, unless he profess or renounce this or that religious opinion, is depriving him injuriously of those privileges and advantages to which, in common with his fellow citizens, he has a natural right; that it tends also⁷ to corrupt the principles of that very⁸ religion it is meant to encourage, by bribing, with a monopoly of worldly honours and emoluments, those who will externally profess and conform to it; that though indeed these are criminal who do not withstand such temptation, yet neither are those innocent who lay the bait in their way; that the opinions of men are not the object of civil government, nor under its jurisdiction;⁹ that to suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion and to restrain the profession or propagation of principles on supposition of their ill tendency is a dangerous falacy, which at once destroys all religious liberty, because he being of course judge of that tendency will make his opinions the rule of judgment, and approve or condemn the sentiments of others only as they shall square with or differ from his own; that it is time enough for the rightful purposes of civil government for its officers to interfere when principles break out into overt acts against peace and good order; and finally, that truth is great and will prevail if left to herself; that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate; errors ceasing to be dangerous when it is permitted freely to contradict them.

We the General Assembly of Virginia do enact¹⁰ that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.

And though we well know that this Assembly, elected by the people for the ordinary purposes of legislation only, have no power to restrain the acts of succeeding Assemblies, constituted with powers equal to our own, and that therefore to declare this act¹¹ irrevocable would be of no effect in law; yet we are free to declare, and do declare, that the rights hereby asserted are of the natural rights of mankind, and that if any act shall be hereafter passed to repeal the present or to narrow its operation, such act will be an infringement of natural right.

Kerwin Jones

PII
PII

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.” Micah 6:8

From: 1844Thunder <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >, "[REDACTED] PII"
<[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:09:18 -0400

Importance: Normal

While our leaders consider religious liberty wrt church - state issues that are very important one thing keeps coming to my mind. I've heard it said numerous times that the separation of church and state was NOT an intention of the founding fathers. Yet we can see in the constitution and amendments that there is most certainly a wall of separation intended and built into the founding framework documents of this great nation.

A study of history reveals that one of the main reasons so many early settlers braved to come to this continent was to escape religious persecution. And though it took a little time, the idea of religious liberty for all caught on, first perhaps in Rhode Island but eventually most if not all the colonies adopted this concept and put it into practice. Here are some quotes from some of the framers of the constitution:

Thomas Jefferson

Jefferson famously coined the metaphor "wall of separation" to describe the relationship intended by the First Amendment.

- **From his letter to the Danbury Baptist Association (1802):**

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a **wall of separation between church & State**."

- **From *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781):**

"The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg."

James Madison

Commonly known as the "Father of the Constitution," Madison was fiercely opposed to government-sponsored religion, arguing it corrupted both the state and religion itself.

- **From *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments* (1785):**

"Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity, in exclusion of all other Religions, may establish with the same ease any particular sect of Christians, in exclusion of all other Sects? That the same authority which can force a citizen to contribute three pence only of his property for the support of any one establishment, may force him to conform to any other establishment in all cases whatsoever?"

- **From an undated essay (*Detached Memoranda*, early 1800s):**

"Strongly guarded... is the separation between religion & Government in the Constitution of the United States... the number, the industry and the morality of the priesthood, & the devotion of the people have been manifestly increased by the **total separation of the Church from the State**."

Benjamin Franklin

Franklin believed that a religion should be robust enough to survive on its own merits without relying on the coercive power of the government to fund or enforce it.

- **From a letter to Richard Price (1780):**

"When a Religion is good, I conceive that it will support itself; and, when it cannot support itself, and God does not take care to support it, so that its Professors are oblig'd to call for the help of the Civil Power, 'tis a Sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one."

John Adams

Adams signed the Treaty of Tripoli, an official document ratified unanimously by the Senate, which sought to clarify the secular nature of the federal government to foreign powers.

- **From the Treaty of Tripoli, Article 11 (1797):**

"As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion;—as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquility, of Mussulmen [Muslims];—and as the said States never entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mahometan nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries."

George Washington

Washington frequently emphasized that religious tolerance was a baseline right rather than a favor granted by the government, reassuring various religious minorities that the state would protect them equally.

- **From his Letter to the United Baptist Churches in Virginia (1789):**

"If I could have entertained the slightest apprehension, that the constitution framed in the Convention, where I had the honor to preside, might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical society, certainly I would never have placed my signature to it."

Thomas Paine

Paine, whose writings heavily influenced the philosophical underpinnings of the American Revolution, argued that state-established religion naturally bred persecution.

- **From *The Age of Reason* (1794):**

"Persecution is not an original feature in any religion; but it is always the strongly marked feature of all religions established by law." ¹

I love my Heavenly Father and my Savior Christ Jesus and I think The United States of America was used by God to save the church from persecution that was taking place throughout Europe back in the day. Let us not make the mistake of now allowing the blurring of the line between church and state which will eventually lead to tyranny and overt persecution.

Thank you.

From: Jeffrey G Marshall <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:10:55 -0400

Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern:

Please do not move to unite church in state. History tells us it doesn't go well when we do this. Please don't.

Kindly,

Jeff

From: askale laeke <[REDACTED] PII >

To: <[REDACTED] PII >, <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:11:32 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Religious liberty is best protected by keeping church and state separate. We have enough evidence in church history as to how people of faith suffered when the two merge. Let's keep them separate.

Sincerely,

Askale LAEKE

State Arlington, VIRGINIA

From: Diana Klump <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:12:00 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission:

I would like to appeal to the Commission to maintain religious liberty in the United States of America by continuing to provide a separate church and state. My forefathers were Anabaptists and they came to this country many years ago because they were guaranteed religious freedom. And I believe this country, our beloved country, has flourished precisely because of the religious freedom our leaders have endorsed. When the separation between the church and the state is removed, religion will be forced upon the population at large. This is and has always been in conflict with God's Holy Word, the Bible. This will be the beginning of the end of our society in America as we know it. Those who believe this forced religion will bring us closer to God will soon find out that this forced religion will actually remove our freedom of religion.

Sincerely,
Diana Klump

From: Elizabeth Christian <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Reply to the Religious Liberty Commission Report of June 26, 2026

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:14:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the United States Department of Justice:

Thank you for providing the opportunity for members of the public to comment on the recommendations of the Religious Liberty Commission submitted on June 26, 2026.

I write as an American citizen, a Christian, a wife, and a mother who is deeply grateful for the religious freedoms protected by our Constitution. While I appreciate the Commission's efforts to strengthen religious liberty, I respectfully urge the Department of Justice not to adopt Recommendation 1 regarding guidance on the Establishment Clause or Recommendation 9 recommending repeal of the Johnson Amendment.

The separation of church and state has never meant hostility toward religion. Rather, it has served as one of the greatest protections for both religious faith and civil liberty. It has allowed people of every faith—and those of no faith—to worship according to conscience without fear of government coercion or religious persecution.

The Founders understood this because they knew history well. James Madison warned of the dangers posed by the union of religion and government, even in the early years of the Republic Thomas Jefferson described the protections of the First Amendment as building "a wall of separation between Church & State," safeguarding the freedom of every citizen to follow the dictates of conscience.

History offers many sobering examples of why this principle matters. William Penn was repeatedly imprisoned because of his religious beliefs. Roger Williams was banished from Massachusetts for defending liberty of conscience. Obadiah Holmes was publicly whipped for religious dissent. William Tyndale was executed after translating the Bible into English so ordinary people could read God's Word for themselves. These events remind us that religious persecution has often come through governments acting together with dominant religious institutions.

As a Christian, I believe genuine faith must always be freely chosen. Government can regulate civil conduct, but it cannot create sincere belief. Whenever governments attempt to influence religious conviction or religious institutions seek governmental power, both faith and freedom suffer.

I am also concerned about repealing the Johnson Amendment. Churches should be free to proclaim biblical truth without fear of government interference, but

they should also remain independent from partisan political influence. When churches become political organizations, there is a real danger that spiritual priorities become secondary to political ones, and that government begins rewarding religious institutions for political support. History repeatedly demonstrates the dangers of such arrangements.

Jesus taught, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Those words recognize distinct responsibilities for civil government and for our duty to God. Preserving that distinction has protected religious liberty in America for generations.

For the sake of our children, our grandchildren, and future generations of Americans, I respectfully ask the Department of Justice to preserve the constitutional principles that have allowed religious liberty to flourish in this country. I also encourage the Department to seek broad public input and careful historical scholarship before issuing guidance concerning the Establishment Clause.

Thank you for considering my comments and for your service in protecting the constitutional rights and freedoms of all Americans.

Respectfully,

Elizabeth Christian

Sent from my iPhone

From: BRENT GOODGE <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:15:40 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them.

He who has the Son has life.

1 John 5:12

From: Jeremy Warren <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE
(CHAPTERS 2, 3, 4, 8, AND 14)s- Jeremy Isaac D Warren

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:16:46 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Carson, and Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

I am submitting this comment as a Christian and as an American citizen who believes that liberty of conscience is a God-given right that civil government must protect equally for every person. It is not a political favor that government creates, distributes, or withdraws according to which religious group presently possesses influence.

I appreciate several legitimate concerns identified in the draft report. Government must not punish private prayer, censor students merely because their speech is religious, force medical professionals or service members to abandon sincerely held convictions without proper legal consideration, discriminate against faith-based organizations simply because they are religious, or fail to protect synagogues, churches, mosques, temples, and their worshippers from violence. Jewish Americans must receive the same full protection of law and religious liberty as every other American. Religious believers do not surrender their constitutional rights when they enter a school, workplace, military installation, university, hospital, or public discussion.

Nevertheless, I firmly object to recommendations that would weaken the institutional separation between church and state—particularly the report’s “bridge” framing, expanded government financial partnerships with religious ministries, federal support for Ten Commandments displays in public-school classrooms, and repeal of the Johnson Amendment.

I do not question the sincerity of the Commission’s desire to defend religious people. I question the wisdom, structure, and foreseeable consequences of these particular recommendations.

1. THE “BRIDGE” BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE IS A DANGEROUSLY IMPRECISE MODEL

At page 42, the draft says that church and state “strengthen and support one another” and proposes religious liberty as a “bridge” between them. Pages 177–178 apply that bridge model to government policies intended to support faith-based institutions.

I respectfully but firmly oppose that language.

The wall metaphor can certainly be misused. It must never become a wall between a religious citizen and public life. It must not be used to censor a student’s voluntary prayer, a worker’s religious identity, a pastor’s preaching, a citizen’s political participation, or a privately expressed religious viewpoint.

But that does not justify replacing a proper institutional boundary with a bridge of government money, political influence, official religious promotion, and mutual dependence.

A bridge carries traffic in both directions. Government money travels toward religious institutions; government conditions and political expectations travel back. Religious influence travels toward government; government officials then acquire incentives to determine which beliefs, ministries, doctrines, and religious organizations are sufficiently acceptable or socially useful to receive support.

The same civil authority powerful enough to promote religion is powerful enough to define it, regulate it, reshape it, and eventually punish dissent from its preferred version.

The proper constitutional distinction is therefore this:

Religious people must remain completely free to participate in public life, while civil government must remain institutionally restrained from establishing, directing, financing, or preferring religious doctrine.

Government neutrality is not hostility toward God. Proper neutrality leaves the church free to obey God without depending on political favor.

2. HISTORY WARNS AGAINST RELIGIOUS DEPENDENCE ON CIVIL POWER

The American tradition of liberty of conscience did not begin as an effort to eradicate Christianity. It was substantially advanced by religious dissenters who wanted the church protected from civil domination.

Roger Williams defended a separation between the church and civil government because he believed that forced worship corrupted both faith and government. Rhode Island became an early refuge for liberty of conscience. Baptists and other dissenters pressed for constitutional protection because they understood from experience that an establishment favoring one religious body would eventually burden others.

American disestablishment did not destroy religion. It required churches to depend on voluntary faith, conviction, sacrifice, and God rather than compulsory taxation and political patronage. Lyman Beecher, who initially lamented Connecticut's disestablishment, later recognized that cutting churches loose from state support forced them to rely on their own resources and on God—and strengthened their spiritual influence.

The Commission should not teach Americans that institutional separation is intrinsically hostile to religion. Proper separation has often protected religious vitality by preventing government from purchasing, managing, or domesticating the church.

3. GOVERNMENT FUNDING CREATES DEPENDENCE, FAVORITISM, AND CONTROL

Pages 62 and 202 recommend expanded federal grants, contracts, partnerships, grant training, “faith-welcoming” funding notices, and increased government assistance to make religious institutions “grant ready.”

Religious organizations should not be excluded from neutral and generally available public programs solely because they are religious. At the same time, equal civil treatment must not become a pretext for transforming churches and ministries into government-supported religious contractors.

Public money is never simply free money. It carries reporting duties, eligibility rules, employment conditions, audits, political pressure, changing administrative interpretations, and the possibility that funding will later be conditioned on conformity to the government's preferred social or theological standards.

A church dependent upon public grants may gradually become reluctant to rebuke the administration that controls those grants. A struggling ministry may soften an unpopular doctrine to preserve its funding. Politicians may reward friendly religious organizations and neglect dissenting ones. Religious bodies may begin competing against one another for state favor rather than serving through voluntary generosity.

This arrangement is spiritually dangerous to the church and constitutionally dangerous to the nation.

I therefore ask the Commission to:

- distinguish constitutionally required equal access to neutral public benefits from direct government subsidy of worship, evangelism, proselytism, devotional instruction, or inherently religious ministries
- oppose direct grants earmarked for worship, evangelism, religious recruitment, or doctrinal formation;

- require genuinely nonreligious alternatives for every publicly funded social service;
- prohibit coercion, religious tests, compelled participation, and discrimination against beneficiaries who reject a provider's faith;
- require transparent accounting that separates publicly funded services from privately funded religious activities;
- prevent government officials from evaluating the truth, orthodoxy, or spiritual worth of religious doctrine; and
- ensure that receipt or refusal of public money never determines a religious organization's political access or civil protection.

The church's witness is strongest when its service is voluntary, sacrificial, and answerable to God rather than financially dependent on Caesar.

4. PUBLIC SCHOOLS MUST PROTECT PRIVATE FAITH WITHOUT BECOMING DEVOTIONAL INSTITUTIONS

I support the right of students to pray voluntarily, discuss their beliefs, form religious clubs on equal terms, write about their faith when an assignment permits personal viewpoints, possess religious literature, and be free from religious discrimination.

Those are examples of protected private expression. They are not the same thing as government-sponsored devotional exercises.

At page 79, the report recommends that the Department of Justice support litigation defending Ten Commandments posters in public-school classrooms. I oppose that recommendation.

I honor the Ten Commandments. Precisely because I take them seriously, I do not want civil officials deciding which textual tradition, translation, numbering system, or theological presentation of the Commandments the state will display. Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, and other traditions do not always divide or present the Commandments identically. Government should not decide such doctrinal questions.

The Bible and the Ten Commandments may be taught objectively for their historical, literary, moral, and legal influence. That is materially different from using governmental authority to prescribe a devotional religious display to every classroom.

Please preserve the distinction between:

- student-initiated religious expression, which must be protected; and
- government-sponsored religious instruction or observance, which threatens the conscience of religious minorities, nonbelievers, and Christians who reject state management of faith.

Parents remain free to teach the commandments of God in their homes, churches, and religious schools. Civil government should not assume that sacred responsibility.

5. RETAIN THE PROHIBITION ON TAX-EXEMPT ORGANIZATIONS INTERVENING IN CANDIDATE CAMPAIGNS

Pages 127 and 219 recommend repealing the Johnson Amendment, narrowing its application through Treasury guidance, and supporting litigation challenging it.

I strongly oppose repeal.

Churches are currently free to preach about abortion, marriage, sexuality, justice, war, peace, poverty, immigration, race, religious liberty, economic morality, and every other public issue. They may discuss legislation and ballot questions within the applicable tax rules. What tax-exempt organizations may not do is intervene for or against candidates for public office.

That distinction protects the pulpit.

Without it, churches could become tax-exempt conduits for campaign money. Candidates, parties, donors, and political organizations would have powerful incentives to cultivate religious endorsements and finance cooperative ministries. Pastors could face pressure to deliver congregational votes. Churches might divide according to candidates rather than doctrine. Wealthy political interests could use tax-exempt ministries to obtain influence while presenting campaign activity as religious work.

No candidate should be able to purchase a pulpit, and no pastor should be pressured to deliver a congregation's votes in exchange for access, funding, or political favor.

A pastor must remain free to tell every political party, administration, and candidate, "Thus saith the Lord," without first calculating whether the message will jeopardize a political alliance.

Retaining the candidate-intervention prohibition does not silence the prophetic voice of the church. It helps prevent that voice from becoming campaign property.

6. CIVIC EDUCATION MUST BE BALANCED, LEGALLY PRECISE, AND PLURALISTIC

I do not oppose accurate "Know Your Rights" resources. Many citizens and officials genuinely misunderstand the religious-expression rights of students, employees, service members, healthcare workers, and religious institutions.

However, government educational materials should not present the Commission's disputed historical and constitutional conclusions as the only permissible understanding of religious liberty.

Any final materials should clearly explain:

- the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause;
- the difference between private religious speech and governmental religious speech;
- protection for voluntary personal prayer;
- prohibitions against government coercion of religious observance;
- equal access for religious and nonreligious viewpoints;
- the rights of minority faiths and people of no faith;
- the distinction between teaching about religion and conducting religious instruction; and
- the difference between constitutionally required equal treatment and government promotion of religion.

The advisory and review process should include Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Protestants of differing traditions, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, members of smaller faiths, atheists and agnostics, historians, and constitutional scholars who represent more than one jurisprudential viewpoint.

Religious liberty belongs equally to all. It cannot safely be defined solely by whichever coalition presently enjoys political authority.

7. PROTECT JEWISH AMERICANS WHILE PRESERVING LAWFUL SPEECH

I unequivocally condemn anti-Semitic violence, threats, vandalism, harassment, employment discrimination, and obstruction of Jewish worship or access to public facilities. Government must investigate and prosecute actual violations of law and must protect Jewish communities with the same diligence owed to every religious community.

At the same time, anti-Semitism policies must be carefully written so that lawful political disagreement, historical discussion, theological disagreement, or criticism of any foreign government is not automatically treated as unlawful discrimination.

Threats and violence are not protected merely because they are political. But peaceful political speech does not become violence merely because it is offensive or sharply critical.

The proper standard is equal civil protection, viewpoint neutrality, and careful attention to actual conduct.

8. PROTECT MILITARY CHAPLAINCY AND CONSCIENCE WITHOUT COERCION

I support meaningful religious accommodation for service members and access to chaplains representing diverse faith traditions. Military personnel, prisoners, hospitalized patients, and others under government control may lack ordinary access to private religious services. Government accommodation in those constrained settings can protect free exercise rather than establish religion.

Such accommodation must nevertheless remain voluntary, noncoercive, and available without denominational favoritism.

9. CHRISTIAN FAITH DOES NOT NEED CIVIL COMPULSION

My objection is not rooted in hostility toward Christianity. It is rooted in Christian conviction.

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36, KJV). He also said, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21, KJV). Scripture declares, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17, KJV).

Christ advanced His kingdom through truth, love, persuasion, service, sacrifice, and the cross—not through government grants, political patronage, compulsory worship, or state-enforced doctrine.

The church should be free to preach, worship, educate, serve, persuade, and bear public witness. It must also remain sufficiently independent to correct the state, resist injustice, and obey God when civil authority exceeds its proper jurisdiction.

A church financially or politically joined to the state may eventually find that it has exchanged its prophetic independence for access and influence.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Commission substantially revise the draft report and:

1. Replace the “bridge” model with language clearly affirming both robust individual free exercise and institutional nonestablishment.
2. State expressly that protecting religious citizens in public life does not require financial or political union

between religious institutions and civil government.

3. Limit faith-based funding recommendations to what binding constitutional law actually requires and prohibit direct public financing of worship, evangelism, proselytism, and devotional formation.
4. Withdraw the recommendation that DOJ support litigation promoting Ten Commandments posters in public-school classrooms, while continuing to protect voluntary student religious expression.
5. Withdraw the recommendation to repeal the prohibition on 501(c)(3) candidate campaign intervention, while clearly affirming churches' freedom to preach on moral questions and public issues.
6. Ensure that every religious-liberty educational resource is balanced, pluralistic, historically responsible, and equally protective of majority faiths, minority faiths, and people of no faith.
7. Enforce laws against anti-Semitic and other religiously motivated violence and discrimination using viewpoint-neutral standards that also preserve lawful political speech.
8. Maintain strong, noncoercive accommodations for service members, prisoners, patients, and others whose access to private religious services is restricted by government custody or duty.

Religious liberty is too important to be reduced either to aggressive secular exclusion or to government-supported religion. Both extremes endanger conscience.

Please protect faith without purchasing it, protect religious speech without converting it into government speech, protect churches without making them political instruments, and protect every person's right to worship—or not worship—without civil coercion.

I submit these concerns respectfully, prayerfully, and firmly. I ask the Commission to revise the report before it becomes the basis for executive policy, litigation strategy, administrative guidance, or proposed legislation.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Isaac D Warren
Troup TX

From: Uyeno Randall <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:17:31 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

I respectfully submit this public comment out of deep concern for the future of religious liberty in the United States. I urge the Commission to reject any recommendation directed at the Department of Justice or any other branch of government that would weaken the historic constitutional principle of keeping religion and government institutionally separate, as well as any proposal that encourages greater unity between the two.

America's greatest contribution to the cause of religious liberty has not been the state's endorsement of religion, but the protection of every person's God-given right to worship according to conscience without government interference. This principle has allowed religious communities of every tradition to flourish in freedom while preserving civil peace.

As a Bible-believing seventh-day Sabbath keeper, I write from the perspective of a religious minority whose spiritual ancestors experienced firsthand the dangers that arise when government aligns itself with the religious majority.

During America's colonial period, Baptists, Quakers, Jews, seventh-day Sabbath keepers, and many other religious minorities endured discrimination, imprisonment, fines, and civil persecution because certain established churches enjoyed the support of the state. These injustices were among the very reasons the Founders rejected religious establishments and adopted the First Amendment.

The experience of Seventh-day Adventists provides another historical warning. During the late nineteenth century, Adventists who faithfully observed God's seventh-day Sabbath were prosecuted under Sunday laws that were imposed, once again, by the religious Christian majority.

Some of our fellow believers were fined, imprisoned, and even forced into chain gangs because they chose to honor Saturday as the biblical Sabbath rather than conform to popular Blue Law Sunday observances. Their only offense was obeying the dictates of conscience and remaining faithful to their religious convictions.

Their experience stands as a warning that whenever civil authority is used to enforce religious beliefs or practices, freedom of conscience is inevitably endangered, and religious minorities are often the first to endure discrimination and persecution.

The medieval Inquisition demonstrated how religious institutions armed with civil authority suppressed dissent through torture, punishment, and even death. Various forms of religious extremism, including movements that have justified violence in the name of Islam, have shown how state-backed religious ideology can deny liberty of conscience. Likewise, communist regimes that officially embraced atheism illustrate the opposite side of the same error: when government suppresses religion altogether, believers are again persecuted.

Though these different oppressive systems differed in ideology, they shared one common characteristic—the concentration of civil power over matters of conscience.

The strength of the American constitutional system is that it avoids these extremes. Government was never commissioned to direct the spiritual lives of the people. The mission of the state is to preserve order, protect individual rights, and secure equal treatment under the law.

The mission of the church is altogether different: to preach the gospel, emphasize truth and love through persuasion, not coercion, and call people to a voluntary faith, as Jesus did. These two institutions are strongest and remain uncorrupted when each remains within its proper sphere.

Our nation has become home to a diverse group of churches, synagogues, mosques, and religious communities because government has generally refrained from controlling or establishing religion. This constitutional heritage has protected both the majority and the minority alike.

I therefore respectfully urge the Commission to recommend policies that reinforce—not diminish—the constitutional barriers separating ecclesiastical authority from civil government. Religious liberty is best preserved when government neither advances nor inhibits religion but instead protects the equal rights of all people to follow their own conscience.

The United States must remain a nation where every church is free to proclaim its beliefs without governmental control and where every citizen is free to worship—or not to worship—without governmental pressure. History has already taught us the consequences of abandoning this principle.

We should not repeat mistakes that countless generations have paid dearly to overcome. For if we do, we would once again be fanning the flames of intolerance, religious bigotry, and injustice.

Respectfully submitted,

Randall Uyeno

Honolulu, HI

Sent from my iPhone

From: Diane Parker <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment-Separation of Church and State - (Diane Parker)

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:18:26 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission: I'm responding as a concerned citizen of faith, and I object to replacing the wall of separation between church and state. Which will open the way for government money and political favors to come in and take over, then churches will have to compete for grants and answer to politicians instead of to God. And I don't believe that's good for the Churches or the country either. To keep them both free, Please keep church and state separate. Please don't build that bridge. Keep the wall.

Sincerely,

Diane Parker

Woodbridge, Virginia

From: CAROLEE & DAVID L MAXSON <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:20:39 -0400

Importance: Normal

I believe it's very important to continue religious freedom in our country at this time. Do not change the law to take it away. Freedom in our country sets us apart from many other ways of life. Thank you.

[Sent from AT&T Yahoo Mail on Android](#)

From: John Nolf <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:22:11 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

My name is John Nolf and I am writing in response to the movement to remove the barrier between church and state. I find this proposal to be very concerning.

I understand at its basic argument there seems to be no basis for it (separation of church and state) in the constitution. While it may not be explicitly stated in the constitution the principles are there. Freedom is one of our defining values not just for religious freedom but all manner of freedoms we are so blessed to enjoy here in our wonderful country.

As I am sure you are aware there has been a more pronounced movement over the past few years to make America a more Christian nation. I do agree we have lost our way in our society and it has become very secular. However as much as I would love for everyone to love Jesus and accept Him as their personal Savior. I do not believe in forcing that choice or my beliefs upon other individuals.

Let me explain briefly a bit further. Our forefathers risked life, finances, left country and family to come to this land of opportunity, not for just temporal opportunities but to be able to pursue a relationship with God as conscience allowed. Europe had for centuries been in battle between religious ideologies and the common person bore the brunt of it from many angles, in particular religious persecution.

My point. When the church unites with the state to "encourage" a more religious society it never goes well even if the intentions are well intended. There are so many examples of this in history regardless of whether it is Christianity or any other religion for that matter. And history tells us it never goes well.

Look at it from Christ's perspective. During Jesus' ministry there was never once an instance where He forced someone to follow Him. He did not try to collaborate with the Roman government or the religious leaders of His time in order to get His message across and get as many people on His side as possible.

In fact the very opposite is true. He said, "If I be lifted up I will draw all men to me" (John 12:32). Meaning His death on the cross would be sufficient evidence of His love for humanity. Christ's death on the cross is the ultimate argument for religious freedom; Christ died because He gave us free will to choose for or against Him; in other words follow His word or to sin against Him.

So in view of the cross we are given freedom of individual choice. Do we choose Christ or our own way? Christ is our example and He never modeled anything other than liberty of conscience. Salvation is a personal choice. Religious liberty should remain a free unencumbered choice.

I believe tearing down that barrier only opens the door for more legislation to impose a particular viewpoint and belief system on the people of America. Why after 250 years of being a nation do we now need separation of church and state? Why do we need it out of the way? What is the reason? What is the agenda? I think that

these are some of the core questions to ask. And frankly some of the potential answers to these questions scares me a great deal.

My fear is that with the good intentions that may be there, to fuse religious interests with government interests, will only result in oppression of individual conscience and freedom of worship and choice. I agree it would be beneficial for our society to be more Christ centered but not at the cost of individual freedom.

One last example. I'm a healthcare professional. I worked frontline in one of Southern California's busiest ERs during COVID. I'm not an antivaxer. I am however against coercing folks to take something against their better judgment. I believe that was wrong even if it was for the common good. Coercion is not a Christlike quality and should not be imposed upon our fellow citizens.

And my concern is the same when it comes to losing the barrier church and state provides. We may find ourselves down an unintended road.

Again your relationship with God is a personal matter not a matter that needs to be directed by the government or a presiding religious body. How will an America without the separation of church and state function to maintain our enjoyed freedoms? I hope to not find out.

I hope you will consider these things as you move forward.

In closing I thank you for your time and consideration to this important issue.

Sincerely

John Nolfé

From: Lynda dupreez <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Cc: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Concerns

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:22:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission of the USA.

I am a grateful citizen of the United States. I want to firstly thank the Religious Liberty Commission for doing some good work in defending the Free Exercise Clause.

And, I want to express my concern with its dismissive approach to the Establishment Clause, as well as the dismantling of the Separation of Church and State.

Today, I think it's important to remember that we can thank Christians for the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment of the US Constitution. The first person in the American colonies to keep the church out of government and the government out of church was Roger Williams, a devout Christian pastor. He fought for this new arrangement because of the religious persecution that he and millions of others experienced in Europe and the American colonies. He saw the results of churches who persecuted dissenters and he was committed to the example of Jesus who never forced anybody and declared, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

The establishment of the Separation of Church and State was an extraordinary achievement that has contributed significantly to America's success. As one who belongs to a religious minority, I am alarmed at the new willingness to redefine the Establishment Clause to accommodate a much closer union of church and state that will inevitably favor larger religions. The Founding Fathers gave us the Establishment Clause to protect against religious tyranny and the Free Exercise Clause to protect against secular tyranny. When the two are out of balance the future of religious liberty in America is threatened.

Here are some specific areas of concern from your report:

- It sets a dangerous precedent when you openly oppose the Separation of Church and State.
- Public funds should go to public schools, not private schools. A key part of disestablishment in America was to no longer use tax dollars to support religious institutions.
- Sectarian religion should not be forced in school, such as the required posting of the 10 Commandments in classrooms, or required prayers.
- Repealing the Johnson Amendment removes safeguards that protect houses of worship from partisan politicking, and preserves their spiritual purpose.

The Christian's commitment to religious liberty should be guided by God's character of love, his respect for human choice and free will, and the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12).

I hope you have discernment to understand the legacy of religious freedom in America, and the courage to defend the eternal principles that are so important to us.

Thank you for listening.6

Sincerely,

Lynda du Preez

From: Debby Smithes [REDACTED] PII >

To: " [REDACTED] PII " < [REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Choice

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:23:27 -0400

Importance: Normal

I feel that it is important for each person to choose their own faith. Faith is a matter of personal relationship with the Lord. Faith should be determined on an individual basis. The freedom to worship God on an individual basis, the way a person chooses to worship, how they choose to worship, and what day they choose to worship should not be dictated. Worship is a matter of conscience. We in America need to preserve this freedom a religious choice. Sent from my iPhone

From: "[REDACTED PII]" <[REDACTED PII]>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED PII]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:26:08 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am concerned about the erosion of our religious liberty with the joining of church and state because every time it's happened throughout history it has had adverse effects.

Respectfully,

Andrea Rottacker

Sent from my iPhone

From: Rachel Beabout <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - General Comments RE: 10th Amendment of U.S. Constitution - Rachel Beabout

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:26:08 -0400

Importance: Normal

Constitution of the United States Tenth Amendment

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.

The Constitution does not enumerate power to the executive branch to create such a commission nor to make recommendations of policy on the exercise of religion or to codify a definition of religious liberty.

The Declaration of Independence cites LIBERTY alone as an unalienable right, given by "their Creator." Liberty as a whole includes religious liberty.

Thomas Jefferson wrote: "A free people [claim] their rights, as derived from the laws of nature, and not as the gift of their chief magistrate."

Deciding when, who, how, and most importantly why to exercise a person's faith or religious practice is a matter of individual conscience.

As long as it does not violate the civil liberties of other individuals or federal, state, or local law, people should be able to exercise their religious liberty according to their conscience.

Neither a Congress-person, a President, nor a Supreme Court Justice should have the power to assume such authority to make such decisions or statements.

Arbitrary power is usurpation of the Sovereignty of the people.

John Adams Jan. 1776 - As the Happiness of the People alone, is the sole End of Government, So the Consent of the People is the only Foundation of it, in Reason, Morality, and the natural Fitness of things: and therefore every Act of Government, every Exercise of Sovereignty, against, or without, the Consent of the People, is Injustice, Usurpation, and Tyranny.

Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God. - Thomas Jefferson and/or Ben Franklin, 1776

There is a separation between church and state; not all religions have a church, in the Christian sense of the word as a noun. Yet the report argues the church and state support each other. The fact that word is used shows bias towards one religion - Christianity. Providence and wisdom are words in our founding documents that seem universal or applicable to any religious faith.

The words in the Declaration of Independence are "their Creator" not "the Creator." This distinction acknowledges a personal idea, as all men are created equal, and with the liberty given by natural law to determine who or what "their Creator" may be. The inclusion of such words acknowledges also a higher.

The Confederate States fought in the Civil War to protect what some believed, a religious liberty to own fellow human beings.

Abolitionists believed it was their religious liberty, or rather their duty, to oppose the ownership of image bearers of God.

From: Pamela Seay <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:27:25 -0400

Importance: Normal

We have been a nation that tolerated people of all religious backgrounds. This has made our nation a wonderful place to live. Where everyone has the right to worship or not worship God on the day they choose. Governments should not dictate how to worship or what day all the nation should worship on. The meaning of separation of church and state came from this concept. History has shown us when government passes laws on how its citizens should worship, that it causes religious persecution.

We pray that God will guide the directors and leaders of the Religious Liberty Commission in liberty and justice for all people.

Thank you for your attention to Religious Liberty. May God bless our nation.
Pamela Thampi

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

From: Kody Kostenko <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public response to the RLC's draft report.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:28:18 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Letter_to_RLC_july_2026_FINAL.pdf

NOTE: Please find attached PDF with footnotes which did not copy and paste into the email browser.

To the patriotic men and women serving on the Religious Liberty Commission and at the U.S. Department of Justice, and to all my fellow Americans, greetings.

It is a privilege to be alive and have a voice at this pivotal and historic moment for our country.

First of all, I thank God for the great American legacy of freedom and for the brave men and women who have sacrificed so much and worked so hard to secure and preserve it. For centuries, the United States of America has been a bastion of religious liberty and tolerance, a refuge for people like my great-grandparents who were part of a religious minority and suffered persecution in their home country in eastern Europe where the state fined and imprisoned anyone at odds with the national religion. My Great-grandfather and his family left all their belongings behind and rode horseback to a port city where they providentially secured passage on a foreign ship and boarded under the cover of darkness. Like millions of others, they found in the United States of America a safe haven to practice their religion, a right guaranteed and protected by the highest law of the land.

I want to thank the Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) for their work over the last year in listening and calling attention to infringements and threats to religious liberty that have arisen in America in recent years, and I share the deep concerns about the injustices suffered by Shea Encinas, Jennifer Mead, Blake Martin, Dr. Eithan Haim and the many others who testified before the commission. I agree with their analysis that the metaphor of "the wall of separation between church and state" can be abused to exclude people of faith or restrict their liberties to the detriment of the country at large. However, just because a wall that was built to protect the church from the state and the state from the church is misappropriated to justify denying people the right to live out their convictions in public, doesn't mean that the wall should be torn down, or even repurposed as a bridge. As the RLC itself aptly points out in its full draft report, "Human history has shown how difficult it is to get this relationship [between church and state] right and how dangerous it is to get it wrong" (pg 12, 34).

I completely agree, and therefore am duty-bound to address some important concerns with dangers already lurking in the RLC's report, the first of which appears in the President's own words at the top of the [Two-page Summary of the Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report](#): "We're bringing back religion in America." The implication is that religion has either been expelled or died out in America. Was the government responsible for that? If so, in what sense? If not, why should the government make itself responsible for religion's return? Furthermore, how could the government go about to bring religion back and yet remain neutral as to *what exactly constitutes religion*?

In other words, Trump's assertion, which provides the context and sets the tone for the remainder of the RLC's summarized report, begs some important questions:

1. What religion is being brought back in America? There are many different religions in America. Logically, the answer must be a religion that was already in America at some point, but has disappeared or is in danger of disappearing.
2. In what sense is religion being brought back in America? Has it been expelled and is now being readmitted, or is it dying and needs to be brought back to life? If the absence of this religion in America is attributable to *both* of the aforementioned causes, how does the government propose to bring it back from illegal exclusions without illegally establishing it in the very process of "bringing it back"?

To "bring back religion," the government involves itself in *defining* what constitutes legitimate religion by default, which is a violation of the first amendment. This is already happening through the strong religious rhetoric adopted by many high-ranking government officials. Far better it would be for them to quietly and consistently live out the principles of religious conviction in honesty, integrity and sacrificial service.

Trump's stated goal is mirrored in the list of recommendations and "opportunities" proposed by the RLC. Mixed in with a great many excellent ideas that I wholeheartedly support, in the list of the RLC's recommendations found both in their full draft report and summary report, there are at least two that merit criticism and revision, and a third that serves as a solemn warning.

1. "Instruct the **Department of Justice to issue guidance clarifying** the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state."

This recommendation presupposes a widespread improper understanding of the first amendment, particularly in regards to separation of church and state. What exactly is the "proper understanding" of the Establishment Clause according to the RLC? Commission chair Dan Patrick has already told us in no uncertain terms that the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution, a direct contradiction of written statements from founding fathers and authors of the Constitution, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. And while it is true that there are instances of improper usage of this terminology that have resulted in the suppression of religious liberty, the problem is the abuse and misapplication of the phrase, not the phrase itself.

Separation of church and state has even deeper American roots than the Constitution. Baptist minister Roger Williams, pioneered the revolutionary idea of separating the powers of church and state in colonial America, drawing his arguments directly from the Bible. Williams taught that civil government has no jurisdiction over the conscience in matters of religion and worship. God Himself instituted the separation of powers by recording His law on two distinct tables, the first to govern the vertical relationship between man and God, and the second to govern horizontal relationships between man and his neighbor. Civil authorities have no jurisdiction over any matters related to the first table of the Decalogue. When they invade this sacred space they commit what Rogers called “the rape of the soul.” Civil authorities may only enforce obedience concerning violations of the second table: prohibitions of theft, murder, adultery, perjury, defamation, etc. Rogers’ ideas were considered treasonous, a threat to the well-being of the Massachusetts and Plymouth colonies, and Puritan authorities ordered his arrest and deportation. Roger escaped into the wilderness in the dead of winter and was rescued by Wampanoag natives. He went on to become the founder of a new colony in Providence, Rhode Island after making a deal with the native Narragansetts, who trusted him more than they did any of the other Englishmen, no doubt because he practiced his religion consistently in his dealings with them just as he did with his own countrymen. Rhode Island went on to become the first colony to grant full religious freedom to all peoples, not just those who practiced the state-endorsed religion. Among other things, that meant that religious beliefs could not be made a test for exclusion from or for gaining public office. The influence of that successful and providential experiment on the new nation in the making cannot be underestimated.

The establishment clause of the first amendment to the constitution states: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;” By signaling Christianity as the religion it intends to bring back, the current administration is already in danger of violating the first amendment, because an official definition that favors a particular religion is the first step in establishing that religion. While *Congress* has yet to confirm the suggested definition through legislation, in today’s America where presidents routinely circumvent the legislative branch’s lawmaking prerogative in the name of national security or in response to an emergency with a swift, executive-order stroke of the pen, the government could claim a legal adherence to the first amendment on a technicality while practically repudiating the very fabric of its broad, noble principles. There does exist the danger of executing a law to death.

Which brings us to the ninth proposal in the RLC’s draft:

9. “Repeal the Johnson Amendment.”

In the opening pages of the RLC’s full draft report, the recommendation is given to religious institutions and houses of worship to “Issue guidance to ensure the **Johnson Amendment** is not applied to chill religious leaders’ First Amendment right to provide religious guidance to their communities” (pg 14). This soft recommendation turns a lot harder however on page 23 with the RLC’s recommendation to “Repeal the **Johnson Amendment** which purports to give the government authority to regulate religious leaders’ sermons and spiritual guidance to their communities.” To repeal means to revoke or to make null and void! Why the sudden drastic change in the recommendation concerning the Johnson Amendment?

The Johnson amendment is essentially a law that requires non-profit organizations with 501-C3 status, including churches, to be non-partisan in order to maintain their tax-exempt status. Some argue that this infringes on freedom to express or practice religion, *but since when has identification with and participation in partisan politics become a tenet of Christian practice that needs to be restored and protected?* The very idea is repulsive and in direct contradiction to the words of Christ Himself: “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews” (John 18:36).

The inclusion of this recommendation on the list forewarns what particular brand of Christianity the present administration will inevitably “bring back,” unwittingly or not: the Christianity of Judas that would betray Christ for a little silver, and that will be selective in its service, preferring those of its chosen political party, and the men-pleasing, pandering religion of eye-service. The “religion” that will clamor and compete for state status, position and influence rejects its self-sacrificial and impartial mission of ministry to all people without the external motivation of material benefits or financial reward. To do away with the Johnson Amendment firewall opens a Pandora’s box of religio-political corruption. As such, there is no way that repealing the safeguard of the Johnson amendment will improve religious liberty unless by religious liberty you mean liberty for religion to use the government to further its own ends or vice-versa!

Furthermore, if instances of abuse or misuse of the Johnson amendment justify a complete disposal of it with its important safeguards, what guarantee do we have that the first amendment of the Constitution will not suffer the same fate?

As the RLC report points out, “In many cases the law protects the religious expression of Americans, but government officials and employers often use fear tactics to silence individuals into believing that they don’t have the right to publicly express their faith.”

The solution is not to change or discard the law, rather for more brave Christians like those who testified before the commission to not only refuse to be silenced, but also refuse to be unkind in the process. Christians who follow Christ who said, “in everything, treat others as you would want them to treat you, for this fulfills the law and the prophets” Unfortunately, the rhetoric coming from many Christian Nationalists today seems to be a legislative eye for an eye in response to the restrictions and hardships imposed on conscientious Christians in recent years by oppressive legislation imposing LGBTQ+ ideology, vaccination and like issues. If we are indeed a Christian nation, then let each Christian patriot exercise Christian principles of grace, self-control, kindness and forbearance, and resist the temptation to resort to the same coercive fear-tactics used against us by our enemies. True religious liberty extends the dignity of choice to others and will be respectful of that choice, even when we don’t agree with it, as long as that choice does not infringe on the civil liberties and natural rights of others.

Finally, I wish to conclude pointing out the warning we should take from the eleventh recommendation in the RLC’s draft:

“11. Continue efforts to restore the retirement or re-enlistment eligibility for service members who lost employment, health insurance, pensions, and other benefits because of their religious beliefs about the COVID-19 vaccine.”

I applaud this recommendation. However, the very fact that there is a need for it should itself serve as a warning to the Trump administration, the RLC and the DOJ of the dangers of pushing for rapid solutions. We live in a society that has been conditioned to expect and demand quick fixes, expedited solutions and instant gratification. This is problematic, especially when it comes to complex issues like religious liberty. Yet the premise for the creation of this commission is “we’re bringing back religion in America, **and we’re bringing it back quickly and strongly**” We are addicted to rapid solutions in today’s society, but we should know better. Quick fixes and rapid solutions are by necessity superficial and cosmetic, and as such they are deceptive. When it comes to restoring life, they are often fatal because they mask the symptoms while allowing the root cause to keep growing under the surface. We didn’t get where we are today overnight. It would be presumptuous and foolish to imagine that we take shortcuts when it comes to fixing problems that have been building for multiple decades. Be exceedingly cautious lest the cure you propose cause more harm than the disease. It is essential to thoroughly investigate and address the root causes of our current problems. I deeply appreciate the RLC’s efforts in that direction, and their observations and evidence that religious liberty is the first of our rights and essential to national prosperity. As the good book says, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” Proverbs 14:34. Which brings us to an essential point that is absent from the draft report: before religion can hope to successfully reform the government and the nation, it must thoroughly reform itself.

The deterioration and vulnerability of Christianity in America is due, not to its exclusion from the public square, but from its own apostasy and departure from its Source. The stench of decay in the churches tell us that Christianity is *dead or dying*. Many decades ago, Christianity by and large rejected the authority of the law of God. In practice and appearance the Christian church became more and more similar to surrounding culture and society. To justify themselves, the majority of Christians have also rejected the law of God in theory, teaching that the law of God was nailed to the cross, is no longer binding, and is impossible to keep. Over the last few decades, we have been reaping the whirlwind as crime, perversity and wickedness of every stripe have multiplied and metastasized. The moral gravitation in our nation seems about to hit terminal velocity. The guilt for this lies largely at the door of the church. Not because it hasn’t been active enough in the public square, but because it has lost its moral authority, and therefore has lost most of its influence as the “collective conscience” for society and the state. Many Christians, instead of reflecting on our personal and ecclesiastical responsibility for this condition and confessing and repenting of our own immorality and wickedness, are casting the blame for our current depravity on the separation of church and state. Having rejected the law of God, Christianity has bereaved itself of its God-given Authority, and now of necessity seeks to appropriate the authority of the state for itself in a self-justifying attempt to fill the void and still appear pious. In so doing, Christians double-down on their rejection of God, the divine Lawgiver and seek another ruler to take His place. Many Christians now look hopefully to the government to restore our influence and secure the changes in society that we have become powerless to make. Rather than see our sin and humbly confess, we now assert that the power of the state is rightfully ours to wield for the restoration of all our ills. Astute politician that he is, Trump has zeroed in and capitalized on this felt need. Thus, the words of the Trump administration “of bringing back religion” speak of bringing Christianity back to life. The aim is to revive, or give new life to religion, as evidenced by the boastful words of his son that his father has “saved Christianity in America.” In what ways does a nation or government revive religion? Only in a political sense. The nation apparently speaks life into Christianity by making, interpreting and executing laws and policies that lend favors and influence to the church in exchange for financial and political endorsements. Yet the life-giver is the Creator God. He is the only One who can speak life into anything. In attempting to fill the Divine role of bringing religion back to life, the government oversteps its limits, and the results can only be disastrous. History has proved this again and again. In fact, Bible prophecy reveals that just before the world ends, the leading nation of the world, depicted with two lamb-like horns, or Christlike powers, begins to speak like a dragon and sets up an image, or copy of the last world-dominating church-state government, the Roman Papacy, which ruled Europe with bloody iron teeth for centuries prior to the revolutionary backlash of the late 1700’s.

“And he had power to give life to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed” (Revelation 13:15).

This prophecy should not be read as license, but as a warning. While it will happen one day, we don’t have to be the ones responsible for doing it. Indeed, we cannot afford to be, for when the Christian church turns to the state for power it confirms its rejection of God and becomes a vehicle of spiritual deception and coercion. Revelation reveals the outcome: “And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Revelation 16:13).

Therefore, I urge you my fellow Americans and honorable compatriots at the RLC and DOJ, to carefully re-evaluate your stance of restructuring the protective wall of separation into a bridge, especially considering the current condition of both the State and the church. While it is true that the “church and state strengthen and support one another,” as you say, they can never do so in a positive sense unless they respect proper boundaries and limitations. To turn those boundaries into a bridge open for traffic, especially when both church and state are rife with corruption, is to strengthen and support one another in mutual decay and hasten, rather than mitigate both spiritual and national ruin.

May we each search our hearts individually, turn to God personally in humility and repentance, and pray for that true religious liberty that no man or government can ever take away: freedom from sin through faith in the righteousness of Christ and His atoning blood. Only as we experience religious liberty in our souls will we be able to live it, model it, and champion it on behalf of others in our communities, institutions, and nation.

Sincerely,

Kody James Kostenko

To the patriotic men and women serving on the Religious Liberty Commission and at the U.S. Department of Justice, and to all my fellow Americans, greetings.

It is a privilege to be alive and have a voice at this pivotal and historic moment for our country.

First of all, I thank God for the great American legacy of freedom and for the brave men and women who have sacrificed so much and worked so hard to secure and preserve it. For centuries, the United States of America has been a bastion of religious liberty and tolerance, a refuge for people like my great-grandparents who were part of a religious minority and suffered persecution in their home country in eastern Europe where the state fined and imprisoned anyone at odds with the national religion. My Great-grandfather and his family left all their belongings behind and rode horseback to a port city where they providentially secured passage on a foreign ship and boarded under the cover of darkness. Like millions of others, they found in the United States of America a safe haven to practice their religion, a right guaranteed and protected by the highest law of the land.

I want to thank the Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) for their work over the last year in listening and calling attention to infringements and threats to religious liberty that have arisen in America in recent years, and I share the deep concerns about the injustices suffered by Shea Encinas, Jennifer Mead, Blake Martin, Dr. Eithan Haim and the many others who testified before the commission. I agree with their analysis that the metaphor of “the wall of separation between church and state” can be abused to exclude people of faith or restrict their liberties to the detriment of the country at large. However, just because a wall that was built to protect the church from the state and the state from the church is misappropriated to justify denying people the right to live out their convictions in public, doesn’t mean that the wall should be torn down, or even repurposed as a bridge. As the RLC itself aptly points out in its full draft report, “Human history has shown how difficult it is to get this relationship [between church and state] right and how dangerous it is to get it wrong” (pg 12, 34).

I completely agree, and therefore am duty-bound to address some important concerns with dangers already lurking in the RLC’s report, the first of which appears in the President’s own words at the top of the Two-page Summary of the Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report: “We’re bringing back religion in America.” The implication is that religion has either been expelled or died out in America. Was the government responsible for that? If so, in what sense? If not, why should the government make itself responsible for religion’s return? Furthermore, how could the government go about to bring religion back and yet remain neutral as to *what exactly constitutes religion*?

In other words, Trump’s assertion, which provides the context and sets the tone for the remainder of the RLC’s summarized report, begs some important questions:

1. What religion is being brought back in America?¹ There are many different religions in America. Logically, the answer must be a religion that was already in America at some point, but has disappeared or is in danger of disappearing.
2. In what sense is religion being brought back in America? Has it been expelled and is now being readmitted, or is it dying and needs to be brought back to life? If the absence of this religion in America is attributable to *both* of the aforementioned causes, how does the government propose to bring it back from illegal exclusions without illegally establishing it in the very process of “bringing it back”?

To “bring back religion,” the government involves itself in *defining* what constitutes legitimate religion by default, which is a violation of the first amendment. This is already happening through the strong religious rhetoric adopted by many high-ranking government officials. Far better it would be for them to quietly and consistently live out the principles of religious conviction in honesty, integrity and sacrificial service.

Trump’s stated goal is mirrored in the list of recommendations and “opportunities” proposed by the RLC. Mixed in with a great many excellent ideas that I wholeheartedly support, in the list of the RLC’s recommendations found both in their full draft report and summary report, there are at least two that merit criticism and revision, and a third that serves as a solemn warning.

1. “Instruct the **Department of Justice to issue guidance clarifying** the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state.”

This recommendation presupposes a widespread improper understanding of the first amendment, particularly in regards to separation of church and state. What exactly is the “proper understanding” of the Establishment Clause according to the RLC? Commission chair Dan Patrick has already told us in no uncertain terms that the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution, a direct contradiction of written statements from founding fathers and authors of the Constitution, Thomas Jefferson² and James Madison³. And while it is true that there are

¹ The current administration has already given ample evidence showing a predisposition toward judeo-cristianity. Which version of Christianity remains to be seen, but as the initial revised list of religions recognized by the Pentagon under Secretary of War Pete Hegeseth indicates, religious bias and favoritism will be inevitable. (Hegeseth shortened the military’s list of recognized religions from about 200 religions down to 30, drawing fire especially for excluding the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints from the Christian category.)

² “Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building a wall of separation between Church and State.” Thomas Jefferson, letter to the Danbury Baptists. <https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html>

³James Madison, Letter to Robert Walsh, March 2, 1819.

instances of improper usage of this terminology that have resulted in the suppression of religious liberty, the problem is the abuse and misapplication of the phrase, not the phrase itself. Separation of church and state has even deeper American roots than the Constitution. Baptist minister Roger Williams, pioneered the revolutionary idea of separating the powers of church and state in colonial America, drawing his arguments directly from the Bible. Williams taught that civil government has no jurisdiction over the conscience in matters of religion and worship. God Himself instituted the separation of powers by recording His law on two distinct tables, the first to govern the vertical relationship between man and God, and the second to govern horizontal relationships between man and his neighbor. Civil authorities have no jurisdiction over any matters related to the first table of the Decalogue. When they invade this sacred space they commit what Rogers called “the rape of the soul.” Civil authorities may only enforce obedience concerning violations of the second table: prohibitions of theft, murder, adultery, perjury, defamation, etc. Rogers’ ideas were considered treasonous, a threat to the well-being of the Massachusetts and Plymouth colonies, and Puritan authorities ordered his arrest and deportation. Roger escaped into the wilderness in the dead of winter and was rescued by Wampanoag natives. He went on to become the founder of a new colony in Providence, Rhode Island after making a deal with the native Narragansetts, who trusted him more than they did any of the other Englishmen,⁴ no doubt because he practiced his religion consistently in his dealings with them just as he did with his own countrymen. Rhode Island went on to become the first colony to grant full religious freedom to all peoples, not just those who practiced the state-endorsed religion. Among other things, that meant that religious beliefs could not be made a test for excluding from or for gaining public office. The influence of that successful and providential experiment on the new nation in the making cannot be underestimated.

The establishment clause of the first amendment to the constitution states: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;” By signaling Christianity as the religion it intends to bring back, the current administration is already in danger of violating the first amendment, because an official definition that favors a particular religion is the first step in establishing that religion. While *Congress* has yet to confirm the suggested definition through legislation, in today’s America where presidents routinely circumvent the legislative branch’s lawmaking prerogative in the name of national security or in response to an emergency with a swift, executive-order stroke of the pen, the government could claim a legal adherence to the first amendment on a technicality while practically repudiating the very fabric of its broad, noble principles. There does exist the danger of executing a law to death.

Which brings us to the ninth proposal in the RLC’s draft:

9. “Repeal the Johnson Amendment.”

⁴ “Roger Williams: Founding Providence.” <https://www.nps.gov/rowi/learn/historyculture/foundingprovidence.htm>

In the opening pages of the RLC's full draft report, the recommendation is given to religious institutions and houses of worship to "Issue guidance to ensure the **Johnson Amendment** is not applied to chill religious leaders' First Amendment right to provide religious guidance to their communities" (pg 14). This soft recommendation turns a lot harder however on page 23 with the RLC's recommendation to "Repeal the **Johnson Amendment** which purports to give the government authority to regulate religious leaders' sermons and spiritual guidance to their communities." To repeal means to revoke or to make null and void! Why the sudden drastic change in the recommendation concerning the Johnson Amendment?

The Johnson amendment is essentially a law that requires non-profit organizations with 501-C3 status, including churches, to be non-partisan in order to maintain their tax-exempt status. Some argue that this infringes on freedom to express or practice religion, *but since when has identification with and participation in partisan politics become a tenet of Christian practice that needs to be restored and protected?* The very idea is repulsive and in direct contradiction to the words of Christ Himself: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews" (John 18:36).

The inclusion of this recommendation on the list forewarns what particular brand of Christianity the present administration will inevitably "bring back," unwittingly or not: the Christianity of Judas that would betray Christ for a little silver, and that will be selective in its service, preferring those of its chosen political party, and the men-pleasing, pandering religion of eye-service. The "religion" that will clamor and compete for state status, position and influence rejects its self-sacrificial and impartial mission of ministry to all people without the external motivation of material benefits or financial reward. To do away with the Johnson Amendment firewall opens a Pandora's box of religio-political corruption. As such, there is no way that repealing the safeguard of the Johnson amendment will improve religious liberty unless by religious liberty you mean liberty for religion to use the government to further its own ends or vice-versa!

Furthermore, if instances of abuse or misuse of the Johnson amendment justify a complete disposal of it with its important safeguards, what guarantee do we have that the first amendment of the Constitution will not suffer the same fate?

As the RLC report points out, "In many cases the law protects the religious expression of Americans, but government officials and employers often use fear tactics to silence individuals into believing that they don't have the right to publicly express their faith."

The solution is not to change or discard the law, rather for more brave Christians like those who testified before the commission to not only refuse to be silenced, but also refuse to be unkind in the process. Christians who follow Christ who said, "in everything, treat others as you would want them to treat you, for this fulfills the law and the prophets" Unfortunately, the rhetoric coming from many Christian Nationalists today seems to be a legislative eye for an eye in response to the restrictions and hardships imposed on conscientious Christians in recent years by

oppressive legislation imposing LGBTQ+ ideology, vaccination and like issues. If we are indeed a Christian nation, then let each Christian patriot exercise Christian principles of grace, self-control, kindness and forbearance, and resist the temptation to resort to the same coercive fear-tactics used against us by our enemies. True religious liberty extends the dignity of choice to others and will be respectful of that choice, even when we don't agree with it, as long as that choice does not infringe on the civil liberties and natural rights of others.

Finally, I wish to conclude pointing out the warning we should take from the eleventh recommendation in the RLC's draft:

"11. Continue efforts to restore the retirement or re-enlistment eligibility for service members who lost employment, health insurance, pensions, and other benefits because of their religious beliefs about the COVID-19 vaccine."

I applaud this recommendation. However, the very fact that there is a need for it should itself serve as a warning to the Trump administration, the RLC and the DOJ of the dangers of pushing for rapid solutions. We live in a society that has been conditioned to expect and demand quick fixes, expedited solutions and instant gratification. This is problematic, especially when it comes to complex issues like religious liberty. Yet the premise for the creation of this commission is "we're bringing back religion in America, **and we're bringing it back quickly and strongly**" We are addicted to rapid solutions in today's society, but we should know better. Quick fixes and rapid solutions are by necessity superficial and cosmetic, and as such they are deceptive. When it comes to restoring life, they are often fatal because they mask the symptoms while allowing the root cause to keep growing under the surface. We didn't get where we are to today overnight. It would be presumption and foolishness to imagine that we take shortcuts when it comes to fixing problems that have been building for multiple decades. Be exceedingly cautious lest the cure you propose cause more harm than the disease. It is essential to thoroughly investigate and address the root causes of our current problems. I deeply appreciate the RLC's efforts in that direction, and their observations and evidence that religious liberty is the first of our rights and essential to national prosperity. As the good book says, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" Proverbs 14:34. Which brings us to an essential point that is absent from the draft report: before religion can hope to successfully reform the government and the nation, it must thoroughly reform itself.

The deterioration and vulnerability of Christianity in America is due, not to its exclusion from the public square, but from its own apostasy and departure from its Source. The stench of decay in the churches tell us that Christianity is *dead or dying*. Many decades ago, Christianity by and large rejected the authority of the law of God. In practice and appearance the Christian church became more and more similar to surrounding culture and society. To justify themselves, the majority of Christians have also rejected the law of God in theory, teaching that the law of God was nailed to the cross, is no longer binding, and is impossible to keep. Over the last few decades, we have been reaping the whirlwind as crime, perversity and wickedness of every stripe have multiplied and metastasized. The moral gravitation in our nation seems about to hit terminal

velocity. The guilt for this lies largely at the door of the church. Not because it hasn't been active enough in the public square, but because it has lost its moral authority, and therefore has lost most of its influence as the "collective conscience" for society and the state. Many Christians, instead of reflecting on our personal and ecclesiastical responsibility for this condition and confessing and repenting of our own immorality and wickedness, are casting the blame for our current depravity on the separation of church and state. Having rejected the law of God, Christianity has bereaved itself of its God-given Authority, and now of necessity seeks to appropriate the authority of the state for itself in a self-justifying attempt to fill the void and still appear pious. In so doing, Christians double-down on their rejection of God, the divine Lawgiver and seek another ruler to take His place. Many Christians now look hopefully to the government to restore our influence and secure the changes in society that we have become powerless to make. Rather than see our sin and humbly confess, we now assert that the power of the state is rightfully ours to wield for the restoration of all our ills. Astute politician that he is, Trump has zeroed in and capitalized on this felt need. Thus, the words of the Trump administration "of bringing back religion" speak of bringing Christianity back to life. The aim is to revive, or give new life to religion, as evidenced by the boastful words of his son that his father has "saved Christianity in America." In what ways does a nation or government revive religion? Only in a political sense. The nation apparently speaks life into Christianity by making, interpreting and executing laws and policies that lend favors and influence to the church in exchange for financial and political endorsements. Yet the life-giver is the Creator God. He is the only One who can speak life into anything. In attempting to fill the Divine role of bringing religion back to life, the government oversteps its limits, and the results can only be disastrous. History has proved this again and again. In fact, Bible prophecy reveals that just before the world ends, the leading nation of the world, depicted with two lamb-like horns, or Christlike powers, begins to speak like a dragon and sets up an image, or copy of the last world-dominating church-state government, the Roman Papacy, which ruled Europe with bloody iron teeth for centuries prior to the revolutionary backlash of the late 1700's.

"And he had power to give life to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed" (Revelation 13:15).

This prophecy should not be read as license, but as a warning. While it will happen one day, we don't have to be the ones responsible for doing it. Indeed, we cannot afford to be, for when the Christian church turns to the state for power it confirms its rejection of God and becomes a vehicle of spiritual deception and coercion. Revelation reveals the outcome: "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Revelation 16:13).

Therefore, I urge you my fellow Americans and honorable compatriots at the RLC and DOJ, to carefully re-evaluate your stance of restructuring the protective wall of separation into a bridge, especially considering the current condition of both the State and the church. While it is true that the "church and state strengthen and support one another," as you say, they can never do so in a positive sense unless they respect proper boundaries and limitations. To turn those boundaries

into a bridge open for traffic, especially when both church and state are rife with corruption, is to strengthen and support one another in mutual decay and hasten, rather than mitigate both spiritual and national ruin.

May we each search our hearts individually, turn to God personally in humility and repentance, and pray for that true religious liberty that no man or government can ever take away: freedom from sin through faith in the righteousness of Christ and His atoning blood. Only as we experience religious liberty in our souls will we be able to live it, model it, and champion it on behalf of others in our communities, institutions, and nation.

Sincerely,

Kody James Kostenko

From: Sandee Wavecable <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comments- Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:28:50 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone

I sent a previous email but didn't put public comments in subject line. I want to make sure this goes to the appropriate place and I did a slight edit as well. Here is the email I sent.:

From what I glean from a study of my families history, my ancestor was Julines Herring who was a Puritan Minister in Wales. He went to the Nethelands for religious freedom. His son John Herring his son and my ancestor came instead to America to the Isle of Wight countyq VA sometime around 1635 or a little after. Freedom is a big part of my family history. I have 2 ancestors that fought in the Revolutionary war.

I am a Christian and the God I know is Love. Love cannot be coerced and Love does not demand its own way. My God desires freedom of choice and is not a God of force, fear or coercion.

I respect freedom of conscience and separation of the government from religion. I respect the right to reject God or have a different belief than I, as I know He does too. Since, as a Christian I believe we all are in different and personal relationships and knowledge with and of God and that we will be learning for eternity more about Him, it is arrogant to think that we have all the truth and the only way to do His will and be in relationship with Him. All relationships are personal and different. God made us all unique and our relationship with God is unique.

Sincerely,
Sandee Crane

From: SRP <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State-Shawn R. Peasley

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:29:45 -0400

Importance: Normal

Revised Version to correct intended wording and clarify meaning

I have been amazed at the level of first amendment right violations that have been brought to light by these sessions (I watched all videos in the seven sessions in two days). So much work needs to be done to guard against these abuses! I'm concerned however that in an effort to fight against the abuses of the government violating these freedoms of conscience we need to also be sure to not allow one abuse of religious liberty to be replaced by another. The "wall" of separation of church and state most all of my life I have been taught and I have (I think sensibly and appropriately) interpreted not as a wall disallowing the free exercise of religious convictions by an individual in a government role in which one could perform one's public service duties to the government without violating one's conscience and without foisting such views on others, but rather the intentional limitation of a governments involvement with religion to a protective role and should otherwise stay out of religion entirely.

It certainly seems wise to me to have a policy of separation of government from religion (separation of church and state) which I believe in that interpretation would safeguard liberties and freedoms that deserve to be protected. In fact guarding against the abuse of one sect against another is the only sense this separation even makes sense to me would have been intended originally. It would protect one's right to religion and to have no religion as one chooses. This separation interpretation would not forbid people from religious expression so long as such exercise did not infringe on the rights of others nor interfered with their government duties.

If however we mean to interpret a separation of church and state as something that disallows a person to follow religious beliefs that don't prevent the individual performance of their government job that would be the exact kind of wall that should be antithetical to the principles of liberty.

I think more is gained by construing a wall of separation as a good thing in the first sense of essentially saying the government's job is not to endorse nor preclude any religious exercise that doesn't threaten its limited duties of essentially maximizing freedoms of citizens while providing also for defense. By viewing the wall as a good thing for the preservation of freedoms we are more in line with the original intent and also don't lose the metaphor's imagery which is the subtler point which might be more easily lost sight of which is that anytime religious freedom is threatened it is almost certainly because people have lost sight of the unintended consequences associated with its demise. Also future people that need from time to time be reminded of the best of our founding father's notions and need a review they will be able to plainly see more easily. Since laws out live the makers of the laws this also helps people to be careful to have a legacy perspective on this.

Sent with [Proton Mail](#) secure email.

From: Bemnet Merieds [REDACTED] PII

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Stand for Freedom of Religion but I don't support the report of June 2026 since it weakens religious freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:31:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to submit my formal public comment expressing total opposition to the recommendations put forward in the June 2026 draft report. Rather than protecting true religious freedom, this document outlines an alarming blueprint to systematically break down the constitutional wall between church and state, while simultaneously narrowing the religious liberties of everyday Americans.

True religious freedom requires the government to remain strictly neutral. By attempting to elevate a singular, preferred religious viewpoint to a position of federal backing, this report actively undermines the First Amendment.

I urge the Commission to completely reject the following recommendations before a final report is issued:

1. The Subversion of the Johnson Amendment

The recommendation to eliminate or weaken the Johnson Amendment directly threatens the independence of both our political system and our houses of worship. Allowing tax-exempt religious institutions to funnel money into political campaigns and endorse candidates turns sacred spaces into partisan tools. This narrows religious liberty by forcing churchgoers into politically divided congregations and inappropriately subsidizes political speech through tax-exempt dollars.

2. The Diversion of Public Funds to Religious Education

The report's push to expand federal voucher programs and direct public tax dollars to religious private schools is a direct violation of the Establishment Clause. Public funds must support public education, which serves all children equally. Forcing taxpayers to fund religious instruction—including schools whose doctrines they may fundamentally disagree with—is a severe infringement on individual freedom of conscience.

3. The Weaponization of "Conscience Protections" to Discriminate

The report seeks to radically expand "Free Exercise" rights for corporations, government-funded agencies, and healthcare providers at the direct expense of individual citizens.

In Healthcare: Expanding medical refusal clauses allows providers to deny essential care to patients based on religious dogma, compromising patient safety and autonomy.

In Social Services: Allowing taxpayer-funded adoption and foster care agencies to reject qualified families based on sexual orientation or religion is state-sanctioned discrimination.

In the Workplace: Broadening corporate religious rights allows private business owners to override federal labor protections, stripping employees of their reproductive healthcare benefits and civil rights.

4. The Exclusion of Minority Faiths and Non-Religious Americans

Religious liberty must be absolute and equal for all people. The draft report focuses almost exclusively on protecting majority Christian institutions while largely ignoring the documented rise of discrimination against Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist Americans, as well as the rapidly growing secular population. By favoring one religious tradition, the report inherently narrows the freedom of all others.

Conclusion

The recommendations in this report do not defend liberty; they attempt to create a dangerous union between church and state that historical precedent proves will lead to oppression, division, and the erosion of minority

rights. I demand that the Commission uphold the strict separation of church and state—the very framework that has allowed diverse religious expressions to thrive peacefully in America for over two centuries.

Sincerely,
Bemnet B. Meried

"Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name." Psalms 86:11.

Dr. Bemnet B. Meried, Director



From: Nancy Lucass <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Religious Liberty Commission DRAFT public comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:31:41 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Committee members:

I wish to register my support for the government to continue the principle of Separation of Church and State. While I agree that it is not specifically stated in either our US Constitution or Bill of Rights, the principles have existed before the founding of our nation and were instrumental in the formation of many of our first states and in the minds and actions of many of our Founding Fathers.

While much has happened over the past few decades, especially the curtailing of the rights and beliefs held dear to many Judeo-Christians-values trod upon by the ever increasing escalation of the inroads of the beliefs of "Secular Atheism." This is not a reason to undue the value of separation of church and state for our country. But instead I would encourage you as a Committee advising our President, Donald Trump, to look at reclassifying the beliefs and doctrines of Secular Atheism as a religion and so their system of beliefs should NOT be used by our Judicial system, Congress or the Executive branch to curtail, restrict or impinge upon the religious rights, morals and beliefs of Christians, Jews or others guaranteed in our Constitution. By ignoring that Secular Atheism is a belief system as a religion much harm has been done.

Rather than allowing a perfunctory quick review, or even our own personal biases to make recommendations that can obscure reality, I strongly urge you to research and consider the comments submitted to you by the "Pillar of Freedom" and implement their recommendations to your Committee and President Trump.

Blurring the lines of separation between church and state has historically led to persecution, imprisonment, torture, and even death of persons who did NOT hold the beliefs or practices of the dominant religion of that state or country at that time. We see worldwide evidence of those atrocities against humanity to this day.

I have been a Christian, since a very young age. Jesus Christ is my Messiah, my personal Savior and my example. Many Jews of Jesus' time were looking for an earthly Savior that would set up an earthly kingdom and overturn the Roman Empire. Jesus made plain that His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). We do not have His authority to institute earthly laws and regulations for others to follow a certain religion or day of rest. Our country made this mistake many years ago with the Sunday Blue Laws. Unfortunately many of these laws are still on the books of states and local municipalities. These laws were made by and passed by duly elected officials, but does it make the right and according to the Bible? No, they do not. Jesus Christ while on earth kept the Seventh-day Sabbath, never Sunday. Christ never said to keep Sunday as sabbath. In fact there are over 56 Bible texts pointing to keeping the seventh day of the week as Sabbath--from Creation in Genesis 1:1-19 (The six days of creation describe God making the heavens, earth, light, sky, land, seas, plants, stars, animals, and humans in six 24-hour periods, then resting on the seventh day, establishing the Sabbath as a holy day of rest.) Further, in Isaiah 66:23 and beyond the Bible states clearly that we will worship God on Sabbath (not Sunday). Jesus Himself states that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfil the law (He was referring to the Ten Commandments).

I grew up with a brass plaque above my crib from the day I was born with the Ten Commandments embossed on it. These were some of the first words I learned as a child. Yet I do believe that we

should separate church and state. God gives us each free will to worship Him. His ways are above our ways and His government is based on agape love--not force or coercion.

I respectfully submit my comments for your kind consideration.

Nancy L. Lucas

From: john simon <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – JS

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:33:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a private citizen who cares about both halves of the First Amendment's religion clauses and ask you to acknowledge that they rise or fall together. My concern is not abstract; it comes from watching how quickly "support" for religion turns into government deciding whose religion counts.

The deepest argument against government sponsorship of religion is a Christian one, not a secular one. Christ himself divided all human duties into two jurisdictions when he said to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's. Civil government was given authority over duties owed to fellow humans; it was never given authority over duties owed to God. When A. T. Jones testified against the national Sunday bill before a Senate committee in 1888, he put the test plainly: the state may ask only whether an action is civil or uncivil, never whether it is religious or irreligious. Every proposal that puts government behind a religious text, display, or lesson crosses the line Christ Himself drew. That is not an attack on Christianity's role in public life; it is a defense of the very distinction Christianity itself teaches.

Rights of conscience cannot depend on how many people currently hold the majority religion because a right that a vote can grant is a right that a vote can take away. The American theory holds that rights are inherent, owed to the Creator, and placed beyond the reach of election returns precisely so minorities need not depend on the goodwill of majorities. As one Religious Liberty Library tract put it, popular governments represent the will of the majority yet are instituted to protect the rights of the minority. Congress's own 1829 committee report on Sunday legislation said the Constitution regards the conscience of a Jew, Hindu, and atheist as sacred as that of a Christian. Popular support may justify a highway bill. It cannot justify a religious one because religion was never submitted to the vote.

Even a law that favors my own faith destroys my free exercise of it because it concedes that religion is a fit subject for legislation at all, and legislatures change hands. Jones called it a flat impossibility to frame a law on religion that does not prohibit religion's free exercise. He said no person can sanction legislation favoring one's own creed without resigning his or her right to ever profess a different one if conscience should lead one there. That is the quiet radicalism worth remembering: religious liberty includes the liberty to change one's mind. Believers who welcome state sponsorship today are handing a tool to whomever governs next, including those who may not share their convictions at all.

Finally, coercion cannot produce faith; it can only produce hypocrisy. A statute can compel attendance, not belief, because love for God is essential to religious duty and cannot be legislated into being. Madison's survey of fifteen centuries of established Christianity found the fruits to be pride and indolence in the clergy and superstition and persecution among the people. Grant's counsel still holds: leave religion to the family altar, the church, and the private school and keep state and church forever separate. The churches most eager for government's help are usually the ones with the most to lose from it.

Protect free exercise for all and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
JS

From: CM GEBB <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:34:29 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern:

We are of the belief that the separation of church and state that has been established for 250 years by pastors of different religions, religious zealots, founding fathers, patriots, and believers in the Holy Word of God, knew exactly what they were doing for God's people who were running from persecution of the enforcement of the dictates of the church by the state.

Thus, it is our belief that history has taught us that to obtain true liberty of conscience that church and state must never be united in an effort to force the conscience which inevitably results in persecution and death of those who choose to live by the Holy Word of God and the dictates of their conscience.

God has spoken clearly in His Holy Word in Matthew 22:21 that what is Caesar's is Caesar's and what is God's is His alone. Hence, the state must leave the church alone for God is in control of His people. Therefore, in addition the Johnson Amendment is also to stay intact.

In Romans 13:1-5 we are told to honor the higher authority, and God is the highest authority. In verse 5 it states we are to check our conscience and the Holy Word of God when ordered to do something we may confirm whether it's from God or man. It is better to obey God rather than man.

Brother & Sister in Christ,
Casey & Margie

From: Cindy Rockney <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment: freedom of conscience preserved.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:37:36 -0400

Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern. I don't want to see freedom of conscience eroded for anyone as a reaction to state overreach.

The Johnson Amendment is a healthy and wise law making it illegal for churches to support a political candidate. This opens up to all kinds of financial entanglements.

Sincerely,
Cindy Rockney

From: Anna Meried <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Protect Religious Freedom - please, reconsider the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:38:35 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to submit my formal public comment expressing total opposition to the recommendations put forward in the June 2026 draft report. Rather than protecting true religious freedom, this document outlines an alarming blueprint to systematically break down the constitutional wall between church and state, while simultaneously narrowing the religious liberties of everyday Americans.

True religious freedom requires the government to remain strictly neutral. By attempting to elevate a singular, preferred religious viewpoint to a position of federal backing, this report actively undermines the First Amendment.

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The recommendation to eliminate or weaken the Johnson Amendment directly threatens the independence of both our political system and our houses of worship. Allowing tax-exempt religious institutions to funnel money into political campaigns and endorse candidates turns sacred spaces into partisan tools. This narrows religious liberty by forcing churchgoers into politically divided congregations and inappropriately subsidizes political speech through tax-exempt dollars.

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Religious liberty must be absolute and equal for all people. The draft report focuses almost exclusively on protecting majority Christian institutions while largely ignoring the documented rise of discrimination against Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist Americans, as well as the rapidly growing secular population. By favoring one religious tradition, the report inherently narrows the freedom of all others.

Conclusion

The recommendations in this report do not defend liberty; they attempt to create a dangerous union between church and state that historical precedent proves will lead to oppression, division, and the erosion of minority

rights. I demand that the Commission uphold the strict separation of church and state—the very framework that has allowed diverse religious expressions to thrive peacefully in America for over two centuries.

Sincerely,
Anna Meried.

From: [REDACTED] PII [REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII [REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:38:42 -0400

Importance: Normal

Please, please, I urge and pray that our country can keep church and state separated. Every time in history where church and state join, it is immediately followed by persecuting those who don't believe like the government. Our country was founded with groups of people fleeing persecution from the Catholic Church that had joined with government and could "punish" heretics. We need to be loving and Christlike.

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)

From: Jolene Tuma <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:39:30 -0400

Importance: Normal

Committee Member:

Please take careful consideration in making suggestions concerning our religious liberties.

We need a strict wall between church and state.

It is impossible to legislate love or worship.

Making laws which concern one's religious worship is obstructing ones personal rights.

Thank you for your service.

Regards:

Jolene L Tuma RN MSN

From: "PII" <PII>

To: "PII" <PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Request to President Trump's Religious Liberty Committee

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:41:10 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Committee,

I was an Outpatient Medical Coder working 100% Remote for NYU Langone Hospital & living in S Carolina when I was fired Oct 1, 2021 because I would not comply getting the Covid Vaccine. That week, Sept-Oct 2021 there was a Religious Exemption case in the NY Courts that was granted a Stay but I was fired anyway that week. I was unfairly terminated and life has been a nightmare since then. In the past several years since I have been fired, I could not get a Medical Coding job, my savings are all gone & I had to borrow money from family to "get by".

I am being represented by Jamie Scher & Jim Mermigis in the EDNY but my case was dismissed by the Obama appointed Judge in Mar 2026 with a decision that I had no standing because I lived in S Carolina, clearly a Religious Exemption doesn't matter anymore. My case is currently being appealed but NYS is a tough place to have your Rights recognized.

Please demand accountability and answers as to how these terrible people are treating the workers.

Thank you

AnneMarie Hickey

From: Marlys Zille <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:41:45 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone Please keep our religious freedom ! We must hold tight to the principles of our first amendment, keeping Church & state separate! There should not be a state universal faith or religion, it is a personal matter. Separation protects faith & that is why religion has stayed in America! No "bridge" is needed. We must keep both free! We must not return to the Dark Ages!

From: Martha Garza <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:42:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

July 13, 2026

Via Electronic Mail to [REDACTED] PII

Religious Liberty Commission
U.S. Department of Justice
Office of the Associate Attorney General
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Re: Public Comment on the Draft Report of the President's Religious Liberty Commission
Chairman Patrick, Vice Chairman Carson, and Distinguished Members of the Commission:

As a dedicated partner with Citizens Defending Freedom (CDF) and a Texas certified educator working in family and community engagement, I appreciate the opportunity to submit this public comment in response to the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission's draft report. This unprecedented and vital examination of religious liberty in America documents the real challenges facing people of faith in churches, schools, and throughout our society. The Commission has rightly recognized what I witness daily through CDF's work: religious liberty is not merely an abstract constitutional principle, but the essential freedom that enables Americans to speak, serve, teach, worship, and lead according to our sincerely held religious convictions.

Founded in 2021, CDF exists to help citizens defend their faith and freedoms while promoting transparency and accountability in local government. Through my partnership with CDF and our collective work with churches, families, schools, and communities nationwide — along with our legal advocacy and public policy efforts — we stand alongside pastors, parents, students, educators, elected officials, and other leaders to address community issues through a biblical worldview.

As someone whose mission is to equip churches and defend America's constitutional liberties, the effectiveness of our work depends on the continued protection of the religious freedoms outlined in the Commission's report. I am therefore pleased to express strong support for its recommendations and to provide real-world examples illustrating why they are urgently needed.

I. Protecting Pastors, Churches, and Faith-Based Civic Engagement

CDF partners with churches to train and mobilize believers to engage the issues affecting their families, communities, and schools through a biblical lens. Through discipleship and leadership development, we equip pastors with education and practical tools to help their congregations engage the public square with truth, courage, and conviction.

Nevertheless, I have repeatedly seen spiritual leaders hesitate to speak out due to longstanding misconceptions about the Johnson Amendment — the federal tax provision widely understood to restrict or endanger pastors' ability to address moral and civic issues from the pulpit without risking their church's tax-exempt status. This uncertainty has caused many pastors to question whether

discussing legislation, encouraging civic participation, addressing candidates' positions on moral issues, or simply applying biblical principles to public affairs might expose their churches to retaliation.

This climate of fear has discouraged some religious leaders from speaking on critical matters such as the sanctity of human life, traditional marriage, parental rights, gender ideology, and other issues directly affecting their congregations.

CDF-aligned Pastor Jack Hilligoss of Lake Wales, Florida, illustrates both the importance of the Commission's recommendations and the backlash faith leaders can face when they address pressing moral, cultural, and civic questions. Pastor Hilligoss, who also serves as mayor of Lake Wales, has actively promoted voter registration, Biblical Citizenship education, and civic responsibility within his congregation. In response, critics publicly accused him of improperly blurring the line between church and state, claiming Christians should not encourage civic engagement from the pulpit. One individual even filed a complaint with the Internal Revenue Service against him. Although Pastor Hilligoss has remained steadfast in his convictions and continues to encourage believers to participate in public life, not every pastor is willing to endure public condemnation or potential government retaliation simply for exercising rights already protected by the First Amendment.

Similarly, in 2024, CDF partnered with Remnant Law to defend Pastor Robert Simmons of Corpus Christi, Texas. Pastor Simmons faced legal action that threatened his constitutionally protected religious and political speech after he addressed the fitness of a congressional candidate for office during a church service. His remarks reflected his conviction that the church must respond to community concerns that intersect with politics and public policy.

Respectfully,

Martha Johnson, M.Ed.

*"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love GOD, to those who are the called according to HIS purpose."
Romans 8:28*

From: Yvonne Stanovich <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Yvonne Stanovich

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:42:46 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

In agreement with Pillars of Freedom's comments, I'm writing as a citizen to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken and dismantle the separation of church and state - especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God - and that's bad for the church and the country alike, for religion is a matter of personal conviction of conscience, not to be dictated by one for another.

Furthermore, separation of church and state isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Consider that our country was founded on principles of religious freedom which should be protected and not repudiated. This is for the good of all citizens, religious or not. When government is aligned with any religious entity, those who don't follow their ideas end up being persecuted in one way or another. Note, the history of the dark ages where many lost not only their freedoms but their lives because they had different ideas about how to worship! We don't want to see this kind of outcome in our beautiful land of freedom. Even Christ did not force the rich young ruler to follow him, neither should any government force its citizens to worship contrary to their own convictions. Civil laws are intended to protect everyone. Let's keep our citizens protected by keeping church and state separate and in their own lanes.

Sincerely,
Yvonne Stanovich
Spencerville, Ohio

From: Margaret Tow <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:43:34 -0400

Importance: Normal

In 1797, the Treaty of Tripoli stated that this nation was in no way a Christian Nation.

It has been a great nation because it has allowed all citizens to worship God according to their own conscience. To force Christianity on those who do not believe it, is a gross misapplication of the scriptures. Although many have gone too far in removing God from the public place, it would also be going too far to dictate conscience regarding religious belief. Too legislate or enforce Christian principles on all the citizens through executive order, would be a true violation of the rights of All God's children. He does not force us. His Holy Spirit woos us and respect our right to make up our own minds.

Morality cannot be legislated nor can it be forced. The purpose of civil law is to maintain order in society and protect the rights of all people. This nation's moral dilemma is because God is not in the home. It is a failure of the church and of fathers and mothers. Still, all must be allowed to make up their own minds. When the civil government must enforce biblical principles, it is because the church has failed. While the moral condition of this nation is deplorable at this time, to seek to enforce biblical principles by government action will lead to its complete and total downfall.

Yes, this nation needs God, but He can only be found when sincere repentance takes place on one's knees.

Jefferson knew what he was talking about whenever he stated there should be a wall of separation between church and state. This nation has been great only because this has been a reality. The Establishment Clause in the Constitution was put there by the founding fathers to ensure that this wall of separation would remain.

Please don't make the terrible mistake of removing this wall of separation. It will bring quick and agonizing consequences for all.

All those who are calling for the government to move into the area of spiritual relationship with God are showing that they have no faith in the power of the Holy Spirit to establish God's Kingdom and are seeking to create God's kingdom their way. These individuals do not understand what the scriptures teach about the consequences of the combination of church and state.

The consequences are found in Revelation 13 where the second beast (the US) makes an image to the first beast (Roman Catholicism). Removing the wall of separation between church and state will bring about the mark of the beast in this nation because civil power will be used by ecclesiastical powers to force worship. It will lead to Swift judgment from God Himself.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

From: Doris Tucker <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:45:34 -0400

Importance: Normal

Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to oppose the claim that the separation of church and state is not a constitutional principle.

Although the exact phrase "wall of separation between church and state" does not appear in the Constitution, the principle is clearly expressed in the First Amendment, which forbids government from establishing religion while protecting the free exercise of religion.

This separation does not exclude Christians or other religious people from public life. It protects everyone by preventing religious institutions from gaining civil power and preventing government from controlling religion. History repeatedly shows that when church and state unite, both are corrupted. The church becomes political, the state claims religious authority, and freedom of conscience is gradually replaced by religious pressure, discrimination and eventually coercion. This occurred under imperial Rome, medieval church-state systems, established Protestant churches and even in parts of colonial America.

Religious liberty is safest when the church is free to teach, persuade and serve, but has no power to enforce belief through government.

As a Christian, I am also concerned because Revelation 13 warns that religious and civil powers will unite again, leading eventually to forced worship, economic penalties and persecution against those who refuse to conform. For this reason, replacing the wall of separation with a "bridge" between church and state is dangerous. It creates an easement through which religious influence may gain access to civil power and government may enter matters of faith and conscience.

I urge the Commission to defend both the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause, and to clearly affirm that government must neither suppress religion nor unite with it.

The separation of church and state is not hostility toward religion. It is one of the strongest protections of religious liberty ever established.

Respectfully,

Eddie and Doris Tucker

From: JTShim <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:46:06 -0400

Importance: Normal

Although the separation of church and state may not appear in the constitution neither is the word "privacy."

Both are strongly implied.

Did not we Mayflower here from England to escape religious prosecution, among other things?

Ask Roger Williams of Providence, RI.

J.T. Shim, PhD, MBA

From: Michael Hasel <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Cc: Michael Hasels <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Report draft comments

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:46:16 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

As a trained historian and devout Christian minister and theologian, I respectfully challenge the suggestion that church-state separation derives from a modern secularist ideology. In fact, history shows that this separation was established by the founders, urged on them by devout believers, after experiencing religious persecution in the Old World they left behind and in the colonies that they settled.

Roger Williams, one of the great champions of Religious Liberty, was thrown out of Massachusetts by a colonial religious establishment and nearly died in the cold of winter before being cared for by the natives of what would later become the state of Rhode Island. Williams called in 1644 for a wall of separation to protect the garden of the church from the wilderness of the world.

The persecuted Baptists of Virginia — who were whipped and jailed under an established church — became James Madison's decisive allies. Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance* (1785) argued that religion is a matter between man and his Creator, prior to all claims of civil society. Jefferson's *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom* (1786) declared that Almighty God created the mind free, and enacted "that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever." The Constitution's only reference to religion, Article VI, commands that "no religious Test shall ever be required." The First Amendment then bound the federal government with two clauses that form a single shield: no establishment, and free exercise.

Williams, Madison, and Jefferson were not secularists. Madison, reviewing the American experiment, concluded that "religion and Government will both exist in greater purity the less they are mixed together"(letter to Edward Livingston, 1822), and described the "practical distinction between Religion and Civil Government as essential to the purity of both."

The colonists of America understood the inalienable right of a free mind that would not be compelled by any single one of many interpretations of Christianity that had emerged after the Protestant reformation. They had fresh in their minds more than a century of severe persecution and wars where millions men, women, and children were tortured and died because of their sincere beliefs in what the Bible taught about Jesus Christ as our only Savior and mediator. They desired to establish a nation free from imposed religious dogmas that in their immediate past experience had led to tyranny.

Their opinions were informed by a deep knowledge of sacred biblical history replete with examples where religion and government, combined and imposed by a majority, often threatened the minority

to suffer the ultimate price. Examples include (1) the three worthies who were forced bow down to worship the image that king Nebuchadnezzar had erected in Babylon or die (Dan 3), (2) the Jewish people who were legislated for destruction by king Xerxes/Ahasuerus (Esther 5), and (3) Nero and Diocletian, who ordered the deaths of the apostles Paul and Peter, and ultimately called for the extirpation of Christianity based on Roman state religion. After Constantine legalized Christianity, it was only a matter of time before church and state were united under the Holy Roman Empire. The secularism of France was a direct result of the overreach and tyranny of the medieval church including the St. Bartholemew's Massacre, that eventually resulted in all religion to be removed from government.

America was established to protect the rights of all people of all backgrounds to worship God according to their conscience, because His government is based on the freedom of choice, not force or legislation. Our founding fathers understood that inalienable right inherent in every individual, which they memorialized in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. It is the freedom of the republic as established by these documents that has caused this nation to be blessed, and serve as a haven for the oppressed of the world.

My own parents immigrated to this country after growing up in the horrific totalitarian government of the Nazi regime that denied these inalienable rights to all men and women. They were proud to legally become Americans, supporting the freedoms and the ideals for which America was founded and on the basis of which they were freed - freedom to honor God in the pursuit of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

I urge the Commission to remove those recommendations that would weaken the Establishment clause and instead to honor the ideals that the founders of this country designed, namely a government with no authority over religion, and a religion free from government interference.

Respectfully,

Michael G. Hasel, PhD
Ooltewah, Tennessee

Sent from my iPhone

From: Lisa Shewchuk <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:47:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Friends of freedom,

Thank you for taking the time to read this message. We all desire to have a life of freedom. We have joy in knowing and loving one another. God has blessed us in this experience. If this freedom is taken from us our joy would disappear and we would be living in darkness. This is why the two institutions of church and that of civil law should remain separate. When we have seen these two institutions joined together it has taken away our liberty of conscience.

Please continue to keep church and state separate as it has been. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Joe and Lisa Shewchuk

From: Marco Mendez <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Union of Church & State Marco Mendez

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:49:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was troubled to read that the Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." With respect, that is exactly backwards — and as a person of faith, I find the idea alarming.

That wall wasn't built by secularists to keep religion down. It was built by believers to keep the church free. A bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it opens the door for government money and political favors to march right in, until churches are competing for grants and answering to politicians instead of to God. History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, and it isn't good for either one.

Please don't build that bridge. Keep the wall. It protects the church far more than it constrains it. Those who wrote the Constitution were protestants who were fleeing from the tyranny of the church who persecuted those who disagreed with her doctrines. That is history. They wrote that in, to keep us from making that same mistake. Jesus Christ clearly recognized this separation "Give to Caesar (the state) that which belongs to Caesar, & Give to God what belongs to God" Matthew 22:21. The very Law of God in the 10 commandments is separated in 2 tablets the 1st has commandments 1-4 "Thou shall have no other God's" "Thou shalt not make idols or bow down before them" "though shalt not take the Lord's name in vain" "remember the Sabbath to keep it Holy" these 4 constitute our duty to God.. "the 1st & greatest of all, love God with all thy heart, mind, & soul" Deutoronomy 6:4-5

The next 6 having to do with our neighbors (human kind) "honor thy parents" "do not commit adultery" "do not bare false witness" "do not murder" "do not steal" "do not covet".. & the 2nd greatest commandment "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" Leviticus 16:14

God Himself established separate Laws, the 1st 4 as mentioned above, you are accountable to God Himself, the state has no business. Now in the last 6 having to do with our neighbors, that is where we answer to God & the civil powers if we break 1 of them. For God gives the civil powers the "sword" to punish transgressors. Romans 13:3-4. Which Paul encourages Christians to respect the civil powers & submit to them, but as well says "we are to obey God rather than men" at the same time.. when our conscience dictates to do so. Acts 5:29

Sincerely,
Marco Mendez
Houston, Tx

From: Sandra Tarpley <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Freedom and Liberty depends on the Separation of Church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:49:09 -0400

Importance: Normal

Hello,

I believe it is absolutely imperative that we keep the separation of church and state in the constitution to protect our freedom to worship according to our conscience. I truly believe that our forefathers were trying to protect us by putting this in the constitution. Please consider carefully before removing this important piece of our constitution. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Sandra Tarpley

From: Kristin Lee <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on the Draft Report of the President's Religious Liberty Commission– Kristin Lee

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:54:06 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Carson, and Members of the Commission,

Thank you for your work preparing the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission's report and for inviting the American people to provide comments before it is finalized.

As a former public school teacher, the spouse of a public school teacher, and now serve as the Michigan Education Director for Citizens Defending Freedom, I have often navigated—and am frequently asked to help others navigate—the intersection of religious liberty and public education.

The **"Know Your Rights" FAQ** included in Appendix A is one of the most practical recommendations in the report. It is clear, accessible, and filled with helpful examples for students, parents, teachers, administrators, and school board members. This kind of guidance is greatly needed. Too often, individuals of faith either silence themselves unnecessarily because they misunderstand their rights or are uncertain about the legal boundaries that apply in public schools. Providing **accurate, easy-to-understand guidance** benefits everyone by promoting both religious liberty and compliance with the law.

I also strongly support the recommendation in Appendix B that the **Department of Justice** and the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission** develop and distribute **"Know Your Rights" posters and FAQs** for students, parents, public school teachers, and administrators. I encourage the Commission to recommend that these materials be developed and distributed using **existing agency resources** rather than requiring additional taxpayer funding.

An additional recommendation is to explicitly include **elected state and local school board members, as well as state legislators**, among the intended audience for these educational materials. These officials regularly make policy decisions affecting religious liberty in public education and would benefit from the same clear guidance provided to school employees and families.

Thank you again for your leadership and thoughtful work to strengthen religious liberty, particularly within America's public schools. I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this important process.

Sincerely,

Kristin Lee

From: Nicky Smith <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Ylomene Saintil

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:54:22 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen who believes the two religion clauses of the First Amendment are partners, not rivals, and I ask you to weigh four arguments before recommending any measure that draws government into religious matters.

The first argument comes from the source Christians themselves profess. When Christ instructed that Caesar's things be rendered to Caesar and God's things to God, he divided human duty into two jurisdictions, and civil government was given only one of them. As A. T. Jones told a Senate committee in 1888, "civil government is civil, and has nothing to do in the matter of legislation, with religious observances in any way." The state's only competent question is whether an act is civil or uncivil, never whether it is religious or true. Any recommendation that puts government behind a religious text, display, or lesson crosses the line Christ himself drew, in the name of the very faith it claims to honor.

The second argument is that a law favoring religion today becomes a precedent controlling it tomorrow. Jones called it a flat impossibility to write a religious law that would not eventually prohibit someone's free exercise, because such a law must define the religion it favors, and every definition excludes as it includes. He warned that no man can safely legislate in favor of his own creed without resigning "his right to profess some other form of faith if he should become convinced that other form is nearer the truth than his own." That warning belongs to anyone who welcomes state sponsorship of their own faith: the machinery you build will be operated by others after you are gone.

The third argument is historical. The Constitution's silence about God was deliberate, not careless, and it was urged by the churches of the founding generation who had felt establishment from underneath. Madison told the Virginia ratifying convention that there is not a shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion, and that its least interference would be a flagrant usurpation. The founders did not wait for full establishment before objecting to it; as Madison wrote, they saw all the consequences in the principle and avoided them by denying the principle itself.

The fourth argument is that Congress has already ruled on this question, in official reports from 1829 and 1830, adopted while men who had lived through the founding still sat in the chamber. Those reports declared that it is not the legitimate province of the legislature to determine what religion is true or false, and warned that if government defines one religious duty it may with equal propriety proceed to define every part of divine revelation, down to the forms of worship and the support of the clergy. A representative, they said, is chosen to guard the rights of man, not to restrict the rights of conscience. Any commission recommending government-defined religious duties today must answer that precedent, not merely a later court case.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Ylomene Saintil

Sent from my iPhone

From: melody beierle sampson <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Cc: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Keep the Johnson Ammendment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:55:11e0400

Importance: Normal

Johnson amendment

Sent from my iPhone

From: virginia tryer <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment -separation of church and state-Lilly

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:55:27 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the religious liberty commission,
Please do not remove the wall between church and state. Keep church and state separate.

From: Teddy Joseph <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- Establishment Clauses- Teddy D. Joseph

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:58:45 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen who takes both halves of the First Amendment seriously, because I have come to believe, as my note suggests, that separation of church and state is not a wall against faith but the very thing that lets faith and civic life coexist without one crushing the other. I ask you to weigh four connected arguments before this Commission moves forward.

First, any law touching religion, even one meant kindly, undoes free exercise rather than protecting it. Barnes-Jones put the difficulty plainly before a Senate committee: it is impossible to frame a law on religion that will not prohibit the free exercise of religion. The reason is structural. Any religious statute must define the religion it favors; that definition excludes some believers, and even those it includes now practice their faith by permission rather than by right. Jones went further and said no man can safely consent to legislation favoring his own creed, because in doing so he surrenders his liberty to change his mind if he later becomes convinced some other view is truer. Whoever welcomes government sponsorship of their faith today is handing a tool to whichever majority governs tomorrow, and that majority may not share their convictions at all.

Second, this separation was not an oversight of the founders but their deliberate design, urged on them by churches that had suffered establishment from underneath, including Presbyterians, Baptists, and Quakers. Jones records that the exclusion of religion from the national government's concern was, so far from having been the result of forgetfulness, by direct design, and out of respect for Christianity and for the rights of men which that religion inculcates. Madison himself told the Virginia ratifying convention that there is no shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion and that its least interference would be a most flagrant usurpation. In his Memorial and Remonstrance, he explained why the founders resisted even the smallest religious measures: they did not wait until usurped power had strengthened itself by exercise and entangled the question in precedent. Still, they saw the consequences in the principle and avoided them by denying the principle. A commission that claims the founders favored state-sponsored religion must answer Madison in Madison's own words.

Third, this is not only a founding-era argument but a settled governmental one. Congress itself, in 1829 and 1830, when men who had lived through the founding still sat in its halls, ruled on Sunday-mail petitions and declared that it is not in the legitimate province of the legislature to determine what religion is true or what false, since our government is a civil and not a religious institution. The same reports warned that if a law defines one point of religious duty, it may with equal propriety define every part of divine revelation. That is the precedent any new religious legislation must overturn, not a modern court case.

Fourth, coercion cannot produce faith; only its counterfeit can. As one source states, forcing men to attend church will not make Christians of them; it might make hypocrites of many, but Christians of none. Madison's own survey of fifteen centuries of established Christianity found pride and indolence in the clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity. Grant's counsel still holds: leave religion to the family altar, the church, and private conviction, and keep the state and church forever separate.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,

Teddy D. Joseph

From: Shelly Patzer <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Keep the JohnsonsAmmendment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:59:07 -0400

Importance: Normal

----- Forwarded message -----

From: melody beierle sampson <[REDACTED] PII >

Date: Mon, Jul 13, 2026, 6:55 PM

Subject: Keep the Johnson Ammendment

To: [REDACTED] PII <[REDACTED] PII >

Cc: [REDACTED] PII <[REDACTED] PII >

Johnson amendment

Sent from my iPhone

From: Caroline Isaac <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Please Keep Church and State Separate

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:59:18 -0400

Importance: Normal

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the recommendations of the Religious Liberty Committee submitted to President Donald J. Trump on June 26, 2026. While we are mindful of the Committee's labors, which resulted in the 12 recommendations released June 26, certain of which we agree with, we write to voice our concerns and objections to the Committee's first and ninth recommendations [1] and its obviously insufficient consideration of the warnings of the Founding Fathers of the dangers of a union of church and state or the many lessons of history regarding same.

The Committee recommended that the Department of Justice "issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state." [2] At the formal release of the Committee's recommendations on the same day, Committee Chair Dan Patrick publicly stated that "the separation of church and state is not in the constitution" and that the phrase "has no constitutional basis." [3]

As citizens and students of history, and as Christians, we are alarmed lest the flawed and unconstitutional view of the Chair of the Committee of the so-called "proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and the separation of church and state" prove influential or worse, instructive, to the Department of Justice. If the Committee's opinion of the so-called "proper understanding" of the Establishment Clause is the same as that of its Chair, it is apparent that its understanding is not proper, but rather improper.

Founding Father, "Father of the Constitution", and fourth President of the United States, James Madison, contradicted Chair Dan Patrick's claim that the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution. Madison stated that "Strongly guarded as is the separation between Religion & Govt in the Constitution of the United States, the danger of encroachment by Ecclesiastical Bodies, may be illustrated by precedents already furnished in their short history." According to James Madison, the separation of church and state is in the Constitution. As to whether James Madison, who is the principal author of the Establishment Clause, or Dan Patrick, is the greater authority on this subject, we think it not difficult for reasonably minded people to ascertain.

Certainly, the Founding Fathers were all aware of the persecution of the Baptists, Quakers, Jews, and others in some of the colonies. They had seen firsthand the ear croppings, whippings, imprisonment, and hangings in Massachusetts and other colonies.

In Europe, the persecution of the martyrs is well documented. Today we take the Bible for granted but forget that William Tyndale was executed for translating the Bible into the English language, not by atheists but by religious bigots. It was a union of church and state that suppressed speech and the freedom of the press in England. It was a union of church and state that prohibited the work of translation of the Bible, which changed the world. It was a union of church and state that necessitated his flight to Europe. It was a union of church and state that killed him.

We respectfully ask that the Department of Justice, in considering the issue of public guidance of the separation of church and state, consider the history of William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania and early Founding Father, who was repeatedly jailed for his religious faith in England. The Pennsylvania Colony became a haven, not from atheist persecutors but from religious persecutors who did not believe in the

separation of church and state. The same is true of Roger Williams, founder of the colony of Rhode Island, who was ordered arrested for declaring that the civil magistrate cannot enforce the first table of the Decalogue. We ask that the Committee take into account the brutal public whipping of President Abraham Lincoln's five-time great-grandfather, Obadiah Holmes, in the Massachusetts colony, for the "crime" of religious dissent. Obadiah Holmes was not whipped by atheists. He was whipped by Puritan bigots who did not believe in the separation of church and state. We respectfully request that the Department of Justice consider this history in the issuance of public guidance on the subject.

We are concerned that the Committee neglected to take into account the impact of the separation of church and state on the other rights codified in the First Amendment. Free speech and freedom of the press, for example, owe their flourishing in the modern world in large part to the separation of church and state in America. Prior to the protections in the First Amendment, the Roman Catholic Church for centuries maintained a list of banned books called the Index Librorum Prohibitorum. The books were subject to confiscation, and the possession of them resulted in the punishment of the owner.

Unfortunately, the Committee makes no mention of the censorship in this context of Galileo and Kepler, Kant and Locke, John Milton and Maimonides, John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, David Hume and Edward Gibbon, and many others, all at the behest of the Roman Papacy, which is itself a union of church and state. Free speech in the Western world is the legacy of those who risked the wrath of a unified church and state, often at the cost of their lives. We would also ask that the Department of Justice consider the repeated modern calls from the papal power today for the censorship of the internet and the suppression of free speech, contrary to the First Amendment. [4] We have no doubt that the censorship of Galileo, Kepler, Milton, and others was prosecuted under the justification of the censorship of misinformation, also.

The Roman Church was not alone in this persecution, either. We would ask the Department of Justice in its formulation of public guidance on the separation of church and state to remember the religious persecutions carried out at the behest of John Calvin in Geneva against religious dissenters such as Michael Servetus, who paid with his life for his writings and teachings. Servetus was executed by a union of church and state. We are concerned at the public statements of those who would create such a system in America. [5]

Therefore, we respectfully ask, what proper guidance can the Department of Justice hope to give to the public on the "proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and the separation of church and state" if it is directed in its object by a Committee and a Committee Chair, who has neglected to more fully analyze the reasons for the separation of church and state, or the reasons why the United States codified the disestablishment of church and state in the First Amendment in the first instance?

The reference to the wall of separation between church and state is not only mentioned by President Thomas Jefferson in the letter to the Danbury Baptists, which, of course, it is. [6] What is often left out of the narrative is that Jefferson said that he personally believed that the principle of the separation of church and state is codified in the Constitution. Therein, Jefferson wrote: "Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church & State." [7]

James Madison wrote, "It is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties. We hold this prudent jealousy to be the first duty of Citizens and one of the noblest characteristics of the late Revolution. The free men of America did not wait till usurped power had strengthened itself by exercise and entangled the question in precedents. They saw all the consequences in the principle, and they avoided the consequences by denying the principle. We revere this lesson too much soon to forget it." [8]

Lastly, we object to the recommendation of the Committee that the Johnson Amendment be removed. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are mindful of Our Lord's words that we "render to Caesar what is Caesar, and to God the things that are God's." [9] Jesus Christ established the principle of the separation of church and state and taught that what belongs to God cannot be rendered to Caesar. The application of this teaching is that religionists, ambitious for civil power, and politicians, ambitious for their endorsement, are to be kept separate in the American system of politics, as the Constitution requires. The union of church and state results in the corruption of both, a result that neither should desire, and neither can afford.

Madison stated that "The number, the industry, and the morality of the Priesthood, & the devotion of the people have been manifestly increased by the total separation of the Church from the State." [10] And he was right. If the Johnson Amendment is removed, religionists who want civil power will publicly stump and promise their votes and congregational dollars in exchange for political favors, and the politicians will be doubtless all too eager to reciprocate in the form of legislation that the religionists desire, provided they will aid their attempts to gain office.

In his anonymous treatise published in the Boston Gazette, John Adams, later the second President of the United States, wrote that canon law was a tyrannical form of government, as was feudal law, but that the worst of all forms of governments was a union of the two. [11] And it was Madison who stated that, "In the Papal System, Government and Religion are in a manner consolidated, & that is found to be the worst of Governments."

We respectfully request, therefore, that the Department of Justice not adopt recommendations 1 and 9 of the Committee and that it adopt recommendation 1 of the Committee that it convene a public hearing, with written and oral submissions from the public, to more comprehensively study the question of the separation of church and state in history, and in American history in particular, a study which we would enthusiastically support.

Yours truly,

Caroline

From: Nicoli Bosque <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- [Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report]- [Nicoli Bosque]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:59:58 -0400

Importance: Normal

July 13, 2026

To the Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

Dear members,

Thank you all for the dedicated time and attention given in drafting the recent Religious Liberty Commission Report to address and affirm religious liberty in the United States. Your report highlights the relevance and importance of religious liberty in America. As a believer of the faith and a health care worker, I am encouraged, that the Commission, in effect, aims to protect our First Amendment rights in matters of faith by identifying "emerging threats to religious liberty, uphold[ing] Federal laws that protect all citizens' full participation in a pluralistic democracy, and protect[ing] the free exercise of religion."

While the phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear specifically in the Constitution, its principles do. The First Amendment rights concerning Freedom of Religion through the Establishment Clause and Free Exercise Clause should absolutely be protected; for this reason I respectfully am opposed to the Religious Liberty Commission's report and its full recommendations. Rather than strengthening genuine religious liberty, the report blurs the constitutional distinction between church and state, a principle that has long protected the freedom of conscience of people of every faith—and those of none.

As outlined in the Church State Council's newsletter, true religious liberty is best preserved when government neither advances nor favors religion. The Commission's recommendations risk granting religious privilege instead of protecting equal religious freedom, undermining the First Amendment's balanced protections. I urge the Commission to reject these recommendations and reaffirm the historic American commitment to liberty of conscience and equal treatment under the law for all. Here are additional points highlighted in this article that affirm my beliefs:

- The separation of church and state is an idea that originated with persecuted Christians like Roger Williams, who wrote that Civil magistrates only have jurisdiction over civil matters and are not "judges, governors, or defenders of the spiritual, or Christian, state and worship... Christ Jesus never directed his disciples to the civil magistrate for help in his cause." - Roger Williams
- Jesus Himself never built His Kingdom with political power. He declared to the Roman governor that "My kingdom is not of this world, if it were my servants would fight..." John 18:36. Instead, Jesus calls His followers to seek justice for the oppressed and fulfill the Great Commission through loving words and acts.
- Roger Williams wrote that "The unknowing zeal of Constantine and other emperors, did more hurt to Christ Jesus's crown and kingdom, than the raging fury of the most bloody Neros." This reminds us that using the force of government to promote Christianity never advances the true kingdom of God.

- The separation of church and state is good for both. It's a constitutional principle that explains how our religious liberty is protected by the First Amendment.
- The Johnson Amendment protects houses of worship from partisan politicking and ensures fair play in our campaigns. It reminds churches that they are not mere political machines but embassies of the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Public funds should go to public schools, not private schools.
- Public schools should not be pushing sectarian faith, like forcing the posting of the Ten Commandments or pushing official prayer. This misrepresents the character of a God of love, who never forces in matters of faith.
- Institutions receiving public funding should not be allowed to discriminate against individuals but instead should treat all people fairly and equally. Christians, of all people, should support this idea which originates in the Golden Rule.

Lastly, as a Christian, I know from God's word the Bible, that He is Love. As I grow closer to Him, through the reading of His word, time with Him in prayer, and sharing His love to others about the sacrifice of Jesus, that he desires that we worship him freely. As our love grows for Him, we will follow Him as our own conscience leads us. He has also left us a comforter which shall convict the hearts of men, not the policies and legislative actions of our government but the methods of Christ alone. This is the love I share for all people of this earth and as the power of the Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh, we will draw nearer to Him and make our own election firm. Thank you for the opportunity to reply and share God's love for you all and for the love of all His people.

NBosque

From: Steve Allred <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comments- Religious Liberty Commission Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:00:41 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: CSC_RL_Committee_Letter.pdf

Inline-Images: PastedGraphic-1.png

Dear Sir or Madam,

Please see attached PDF with comments on the draft Religious Liberty Commission Report.

Thank you,

Stephen N. Allred

Attorney and Director of Government Relations

Director, [Church State Council Fellowship](#)

Office: [REDACTED] PII





Submitted via Electronic Mail: PII

July 12, 2026

Religious Liberty Commission
US Department of Justice
Office of the Associate Attorney General
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Chairman Patrick, Vice Chairman Carson, and Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

The Church State Council is the oldest public interest advocacy and legal services organization in the Western United States devoted exclusively to issues of liberty of conscience, religious freedom, social justice, and the separation of church and state. We are a Seventh-day Adventist organization serving a five-state southwestern region for the Adventist Church, representing nearly a quarter of a million Seventh-day Adventists in over seven hundred congregations. We promote religious freedom for all peaceful people of faith and provide legal services to persons of any and all faiths who suffer discrimination, harassment and/or retaliation on account of their religious belief or practice.

We write in response to the recommendations put forth in the Commission's draft report. We commend the Commission for its devotion to the cause of religious freedom, and we agree with and affirm many of the Committee's recommendations that support the freedom of all peaceful people and institutions of faith to live in accordance with their beliefs.

However, we are also concerned with some aspects of the draft report, including comments disparaging of the wall of separation between church and state and the suggestion that a robust separation between church and state is somehow opposed to the ability of people of faith to freely engage in making the world a better place. We offer this input so that the Commission can revise the report to clarify these issues.

The Separation of Church and State is Not Hostile to Social Justice

As the report rightly observes, "Religious liberty was not incidental to the civil rights movement. It was essential to it" (p. 34). However, the Committee's report also suggests that the separation of church and state is hostile to people living out their faith in society, and thus we must remove the "wall" and build a "bridge" between church and state. On the contrary, we believe that a wall

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PII

between church and state is not only compatible with societal justice but essential to it. Actual social justice can only be realized when the church and state are appropriately separated.

Religious values have driven many social movements throughout history, including in the United States. Two examples are the movement to abolish slavery in the 19th century and the Civil Rights Movement in the 20th century. In both cases, religious and ethical values motivated the people of faith who were at the forefront of these efforts.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church grew out of the Second Great Awakening in the mid-19th century. At the time, America – the land of the free – enslaved Black men and women. Adventists were outspoken abolitionists, and some of the leaders of the Adventist church were active participants in the underground railroad. Religious and ethical values guided not only Adventists, but many other abolitionists as well.

But the goal of these social movements was not to enshrine faith in the law, to unite the church with the state, or even to promote the religion of Christianity. These were movements of *justice* that aimed to make life better for all people in society, regardless of their faith. While biblical principles animated many American abolitionists to advocate for freedom, the ethical principles they advocated were shared by non-religious people as well. The result was that both the Abolitionist movement and the Civil Rights Movement nudged the needle a little more toward justice and made life better for all Americans, regardless of their faith or lack thereof. As such, these social justice movements were compatible with the idea of separation of church and state since their goal was justice, not government sponsorship of faith.

Christians Are Called to Work for Justice in Society, Not Impose Faith

In contrast with the Abolitionist movement was the Christian Amendment movement of the late 1800's. This movement was led by the National Reform Association whose goal was to amend the Constitution of the United States to declare “the Lord Jesus Christ as the Ruler of nations and...his revealed will as the supreme standard to decide moral issues in national life, and thus indicate that this is a Christian nation, and place all the Christian laws, institutions, and usages of the government on an undeniably legal basis in the fundamental law of the land.”¹

Seventh-day Adventists opposed the Christian Amendment movement. In January 1886, Adventists launched *The American Sentinel* from Oakland, California, whose editors stated that they would “ever be uncompromisingly opposed to anything tending toward a union of Church and State, either in name or in fact.”² The *Sentinel's* opposition was based in the Bible. “The kings of the Gentiles,” Jesus had said, “lord it over them...But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one

¹ David McAllister, *A Manual of Christian Civil Government*, p. 9, available at: [http://library.logcollegepress.com/McAllister%2C+David%2C+The+National+Reform+Movement+\(1890\).pdf](http://library.logcollegepress.com/McAllister%2C+David%2C+The+National+Reform+Movement+(1890).pdf).

² *The American Sentinel*, December 1886, 92.

who serves.” Luke 22:25-27 NIV. Adventists concluded that followers of Jesus should never seek supremacy over others but instead should seek to serve by doing justice in the world.

In fact, the *Sentinel* argued that separation of church and state was precisely the way of Jesus:

The *Sentinel* espouses the Christian theory of government; the theory enunciated by Christ: that man shall render to Cesar the things that are Cesar’s and to God the things which are God’s; the theory that so far, as man or civil government is concerned, the heathen, or the infidel, or the atheist, has just as much right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, as the Christian has; the theory that under civil government any man has just as much right not to worship God as the Christian has to worship him; **the theory that, though a man be a Christian, he is not thereby entitled to authority or lordship over other men’s consciences or rights**; the theory that will reach all men by the power of truth, in love and persuasive reason, and not by the power of the sword or of civil law, in bitter persecution and oppressive force. *The American Sentinel*, December 1887, 92 (emphasis added).

Adventists also drew inspiration from Roger Williams, founder of Rhode Island and a devout 17th-century Christian, who was persecuted for his beliefs that ran afoul of the established church in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Williams believed that there should be a wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world. Williams argued that civil magistrates only have jurisdiction over civil matters and are not “judges, governors, or defenders of the spiritual, or Christian, state and worship...**Christ Jesus never directed his disciples to the civil magistrate for help in his cause.**”³ To those who believed that government promotion of Christianity was necessary to the stability of society, Williams argued that “All over the world people enjoy ‘civil peace and quiet’ even though the name of Christ is not known.”⁴ To Williams, the separation of church and state was essential for true freedom in matters of faith. Freedom, Williams believed, was at the core of God’s character of love.

At the same time, Williams argued for social justice. John Barry, in his magnificent biography of Williams, notes that Rhode Island became likely the first government in the world to abolish slavery.⁵ Williams understood that while Christians should never use the government to promote or enforce their faith, it was right and good for people of faith to do justice in the world.

Conclusion

In a pluralistic world such as ours, *uniting* church and state is unjust, unloving, and contrary to the Golden Rule, which commands us to do to others as we would have them do unto us. When

³ Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for the Cause of Conscience* (Castle Street, Finsbury: J. Haddon 1644 [1848]), p. 90.

⁴ Robert Louis Wilken, *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origin of Religious Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 151.

⁵ John M. Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul: Church, State, and the Birth of Liberty* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), p. 356.

church and state unite, religion - and often only the majority religion - is favored and in control. History shows us that government sponsorship of religion always leads to persecution of dissenters. Jesus never called His church to dominate or persecute. In fact, the Bible indicates that it is a false church, united with the political leaders, that dominates and persecutes (see, e.g., Luke 22:25-26; Rev. 17:1-6). Instead, Jesus calls His followers to love and serve by doing justice in society.

Our hope is that the Commission will edit the draft report to remove the parts of the report that disparage the wall of separation between church and state. We also request that the final report be updated to reflect the perspective of Christians who believe that religion should never seek legal supremacy or a favored place in society through domination but instead should only influence society through loving words and deeds and advocating for justice.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Allred". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Stephen Allred, J.D., M.Div.
Director of Government Relations

From: Tonya Miller <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:03:08 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them.

Our forefathers came to America to escape religious persecution. To have a choice in how they worshiped God. Please don't go against our Constitution and implement a government controlled church.

Tonya Miller

Sent from my iPhone

From: Simone O <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Simone Orlet

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:03:47 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was troubled to read that the Religious Liberty Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." With respect, that is exactly backwards — and as a person of faith, I find the idea alarming.

That wall wasn't built by secularists to keep religion down. It was built by believers to keep the church free.

A bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it opens the door for government money and political favors to march right in, until churches are competing for grants and answering to politicians instead of to God.

History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, and it isn't good for either one.

Please don't build that bridge. Keep the wall. It protects the church far more than it constrains it.

Sincerely,

Simone Orlet
Newark, Ohio

Sent from [Proton Mail](#) for Android.

From: adrienne brantley <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – [draft report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission.] [AdrienneCobb]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:03:59 -0400

Importance: Normal

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

From: River Renk <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment - Separation of Church and State - River Mason

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:04:50 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them.

Thank you

- River Mason

Sent from my iPhone

From: Karen Lewis <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Karen Lewis

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:05:39 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a private citizen from Andover, Minnesota, and as a Christian who believes the two religion clauses of the First Amendment rise or fall together. My own faith teaches me this. Jesus Christ never forced anyone to accept him, and if I mean to follow him, neither should I use the machinery of government to compel or favor belief. We call ourselves the land of the brave and the free, and free exercise means each person following the dictates of their own conscience, not the dictates handed down by a government office.

Consider what happens the moment government passes any law touching religion, even one meant kindly. To write such a law, the state must first define which religion, or which version of religious observance, it means to favor. That definition necessarily includes some believers and excludes others, and even those included no longer practice their faith freely; they practice it by permission, on terms a future legislature can amend or revoke. A traveling advocate who testified before a Senate committee on a proposed national Sunday law put this as plainly as it can be put: it is impossible to frame a law on the subject of religion that will not prohibit the free exercise of religion. He went further, warning believers not to celebrate laws favoring their own creed, since no man can ever sanction legislation in favor of the religion he believes without robbing himself of the free exercise of that religion. That warning applies whether the beneficiaries today are Christians, or anyone else; the danger is not in whose faith gets favored but in favoring any faith at all, because the next administration inherits the same tool.

My own faith actually settles this question directly. When Jesus said to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's, he drew a line no government may cross. Civil authority governs our duties to one another; it has no jurisdiction over our duties to God. That is why the state's only proper question about any act is whether it injures a neighbor, never whether it is religious, irreligious, or heretical. A government that puts its weight behind a prayer, a text, or a display has not merely overstepped secular boundaries; it has trespassed into territory that belongs to God alone, and it has done so in the name of the very faith that forbids the trespass.

Finally, no vote of the people can create or cancel a right of conscience, because a right subject to majority approval is not a right at all, only a permission that a future majority can withdraw. Our rights come from our Creator, and government exists to protect them, not to distribute them by election returns. Constitutions exist for exactly this purpose: to shield the minority when the majority is tempted to overrule it. As one early congressional report on Sunday observance put it, the Constitution regards the conscience of the solitary dissenter as sacred as that of the whole community. Popular support may justify a highway bill. It cannot justify a religious one, because religion was never among the things put to a vote.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Karen Lewis
Andover, MN

Sent from my iPhone

From: "Niderost, Darlene" <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:06:26 -0400

Importance: Normal

To whom it May Concern:

It saddened me to hear of our country which was established on religious freedom, to be attempting to take down this most precious belief system! I believe the reason our country has been so honored, blessed, favored is because of the freedom we as a people have been privileged to live under.

All one needs to do to understand the importance of religious liberty is to study the history of the past. If we revisit the Dark Ages and the control that the Papacy exerted over those who didn't believe the same, we can see which direction this mindset can tend. History is replete with persecution where there was no separation of church and state: just study Martin Luther, the Waldenses, the Huguenots, the Anabaptists, Roger Williams and the history of Rhode Island and William Penn to name a few. We can look around right now and observe countries today which have no religious freedom. Just observe life in Iran, China, and North Korea today.

Bible prophecy, especially Daniel 7:25, Revelation 13 and 17 foretell a time when this religious freedom shall be taken away. When that time comes, and our country will repudiate every article of religious freedom, then national apostasy will be followed by national ruin.

Please tread very carefully on one of the major reasons as to why our country has been so blessed.

Thank you,

Darlene Niderost

[REDACTED]

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From: Shon Mellors <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – [Shon and Christy Mellor]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:11:29 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a citizen that is concerned by your recommendations to weaken the separation of church and state — especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment. When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God — and that's bad for the church and the country alike. Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,
Shon and Christy Mellor
Sparks, Nevada

From: Ruth Kamieneski <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential commission on Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:12:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Dear Sirs,

Please keep church and state separate to protect our freedoms as US citizens. We do not want to repeat history that our pioneer fled from in Europe.

Please keep the Johnson Ammendment .

Ruth Kamieneski

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From: meredith [REDACTED] PII

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church & state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:15:13 -0400

Importance: Normal

Greetings, I am writing to request thoughtful consideration on this topic of 'separation of church & state'.

History can give us great insight as to what happens when the church can influence the state. That history does not provide a positive outcome when that wall is broken down. Persecution (to at least one or many groups/sects/religions) will begin to occur.

Our country has been operating for a long time with a 'wall of separation' . The fault does not lie in that separation but in the people and perhaps, mostly from the government(both parties), & it's legislations.

Please keep government & religion separate.

Thank you for your time,

Meredith

PII
PII
PII

From: Cherith Mundy <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment Opposing Recommendations to Weaken Church-State Separation

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:18:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the Commission's draft report recommendations that seek to dismantle the separation of church and state. Far from being a flaw in our legal framework, this separation is the absolute foundation of religious liberty in America.

The concept of a "wall of separation" was not designed to harm faith. Historically, leaders and founders—including Thomas Jefferson, in his 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptists—championed this boundary precisely to protect religious institutions from government interference and co-optation.

Allowing government entities to endorse specific religious viewpoints or financially fund sectarian institutions compromises the First Amendment. When the state involves itself in religious affairs, it inevitably picks winners and losers among different faiths. Genuine religious freedom guarantees that no American is coerced by the government to practice a religion or adhere to the beliefs of another.

I respectfully urge the Commission to revise its recommendations and reaffirm the historic separation of church and state. Maintaining this boundary remains the best way to ensure a pluralistic society where citizens of all faiths—and no faith—can live and worship according to their own conscience.

Cherith Mundy

[REDACTED] PII

From: ScottsD <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Scott Dinwiddie

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:19:33 -0400

Importance: Normal

The principle of separation of church and state is found within the first amendment of the Constitution, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof".

History has shown repeatedly that when any religious body gains control of civil government, persecution of religious minorities results, and their freedom to exercise their faith according to the dictates of conscience is greatly restricted. For this reason I find the recent developments within the Trump administration - whom I voted for and have supported with donations and prayers - deeply troubling.

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them.

Sincerely,
Scott Dinwiddie

From: Cindy Kuykendall <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:20:11 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments.
Please implement them!

Sent from my iPhone

From: Dena Badger <hspros@yahoo.com>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <RLC@usdoj.gov>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:20:49 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to submit my formal public comment expressing total opposition to the recommendations put forward in the June 2026 draft report. Rather than protecting true religious freedom, this document outlines an alarming blueprint to systematically break down the constitutional wall between church and state, while simultaneously narrowing the religious liberties of everyday Americans.

True religious freedom requires the government to remain strictly neutral. By attempting to elevate a singular, preferred religious viewpoint to a position of federal backing, this report actively undermines the First Amendment.

I urge the Commission to completely reject the following recommendations before a final report is issued:

1. The Subversion of the Johnson Amendment

The recommendation to eliminate or weaken the Johnson Amendment directly threatens the independence of both our political system and our houses of worship. Allowing tax-exempt religious institutions to funnel money into political campaigns and endorse candidates turns sacred spaces into partisan tools. This narrows religious liberty by forcing churchgoers into politically divided congregations and inappropriately subsidizes political speech through tax-exempt dollars.

2. The Diversion of Public Funds to Religious Education

The report's push to expand federal voucher programs and direct public tax dollars to religious private schools is a direct violation of the Establishment Clause. Public funds must support public education, which serves all children equally. Forcing taxpayers to fund religious instruction—including schools whose doctrines they may fundamentally disagree with—is a severe infringement on individual freedom of conscience.

3. The Weaponization of "Conscience Protections" to Discriminate

The report seeks to radically expand "Free Exercise" rights for corporations, government-funded agencies, and healthcare providers at the direct expense of individual citizens. In Healthcare: Expanding medical refusal clauses allows providers to deny essential care to patients based on religious dogma, compromising patient safety and autonomy. In Social Services: Allowing taxpayer-funded adoption and foster care agencies to reject qualified families based on sexual orientation or religion is state-sanctioned discrimination.

In the Workplace: Broadening corporate religious rights allows private business owners to override federal labor protections, stripping employees of their reproductive healthcare benefits and civil rights.

4. The Exclusion of Minority Faiths and Non-Religious Americans

Religious liberty must be absolute and equal for all people. The draft report focuses almost exclusively on protecting majority Christian institutions while largely ignoring the documented rise of discrimination against Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist Americans, as well as the rapidly growing secular population. By favoring one religious tradition, the report inherently narrows the freedom of all others.

Conclusion

The recommendations in this report do not defend liberty; they attempt to create a dangerous union between church and state that historical precedent proves will lead to oppression, division, and the erosion of minority rights. I urge that the Commission uphold the strict separation of church and state—the very framework that has allowed diverse religious expressions to thrive peacefully in America for over two centuries.

Sincerely,
Dena Badger
Sent from my iPhone

From: Michele Baker <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:20:55 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am against the union of church and state because in the Bible Jesus said let what is Cesar be Cesar and the things of God be of God.

From: "PII" <PII>

To: "PII" <PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- [TOPIC OR CHAPTER NUMBER] – [YOUR NAME]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:21:12 -0400

Importance: Normal

I'm concerned that the Religious liberties of All Christian denominations will be impacted by giving any special provisions to one religious faith over any other, abridgement of our Constitutional rights and will be detrimental if any law is passed to make it more difficult to practice the Christian faith in these United States of a America.

From: Mike Andrews <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:24:38 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission Members,

I don't want to see the separation of church and state changed. It protects all from being persecuted or coursed by the dominant religion. The founders of our nation knew what they were doing.

Best Regards,

Michael Andrews

From: Dee Durbin <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] The right of all Americans to freely exercise their faith without fear or Government censorship or retaliation

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:25:13 -0400

Importance: Normal

Keep the Constitution, keep the separation of church and state.

I'm certain it will have unintended consequences.

From: Brian Kaylor <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Chapter 2 - Brian Kaylor

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:28:42 -0400

Importance: Normal

This report fundamentally misunderstands and misrepresents the separation of church and state. This fatal flaw undermines the entire report and means it should be withdrawn to undergo a massive rewrite.

It is simply inaccurate to say that the separation of church and state is not a constitutional principle. While the exact phrase cannot be found in the Constitution, that doesn't mean it's not a constitutional principle. You also won't find the phrase "religious liberty" in the document either, but it's clearly a constitutional precept. Surely the "Religious Liberty Commission" doesn't believe "religious liberty" is not a constitutional concept. Similarly, you won't find the word "trinity" in the Bible, but that doesn't mean it's not a biblical doctrine.

Like with "religious liberty," understanding how the phrase "separation of church and state" explains constitutional provisions such as Article VI and the First Amendment requires the ability to move from kindergarten-level rote copying of letters and words to understanding concepts and how to describe them in other ways. And this shouldn't be hard. Because when Thomas Jefferson used his famous phrase about church-state separation, he explicitly spelled out in his letter to Baptists in Connecticut exactly why he saw that phrase as a way of describing what the Constitution does.

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church & State," Jefferson wrote.

He literally quoted the First Amendment and then said that those words thus built the wall. So, yes, while the exact phrase is not there, the separation of church and state is very much in the Constitution. This misunderstanding in this report is like looking at a map upside before starting a journey. You went in completely the wrong direction, which is why you got almost everything wrong.

The separation of church and state is good for both. And it is a constitutional principle. If you do not understand that, then your report is not only historically (and theologically) suspect, it is also not helpful. Time to scrap it and start over.

thanks,
Rev. Dr. Brian Kaylor
President & Editor-in-Chief, *Word&Way*
New book – [*The Bible According to Christian Nationalists*](#)

From: Gayle Stevens <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- [Religious Liberty/Separation of Church and State]-G. Stevens

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:29:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

Regarding the Religious Liberty Commission's Draft Report:

The first amendment has what the country needs to protect freedom of religion. There is no need to change anything. Nothing should be changed. Americans have rights specified there and changing those could and likely will open the way to changing other areas of the constitution. Church and state need to be kept separate. The specific wording "separation of church and state" may not be there, but the idea is.

The Johnson Amendment needs to be fully enforced. Churches should not be a political platform.

The government should not be funding religious education and clubs in public schools or other non-profit activities. If they do, the government will then have a hand in setting requirements for them and could force a certain type of religion to be taught.

One example, in public schools, there should **not** be teacher-led religious classes/prayers. There are children of many faiths and children of no faith there. So, teacher-led religious training would be a big problem for those families who are not of the same faith as is being taught. Allowing the ten commandments to be posted in public schools means that you must allow things to be posted from other religions. This is why there are religious schools. If parents want their children in religious training, they should enroll them in a religious school.

Using government vouchers for tuition could become a problem. If private schools do accept them, they are risking the government telling them what to teach and forcing them to change their mission.

The same goes for other areas of religious liberty. The first amendment already protects that. Our country was founded on freedom of religion. This idea even goes back before the constitution for some of the colonies. Rhode Island was the first colony to have freedom of religion in the 1600s. Then some other colonies followed Rhode Island's lead and eventually many years later, it was written for the whole United States of America.

Again, the first amendment has what the country needs to protect freedom of religion. There is no need to change anything. Changing it will open doors to change other things also, and soon the people (or some of the people) will have no rights like many years ago.

Thank you,

G. Stevens

From: Eric Schatzschneider <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Committee Report Feedback

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:30:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I respectfully submit this request to urge the Commission to defend the historic principles of religious liberty and the separation of church and state. I oppose any recommendation to the Department of Justice or another government agency that would weaken these constitutional safeguards or encourage greater unity between religious institutions and civil government.

True religious liberty does not require the government to promote religion. It requires government to protect every person's right to worship according to conscience—or not to worship—without coercion, discrimination, or interference.

American history shows why this protection is necessary. During the colonial period, Baptists, Quakers, Jews, and other religious minorities suffered fines, imprisonment, and discrimination because established churches enjoyed the support of the state. These abuses helped lead to the adoption of the First Amendment.

The experience of seventh-day Sabbath keepers, particularly Seventh-day Adventists, provides another warning. During the late nineteenth century, some were fined, imprisoned, and sentenced to chain-gang labor for performing ordinary work on Sunday after conscientiously observing Saturday as the biblical Sabbath. Their experience demonstrates that when government enforces religiously influenced observances, minority believers are often the first to suffer.

History repeatedly shows the danger of giving civil authority power over conscience. Whether through religious persecution, state-backed religious extremism, or atheistic governments that suppress faith, the result is the same: individual liberty is lost. Government should protect public order, individual rights, and equal treatment under the law. Religious institutions should advance their beliefs through teaching, persuasion, and voluntary faith—not through civil power or coercion. Genuine religion does not need the state to compel belief or observance.

I therefore respectfully urge the Commission to reject any proposal that weakens the constitutional separation of church and state. Every church should remain free to proclaim its beliefs, and every citizen should remain free to accept or reject those beliefs without government pressure.

The lessons of history and the prophecies of Revelation are clear. When religious and civil power are united, intolerance and injustice follow. Please defend the First Amendment and preserve the religious liberty of every citizen.

A concerned child of Christ.

Sincerely,
Eric Schatzschneider

From: Chuck Penns <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Chapter 1 – Foundations of Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:30:30 -0400

Importance: Normal

I commend the Commission for preparing a thoughtful and historically grounded report. I respectfully encourage the Commission to continue emphasizing that the liberties secured by the Bill of Rights represent constitutional judgments ratified by the sovereign People of the several States and therefore should be interpreted according to their original public meaning rather than continually rebalanced through changing public policy.

This chapter properly recognizes that religious liberty is a pre-political natural right arising from mankind's duty to the Creator rather than from governmental permission. Consistent with the Founders' original understanding, the First Amendment reflects the sovereign People's own constitutional judgment protecting the free exercise of religion, liberty of conscience, speech, and peaceable assembly according to their original public meaning.

From: Chuck Penns <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- Chapter 2 – The American Tradition of Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:31:44 -0400

Importance: Normal

I commend the Commission for preparing a thoughtful and historically grounded report. I respectfully encourage the Commission to continue emphasizing that the liberties secured by the Bill of Rights represent constitutional judgments ratified by the sovereign People of the several States and therefore should be interpreted according to their original public meaning rather than continually rebalanced through changing public policy.

I appreciate the report's recognition that the American tradition of religious liberty was deeply informed by the Founding generation's understanding that civil government possesses limited jurisdiction over matters of conscience. Renewed fidelity to that original constitutional settlement will strengthen ordered liberty for all Americans.

From: James [REDACTED] PII

To: [REDACTED] PII [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE AND CHURCH-STATE SEPARATION – JAMES WILLOCHELL

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:32:41 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

I support strong protections for the free exercise of religion. No American should be punished, excluded from public life, denied employment, or compelled to violate sincerely held religious convictions merely because of his or her faith.

However, I am concerned by the draft report's repeated claim that church and state "strengthen and support one another" and that religious liberty should be viewed as a "bridge between church and state," as stated on pages 22, 43, and 179.

Religious individuals and organizations should certainly be free to participate in public life, serve their communities, express their beliefs, and receive the same legal protections available to everyone else. But that is very different from saying that the institutions of church and government should strengthen and support one another.

Government's proper role is to protect the freedom of conscience of every person equally. It should neither suppress religion nor promote, direct, finance, or become institutionally aligned with religion. Religious liberty is safest when government protects religious exercise without using civil authority to advance the religious beliefs of either the majority or the minority.

I write as a Christian who observes the seventh-day Sabbath. Sabbath keepers have a particular historical reason to be cautious whenever government becomes closely aligned with the dominant religious culture. During the late nineteenth century, Seventh-day Adventists were arrested, fined, imprisoned, and sentenced to chain gangs under Sunday laws because the religious convictions of the majority had been given civil enforcement.

Those laws were often defended as beneficial to religion, families, morality, and society. Yet their practical result was the punishment of people who conscientiously observed a different day. What appears to be cooperation between church and government from the majority's perspective can become religious coercion from the minority's perspective.

I respectfully request that the Commission remove or revise language describing church and state as institutions that strengthen and support one another. The report should instead state clearly that:

Religious individuals and organizations are free to participate fully in public life.

Government must remain institutionally independent from religious bodies.

Government must not favor one denomination, religion, or religious practice over another.

Conscience protections must apply equally to Christians, Jews, Muslims, members of minority faiths, and those who profess no religious faith.

Religious observance must never be imposed through governmental authority.

I am also concerned about the recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment completely. Religious leaders must remain free to preach on moral, biblical, and public-policy questions without government censorship. However, tax-exempt churches should not be transformed into partisan campaign organizations that officially endorse candidates or coordinate political campaigns. That would risk corrupting both religion and government by making churches dependent upon political parties and political power.

As a Christian, I believe faith should advance through truth, persuasion, service, and voluntary conviction, not through civil authority. Government protects religion best when it protects the conscience of all people while refusing to control or promote the religious mission of any church.

Please strengthen the report's protection of free exercise while retaining a clear and meaningful institutional boundary between church and state.

Respectfully submitted,

James Willochell from Tennessee

From: Chuck Penns <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Chapter 3 – Faith-Based Institutions

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:33:08 -0400

Importance: Normal

I commend the Commission for preparing a thoughtful and historically grounded report. I respectfully encourage the Commission to continue emphasizing that the liberties secured by the Bill of Rights represent constitutional judgments ratified by the sovereign People of the several States and therefore should be interpreted according to their original public meaning rather than continually rebalanced through changing public policy.

Faith-based institutions should remain free to maintain their religious doctrine, worship, governance, and ministry without governmental coercion. The First Amendment already embodies the constitutional balance struck by the People between legitimate civil authority and the liberties of religion, speech, and peaceable assembly.

From: Anita Jepsone <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] No -- to bridges between church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:33:31e0400

Importance: Normal

Churches remain taking care of themselves

State business keeping separate and to themselves. No business involving themselves with churches.

No -- to Bridges between church and State.

Thank you very much!

God bless America

Anita and Barry Jepson

From: Chuck Penns <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Chapter 4 – Students in Government Schools

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:34:13 -0400

Importance: Normal

I commend the Commission for preparing a thoughtful and historically grounded report. I respectfully encourage the Commission to continue emphasizing that the liberties secured by the Bill of Rights represent constitutional judgments ratified by the sovereign People of the several States and therefore should be interpreted according to their original public meaning rather than continually rebalanced through changing public policy.

Students do not surrender their constitutional liberties upon entering public schools. Their rights of free exercise, speech, and peaceable assembly should be protected according to the original meaning of the First Amendment rather than narrowed by shifting policy preferences.

From: Petina McVay <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] URGENT: Keep Church and State Separate

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:35:46 -0400

Importance: Normal

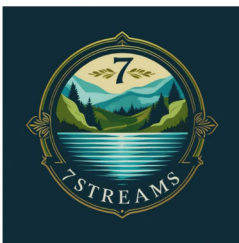
Inline-Images: image.png

My understanding that there is an effort to unite Church and State.

Kind Sir, I believe that the government has absolutely no authority to tell me or anyone else 'what' to believe or 'how' to worship. Isn't religious persecution what those who first came to this country were fleeing? Furthermore, God is the authority over religion. I firmly hold the stance that not only does God, and God alone, authorize true religion and all associated with it, but that government has absolutely no authority over religion. Please consider the words of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour..."Render to Ceasar (government) what is Ceasar's and unto God (religion and religious matters) what is God's." He was *very* clear in this simple statement regarding such a crucial matter. Thank you for hearing my sincere opposition in standing as Christ did and always has; that even God doesn't 'force' religion or religious choices, however, He does give us free will to 'choose' for ourselves. Surely, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty." 2 Corinthians 3:17. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). If He didn't change His stance or take away our freedom to choose in religion (which He didn't), the government or anyone else for that matter should not seek to attempt to supersede His authority. Let freedom continue to ring in our wonderful country. My prayers are for you and all that are in leadership in our God-given country, that He will instruct you and show you in the way that you should go in this crucial decision for our country. Do not unite Church and State.

Humbly and with Kindest Regards,

Petina McVay



Petina C. McVay

[REDACTED] PII

[REDACTED] PII

From: Chuck Penns <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Chapter 6 – Parents and Teachers

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:36:23 -0400

Importance: Normal

I commend the Commission for preparing a thoughtful and historically grounded report. I respectfully encourage the Commission to continue emphasizing that the liberties secured by the Bill of Rights represent constitutional judgments ratified by the sovereign People of the several States and therefore should be interpreted according to their original public meaning rather than continually rebalanced through changing public policy.

The report appropriately reaffirms the historic principle that parents bear the primary responsibility for directing the upbringing and education of their children. This reflects the Founders' understanding that civil government serves limited and delegated purposes while preserving the liberties of families and communities.

From: Jen Castel <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:36:50 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern,
I agree with the Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them.

Separation of church and state is extremely important to the freedoms America was founded on.

Thank you,

Jennifer CastelbuonoSent from my iPhone

From: "PII" <PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and State Concerns

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:37:01 -0400

Importance: Normal

It is very concerning to me that we are considering combining church & state. I pray that we seriously reconsider this. History & the Bible both confirm that it never ends well when church & state come together. There should be a clear and distinct separation. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

From: Chuck Penns <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Chapter 7 – Military

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:37:17 -0400

Importance: Normal

I commend the Commission for preparing a thoughtful and historically grounded report. I respectfully encourage the Commission to continue emphasizing that the liberties secured by the Bill of Rights represent constitutional judgments ratified by the sovereign People of the several States and therefore should be interpreted according to their original public meaning rather than continually rebalanced through changing public policy.

Military service should not require the unnecessary surrender of constitutional liberties. Even within the unique demands of military service, government should faithfully preserve the free exercise of religion and liberty of conscience to the fullest extent consistent with genuine military necessity.

From: Rogelio Sanchez <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Christian Nationalism

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:37:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

As a Christian I must say, "Stay in your lane, and let God handle worship; the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Spiritual Israel- not the actual nation".

Rogelio Reyes

From: barbara CZAJKA <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comments on Religious Liberty Commission report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:37:53 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Comments_on_Religious_Liberty_Commission_report.pdf

Dear Commission -

Please find attached my comments.

Regards,
Barbara Czajka

Sent from my iPhone

Barbara Czaika

PII

July 13, 2026

Via Electronic Mail to PII PII PII PII PII PII PII PII
Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing to comment on and express my sincere concerns about the proposed unity of church and state presented by the Religious Liberty Commission:

1. "Wall of separation" between church and state was created by religious believers to protect faith, not to suppress it. Replacing this separation with closer government-religion ties would threaten religious liberty the United States Constitution was designed to protect.
2. Prominent American leaders such as Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Millard Fillmore, Ulysses S. Grant, James Garfield, and Theodore Roosevelt were supporters of keeping church and state separate.
3. History of nations proves that government involvement in religion could lead to religious favoritism, political conflict, and restrictions on freedom, paving the way for oppressive laws justified by majority opinion or claims of public good.
4. Government-sponsored religious displays of the Ten Commandments in schools and courthouses will be challenged to choose among competing religious interpretations of Ten Commandments, leading to dogmatic disputes.
5. Churches should not become vehicles for political activity. If religious organizations receive government benefits or political incentives, pastors and churches could face pressure to influence voting behavior, and powerful interests could exploit religious institutions for political purposes, which happens in other countries.

The United States presents itself as a defender of freedom and historically has fought against oppression in other countries. Eroding the separation of church and state could introduce the

same kinds of religious and political oppression on American soil that earlier generations and refugees have sought to escape.

I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its report and consider preserving the true American identity grounded on a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,


Barbara Czajka

From: " [REDACTED] PII " < [REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" < [REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Appeal to Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:38:00 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

I respectfully submit this public comment out of deep concern for the future of religious liberty in the United States. I urge the Commission to reject any recommendation directed at the Department of Justice or any other branch of government that would weaken the historic constitutional principle of keeping religion and government institutionally separate, as well as any proposal that encourages greater unity between the two.

America's greatest contribution to the cause of religious liberty has not been the state's endorsement of religion, but the protection of every person's God-given right to worship according to conscience without government interference. This principle has allowed religious communities of every tradition to flourish in freedom while preserving civil peace.

As a Bible-believing seventh-day Sabbath keeper, I write from the perspective of a religious minority whose spiritual ancestors experienced firsthand the dangers that arise when government aligns itself with the religious majority. During America's colonial period, Baptists, Quakers, Jews, seventh-day Sabbath keepers, and many other religious minorities endured discrimination, imprisonment, fines, and civil persecution because certain established churches enjoyed the support of the state. These injustices were among the very reasons the Founders rejected religious establishments and adopted the First Amendment.

The experience of Seventh-day Adventists provides another historical warning. During the late nineteenth century, Adventists who faithfully observed God's seventh-day Sabbath were prosecuted under Sunday laws that were imposed, once again, by the religious Christian majority. Some of our fellow believers were fined, imprisoned, and even forced into chain gangs because they chose to honor Saturday as the biblical Sabbath rather than conform to popular Blue Law Sunday observances. Their only offense was obeying the dictates of conscience and remaining faithful to their religious convictions. Their experience stands as a warning that whenever civil authority is used to enforce religious beliefs or practices, freedom of conscience is inevitably endangered, and religious minorities are often the first to endure discrimination and persecution.

The medieval Inquisition demonstrated how religious institutions armed with civil authority suppressed dissent through torture, punishment, and even death. Various forms of religious extremism, including movements that have justified violence in the name of Islam, have shown how state-backed religious ideology can deny liberty of conscience. Likewise, communist regimes that officially embraced atheism illustrate the opposite side of the same error: when government suppresses religion altogether, believers are again persecuted. Though these different oppressive systems differed in ideology, they shared one common characteristic—the concentration of civil power over matters of conscience.

The strength of the American constitutional system is that it avoids these extremes. Government was never commissioned to direct the spiritual lives of the people. The mission of the state is to preserve order, protect individual rights, and secure equal treatment under the law. The mission of the church is altogether different: to preach the gospel, emphasize truth and love through persuasion, not coercion, and call people to a voluntary faith, as Jesus did. These two institutions are strongest and remain uncorrupted when each remains within its proper sphere.

Our nation has become home to a diverse group of churches, synagogues, mosques, and religious communities because government has generally refrained from controlling or establishing religion. This constitutional heritage has protected both the majority and the minority alike. I therefore respectfully urge the Commission to recommend policies that reinforce—not diminish—the constitutional barriers separating ecclesiastical authority from civil government. Religious liberty is best preserved when government neither advances nor inhibits religion but instead protects the equal rights of all people to follow their own conscience.

The United States must remain a nation where every church is free to proclaim its beliefs without governmental control and where every citizen is free to worship—or not to worship—without governmental pressure. History has already taught us the consequences of abandoning this principle. We should not repeat mistakes that countless generations have paid dearly to overcome. For if we do, we would once again be fanning the flames of intolerance, religious bigotry, and injustice.

(copied from Andy Roman)

In His Love,

Pastor John Lewis

New Haven, Meriden District

PII

[Facebook Page](#)

[YouTube Channel](#)

To train disciples to make disciples preparing to meet Jesus

From: Chuck Penns <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Chapter 8 – Religious Leaders

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:38:11 -0400

Importance: Normal

I commend the Commission for preparing a thoughtful and historically grounded report. I respectfully encourage the Commission to continue emphasizing that the liberties secured by the Bill of Rights represent constitutional judgments ratified by the sovereign People of the several States and therefore should be interpreted according to their original public meaning rather than continually rebalanced through changing public policy.

The freedom of pastors and other religious leaders to proclaim what they sincerely believe God has revealed lies beyond the ordinary jurisdiction of civil government. Protecting that freedom accords with the Founders' understanding that matters of conscience and worship belong first to duties owed to the Creator.

From: [REDACTED] PII [REDACTED] PII <[REDACTED]>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

Subject: Re: Automatic reply: [EXTERNAL] A Response to the Threat to the Freedom and Liberty of Conscience of Americans

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:38:37 -0400

Importance: Normal

Please use only my first name on my email.

Marea

On Monday, July 13, 2026 at 04:16:05 PM CDT, RLC (OASG) <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]> wrote:

Thank you for your email! Please be aware public comments to the Commission may be subject to public inspection. Please do not include personally identifiable information such as addresses, birth dates, or other details you may wish to keep private.

From: Chuck Penns <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Chapter 9 – Religious Liberty in Healthcare

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:39:04 -0400

Importance: Normal

I commend the Commission for preparing a thoughtful and historically grounded report. I respectfully encourage the Commission to continue emphasizing that the liberties secured by the Bill of Rights represent constitutional judgments ratified by the sovereign People of the several States and therefore should be interpreted according to their original public meaning rather than continually rebalanced through changing public policy.

Conscience protections remain an indispensable safeguard of genuine religious liberty. Respecting sincere religious convictions recognizes that civil authority was instituted to secure pre-existing rights of conscience, not to redefine or subordinate them.

From: Aysha Inankur <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Aysha Inankur

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:39:33 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

"The framers of the Constitution recognized the eternal principle that man's relation with his God is above human legislation, and his rights of conscience inalienable. Reasoning was not necessary to establish this truth: we are conscious of it in our own bosoms. It is this consciousness which, in defiance of human laws, has sustained so many martyrs in tortures and flames. They felt that their duty to God was superior to human enactments, and that man could exercise no authority over their consciences. It is an inborn principle which nothing can eradicate."—Congressional documents (U.S.A.), serial No. 200, document No. 271.

Please protect the free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Aysha Inankur
Collegedale, TN

From: Angila Milam <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment: Separation of Church and State - Angila Milam

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:40:34 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

As a concerned citizen and Christian, I respectfully ask you to reject the recommendations in your report that would erode the historic separation of church and state, including proposals to expand government funding for religious activities and proposals to repeal the Johnson Amendment.

History has repeatedly shown that when churches become financially or politically dependent on the government, both religion and government are harmed. Government funding often brings government influence, while partisan political involvement can divide congregations and distract churches from their primary mission.

The separation of church and state was established not to weaken religion, but to protect it. It has allowed people of every faith to worship according to conscience, free from government control or political coercion. This principle has been a cornerstone of our nation's religious liberty and has benefited both the church and the state.

I respectfully urge you to preserve these protections and oppose policies that would blur the line between church and state. Maintaining that separation remains one of the best ways to safeguard both religious freedom and our constitutional system. Thank you for your time and service to our beautiful country.

Blessings to you and yours,

Angila Milam

"And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat."

From: Waldtraut Jedamski <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment- Separation of Church and State - Waldtraut Jedamski

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:40:53 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Commission

It is with great concern that I write this as Religious Liberty is a write I have enjoyed throughout my life and I feel it is being slowly taken away. Yes, our Constitution did not say that there needs to be Separation of Church and State but this is clearly what our Founding Fathers were intending. The Pilgrims that came to this wonderful Country did so fleeing areas where they had State interference in their religious observance. There have been many times in history that the State/Government has gotten involved in one form or another with Religious beliefs of their Citizens and it never ended up being a good thing. We cannot have a State/Government pushing forth any one religious belief over another and still have people's rights to Freedom of Religion not trampled on. I beg of you to consider.

Sincerely,
Dr. Waldtraut Jedamski

From: Chuck Penns <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- Chapter 11 s- Anti-Semitism

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:41:04 -0400

Importance: Normal

I commend the Commission for preparing a thoughtful and historically grounded report. I respectfully encourage the Commission to continue emphasizing that the liberties secured by the Bill of Rights represent constitutional judgments ratified by the sovereign People of the several States and therefore should be interpreted according to their original public meaning rather than continually rebalanced through changing public policy.

The report rightly condemns anti-Semitism and affirms that every person should enjoy equal protection in the peaceful exercise of religion. Government fulfills one of its highest constitutional duties when it protects all persons from violence, intimidation, and unlawful discrimination because of their faith.

From: Chuck Penns <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- Chapter 12s- Houses of Worship

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:41:49 -0400

Importance: Normal

I commend the Commission for preparing a thoughtful and historically grounded report. I respectfully encourage the Commission to continue emphasizing that the liberties secured by the Bill of Rights represent constitutional judgments ratified by the sovereign People of the several States and therefore should be interpreted according to their original public meaning rather than continually rebalanced through changing public policy.

Houses of worship exemplify the very peaceable religious assemblies the First Amendment was adopted to protect. Government should vigorously safeguard these assemblies from violence, unlawful interference, and unequal treatment while respecting the constitutional balance already established by the People through the Bill of Rights.

From: WILLIE MAY <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] I agree

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:42:26 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone

From: David Zwiebel <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Cc: "A.D. Motzen" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- END OF LIFE RELIGIOUS LIBERTY – DAVID ZWIEBEL, A. D. MOTZEN

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:42:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Letter_to_Lieutenant_Governor_Dan_Patrick_-_7.13.26.pdf

Please see the enclosed letter.

Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel
Executive Vice President
Agudath Israel of America



July 13, 2026

Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick
Chair
Religious Liberty Commission
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Chairman Patrick:

We are Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, executive vice president of Agudath Israel of America, a national Orthodox Jewish organization, and Rabbi A. D. Motzen, Agudath Israel's national director of government affairs. We have had the privilege of working with the Commission in the vital task of enhancing the essential cause of religious liberty. We are particularly grateful for the opportunity you afforded us to offer oral testimony on the importance of preserving the autonomy of private religious schools in the face of intrusive governmental encroachment. Thank you.

We commend the Commission for highlighting the importance of religious liberty and for providing specific recommendations, many of them longtime priority areas for Agudath Israel and its constituency. These include the effort to enact universal school choice, combatting anti-Semitism, and working towards the reversal of *Employment Division v. Smith*, among others.

We are grateful that the Commission's sixth hearing focused on religious liberty in healthcare. Protecting the religious and conscience rights of healthcare professionals and medical students is extremely important. However, we feel that the hearing and the recommendations should have also included protecting the rights of *patients*, especially at the end of life. These end of life issues are many. Indeed, we at Agudath Israel of America have established a special division, known as "Chayim Aruchim" (Long Life), to help the Jewish community remain faithful to the Torah's teachings about the sanctity of human life and dealing with end of life medical challenges.

We are encouraged by the recent announcement that HHS is reopening its Conscience and Religious Freedom Division. We recommend that HHS combine the opening of that division with the creation of a task force focused on religious liberty in healthcare. The task force should have a particular focus on the rights of patients from the beginning to the end of life.

THE RABBI MOSHE SHERER NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

42 Broadway • New York, NY 10004 •

PII

• Fax:

PII

The most basic principle that needs to be established in dealing with end of life medical care is that the patient's religious beliefs must be honored. We receive many complaints from patients and their families who believe in the inherent sanctity of human life, and who accordingly seek religiously mandated medical care despite the patient's diminished quality of life, but who encounter resistance from their care providers who unilaterally decide that the patient's life is no longer worth living and that life-sustaining measures should be withheld or even withdrawn.

Nowhere is this conflict more pronounced than when hospitals demand unilateral testing and determination of brain death, even for patients whose religious beliefs reject the notion of neurological death so long as the heart continues to beat. From the patient's religious perspective, such tests and determinations override the basic right to life itself, as otherwise protected by the First, Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments.

Currently, New Jersey stands alone as the only state that expressly preserves cardiopulmonary death as an alternative criterion of death for those whose religious beliefs reject brain death as a justification for discontinuing ventilation, nutrition, hydration and medical care. New York, California, and Illinois have regulations that require a reasonable accommodation of religious objections to brain death. This is good—but not good enough. Uniform federal criteria that protect religious rights are urgently needed.

This is especially important after a shocking investigation by the US Department of Health and Human Services exposed that the protocol for determining death was not being followed in as many as 29% of cases handled by a particular organ procurement organization. It identified 73 patients with neurological signs incompatible with organ donation and at least 28 patients who may not have been deceased at the time organ procurement was initiated.

Often, the main battle is just prior to the declaration of death when a hospital wishes to perform a confirmatory test, such as the apnea test, to determine if the patient meets the neurologic criteria for death. For many Orthodox Jews, performing the test itself is a violation of the patient's religious beliefs, and many courts have stopped or delayed the test in some cases allowing for a transfer to a more accommodating facility.

One way to address these issues is by revising the Uniform Determination of Death Act (UDDA). In 2022, the US Uniform Law Commission (ULC) attempted to revise the UDDA, but failed to generate consensus. One of the unresolved controversies was an opt out option that would allow family members who believe brain death is not truly death to prohibit physicians from declaring it. The other was requiring consent from the family before performing the confirmatory test.

The current status of determination of brain death/death by neurologic criteria by the Uniform Determination of Death Act is that such determination must be made in accordance with "accepted medical standards," but the UDDA does not delineate those standards. This is an area that state and federal laws and regulations can be written in a way that ensures that religious rights of patients are protected.

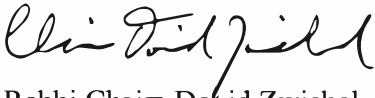
We respectfully urge the Commission to recommend that hospitals and similar facilities that deliver acute medical care, which are a vital part of interstate commerce, be required to respect a patient's religious right to have death determined by the traditional civil and religion-supported, cardiopulmonary criterion of death. At the very least, health care providers should require the family's prior consent before performing confirmatory brain death tests.

Unlike employment protections under Title VII, patients do not have any guaranteed protections when it comes to a lack of accommodations in a hospital setting. While patients can file religious discrimination complaints related to visitation rights or when hospitals are recipients of certain block grants, there are no laws protecting patients when hospitals refuse to accommodate their religious beliefs. This administration should find ways to change this gap in religious protection. This is not only a matter of accommodation. From the religious patient's perspective, it is a matter of life and death.

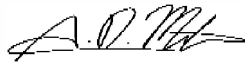
In this letter, we have focused specifically on the issue of brain death, as it offers a stark illustration of the potential clash between evolving secular norms and religious beliefs in end of life scenarios. But brain death is by no means the only end of life issue that implicates religious beliefs. We reiterate our recommendation that HHS establish a special task force to focus comprehensively on religious liberty issues in the area of medical care.

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to working with the administration to promote religious liberty for all Americans.

Sincerely,



Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel
Executive Vice President



Rabbi A. D. Motzen
National Director of Government Affairs

CDZ/ADM/aa

From: Top6Cat <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State -James W. Evans, Jr.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:42:40 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

It has been brought to my attention that there exists a DRAFT REPORT of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission. With the most critical issue in this report being the Commission's effort to weaken and dismantle the separation of church and state, I like many others am troubled. We have a Constitution which has protected the Rights of this country's citizens for centuries; one of those Rights being freedom of religion.

This same Constitution lists a Bill of Rights naming "freedom of religion" as the very first Right. How is it that now government feels justified in taking away or limiting that Right?

I am a Christian who acknowledges God as the Creator, who gives free will as a gift to mankind to choose who/and or how he will serve? Man has no right to take away something God has already given.

The church involves our personal relationship with God and should have nothing to do with politics. Maintaining separation of church and state keeps boundaries clear. It is a known fact that oil and vinegar don't mix. Don't tear down that wall which protects a very crucial Right - Freedom of Religion!

Sincerely,

James W. Evans, Jr.
Chesapeake, VA.

From: Marji Eismont <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:44:15 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a private citizen from Titusville, Pennsylvania, because I believe our government was created to protect every individual's freedom of choice in matters of faith. Whether to believe, and what to believe, is a matter for each person's own conscience, not a question for governing officials to settle. That conviction is not opposed to religion; it is drawn from religion itself, and it shapes everything I say below.

Consider first that the strongest argument for keeping government out of religion is a Christian one. When Christ said to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's, he divided all human duty into two jurisdictions. Civil government answers for what we owe each other; it has no authority over what we owe God. That means the state's only proper question about any action is whether it is civil or uncivil, whether it injures a neighbor, never whether it is religious or irreligious. Every proposal that puts government behind a religious text, display, or observance crosses a line that was drawn not by secular judges but by Christ himself, and no commission acting in his name should be the one to erase it.

Second, I ask the Commission to consider that a law favoring religion is never a gift to believers, it is a trap. Any law on the subject of religion must define which religion it favors, and that definition necessarily excludes someone. Even those it seems to favor no longer practice their faith freely; they practice it on terms a legislature can later revise. A believer who welcomes government sponsorship of his own creed today is handing the very same machinery to whatever majority holds office tomorrow, and he is also, quietly, legislating against his own future conscience, should he ever come to see the truth differently than he does now.

Third, I would remind the Commission that separation of church and state was not an accident of silence in our founding documents, nor a later invention forced onto an unwilling Constitution. It was deliberate, and it was pushed for by churches who had felt establishment from underneath. James Madison, who drafted the First Amendment, told the Virginia ratifying convention there is not a shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion, and that its least interference would be a flagrant usurpation. He and his contemporaries did not wait for full establishment to object; they saw the consequence in the principle and denied the principle itself. A commission that invokes the founders for state-sponsored religion must reckon with the founders' own words.

Finally, this is not only a matter of founding-era intent; Congress itself settled the question a generation later. When petitioners demanded a stop to Sunday mail on religious grounds, committee reports adopted by Congress in 1829 and 1830 declared plainly that it is not the legitimate province of the legislature to determine what religion is true or false, and that a representative is chosen to guard the rights of man, not to restrict the rights of conscience. Those reports warned that if government defines even one religious duty, it claims the power to define them all, down to the ceremonies of worship itself. That is the precedent this Commission would have to overturn, not a modern court ruling, but the considered judgment of Congress while the founders themselves were still living.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Marjorie Eismont
Titusville, PA

From: Amy Conley <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Amy Conley

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:45:21e0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen who takes both halves of the First Amendment seriously, and I ask you to weigh four arguments that together explain why government must stay out of the business of religion.

The first is Christian in its own foundation. Christ himself divided human duty into two jurisdictions when he said to render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's. Civil government was never given authority over what belongs to God; its competence is limited to civil matters, to injuries between neighbors. Government may rightly ask whether an act harms another person's rights. It has no business asking whether an act is religious, irreligious, or heretical. When officials put the state behind a religious text, display, or lesson, they are not merely risking a secular objection — they are crossing a boundary that Christianity itself sets for them.

The second argument concerns where rights come from. If religious liberty exists only because a majority permits it, then it is not a right but a favor, revocable whenever the votes shift. Our tradition holds instead that rights are inherent, belonging to persons prior to any government, and that constitutions exist precisely to place them beyond the reach of election returns. Popular government is instituted to protect the minority, not to overrule it, because the majority hardly needs protection at the ballot box. However many citizens favor a religious policy, that number gives them no right to decide what any person owes to God.

The third argument is the most exacting, and I think the most important. Our government rests on the consent of the governed — on powers the people delegate. But no person can delegate his relationship to God to anyone else; he cannot appoint a representative to believe or worship in his place. Since that power was never given, it was never received. Government cannot bear responsibility in religious matters because it can never answer for them; no government will stand before judgment for another's soul. The exclusion of religion from civil jurisdiction is not a grant made by the First Amendment — it is a fact that amendment merely recorded.

The fourth argument should give pause to believers who welcome favorable religious legislation. Any law touching religion must define which religion it favors, and any definition excludes someone. Even those it includes no longer practice freely; they practice by permission, on terms a future legislature can rewrite. A believer who locks his present convictions into law forfeits his own liberty to be persuaded otherwise later, and hands a precedent to every administration that follows — including ones hostile to his faith. The machinery built to favor one creed today can be turned against it tomorrow.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Amy Conley

From: Evelyn LeBlanc <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:45:41 -0400

Importance: Normal

I believe that government has no authority to tell me or anyone what to believe or how to worship, and that government lacks authority over religion.

Thank you,

Evelyn LeBlanc

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

From: Frank Fischer <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:48:34 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them!

Kay

From: [REDACTED] PII

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:50:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

The Church is the called out followers of Jesus Christ and since He is the Head of that Blood bought Kingdom, nation states have NO authority over it. It is separate. So, governments must respect and stay out of it. Also, the Muslims should not be granted the same protections from the American government, because Islam teaches its followers to lie, deceive, and kill infidels, which are crimes against humanity and the role of government is to preserve and protect this nation and its citizens.

Sent from my iPhone

From: Rolando Diaz <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] public comments separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:54:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

From: IserveAlmightyGod <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential religious liberty commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:52:08 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with the pillar of faith response. Please implement them

From: Dan Reich <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Daniel Reich

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:53:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a citizen to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state — especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment. When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God — and that's bad for the church and the country alike. Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

“I agree with Pillar of Freedom’s comments. Please implement them.”

Sincerely,

Daniel Reich

Granger Washington

From: Anthony Spencer <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:56:01 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Presidential Religious Commission

I agree with The Pillar of freedom's response. Please implement them

As a Christian when Jesus said in Matt.22:21 Render unto caesar what is caesar's and unto God what is God's.

Sincerely

Anthony Spencer

Maryland

From: Dina Marisol Tornel Pascual <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] "The separation of church and state is absolutely necessary to prevent oppression or persecution by the dominant religious body, as has happened throughout history."

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:56:22 -0400

Importance: Normal

"The separation of church and state is absolutely necessary to prevent oppression or persecution by the dominant religious body, as has happened throughout history."

From: livlovskis <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:56:41 -0400

Importance: Normal

Remembering back to history class and the support of religion in Europe and all the killing that went with that structure. Those that did not believe the way you did, meant you needed to flee to an area that had people who believed like you did to survive. America struck a deal that no one religion would be supported by the state. Religion should not be supported or denied their freedom to worship.

Thanks for listening,
Gerald Hill

Sent from my Galaxy

From: Paul Kuizinas <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] RLC draft report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:57:36 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patric, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and members of theRLC.

Concerning the response to the RLC draft report which was submitted by Eva J. Tompkins, esq., I wish to express my full agreement and support of her response.

Sincerely,
Paul Kuizinas
7/13/2026

From: SGWillis <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Cc: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Sheila Glass Willis

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:58:10 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

As a citizen and person of faith, I am concerned about proposals to weaken the separation of church and state. This principle protects both our nation and religious communities by keeping faith free from political influence.

I ask you to reconsider recommendations such as government funding for religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment, which could blur important boundaries.

Please continue to uphold this separation to protect both religious freedom and democratic fairness.

Sincerely,

Sheila Glass Willis
Decatur, Georgia

From: " [REDACTED] PII " < [REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" < [REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:01:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the recommendations of the Religious Liberty Committee submitted to President Donald J. Trump on June 26, 2026. While we are mindful of the Committee's labors, which resulted in the 12 recommendations released June 26, certain of which we agree with, we write to voice our concerns and objections to the Committee's first and ninth recommendations [1] and its obviously insufficient consideration of the warnings of the Founding Fathers of the dangers of a union of church and state or the many lessons of history regarding same.

The Committee recommended that the Department of Justice "issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state. [2] At the formal release of the Committee's recommendations on the same day, Committee Chair Dan Patrick publicly stated that "the separation of church and state is not in the constitution" and that the phrase "has no constitutional basis. [3]

As citizens and students of history, and as Christians, we are alarmed lest the flawed and unconstitutional view of the Chair of the Committee of the so-called "proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and the separation of church and state" prove influential or worse, instructive, to the Department of Justice. If the Committee's opinion of the so-called "proper understanding" of the Establishment Clause is the same as that of its Chair, it is apparent that its understanding is not proper, but rather improper.

Founding Father, "Father of the Constitution", and fourth President of the United States, James Madison, contradicted Chair Dan Patrick's claim that the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution. Madison stated that "Strongly guarded as is the separation between Religion & Govt in the Constitution of the United States, the danger of encroachment by Ecclesiastical Bodies, may be illustrated by precedents already furnished in their short history. According to James Madison, the separation of church and state is in the Constitution. As to whether James Madison, who is the principal author of the Establishment Clause, or Dan Patrick, is the greater authority on this subject, we think it not difficult for reasonably minded people to ascertain. Certainly, the Founding Fathers were all aware of the persecution of the Baptists, Quakers, Jews, and others in some of the colonies. They had seen firsthand the ear croppings, whippings, imprisonment, and hangings in Massachusetts and other colonies.

In Europe, the persecution of the martyrs is well documented. Today we take the Bible for granted but forget that William Tyndale was executed for translating the Bible into the English

language, not by atheists but by religious bigots. It was a union of church and state that suppressed speech and the freedom of the press in England. It was a union of church and state that prohibited the work of translation of the Bible, which changed the world. It was a union of church and state that necessitated his flight to Europe. It was a union of church and state that killed him.

We respectfully ask that the Department of Justice, in considering the issue of public guidance of the separation of church and state, consider the history of William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania and early Founding Father, who was repeatedly jailed for his religious faith in England. The Pennsylvania Colony became a haven, not from atheist persecutors but from religious persecutors who did not believe in the separation of church and state. The same is true of Roger Williams, founder of the colony of Rhode Island, who was ordered arrested for declaring that the civil magistrate cannot enforce the first table of the Decalogue. We ask that the Committee take into account the brutal public whipping of President Abraham Lincoln's five-time great-grandfather, Obadiah Holmes, in the Massachusetts colony, for the "crime" of religious dissent. Obadiah Holmes was not whipped by atheists. He was whipped by Puritan bigots who did not believe in the separation of church and state. We respectfully request that the Department of Justice consider this history in the issuance of public guidance on the subject.

We are concerned that the Committee neglected to take into account the impact of the separation of church and state on the other rights codified in the First Amendment. Free speech and freedom of the press, for example, owe their flourishing in the modern world in large part to the separation of church and state in America. Prior to the protections in the First Amendment, the Roman Catholic Church for centuries maintained a list of banned books called the Index Librorum Prohibitorum. The books were subject to confiscation, and the possession of them resulted in the punishment of the owner.

Unfortunately, the Committee makes no mention of the censorship in this context of Galileo and Kepler, Kant and Locke, John Milton and Maimonides, John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, David Hume and Edward Gibbon, and many others, all at the behest of the Roman Papacy, which is itself a union of church and state. Free speech in the Western world is the legacy of those who risked the wrath of a unified church and state, often at the cost of their lives. We would also ask that the Department of Justice consider the repeated modern calls from the papal power today for the censorship of the internet and the suppression of free speech, contrary to the First Amendment. [4] We have no doubt that the censorship of Galileo, Kepler, Milton, and others was prosecuted under the justification of the censorship of misinformation, also.

The Roman Church was not alone in this persecution, either. We would ask the Department of Justice in its formulation of public guidance on the separation of church and state to remember the religious persecutions carried out at the behest of John Calvin in Geneva against religious dissenters such as Michael Servetus, who paid with his life for his writings and teachings. Servetus was executed by a union of church and state. We are concerned at the public statements of those who would create such a system in America. [5]

Therefore, we respectfully ask, what proper guidance can the Department of Justice hope to give to the public on the “proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and the separation of church and state” if it is directed in its object by a Committee and a Committee Chair, who has neglected to more fully analyze the reasons for the separation of church and state, or the reasons why the United States codified the disestablishment of church and state in the First Amendment in the first instance?

The reference to the wall of separation between church and state is not only mentioned by President Thomas Jefferson in the letter to the Danbury Baptists, which, of course, it is. [6] What is often left out of the narrative is that Jefferson said that he personally believed that the principle of the separation of church and state is codified in the Constitution. Therein, Jefferson wrote: “Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of separation between Church & State.’ [7]

James Madison wrote, “It is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties. We hold this prudent jealousy to be the first duty of Citizens and one of the noblest characteristics of the late Revolution. The free men of America did not wait till usurped power had strengthened itself by exercise and entangled the question in precedents. They saw all the consequences in the principle, and they avoided the consequences by denying the principle. We revere this lesson too much soon to forget it.” [8]

Lastly, we object to the recommendation of the Committee that the Johnson Amendment be removed. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are mindful of Our Lord’s words that we “render to Caesar what is Caesar, and to God the things that are God’s.” [9] Jesus Christ established the principle of the separation of church and state and taught that what belongs to God cannot be rendered to Caesar. The application of this teaching is that religionists, ambitious for civil power, and politicians, ambitious for their endorsement, are to be kept separate in the American system of politics, as the Constitution requires. The union of church and state results in the corruption of both, a result that neither should desire, and neither can afford.

Madison stated that “The number, the industry, and the morality of the Priesthood, & the devotion of the people have been manifestly increased by the total separation of the Church from the State.” [10] And he was right. If the Johnson Amendment is removed, religionists who want civil power will publicly stump and promise their votes and congregational dollars in exchange for political favors, and the politicians will be doubtless all too eager to reciprocate in the form of legislation that the religionists desire, provided they will aid their attempts to gain office.

In his anonymous treatise published in the Boston Gazette, John Adams, later the second President of the United States, wrote that canon law was a tyrannical form of government, as was

feudal law, but that the worst of all forms of governments was a union of the two. [11] And it was Madison who stated that, "In the Papal System, Government and Religion are in a manner consolidated, & that is found to be the worst of Governments."

We respectfully request, therefore, that the Department of Justice not adopt recommendations 1 and 9 of the Committee and that it adopt recommendation 1 of the Committee that it convene a public hearing, with written and oral submissions from the public, to more comprehensively study the question of the separation of church and state in history, and in American history in particular, a study which we would enthusiastically support.

Yours truly,

Mardel Pacheco

From: Rakhee Goyal <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State -- Rakhee Goyal

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:04:31 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

The United States of America was founded upon principles of religious liberty. Please do not erode the separation between church and state, by advocating for "bridges" and thus eroding the founding principles and Constitution of this great country. It was exactly why the USA was founded originally. The first people came here because of religious persecution stemming from oppressive laws rooted in no separation between church and state in the countries they fled.

Separation of church and state protects freedom. Religion is personal. Government must stay neutral to protect everyone's right to believe without interference. History has proved time and again that religious states oppress.

Religious freedom is necessary so that individuals are free to discover and understand the true character of God, and choose of their own volition to love and serve Him, without coercion of any kind.

So I plead with you, as a citizen of this country and as a person of faith, to Please maintain the separation between church and state.

Sincerely,
Rakhee Goyal
Maryland

From: Nadège Pharuns Baines <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State - Nadege Baines

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:04:51 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am an American citizen asking for you to reconsider the recommendations in your report, weakening the separation of church and state and to cease the use of government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

Historically, when churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics follows. Churches eventually compete for funding which results in them answering to politicians instead of God. This is bad for the church and the country alike. Separation is not a secular concept. On the contrary, it was carefully birthed by people of the book to protect faith, and is the very reason religion has remained strong on American soil. I implore you to please keep church and state separate.

Sincerely,

Nadege Baines
Sandy Ridge, NC

From: Tom Zirklee <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Tom Zirkle

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:06:22 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Committee:

Thank you for your service regarding this important issue. However, I, as a Seventh-day Sabbath keeper, am concerned with the direction in which the report is drifting.

I would call the committee to hold closely to the meaning and intent of the first words of the First Amendment of our Constitution where it reads "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

I read this to say that my government:

- 1) will not use my tax dollars in the religious sphere,
- 2) will not specify or require any specific observance,
- 3) will not coerce my thoughts or words regarding religion, and
- 4) will allow me to observe my faith and engage in evangelizing (with others of like persuasion) without undue

restraint.

I understand the balance between free exercise and non-establishment is difficult, but an attempt must be made to hold the line where government is not the source of religious/moral fervor, rather the outcome born of individual conviction supported by the free exchange of ideas in the public square.

Thank you for your consideration,

Tom Zirkle
Scottsdale, Arizona

From: Randall Tilley <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:06:58 -0400

Importance: Normal

Yes, the phrase, "Separation of Church and State" is not found in the Constitution BUT, the first amendment states that ;
"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof"

From 538 AD to 1798 the state and the church united, the church was King.
NOTHING good came from THIS

YES, YES, YES !!! Keep church and state SEPARATE !!!!

From: sonia greaves ellis <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberties

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:07:00 -0400

Importance: Normal

To whom this may concern,

As a fellow American, it has come to my attention that there is a possibility of the unification of church and state. The first amendment in the bill of rights specifically protects my ability to practice whatever religion I deem is right to follow, but I am concerned that my rights will be infringed on if church and state become one. Freedom of conscience and religious liberties are important to my faith and my religion of choice and it should be for everyone. Looking back through history, whenever the state gets involved with the church, it always led to persecution, and the disregard of people's rights. Given this forum is meant to allow citizens to state their opinions, I hope that when considering to involve the church and state matters and vice versa we will return to the text our forefathers wrote and remember the foundation of our great nation.

From: Carole Woods <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Draft Proposal

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:11:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Commission Members,

I believe firmly in the separation of church and state and would like to continue to have my religious freedom. Throughout history whenever there has been a joining of church and state religious freedom has been lost.

Please do not repeal the Johnson Amendment. Endorsements and funding for political campaigns should not involve the pulpit or places of worship.

Sincerely,

Carole Woods

From: Chris & Tiffany <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] To the Commission on Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:13:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

July 12, 2026

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty U.S. Department of Justice

Good Day,

Most respectfully I need to approach the seriousness of what is taking place and reflect some on history. The United States was not founded as a religious state, but as a constitutional republic committed to liberty of conscience. That commitment has allowed diverse religious communities to thrive without relying on government preference.

The colonies' experience with the British Crown—particularly the consequences of government interference in conscience and religion—helped shape the purpose of the Declaration of Independence. Americans were not seeking to swap one set of authorities for another; they were seeking to secure freedom in the new world by limiting government power over belief and worship. That founding purpose—protecting liberty of conscience from coercion—lies at the root of the religious liberty tradition reflected in the First Amendment.

I seek to employ the Commission to recognize the full historical record, as the separation of church and state is not a modern inception, but is historical, showing that when government aligns with a particular religion, the result is rarely greater freedom. The state tends to favor one tradition over others, granting advantages that are not fair or equal to all. And history has proven that whenever church and state are joined, persecution follows. The Dark Ages are a perfect reminder of what happens when freedom is surrendered. Genuine religion is a matter of personal conviction and conscience.

I fear we are facing history in the repeating of itself, and before the separation of church and state be done away with, please take a serious look at history to see what follows, like punishments.... These punishments harm others without legitimate authority to regulate a person's worship, Sabbath observance... these belong to an individual's conscience, which is our God-given right that no man should be so bold as to over-ride.

The strongest protection for both religion and civil liberty is complete separation of church and state. This principle safeguards the rights of believers and non-believers alike, according to conscience without interference from the state.

I respectfully encourage the Commission to continue defending policies that preserve governmental neutrality in matters of religion, and uphold the equal rights and freedoms of all members of our community.

Most Concerned,

Tiffany Fuemmeler

From:sK G <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State (Kimberly Goodge)

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:14:56 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

As representatives of the people in America I appreciate that you are seeking in some way to improve the lives of American citizens by removing the separation of church and State.

As an American Citizen, I do have concern in combining church and State and opening the door for turning church into a lobbying position for political happenings and direction.

As a Bible believing Christian, I believe my life belongs to God first and those decisions that affect my relationship with Him and what He asks of me are guided by His Word and prayer.

In Jesus day.....State overshadowed the church at the time or "combined" and jointly put Jesus to death on a cross. The founding of our Nation was set up by people fleeing church and State rule and the persecution and death that came with that rule. They came to seek freedom to live and work as their conscience and Biblical understanding lead them to.

In the years since that time, many have fought and died to preserve that freedom. The freedom to choose. The same freedom that God gives each one of us. The freedom to "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." Joshua 24:15

As Christians, we are representatives of Him who has created us and set up this land with the freedom to serve Him as conscious dictates. Please do not now combine and confuse the requirements of God and man in our country of freedom.

Thank you for taking the time to read this request to again carefully consider the proposed steps and the cascade of events that may be set in motion because of these decisions. Each one of you are chosen for this position at this time, by the people of America and while you answer to the people of America for the decisions you make here, more importantly, you must answer to God.

Consider Daniel 2:20-22.

20Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his:

21and he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

22he revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what *is* in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him.

Consider Esther 4:14b

14b who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for *such a* time as this?

As you listen, read and ponder the decision re building a bridge between church and State, many from various walks of life (both seen and unseen) will strive with you as you make your decision. I encourage you to humbly bow before the one Leader who knows the end from the beginning, seeking His wisdom as did Daniel and Esther, so you may stand with a clear conscious before God and man and say with Luther, "Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God."

From: s'vs<[REDACTED] PII>

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and Stateh

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:15:54 -0400

Importance: Normal

I want to encourage the protection of the separation of church and state. Thank you.

From: Kishore Isaac <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Kishore Isaac

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:16:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen of Maryland, who cares deeply about both religion clauses of the First Amendment and is concerned with your report put out recently. I ask you to consider three arguments that I think bear directly on your work.

First, any law touching religion, even one taken with good intentions, ends up destroying the free exercise it claims to protect. A law favoring a faith today becomes a precedent controlling that faith tomorrow because it concedes that religion is subject to legislation. Once that concession is made, faith is no longer a matter of individual conscience but a matter of popular opinion. Even believers who win such a law lose something real: they can no longer follow their conscience wherever new conviction leads, because their present creed is now locked into statute. I would ask this Commission to weigh that no religious lobbyist can guarantee who administers the machinery he builds after he is gone.

Second, the separation the founders wrote into our Constitution was not an oversight later imposed on their work. It was deliberate and was urged by churches that had themselves suffered under establishment. Madison told the Virginia ratifying convention plainly that there is not a shadow of right in the general government to interfere with religion, and that even its least interference would be a flagrant usurpation. His Memorial and Remonstrance explains why the founders objected to establishment at its very first appearance rather than waiting for it to grow dangerous: they saw all the consequences in the principle, and so denied the principle itself. Any commission that reinterprets the Establishment Clause as merely barring a national denomination must reckon with Madison's own words, spoken in Madison's own convention.

Third, history shows that the even simple religious laws lead to tremendous overreach of government in personal faith. Constantine's Sunday law of A.D. 321 seemed a good civil decision on the surface. Yet it resulted in: the state policing religious controversy, opened the door for the theory and practice of righteous compulsion, and ultimately ended in the Inquisition. As one historian observed, it was the aim of the emperor to make theology a branch of politics, and the hope of the bishops to make politics a branch of theology. This led to religious persecution as well as the deaths of many throughout history who dared practice faith according to the dictates of their conscience rather than follow government prescribed religious practices. No one today proposes an Inquisition, but no one ever does at the first step. The danger is not that this Commission's recommendations are the last step, but that this is a dangerous precedent which in history has led to government claiming the authority to define and promote religious duty.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Kishore Isaac
Beltsville, MD

From: Sterling Shankles <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty must be protected.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:18:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to submit my formal public comment expressing total opposition to the recommendations put forward in the June 2026 draft report. Rather than protecting true religious freedom, this document outlines an alarming blueprint to systematically break down the constitutional wall between church and state, while simultaneously narrowing the religious liberties of everyday Americans.

True religious freedom requires the government to remain strictly neutral. By attempting to elevate a singular, preferred religious viewpoint to a position of federal backing, this report actively undermines the First Amendment.

I urge the Commission to completely reject the following recommendations before a final report is issued:

1. The Subversion of the Johnson Amendment

The recommendation to eliminate or weaken the Johnson Amendment directly threatens the independence of both our political system and our houses of worship. Allowing tax-exempt religious institutions to funnel money into political campaigns and endorse candidates turns sacred spaces into partisan tools. This narrows religious liberty by forcing churchgoers into politically divided congregations and inappropriately subsidizes political speech through tax-exempt dollars.

2. The Diversion of Public Funds to Religious Education

The report's push to expand federal voucher programs and direct public tax dollars to religious private schools is a direct violation of the Establishment Clause. Public funds must support public education, which serves all children equally. Forcing taxpayers to fund religious instruction—including schools whose doctrines they may fundamentally disagree with—is a severe infringement on individual freedom of conscience.

3. The Weaponization of "Conscience Protections" to Discriminate

The report seeks to radically expand "Free Exercise" rights for corporations, government-funded agencies, and healthcare providers at the direct expense of individual citizens.

In Healthcare: Expanding medical refusal clauses allows providers to deny essential care to patients based on religious dogma, compromising patient safety and autonomy.

In Social Services: Allowing taxpayer-funded adoption and foster care agencies to reject qualified families based on sexual orientation or religion is state-sanctioned discrimination.

In the Workplace: Broadening corporate religious rights allows private business owners to override federal labor protections, stripping employees of their reproductive healthcare benefits and civil rights.

4. The Exclusion of Minority Faiths and Non-Religious Americans

Religious liberty must be absolute and equal for all people. The draft report focuses almost exclusively on protecting majority Christian institutions while largely ignoring the documented rise of discrimination against Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist Americans, as well as the rapidly growing secular population. By favoring one religious tradition, the report inherently narrows the freedom of all others.

Conclusion

The recommendations in this report do not defend liberty; they attempt to create a dangerous union between church and state that historical precedent proves will lead to oppression, division, and the erosion of minority rights. I demand that the Commission uphold the strict separation of church and state—the very framework that has allowed diverse religious expressions to thrive peacefully in America for over two centuries.

Sincerely, Sophia Sterling Aparicio-Bolaños

From: Robert Goodman <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Religious Liberty – Robert Goodman

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:20:08 -0400

Importance: Normal

Chairman Patrick, Vice Chairman Carson, and Distinguished Members of the Commission:

My name is Robert Goodman. I am a resident of Polk County, Florida, the Southeast Regional Director for Citizens Defending Freedom, and a church elder and lay pastor at Shepherd Road Presbyterian Church. I write to you not only in those capacities but as someone who has spent years tracking, reporting on, and writing about religious liberty cases across this country. Week after week I have documented stories of Americans whose faith cost them something real. This report is the first time I have seen the federal government do the same thing. For that I am grateful, and I want to add my voice to the record before it closes.

I. The Johnson Amendment Must Be Repealed

I have written about the Johnson Amendment and its effects on American pastors more than any other single topic in my years of publishing. And the story that shaped my understanding of it most was not a dramatic courtroom case. It was simpler and sadder than that.

I have sat with pastors who love their congregations, know exactly what Scripture says about the issues their people are facing, and have chosen silence anyway. Not because they lack courage. Because they have been made to believe that speaking the truth could cost their church everything. That is what the Johnson Amendment actually does. It does not need to be enforced to do its damage. The threat alone has worked for seventy years.

In July 2025 I reported on the landmark case of *National Religious Broadcasters v. Werfel*, in which the IRS entered a consent decree acknowledging that communications from a house of worship to its congregation about candidates, expressed through a religious lens during normal services, do not constitute campaign intervention. For the first time in seventy years, a court said plainly that pastors can speak without fear of IRS reprisal for doing so. I called it what it was: a restoration of a founding American tradition, not a new right but a recovered one.

But a consent decree covering two plaintiff churches is not the same as a repeal. The Johnson Amendment remains in the tax code. Future administrations can enforce it. The chilling effect it creates in the minds of pastors who have never read a court decision but have heard the warnings is still real every Sunday morning in churches across this country.

I urge the Commission to keep the repeal recommendation in the final report and to call on Congress to act. Pastors should never have to choose between speaking biblical truth and protecting their congregation's tax status.

II. Houses of Worship Are Being Targeted, and the Law Is Not Protecting Them

In October 2025 I published an article about Coastal Family Church in Flagler Beach, Florida. This small congregation purchased a unit in a local strip mall, renovated it with their own resources, and held their first Sunday service on October 5, 2025. Within days they were facing a lawsuit. A corporate entity managed out of Boca Raton sued them, arguing that holding Sunday worship services constituted an illegal "public assembly" under the strip mall's deed restrictions.

What made this case remarkable was the hypocrisy at its center. The same strip mall hosted a consignment store and allowed the Fraternal Order of Police to hold banquets, both of which fit the very definition of the "public assemblies" the church was being sued for. The rule was not being applied. It was being weaponized, and only against the church.

I wrote at the time that this is what religious discrimination looks like in practice: not a government official in a uniform telling you that you cannot worship, but a selective application of neutral-seeming rules designed to achieve exactly the same result. Liberty Counsel took the case. The church stood firm. But the fact that a small Florida congregation had to fight in court simply to hold Sunday services in a building they legally owned tells you something important about where we are.

This is not an isolated case. It is a pattern. And it is happening in the Southeast where I work, not just in the cities and states that make national headlines.

I urge the Commission to support stronger enforcement of existing protections for houses of worship and to adopt the recommendation that any public official or authority that accuses a person or institution of improper religious expression must provide a written, constitutionally grounded explanation within 30 days.

III. Street Preachers Are Being Silenced on Public Sidewalks

This week I published an account of what happened in Fort Worth, Texas, when Christian street preachers were confronted by police officers while sharing the Gospel near a Pride event. An officer told them directly: "If someone is offended by your talking, then we have a problem." A citation was issued. The incident was captured on video and went viral.

The DOJ Civil Rights Division opened an investigation. The Fort Worth Police Department later admitted that the officer's statements were "not accurate" and announced First Amendment refresher training for officers.

I wrote at the time that refresher training is not sufficient. The First Amendment is not a subject that needs refreshing. It is the law. And when multiple officers at the same scene are telling the same Christians the same false information about their constitutional rights, this was not one officer having a bad day. This was a department operating under the belief that a permitted event could suspend the First Amendment on a public sidewalk.

This is not new. I have tracked cases like this for years. In 2024, at the same Fort Worth Stockyards location, a jury acquitted a street preacher who had been cited for noise ordinance violations while sharing his faith. He won. But he had to win in court to exercise a right the Constitution already guaranteed him on the street.

I urge the Commission to support clear federal guidance making plain that no permitted event, no noise ordinance selectively applied, and no offense taken by a bystander can constitute legal grounds for silencing a citizen exercising their First Amendment right to share their faith on a public sidewalk.

IV. The Establishment Clause Has Been Misread for Nearly Eighty Years

I have written extensively about the 1947 Everson decision and what it did to American constitutional law. The phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear in the Constitution. It came from a private letter Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1802, ten years after the First Amendment was ratified, to reassure a Baptist congregation that the federal government could not impose a national religion on them.

Justice Hugo Black took that private letter and used it in 1947 to begin pushing faith out of American public life. The wall Jefferson built to protect the church from the state was flipped into a tool to exile the church from public life altogether. That is the exact opposite of what the Founders intended, and I have documented the founding era evidence for that claim in detail.

The Supreme Court took a major step toward correcting this in 2022 with *Kennedy v. Bremerton*, which abolished the *Lemon* test and ruled that a football coach's post-game prayer on a public school field was constitutionally protected. That ruling confirmed what originalist scholars have argued for decades: the Establishment Clause was never meant to scrub religion from public life. It was meant to prevent the government from establishing one.

But *Kennedy v. Bremerton* is a Supreme Court ruling. It does not change the mental model that thousands of school administrators, HR departments, and local government officials operate under every single day. They still believe the wall is real. They still act on it. They still use it to silence students, discipline teachers, and pressure employees.

I urge the Commission to keep the recommendation that the Department of Justice issue formal guidance correcting this misunderstanding. Clear federal guidance is the difference between a constitutional principle that exists on paper and one that actually governs how American institutions treat the people in their care.

V. The Persecution Under the Previous Administration Was Real and Documented

I want to say plainly what this report says carefully: the Biden administration did not simply fail to protect religious liberty. It actively worked against it in multiple arenas simultaneously.

It denied thousands of military service members religious exemptions to vaccine mandates. It removed the HHS Conscience and Religious Freedom Division. It targeted the Little Sisters of the Poor through federal litigation for declining to provide contraceptive coverage that violated their sincerely held religious beliefs. It allowed states to strip religious exemptions to vaccine requirements in schools, leaving families with no path that honored both their faith and their children's education. It presided over the expansion of policies at every level of government that compelled speech, required ideological affirmation as a condition of employment, and treated religious conviction as a liability rather than a protected right.

I have reported on all of these things. I have watched Americans pay real prices for their faith during those years. The trauma surgeon who wrote about unvaccinated patients being treated as "dirty plague rats" during COVID and responded by opening a free clinic out of his church. The parents driving hours out of their way so their children could attend school. The service members who lost pensions and healthcare coverage for following their conscience.

This report names these things. It puts them in an official federal record. That matters enormously because it makes denial harder and accountability possible.

I urge the Commission to retain the full strength of this documentation in the final report and to call on the executive branch to ensure that what happened between 2021 and 2025 is never allowed to happen again through clear executive orders, legislative action, and judicial nominations that take religious liberty seriously as a first freedom rather than an inconvenience.

Conclusion

I publish a weekly newsletter called *Christian Faith in the News*. Every week I sit with the stories of Americans who paid a price for their faith and try to make sure those stories do not disappear. The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission has done something similar on a scale I could never match. It has gathered over 100 of those stories and placed them in an official federal record where they cannot be ignored.

The First Amendment was the first thing the Founders chose to protect. Not because religion is a private preference to be tolerated, but because they understood that the freedom to live according to conscience is the foundation on which every other freedom rests. This report understands that too.

I stand behind its recommendations. I urge the Commission to finalize them without compromise.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Goodman
Southeast Regional Director, Citizens Defending Freedom
Church Elder and Lay Pastor, Shepherd Road Presbyterian Church (ARP)
Polk County, Florida

PII

PII

From: Patricia Diaz <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Separation of church and state-(Alba Vanegas)

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:20:58 -0400

Importance: Normal

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From: Daniel Castro <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment-Re: Recommendations of Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:21:29 -0400

Importance: Normal

I wish to briefly express my concern at one of the recommendations from the RLC, specifically having to do with the Establishment Clause and separation of Church and State. What has made this nation so great is this very idea of separating the governmental powers from the religious powers, and that led to our pilgrims from escaping for their lives from Europe at a time when the State and the Church were united. Our strength as a nation arises from this very core concept.

Please keep the government out of the Church, and keep the Church out of the government.

Respectfully,

Daniel Castro

From: Carmen Lilliam Fradera Olmo <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Keep State and Church Separated

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:21:36 -0400

Importance: Normal

Please, keep Church and state Separated according to the Constitution. We need our religious Liberty to worship. The state can not make laws to impose in religious matters. Thank you. Carmen from New Jersey.

From: Orlando <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Orlando Hernandez

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:23:25 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am troubled to read that the Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." With respect, that is exactly backwards — and as a person of faith, I find the idea alarming. That wall wasn't built by secularists to keep religion down. It was built by believers to keep the church free and accountable to its true head and husband, God. A bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it opens the door for government money and political favors to march right in, until churches are competing for grants and answering to politicians instead of to God. History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, and it isn't good for either one, but especially not good for the church. Please don't build that bridge. Keep the wall. It protects the church far more than it constrains it.

Sincerely,

Orlando Hernandez

Ooltewah, Tennessee

From: Carmen Cortes <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State must remain in place according to the Constitution

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:28:33 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear US Religious LibertyCommission

I'm sending this email to raise my voice in support for separation of church and state, and to reject the Commission's directive to the DOJ to redefine the Establishment Clause to build a "bridge" between church and state. We need a wall, not a bridge.

Sincerely, a sister from New Jersey

From: Lisa Dreers<[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII " [REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Petition re: Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:29:17 -0400

Importance: Normal

My name is Lisa Dreer and my address is [REDACTED] PII [REDACTED] PII

To Whom It May Concern:

The United States of America was founded on freedom, particularly religious freedom. We do not need the government to tell us who to worship, how to worship or when to worship. Each individual has the inalienable right from God their Creator to believe as their individual freedom of conscience allows.

This committtee wants to establish Sunday as the national day of rest. They want to pass a law that forces companies to have to pay employees overtime to work on Sunday. There are Christian and non-Christian religions that do not adhere to Sunday sacredness. This is being done at the expense of other Christian and non- Christian religions that don't observe Sunday as the Sabbath. Employers who do not observe Sunday and want to remain open will have to pay employees overtime to work on a day that they don't observe. This law will violate the establishment clause of the first amendment of the US constitution because it establishes one faith over another. If you give employees time and a half on Sundays employers will eventually close their doors on Sundays or have limited hours in order to save money and stay in business. Those who observe Friday or Saturday as the Sabbath will have a difficult time finding employment

because they will not be able to work on their day of rest and be off on Sunday as well.

This law establishing Sunday as the default day of rest is against the constitution and the 1st amendment and against religious freedom that our founding fathers fought hard to obtain.

There is a reason that the founding fathers separated and established a wall between church and state in this country. If we forget the lesson of Europe where the papacy and the state joined together to persecute those who did not adhere to the established belief system. We do not need government to tell us when and on what day to rest and worship or force us to do so.

Thomas Jefferson letter to Danbury, Connecticut Baptist Association:

“Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between Church & State.”

From: PII Vanderoef <PII>

To: PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] To those in government

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:29:30 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am a Christian who wants nothing to do with the state and government making decisions about my faith. A bridge is a two-way entity. We don't need the government's help in our religion and our faith journey. There needs to be separation. It's best for both the state and the church. We will both have our freedom this way!

T M Vanderoef

From: [REDACTED] PII

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:32:27 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear US Religious LibertyCommission

I'm sending this email to raise my voice in support for separation of church and state, and to reject the Commission's directive to the DOJ to redefine the Establishment Clause to build a "bridge" between church and state. The state can not establish laws to impose their will in religion. We need a wall, not a bridge.

Sincerely, a sister from New Jersey

From: Naula46s<[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State –

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:33:32 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

The separation of church and state is the cornerstone of religious liberty and individual freedom. Whenever religion and state power entangle, the government inevitably defaults to enforcing a preferred faith, paving the way for systemic discrimination, civil strife, and tyranny. Religion belongs strictly to the realm of personal conscience. For a diverse society to thrive, the government must remain strictly neutral, safeguarding every citizen's right to believe or not believe without threat of legislative interference. Global history provides a bleak blueprint of the oppression that arises under state-sponsored religion. Although early American colonists arrived to escape religious persecution in their homelands, the framers of the United States codified a true revolution by explicitly prohibiting a national church. They recognized that both faith and freedom flourish best when government stays out of the pulpit. To preserve true democracy and liberty for all, the wall of separation between church and state must remain absolute

Sincerely,
Naula Gordon
New York

From: Josian Suarez <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public COMMENT

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:34:06 -0400

Importance: Normal

separation of Church and State
Josean Suarez ..

From: Trina Crayton <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] I agree with Freedom of Pillars Comment. Please implement them.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:35:32 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone

From: Rick Pitt <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:37:44 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone

I am writing to express my belief that the separation of church and state should always remain in effect. On September 12, 1960 a speech was given by John F. Kennedy which stated the following.

I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute- where no Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote- where no church or church school is granted funds or political preference-and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.

I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish-where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source- where no religious body seeks to impose it's will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of it's officials-and where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all.

Remarks to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association

These are my beliefs as well

Rick Pitt

From: Rene García <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:39:18 -0400

Importance: Normal

Subject: Public Comment
Separation of Church and State
Rene Gsrcia

Dear Members of the Religious
Liberty Commission

I agree with Pillar of Freedoms
Comments. Please implement them.

Sincerely,
Rene Garcia
Clifton, New Jersey

From: Victor Garcia <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:39:51e0400

Importance: Normal

Victor Garcia, NJ

Sent from my iPhone

From: Dottie Jones <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Protect Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:39:58 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Being a citizen of the USA and a person of faith, I find it very troubling that the commission is contemplating bridging the gap between church and state. History has shown time and again that combining church and state leads to horrible consequences, including much bloodshed. During the Dark Ages...called this for a reason... the very thing you are considering, bridging the gap between church and state, resulted in brutality, persecution, denial of liberty and the deaths of millions of Christians. It was for this reason that our founding fathers fled Europe. When misguided or corrupt religious leaders use the state to enforce their false doctrines through legislation and force, it is not from God, but instead, it is Satan at work. God gives us freedom of choice. Who is man to deny us this freedom? Our religious life is between man and God. No legislation can successfully force morals or belief in God and can only result in persecution and death. Even the Bible supports the separation of church and state by telling us "give to Caesar (the government) what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's."

Bridging the gap would also put religion in the schools. Religion should start at home. I do not want my grandchildren and great grandchildren taught religion in school when we do not know what doctrines are being taught - the Bible or man's false doctrines.

I ask you, please do not remove the separation between church and state. Do not repeal the Johnson Amendment.

Sincerely,
D. Jones

From: "Dan Knoch" <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE AND CHURCH-STATE SEPARATION -DAN KNOCH

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:40:55 -0400

Importance: Normal

Hello White House Religious Liberty Commission,

I want to express my appreciation for the work you are doing to encourage honor, decency, and respect for religious liberty in our nation.

I also want to respectfully offer a caution that history has taught repeatedly: when governments use the force of law to impose religious beliefs or practices, the result is oppression rather than genuine faith. Throughout history—including in the United States—government enforcement of religion has always produced tyranny, even when those in power sincerely believed they were defending the truth.

The history of the Puritans illustrates this lesson. In 17th-century England, they faced persecution from the Crown and the established Church of England because of their desire to reform the church. Seeking the freedom to practice their faith, many came to America. However, they did not establish a society that embraced universal religious freedom. Instead, they sought to build a Bible-centered commonwealth in which religious conformity was enforced. As a result, dissenters—including Quakers, Baptists, and Catholics—were banished, punished, and, in some cases, executed for their beliefs.

The New Testament offers another powerful example. Jesus Himself was condemned by religious authorities and executed by the Roman government. Those who sought His death believed they were defending God's truth, while the civil government used its power to carry out the sentence. Their certainty did not prevent them from committing a profound injustice. This serves as a reminder that when religious authority and government power become intertwined, even those convinced they are acting righteously can commit grave injustice. **How wrong can those who are certain they are right become when religion is united with the power of the state?**

For these reasons, I respectfully ask the Commission to uphold and protect religious liberty without encouraging government coercion in matters of faith. America's commitment to freedom of conscience has been one of its greatest strengths. I hope we will continue to preserve that legacy rather than repeating the mistakes of history.

Thank you for your time and for considering these thoughts.

So I ask you, Please do not add this sin of tyranny to the history of the United States.

Thank you,
Respectfully,
Dan Knoch

PII

PII

From: Meldrina Bernard <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:43:51 -0400

Importance: Normal

Response to Urgent Appeal to Defend Religious Liberty.

From: Blake Billingsley <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment Blake Billingsley

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:48:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

The separation of church and state must be maintained at all costs in order to protect true religious freedom

From: Lorena Lopez <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendations of Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:50:07 -0400

Importance: Normal

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the recommendations of the Religious Liberty Committee submitted to President Donald J. Trump on June 26, 2026. While we are mindful of the Committee's labors, which resulted in the 12 recommendations released June 26, certain of which we agree with, we write to voice our concerns and objections to the Committee's first and ninth recommendations and its obviously insufficient consideration of the warnings of the Founding Fathers of the dangers of a union of church and state or the many lessons of history regarding same.

The Committee recommended that the Department of Justice "issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state." At the formal release of the Committee's recommendations on the same day, Committee Chair Dan Patrick publicly stated that "the separation of church and state is not in the constitution" and that the phrase "has no constitutional basis."

As citizens and students of history, and as Christians, we are alarmed lest the flawed and unconstitutional view of the Chair of the Committee of the so-called "proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and the separation of church and state" prove influential or worse, instructive, to the Department of Justice. If the Committee's opinion of the so-called "proper understanding" of the Establishment Clause is the same as that of its Chair, it is apparent that its understanding is not proper, but rather improper.

Founding Father, "Father of the Constitution", and fourth President of the United States, James Madison, contradicted Chair Dan Patrick's claim that the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution. Madison stated that "Strongly guarded as is the separation between Religion & Govt in the Constitution of the United States, the danger of encroachment by Ecclesiastical Bodies, may be illustrated by precedents already furnished in their short history." According to James Madison, the separation of church and state is in the Constitution. As to whether James Madison, who is the principal author of the Establishment Clause, or Dan Patrick, is the greater authority on this subject, we think it not difficult for reasonably minded people to ascertain.

Certainly, the Founding Fathers were all aware of the persecution of the Baptists, Quakers, Jews, and others in some of the colonies. They had seen firsthand the ear croppings, whippings, imprisonment, and hangings in Massachusetts and other colonies.

In Europe, the persecution of the martyrs is well documented. Today we take the Bible for granted but forget that William Tyndale was executed for translating the Bible into the English language, not by atheists but by religious bigots. It was a union of church and state that suppressed speech and the freedom of the press in England. It was a union of church and state that prohibited the work of translation of the Bible, which changed the world. It was a union of church and state that necessitated his flight to Europe. It was a union of church and state that killed him.

We respectfully ask that the Department of Justice, in considering the issue of public guidance of the separation of church and state, consider the history of William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania and early Founding Father, who was repeatedly jailed for his religious faith in England. The Pennsylvania Colony became a haven, not from atheist persecutors but from religious persecutors who did not believe in the separation of church and state. The same is true of Roger Williams, founder of the colony of Rhode Island, who was ordered arrested for declaring that the civil magistrate cannot enforce the first table of the Decalogue. We ask that the Committee take into account the brutal public whipping of President Abraham Lincoln's five-time great-grandfather, Obadiah Holmes, in the Massachusetts colony, for the "crime" of religious dissent. Obadiah Holmes was not whipped by

atheists. He was whipped by Puritan bigots who did not believe in the separation of church and state. We respectfully request that the Department of Justice consider this history in the issuance of public guidance on the subject.

We are concerned that the Committee neglected to take into account the impact of the separation of church and state on the other rights codified in the First Amendment. Free speech and freedom of the press, for example, owe their flourishing in the modern world in large part to the separation of church and state in America. Prior to the protections in the First Amendment, the Roman Catholic Church for centuries maintained a list of banned books called the Index Librorum Prohibitorum. The books were subject to confiscation, and the possession of them resulted in the punishment of the owner.

Unfortunately, the Committee makes no mention of the censorship in this context of Galileo and Kepler, Kant and Locke, John Milton and Maimonides, John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, David Hume and Edward Gibbon, and many others, all at the behest of the Roman Papacy, which is itself a union of church and state. Free speech in the Western world is the legacy of those who risked the wrath of a unified church and state, often at the cost of their lives. We would also ask that the Department of Justice consider the repeated modern calls from the papal power today for the censorship of the internet and the suppression of free speech, contrary to the First Amendment. We have no doubt that the censorship of Galileo, Kepler, Milton, and others was prosecuted under the justification of the censorship of misinformation, also.

The Roman Church was not alone in this persecution, either. We would ask the Department of Justice in its formulation of public guidance on the separation of church and state to remember the religious persecutions carried out at the behest of John Calvin in Geneva against religious dissenters such as Michael Servetus, who paid with his life for his writings and teachings. Servetus was executed by a union of church and state. We are concerned at the public statements of those who would create such a system in America.

Therefore, we respectfully ask, what proper guidance can the Department of Justice hope to give to the public on the “proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and the separation of church and state” if it is directed in its object by a Committee and a Committee Chair, who has neglected to more fully analyze the reasons for the separation of church and state, or the reasons why the United States codified the disestablishment of church and state in the First Amendment in the first instance?

The reference to the wall of separation between church and state is not only mentioned by President Thomas Jefferson in the letter to the Danbury Baptists, which, of course, it is. What is often left out of the narrative is that Jefferson said that he personally believed that the principle of the separation of church and state is codified in the Constitution. Therein, Jefferson wrote: “Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building a wall of separation between Church & State.”

James Madison wrote, “It is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties. We hold this prudent jealousy to be the first duty of Citizens and one of the noblest characteristics of the late Revolution. The free men of America did not wait till usurped power had strengthened itself by exercise and entangled the question in precedents. They saw all the consequences in the principle, and they avoided the consequences by denying the principle. We revere this lesson too much soon to forget it.”

Lastly, we object to the recommendation of the Committee that the Johnson Amendment be removed. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are mindful of Our Lord’s words that we “render to Caesar what is Caesar, and to God the things that are God’s.” Jesus Christ established the principle of the separation of church and state and taught that what belongs to God cannot be rendered to Caesar. The application of this teaching is that religionists, ambitious for civil power, and politicians, ambitious for their endorsement, are to be kept separate in the American system of politics, as the Constitution requires. The union of church and state results in the corruption of both, a result that neither should desire, and neither can afford.

Madison stated that “The number, the industry, and the morality of the Priesthood, & the devotion of the people have been manifestly increased by the total separation of the Church from the State.” And he was right. If the Johnson Amendment is removed, religionists who want civil power will publicly stump and promise their votes and congregational dollars in exchange for political favors, and the politicians will be doubtless all too eager to reciprocate in the form of legislation that the religionists desire, provided they will aid their attempts to gain office.

In his anonymous treatise published in the Boston Gazette, John Adams, later the second President of the United States, wrote that canon law was a tyrannical form of government, as was feudal law, but that the worst of all forms of governments was a union of the two. And it was Madison who stated that, “In the Papal System, Government and Religion are in a manner consolidated, & that is found to be the worst of Governments.”

We respectfully request, therefore, that the Department of Justice not adopt recommendations 1 and 9 of the Committee and that it adopt recommendation 1 of the Committee that it convene a public hearing, with written and oral submissions from the public, to more comprehensively study the question of the separation of church and state in history, and in American history in particular, a study which we would enthusiastically support.

Yours truly,

Lorena Lopez

From: Alfred Irizarry <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment- Separation of Church and State- (Alfred Irizarry)

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:52:45 -0400

Importance: Normal

Although I recognize the stated purpose of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission—to examine threats to religious freedom and recommend protections for people of faith—I firmly oppose any suggestion that religious liberty requires abandoning or weakening the separation of church and state. True religious freedom is preserved not when government promotes, favors, or enforces religion, but when every person is free to worship according to conscience—or not to worship—without governmental coercion.

The constitutional principle is clear: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof” (U.S. Constitution, Amendment I). Therefore, I support the protection of free religious exercise while rejecting every effort to unite ecclesiastical influence with civil authority, since such a union ultimately threatens both the purity of the church and the liberty of the individual conscience.

Jesus Himself declared, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). In harmony with His words, let us respect those principles of faith that preserve a clear separation between Christ’s kingdom and the governments of this world, thereby safeguarding both the integrity of religion and the liberty of conscience.

Thanks for your attention to this matter
Alfred Irizarry

From: "A.sAnaman"s [REDACTED] PII

To: "RLC (OASG)" [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:52:59 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom it may concern,

Please continue to keep church and state separate. This is our constitutional right.

Thanks

From: Paul Schnurrs <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on Church, State, and Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:56:00 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission and the Department of Justice:

I write to you as an American citizen, a Christian, and someone who loves this country deeply. I feel compelled to speak when I believe one of its greatest freedoms is at risk.

I respectfully ask the Commission and the Department of Justice to reject any recommendation from any person, organization, denomination, or religious body that would blur the line between church and state.

This is not a minor question of wording. It is a question of liberty of conscience. America's strength has never come from government favoring one religion over another. It has come from liberty of conscience: the right of every person to worship God freely — or not worship at all — without fear that the government will reward one faith and disadvantage another.

That freedom is precious. Once surrendered, history warns that it is often regained only through great suffering.

As a follower of Jesus, I believe this issue is more than political. It is deeply personal. The Bible teaches me that conscience belongs to God, not to the state. Religious liberty is not merely a privilege granted by government. It is a right that government has a duty to respect. Genuine faith cannot be legislated, coerced, purchased, or enforced.

The government must protect the free exercise of religion. But the moment the state moves from protecting religious liberty to promoting, preferring, or enforcing religious practice, it stops protecting liberty and starts choosing winners and losers.

History has already shown us where that road can lead.

When church and state unite, it may begin with noble intentions. But civil power changes the nature of religious influence. What begins as official encouragement can become preference. What begins as preference can become pressure. What begins as pressure can become punishment for those who refuse to conform. The victims have changed throughout history, but the danger remains the same.

Many of our Founders understood this. They knew from European and colonial history the destruction that could follow when governments and churches became partners in enforcing religious conformity. They helped establish a constitutional order in which faith would remain free from government control, and government would remain free from ecclesiastical control. That principle has protected Americans of many faiths, and of no faith, for generations.

Please do not allow that safeguard to be weakened.

The issue is not whether religious people may speak, vote, serve, teach, preach, share their convictions, or participate in public life. Of course they may, and they must remain free to do so. The issue is whether government itself may favor, promote, or enforce religious belief or practice.

On that question, history, conscience, and the Constitution all give the same warning: government should not become the instrument of any church, denomination, religious movement, or religious institution.

Whether a recommendation comes from the largest denomination in the world or the smallest local organization should make no difference. Government should never become the enforcement arm of any religious belief, practice, or institution. Once that line is crossed, religious liberty is no longer protected as a right. It is treated as a favor granted by those who hold power.

I ask you to preserve the wall that has protected both religion and government for nearly two and a half centuries. Keep government from controlling the church, and keep religious institutions from becoming instruments of government power. Both religion and government are stronger and freer when they remain within their proper boundaries.

The decisions made by this Commission and the Department of Justice will affect not only this generation, but generations yet unborn. I respectfully ask you to choose liberty over coercion, conscience over compulsion, and the Constitution over religious preference.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your consideration.

Respectfully,
Paul Schnurr

From: Florence Castello <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:56:41 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

As a citizen and a person of faith. I want to maintain the separation of church and state, as reflected in the First Amendment.

Sincerely,
Florence Castello

From: Claudine Williams <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: Strongly Oppose Any Effort to Repeal or Weaken the Johnson Amendment Dear [Name of Senator / Representative / Commission Chair], I am writing to you today as a constituent to express my strong opposition to any efforts to repeal or weaken the Johnson Amendment. I firmly believe that maintaining this long-standing provision is essential to protecting the historic separation of church and state, as well as preserving the integrity of both our religious institutions and our democratic process. For seven decades, the Johnson Amendment has served as a vital safeguard. By ensuring that 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations—including churches, temples, mosques, and charities—do not endorse or oppose political candidates, the law protects houses of worship from becoming battlegrounds for partisan politics. Allowing houses of worship to engage in partisan electoral politics would be deeply damaging for several reasons: Preserving the Integrity of Faith: Religion is at its strongest when it relies upon spiritual persuasion rather than political power. Introducing partisan endorsements into sanctuaries risks dividing congregations along political lines and eroding the sacred, unifying role that houses of worship play in our communities. Preventing Political Dark Money: Repealing the amendment would allow political donors to channel untaxed, unaccountable "dark money" through religious organizations to influence elections. This would fundamentally distort the purpose of charitable tax exemptions. Maintaining Government Neutrality: True religious liberty depends upon the government remaining neutral in matters of faith. When civil authority and religious institutions become entangled through political endorsements and campaign finance, the historic boundary between church and state is dangerously diminished. Government is at its best when it protects the free exercise of religion for all citizens, not when it seeks to integrate religious institutions into the machinery of political campaigns. The preservation of religious liberty depends entirely upon maintaining the proper boundaries between civil authority and matters of conscience. For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to protect the Johnson Amendment and reject any legislative efforts or interpretations that would weaken it. Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your dedication to upholding the principles of the Constitution. Respectfully submitted, [REDACTED] PII

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:56:56 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone

From: Nathan Tylers <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – RECOMMENDATIONS 1 AND 9 – NATHAN TYLER

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:58:16 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Commissioners,

I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to address the Religious Liberty Commission on matters of mutual interest.

Having read the draft Report, I find myself in sympathy with many of the experiences expressed in testimony heard by the Commission. In the various engagements of public life, Christians face from time to time a natural friction between their sincerely held views and the ability to practice them with ease. Nevertheless, faithfulness to conscience demands a humble protest at such times, like the “Protestants” at Speyer, that the individual answers to God alone in matters of faith.

I have experienced personally that truth. As a pastor, I have assisted students studying in universities, employees in the workplace, and parents seeking to assert their responsibilities, to obtain concessions for their conscientious practices. For my own part, observing an entire Sabbath day of rest and worship every Saturday has given rise to numerous situations where I had to choose between my faith and some benefit or participation that would otherwise be available to me. But it is a choice made joyfully, on the side of one’s faith, if it is made with a sense of doing what one believes is right.

The Commission identified many things to be set right. Indeed, it is hard to believe that, living under the light of the “First Freedom” in America today, it would even be necessary to argue in favor of the right of people of faith to practice that faith without fear of retribution.

Nevertheless, there are two points on which I would like to comment.

REGARDING RECOMMENDATION 1 – On Separation of Church and State

The discussion on the idea of separation between the church and the state pinned the origin of the concept of the “wall of separation” to Jefferson’s letter to Danbury. The report posed its own language, of religious liberty being a “bridge” between church and state.

This subject is more complex than a single metaphor can adequately address. Roger Williams wrote of the “garden of the church” and “wilderness of the state” (or the world at large, depending on the context). These two are different spheres, with mutually exclusive responsibilities.

One way of thinking of this, in a Judeo-Christian framework, is to think of the two tables of the Ten Commandments, distinguished by their contents. The first, with its demand that God is first in our allegiance, that He is not to be represented by carved images, that His name is not to be taken in vain, and that He is to be honored by rest on the Sabbath, is entirely in the domain of God and our relationship to Him. The state has no jurisdiction here. The second table of the Ten Commandments, prohibiting murder, theft, deception and so on, is in the domain of the state, because it regulates the relationships between human beings. This is the power that God, the sovereign of all created beings, has delegated on earth to righteous government.

Although many submissions heard by the Commission have provided examples of the power of the state exercised to curtail their God-given rights to practice their faith, a study of history will show that an even greater risk arises when those who believe they act for God seek to compel others to do right toward Him.

Whenever, in history, the church was persecuted, it flourished despite that persecution. But too often, when the church prevailed, it inevitably lost the spirit of the gospel, and sought to limit others’ rights.

Persecution, very often then, is not by the godless toward the believing. It is often perpetrated by those in a position of power, who believe they act for God, yet trample on the God-given rights of others.

This is what figures like Roger Williams experienced first-hand: persecution by the church acting in concert with the state to impose on the rights of the individual. Williams' vision of a state which did not compel in matters of faith was the foundation of his Rhode Island colony, and a great influence in the forming of the First Amendment.

We must not lose that sense today. The argument for religious liberty is not one-sided, and in our zeal to make right the injustices that have sadly taken place in this, the land of liberty, we must also not neglect to safeguard the distinct roles of church and state, so that nothing will cross the "bridge" from the one to the other which does not belong there.

Therefore I SUBMIT to the Commission, to broaden its discussion regarding Recommendation 1, to acknowledge the balancing factors that point to a difference between the roles of church and state, informed by history, and a commitment to maintaining that distinction. This would be the true and un-strained meaning of the "separation of church and state."

REGARDING RECOMMENDATION 9 – The Johnson Amendment

Churches, by their very nature, must comment on social issues, and even political issues with a moral value attached. This is what the Constitution protects. Pastors in the pulpit should be free.

As an example of freedom under threat, the application of Covid-19 pandemic provisions put a strain on freedom of speech. This crept into the social media landscape, right at a time when many churches were expanding their social media reach in order to be able to continue to serve their people. The prospect of censorship on channels of communication with their constituents had a chilling effect on the freedom of speech of pastors. Some resorted to using code words on their live streams to continue encouraging their listeners to follow their conscientious convictions—an incredible situation to find ourselves in, within a free country.

The Commission reported that it heard about the Johnson Amendment being used to restrict free religious speech. It also heard that courts ultimately upheld First Amendment rights in the case of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, when it decided to fight back. And while indeed, "no church should have to do that," it is encouraging that the Constitution was the legal backstop which ended the controversy. It would seem that this prosecution may have been a matter of misapplication of the law. To the extent that it was, the Amendment was improperly applied.

Crucially, however, the Amendment itself contains an important consideration that we should not jettison. That is where the church and politics may court one another to promote their own interests.

The text of the Johnson Amendment, as currently amended in the Code, is:

"and which does not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office"

What does the Johnson Amendment actually prohibit? Politicians courting the favor of religious organizations in order to be elected, and religious bodies promising support in exchange for favors. Churches actively promoting a particular candidate, and making the pulpit a direct part of a political campaign. Such a union of church and state would be inappropriate for both.

History informs us that the church should not seek to wield the arm of the state. The Johnson Amendment points to this.

Therefore I SUBMIT to the Commission, that it should remove its recommendation for repeal of the Johnson Amendment, instead seeking to promote clarity on its legitimate application, while preserving the principle of keeping politicians from benefiting from endorsement by non-profit religious organizations.

CONCLUSION

Genuinely-held religion will always be practiced by faithful individuals, no matter the consequences. The role of the state is to protect and preserve the right to do so. At the same time, there is a legitimate separation to be maintained between the institution of the church and the institution of the state.

I hope and pray that the Commission will lend weight toward keeping America what it has been—the defender of religious freedom.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nathan Tyler

From: David Filippis <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT Draft Report America's First Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:58:18 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

c/o U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

RE: Opposition to the Draft Report and Rejection of Church-State Separation

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission's draft report and the public statements made by its leadership dismissing the constitutional separation of church and state. The claim that this foundational principle is a "myth" or legally illegitimate fundamentally misinterprets the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and threatens true religious freedom for all Americans.

The historical "wall of separation" championed by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison was not designed to suppress faith, but to protect it. By dismantling this barrier, the Commission's recommendations—such as funneling public tax dollars into sectarian environments, rolling back protections like the Johnson Amendment, and expanding government-sanctioned religious displays in public schools—risk turning the state into an arbiter of religious truth. True religious pluralism cannot survive if the government actively endorses, funds, or promotes specific majoritarian religious beliefs over others.

A Department of Justice that weaponizes "religious liberty" to dismantle secular protections fails its duty to ensure equal rights under the law. I urge the Commission to reject these recommendations, respect established Supreme Court precedent, and reaffirm the historic boundaries between civil government and religious conscience.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;

Respectfully,

From: Jeanne Newman <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comments/Religious Liberty Commission Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:59:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to express my concern over the proposal to build bridges between church and state instead of maintaining separation between the two. I believe that we would be repeating the errors of the past should we push to move in that direction. Many of the first settlers that came to America fled Europe in part to escape religious oppression and persecution. The church in Europe used the government to enforce its decrees. Roger Williams, the founder of the colony of Rhode Island, denounced "inforced uniformity of religion" in which majority religious groups that controlled political power, punished, and in many cases persecuted dissenters.

One major attribute that makes America beautiful, is her alignment with the biblical principle that echoes the character of God, in that He does not force any man, rather, He allows one the freedom to choose. As a practicing christian, in my studying of the bible, it is clear that God does not use force or coercion with matters of conscience, nor does He force us to worship Him. Contrary to building bridges, He advised separation, noted three times in the bible, that we render what belongs to Caesar (government) to Caesar, and to God what is God's. We have seen throughout the pages of history that when church and state combine, it usually leads to persecution of minority groups, government corruption, and the loss of religious freedom, rather than the promotion of religious freedom.

Please reconsider all proposed measures that seek to build bridges between church and state, though the intention is to uplift and maintain religious freedom, history has repeatedly shown us, and should have taught us, that combining the two has resulted in the opposite of the intended. Remember the Salem witch trials of 1692 where the courts used church rules to convict people as being witches, and 19 innocent people were hung as a result. Remember The Act of Uniformity in England in 1662 where the King of England was the head of the Anglican Church and passed laws forcing everyone to use the official prayer books causing priests not following these church rules to lose their jobs, and people from different churches were fined and put into prison. Remember in AD 380 when the Roman Empire banned non-christian faiths, causing them to lose their civil rights. Remember the Spanish Inquisitions of 1478-1834 where those suspected to not follow official church teachings were hunted down, tortured, persecuted, and forced to flee their homes. Our founders created the Establishment Clause to help prevent such abuses of power, and the Free Exercise Clause so we are able to practice religion, or not to practice it at all, and not fear government punishment. No need to fall into the same pitfalls of past errors.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanne Newman

From: marvina baksh <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:59:53 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

I respectfully submit this public comment out of deep concern for the future of religious liberty in the United States. I urge the Commission to reject any recommendation directed at the Department of Justice or any other branch of government that would weaken the historic constitutional principle of keeping religion and government institutionally separate, as well as any proposal that encourages greater unity between the two.

America's greatest contribution to the cause of religious liberty has not been the state's endorsement of religion, but the protection of every person's God-given right to worship according to conscience without government interference. This principle has allowed religious communities of every tradition to flourish in freedom while preserving civil peace.

As a Bible-believing seventh-day Sabbath keeper, I write from the perspective of a religious minority whose spiritual ancestors experienced firsthand the dangers that arise when government aligns itself with the religious majority. During America's colonial period, Baptists, Quakers, Jews, seventh-day Sabbath keepers, and many other religious minorities endured discrimination, imprisonment, fines, and civil persecution because certain established churches enjoyed the support of the state. These injustices were among the very reasons the Founders rejected religious establishments and adopted the First Amendment.

The experience of Seventh-day Adventists provides another historical warning. During the late nineteenth century, Adventists who faithfully observed God's seventh-day Sabbath were prosecuted under Sunday laws that were imposed, once again, by the religious Christian majority. Some of our fellow believers were fined, imprisoned, and even forced into chain gangs because they chose to honor Saturday as the biblical Sabbath rather than conform to popular Blue Law Sunday observances. Their only offense was obeying the dictates of conscience and remaining faithful to their religious convictions. Their experience stands as a warning that whenever civil authority is used to enforce religious beliefs or practices, freedom of conscience is inevitably endangered, and religious minorities are often the first to endure discrimination and persecution.

The medieval Inquisition demonstrated how religious institutions armed with civil authority suppressed dissent through torture, punishment, and even death. Various forms of religious extremism, including movements that have justified violence in the name of Islam, have shown how state-backed religious ideology can deny liberty of conscience. Likewise, communist regimes that officially embraced atheism illustrate the opposite side of the same error: when government suppresses religion altogether, believers are again persecuted. Though these different oppressive systems differed in ideology, they shared one common characteristic—the concentration of civil power over matters of conscience.

The strength of the American constitutional system is that it avoids these extremes. Government was never commissioned to direct the spiritual lives of the people. The mission of the state is to preserve order, protect individual rights, and secure equal treatment under the law. The mission of the church is altogether different: to preach the gospel, emphasize truth and love through persuasion, not coercion, and call people to a voluntary faith, as Jesus did. These two institutions are strongest and remain uncorrupted when each remains within its proper sphere.

Our nation has become home to a diverse group of churches, synagogues, mosques, and religious communities because government has generally refrained from controlling or establishing religion. This constitutional heritage has protected both the majority and the minority alike. I therefore respectfully urge the Commission to recommend policies that reinforce—not diminish—the constitutional barriers separating ecclesiastical authority from civil government. Religious liberty is best preserved when government neither advances nor inhibits religion but instead protects the equal rights of all people to follow their own conscience.

The United States must remain a nation where every church is free to proclaim its beliefs without governmental control and where every citizen is free to worship—or not to worship—without governmental pressure. History has already taught us the consequences of abandoning this principle. We should not repeat mistakes that countless generations have paid dearly to overcome. For if we do, we would once again be fanning the flames of intolerance, religious bigotry, and injustice.

Respectfully submitted,

Marvina Baksh

From: Jonathan Castro <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment-Re: Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:01:38 -0400

Importance: Normal

I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the work of the Religious Liberty Commission. I must express my opposition to the 1st and 9th recommendations submitted to President D. Trump on June 26th, 2026 by this commission.

Throughout history, one of the principles that has distinguished our country from most other countries in the world and that has helped pave the way for the growth, innovation, success, and even power that have been synonymous with America, is the freedom of thought, of speech, of religion that our governing body has offered its citizens and protected for their sake. A person's ability to choose or reject God in his life is one of those things that separate humans from the rest of the animal kingdom. It is in fact one of the very things God values most, as is underlined by His giving His Son to die for humankind, and thus giving individuals the ability to choose God and His Word as the guide for their life and mind. As a Christian citizen of this country I believe it is my duty to stand up for my neighbor's right to reject Christianity even as I am convinced that his accepting it is the best and wisest choice he could make for himself. Our Lord Himself drew a line between the government and religion when he indicated people should "give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

When the pilgrims arrived in Plymouth, they came seeking freedom to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience and fleeing the persecution Europe's marriage of church and state was creating for those who believed differently than the ruling church ordained. Those who took on the responsibilities of creating the rules that would govern our country at its beginnings were careful to define that any steps toward allowing the government to dictate in matters of faith and heart, should be fought against. Even if they had not made such ideology clear, my heart would not have peace unless I clearly expressed my conviction and requested that the government and church be kept separate in this US. The only Theocracy that has proven just, fair and truly dedicated to the well-being of all its citizens has been that of Jehova's ruling over Israel until the day Israel demanded a king for itself.

History provides ample evidence as to what happens when a government dictates what its citizens must believe and how they are to express their faith in their day to day life. Whom a person worships, when and how must be decisions individuals make with God's leading alone. As I pray for the work that this Commission has been entrusted to define, I ask Heaven to endow each of its members with wisdom and clarity to keep government and religion separate in America.

Sincerely,
Lorena A. Castro

From: Brother Fred <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:01:48 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

The rights recognized in the Declaration of Independence are described as **inalienable rights**—rights that are inherent to every human being and are not granted by government. Government exists to protect those rights, not to create or remove them.

America's constitutional system has long sought to preserve liberty of conscience, limited government, and the separation of church and state. Regardless of one's religious beliefs, history demonstrates that when civil and religious authority unite to exercise coercive power, individual liberty suffers. The persecution and oppression witnessed during portions of the Middle Ages serve as a sobering reminder of the dangers of such alliances.

As both a citizen and a Christian, I respectfully urge the Commission to carefully consider the long-term consequences of any recommendations that could weaken the separation of church and state or diminish freedom of conscience. Religious faith is strongest when it is embraced voluntarily, never through government influence or coercion.

From my understanding of Scripture, particularly Revelation 13 and 14, the union of religious and civil power is presented as a warning rather than an ideal. Whether or not others share this interpretation, history repeatedly shows that concentrated religious and political authority can threaten the liberties of future generations.

Please reconsider any recommendations that could encourage such a union. The decisions made today will affect not only our generation but those that follow. I respectfully ask the Commission to protect the constitutional principles of religious liberty, freedom of conscience, and the equal rights of all people.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration. I respectfully ask that you prayerfully consider the lasting implications of your recommendations for religious liberty, freedom of conscience, and future generations.

Respectfully,

Fred Gresham

Texas, USA

From: Linda Clever <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] 12 Opportunities to Strengthen Religious Liberty for All Americans

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:05:43 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Commission Members and Staff:

I appreciate your efforts to assure religious liberty in America. I am dismayed, however, at the examples and words you have chosen to support your point of view, such as “genital mutilation surgery” and the omission of scores of terrifying experiences that people of faiths other than Christian have suffered.

Virtually all religions have a version of “The Golden Rule. The Golden Rule seems like a reasonable guideline that does not need “clarification.” Why does the current language of the Constitution need change or clarifying?

I am a member of Rotary. Its Four-Way Test is basically, “Is it true?”, “Is it Fair?”, “Does it benefit everyone?” and “Does it build community?” It would be a good idea to apply this highly respected statement of beliefs and actions to your draft—and change it to a version that is kinder, fairer and fits Jesus’ teaching.

Thank you,
Harrison Johnson

From: Lori Kepners <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment—Chapters 4, 5, and 6, Executive Summary and Appendix B recommendations—Christian Legal Society's

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:06:38 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: 2026.07.13_CLS_RL_Commission_Comment_-_final_with_attachments.pdf

Inline-Images: image.png

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

Please see the attached PDF comment letter from Christian Legal Society's Center for Law & Religious Freedom in response to the Draft Report. It includes attachments for ease of reference.

Sincerely,
Lori Kepner

Lori Kepner | **CHRISTIAN LEGAL SOCIETY** | Senior Counsel

[REDACTED] PII | Springfield, VA 22151 | [REDACTED] PII





July 13, 2026

Religious Liberty Commission
Office of the Associate Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

PII

Re: Public Comment—Chapters 4, 5, and 6, Executive Summary and Appendix B
recommendations—Christian Legal Society's Center for Law & Religious Freedom

Dear Members of the Commission and its Staff:

Christian Legal Society (CLS) and its Center for Law & Religious Freedom (Center) appreciate the tremendous work the Religious Liberty Commission (Commission) has done to highlight the God-given, unalienable human right of religious freedom and the current threats to religious freedom in our country.

CLS and the Center have defended the rights of individuals and organizations to practice and live out their religious identity and beliefs for over fifty years. We have advocated in Congress for the passage of, and in the Supreme Court for the defense of, vital federal legislation like the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), and the Equal Access Act of 1984 (EAA) to protect all Americans' religious freedom.

CLS has law student chapters at approximately 130 public and private law schools nationwide. CLS student chapters typically are small groups of students who meet for prayer, Bible study, and worship. All students of any faith or no faith are welcome at CLS meetings. As Christian groups have done for 2000 years, CLS student chapters require their leaders to agree with CLS's statement of faith, signifying their agreement with the traditional Christian beliefs that define CLS.

The Center was founded in 1975 to defend the rights of students, student groups, teachers, and parents in public schools and on college campuses to engage in religious expression. We support religious organizations' right to be authentically religious by adopting policies and hiring based on religious beliefs. We believe that the unique religious pluralism of our country is a result of strong First Amendment protections that we must preserve for future generations.

To that end, we respectfully offer these comments on the Draft Report. CLS and its Center were grateful for the opportunity for senior counsel, Kim Colby, to serve as a witness before the Commission at its Second Hearing on Religious Liberty in Public Education on September 8,

2025.¹ For that reason, Part I addresses Chapters 4, 5, and 6 with their focus on public education issues, both at the K-12 level and on college campuses. Part II addresses the Draft Report's Twelve Recommendations in the Executive Summary and Appendix B, along with some of the additional recommendations in Appendix B.

Part I: Chapter 4 (Students Don't Check their Rights at the Schoolhouse Gate), Chapter 5 (The Fight for Faith on College Campuses), and Chapter 6 (The Rights and Roles of Parents and Teachers)

We commend the Commission for inviting many brave students to tell their stories about having their freedom of speech and free exercise of religion suppressed by public school administrators. Some commenters may incorrectly claim that the stories of the students who testified before the Commission are either exaggerated or aberrations.

But sadly, their stories are but the tip of the proverbial iceberg, as Center attorneys know too well from decades of experience. For *fifty* years, the Center has worked with real students with similar stories of public school employees ordering them not to read their Bibles in their free time, say grace over their lunch, refer to religious beliefs in their schoolwork, credit God in their graduation speeches, wear t-shirts with religious sayings, or meet for prayer and Bible study when other students meet to play chess or video games.

Sometimes education officials act out of ignorance of the First Amendment's protections for students' religious expression. Some act out of a belief that the school is their personal fiefdom to which the First Amendment does not apply. Too often, they act out of personal hostility to religion in general or, even worse, from hostility to specific religious beliefs. Too many public education officials fail to honor their constitutional duty to respect every student's religious beliefs and speech.

A. Comments on the Draft Report's Recommendations for Chapter 4

1. Issue additional guidance on students' religious liberty rights. We commend the recommendation that the Department of Justice (DOJ) issue additional guidance similar to the *Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools*.

- a. We commend the Commission's list of proposed topics and its objective of "further strengthen[ing] and clarify[ing] the rights of students in public schools to:
 - i. Form and lead religious student clubs;
 - ii. Receive the same level of support for religious clubs and access to school facilities and advertising methods that non-religious clubs receive;
 - iii. Require club leaders and members to meet religious requirements;
 - iv. Read and distribute religious materials at times when reading and distributing non-religious materials is allowed;

¹ Second Hearing of the Religious Liberty Comm'n, Hearing Transcript., 73-75 (Statement of Kimberlee Colby), <https://www.justice.gov/religious-liberty-commission/media/1428746/dl?inline>.

- v. Wear clothing with religious messages;
 - vi. Be excused from school for religious practice and observance, such as to celebrate religious holy days;
 - vii. Attend off-site religious instruction through constitutionally permissible release-time programs;
 - viii. Participate in moments of silence, student-led prayer, and other student-led free exercise;
 - ix. Engage in religious expression at times and events where students are allowed to engage in private expression, such as school talent shows or graduation ceremonies.”
- b. As detailed in the attached memorandum,² we suggest five additions to the above list:
- i. Religious student groups may meet during non-instructional time, including lunch and activity periods;³
 - ii. Add “funding” after “advertising methods” so that 1.a.ii., *supra*, reads “Receive the same level of support for religious clubs and access to school facilities, advertising methods, and funding that non-religious groups receive”;⁴
 - iii. Add “religious” as a modifier for “club” in 1.a.iii., *supra*. While it is clearly invidious discrimination for non-religious groups to use religious criteria for leadership, it is not unlawful discrimination for a religious group to do so.
 - iv. Specific mention in topic viii, *supra*, that students may organize and participate in “See You at the Pole” gatherings as part of an annual, nationwide event in the early weeks of the school year; such specific mention in past guidance has been beneficial in providing definitive guidance for school administrators.
 - v. We respectfully submit that a beneficial and tested template for additional DOJ guidance is the Trump Administration’s guidance issued on January 16, 2020, due to its continuity in format and substance with guidance issued in 1995, 1998, and 2003.⁵

² See Attachment A, Ethics & Public Policy Center and Christian Legal Society, Memorandum “Re: Department of Education’s ‘Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools,’” dated Apr. 1, 2026.

³ See, e.g., *Donovan v. Punxsutawney Sch. Bd.*, 336 F.3d 211 (3d Cir. 2003); *Ceniceros v. Bd. of Trustees of San Diego Unified Sch. Dist.*, 106 F.3d 878 (9th Cir. 1997).

⁴ *Prince v. Jacoby*, 303 F.3d 1074 (9th Cir. 2002) (Equal Access Act requires same access to funding for religious groups that nonreligious groups receive).

⁵ Dept. of Educ., *Updated Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools*, 85 Fed. Reg. 3257 (Jan. 21, 2020), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/01/21/2020-00876/updated-guidance-on-constitutionally-protected-prayer-and-religious-expression-in-public-elementary>. CLS was co-author and co-leader of a coalition that agreed on a joint statement that became the basis of the Department of Education’s guidance in 1995. Dept. of Educ., *Religious Expression in Public Schools: A Statement of Principles*, June 1998, at 10, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED416591.pdf>. (listing CLS as one of eight organizations “that can answer questions on religious expression in public schools.”).

- c. In future DOJ guidance, we suggest adding a succinct discussion⁶ of the landmark decision of *Board of Education v. Mergens*, 496 U.S. 226 (1990), in which the Supreme Court held that religious activity on public school property did not violate the Establishment Clause and upheld the constitutionality and broad application of the Equal Access Act of 1984. Its explanation of the distinction between government’s religious speech and students’ religious speech would be helpful to the lay reader, including school administrators, teachers, students, and parents, who need to understand why students’ religious expression is protected in public school settings. Illuminating quotes from *Mergens* include: 1) “there is a crucial difference between *government* speech endorsing religion, which the Establishment Clause forbids, and *private* speech endorsing religion, which the Free Speech and Free Exercise Clauses protect” and 2) “[t]he proposition that schools do not endorse everything they fail to censor is not complicated.” *Id.* at 250.
 - d. We request that future DOJ guidance address religious community groups’ right of equal access to public school facilities because too often this has been a context in which public school administrators discriminate against religious expression.⁷ Religious community groups have an equal access right to meet after school with elementary school students,⁸ to distribute information to students’ parents about such meetings,⁹ and to meet in school facilities for religious speech on evenings and weekends.¹⁰
2. **Support expansion of the Equal Access Act.** The Center has long defended the right of elementary school children who have parental consent to attend meetings with religious content. As discussed in our comments on Chapter 5, *rather than expanding the EAA* to include religious student groups at the postsecondary level, the Center requests that this recommendation be modified to support passage of the Equal Campus Access Act of 2026 (HR 5505/S 2859). The EAA and the Equal Campus Access Act are distinct legislative mechanisms that sufficiently differ in language, scope, beneficiaries, forum, and operational detail to merit separate legislative protection. The Equal Campus Access Act language is at B.3 *infra*.
 3. **Accountability for public school districts to comply with federal law protecting religious expression and activity.** We would suggest a separate additional recommendation to ensure compliance with federal law. In 2002, Congress enacted 20 U.S.C. § 7904, requiring local school districts to certify annually that “no policy of the local educational agency prevents, or otherwise denies participation in,

⁶ *Id.* at 3262-66 (“C. Overview of Governing Constitutional Principles”).

⁷ See, e.g., *Bronx Household of Faith v. Bd. of Educ. of New York City*, 650 F.3d 30 (2d Cir. 2011) (after nearly a decade of litigation, church denied weekend access because its speech included religious worship, a ruling directly contrary to *Widmar v. Vincent*, 454 U.S. 263 (1981) (holding that religious group’s worship was protected religious speech)).

⁸ *Good News Club v. Milford Cent. Sch.*, 533 U.S. 98 (2001).

⁹ See, e.g., *Child Evangelism Fellowship v. Stafford Tp. Sch. Dist.*, 386 F.3d 514 (3d Cir. 2004) (Alito, J.); *Child Evangelism Fellowship v. Montgomery Cty. Bd. of Educ.*, 373 F.3d 589 (4th Cir. 2004); *Child Evangelism Fellowship v. Montgomery Cty. Bd. of Educ.*, 457 F.3d 376 (4th Cir. 2006); *Rusk v. Crestview Local Sch. Dist.*, 379 F.3d 418 (6th Cir. 2004); *Hills v. Scottsdale Unified Sch. Dist.*, 329 F.3d 1044 (9th Cir. 2003).

¹⁰ *Lamb’s Chapel v. Center Moriches Union Free Sch. Dist.*, 508 U.S. 384 (1993).

constitutionally protected prayer.” It also requires the Secretary of Education to issue guidance as to current law at least every two years.¹¹ It is not clear how closely compliance with Section 7904 has been monitored.

We agree with the recommendation of Jeremy Dys, Senior Counsel at First Liberty Institute, that the “Commission should recommend that the federal government publicly report which states are compliant in the protection of religious liberty at school—and which are not” through maintenance of a website that reports which state and local educational agencies have certified compliance with Section 7904.¹²

We would further recommend that the federal government implement a process to ensure that states annually and accurately report compliance by local school districts and state education agencies with Section 7904. The compliance process should include at least two components:

- a. The compliance form should require states to indicate that local school districts and state education agencies have certified that they require all employees annually to confirm that they have read the federal guidance regarding constitutionally protected prayer and religious expression in public schools.
 - b. Whenever the federal government receives a complaint or otherwise becomes aware of a situation or lawsuit involving a claim that a local school district or state education agency has violated constitutionally protected religious expression, the federal government should contact the state educational agency and local school district to determine whether the agency or district has *falsely* certified compliance with Section 7904 (and thereby put its federal funding at risk).
- 4. Create a religious freedom violation portal.** We would modify this recommendation by explicitly adding that DOJ’s investigations of reports received through the portal must include a determination whether a local school district or state educational agency has falsely certified compliance with Section 7904. See A.3.b., *supra*.
- 5.** CLS and its Center support the following recommendations as useful, positive, and sorely needed steps toward educating public school administrators, teachers, parents, and students of their First Amendment rights while at school and protecting those rights:
- a. Provide “Know Your Rights” posters;
 - b. Offer religious liberty training resources;
 - c. Investigate and litigate religious freedom violations;
 - d. Swiftly and effectively respond to anti-religious discrimination;

¹¹ For a more detailed discussion of Section 7904, see Dept. of Educ., *Updated Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools*, 85 Fed. Reg. 3257, 3260-62 (Jan. 21, 2020), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/01/21/2020-00876/updated-guidance-on-constitutionally-protected-prayer-and-religious-expression-in-public-elementary>.

¹² Second Hearing of the Religious Liberty Comm’n, Hearing Transcript, 16 (Statement of Jeremy Dys), <https://www.justice.gov/religious-liberty-commission/media/1428746/dl?inline>.

- e. Create the First Freedom Hero Award for elementary and secondary school students.
- 6. Expand school choice.** For thirty years, the Center has filed amicus briefs in support of school choice programs in order to support parents' right to direct the religious upbringing of their children. For many parents, their religious convictions require that they send their children to religious schools, while others believe that is the best choice for their children. And like most enterprises, public schools benefit from the challenge to improve their services in response to competition.

B. Comments on the Draft Report's Recommendations for Chapter 5

1. Issue religious liberty guidance for higher education. We commend the recommendation that the Department of Justice (DOJ) issue religious liberty guidance to clarify the rights of students at public institutions of higher education. Such guidance should reduce the incidence of religious liberty violations on campus and reduce the need for litigation.

- a. We commend the Commission's list of proposed topics and its objective of clarifying the rights of students at public institutions to:
 - i. Form and lead religious student clubs;
 - ii. Receive support for religious clubs and the same level of access to school facilities and advertising methods that non-religious clubs receive;
 - iii. Require club leaders and members to meet religious requirements;
 - iv. Read and distribute religious materials at times when reading and distributing non-religious materials is allowed;
 - v. Wear clothing with religious messages;
 - vi. Be excused from school for religious practice and observance, such as to celebrate religious holy days;
 - vii. Attend off-site religious instruction through constitutionally permissible release-time programs;
 - viii. Participate in moments of silence, student-led prayer, and other student-led free exercise;
 - ix. Engage in religious expression at times and events where students are allowed to engage in private expression, such as school talent shows or graduation ceremonies."
- b. We suggest five additions to the above list:
 - i. Add "funding" after "advertising methods" so that 1.a.ii., *supra*, reads "Receive the same level of support for religious clubs and access to school facilities, advertising methods, and funding that non-religious groups receive";¹³

¹³ *Rosenberger v. University of Virginia*, 515 U.S. 819 (1995) (religious student group must be given equal access to student activity fee funding); *Board of Regents of Univ. of Wisconsin v. Southworth*, 529 U.S. 217 (2000) (university's allocation of student activity fee funding must be viewpoint neutral).

- ii. Add “religious” as a modifier for “club” in 1.a.iii., *supra*. While it is clearly invidious discrimination for non-religious groups to use religious criteria for leadership, it is not unlawful discrimination for a religious group to do so.
 - iii. Add a point stating that college and university officials are the state actors responsible and held accountable for the unconstitutional actions of student governments;¹⁴
 - iv. Add a point stating that the method by which a college, including a student government, allocates student activity fee funding must be viewpoint neutral;¹⁵
 - v. Add a point(s) addressing the free speech and free religious exercise rights of college employees, including faculty and staff.
 - c. We suggest that public colleges and universities be required to submit annual certification that their general counsel has reviewed the proposed guidance regarding religious liberty for higher education with the head of the student affairs office, the Title IX compliance officer, and the officers of the student government(s).
- 2. **Provide “Know Your Rights” posters.** We believe this recommendation is a useful, positive, and sorely needed step toward educating public college and university administrators, faculty, and students of their First Amendment rights while at college.
- 3. **Support expansion of the Equal Access Act.** The Center is grateful for the Commission’s recommendation supporting passage of federal legislation to protect religious student groups’ right to form, operate, and advertise as recognized student organizations on campus. We would explicitly include “seek funding” and “maintain leadership standards” to the list of protections. Rather than expanding the EAA to include religious student groups at the postsecondary level, we request that this recommendation be modified to support passage of the Equal Campus Access Act of 2026 (HR 5505/S 2859) that provides:

None of the funds made available under this Act may be provided to any public institution of higher education that denies to a religious student organization any right, benefit, or privilege that is otherwise afforded to other student organizations at the institution (including full access to the facilities of the institution and official recognition of the organization by the institution) because of the religious beliefs, practices, speech, leadership standards, or standards of conduct of the religious student organization.

Because K-12 schools are sufficiently distinct from college campuses, the EAA and the Equal Campus Access Act necessarily are distinct legislative mechanisms that necessarily will differ somewhat in language, scope, beneficiaries, forums, and operational detail

¹⁴ See *Rosenberger and Southworth*, *supra* n.13.

¹⁵ See *Rosenberger and Southworth*, *supra* n.13.

and, therefore, merit separate legislative protection, although both protect the basic First Amendment rights of freedom of speech, religious exercise, and association.

4. **Support legal challenges to the constitutionality of *CLS v. Martinez*.** CLS and its student chapters are grateful for the Commission’s recommendation that the Department of Justice support strategic litigation challenging *CLS v. Martinez*.¹⁶ A narrow, sharply divided (5-4) decision has harmed student groups of all faiths who simply want to meet on their college campuses for religious discussions, study of scripture, worship, and prayer.¹⁷ A representative list of numerous college campuses nationwide where religious student groups have experienced a denial of equal access is attached.¹⁸

We would request that the Commission consider making the recommendation more specific by adding the following language: “In every appropriate Supreme Court case involving First Amendment rights, the Department of Justice should urge the Supreme Court to overrule *CLS v. Martinez* because it is a constitutional outlier in three areas of First Amendment jurisprudence: free exercise of religion¹⁹, free speech²⁰, and free association.²¹ Deeply flawed when it was decided in 2010,²² its constitutional analysis has only become increasingly incompatible with Supreme Court jurisprudence in the intervening 15 years, doing real harm to religious students in K-12²³ and postsecondary educational institutions.”²⁴

5. **Create a religious freedom violation portal:** The Commission should recommend that the Department of Justice create a portal for postsecondary students, faculty, and staff to report public institutions of higher education’s violations of religious liberty rights.

¹⁶ 561 U.S. 661 (2010).

¹⁷ See, e.g., *InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA v. Univ. of Iowa*, 5 F.4th 855, 864 (8th Cir. 2021). The University of Iowa had threatened 32 religious student groups with derecognition because they had religious leadership requirements, including: Chabad Jewish Student Association; Christian Legal Society; Christian Medical Association; Cru; Hillel; Imam Mahdi Organization; J. Reuben Clark Law Society; Latter-day Saint Student Association; Muslim Students Association; Multiethnic Undergrad Hawkeye InterVarsity; Newman Catholic Student Center; Orthodox Christian Fellowship; and Sikh Awareness Club. The court document listing the groups is at https://becketnews.s3.amazonaws.com/2019-02-01_UI-Notice_and_RSO-Registration-List.pdf.

¹⁸ Attachment B, Christian Legal Society, “When Colleges and Universities Exclude Religious Student Groups: A Real Problem” (June 2026) (a representative list of campuses on which various religious student groups have been denied equal access).

¹⁹ *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC*, 565 U.S. 171 (2012); *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Comm’n*, 584 U.S. 617 (2018); *Our Lady of Guadalupe Sch. v. Morrissey-Berru*, 591 U.S. 732 (2020); *Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn v. Cuomo*, 592 U.S. 14 (2020) (per curiam); *Tandon v. Newsom*, 593 U.S. 61 (2021) (per curiam); *Fulton v. Philadelphia*, 593 U.S. 522 (2021); *Catholic Charities Bureau v. Wisconsin Labor & Ind. Rev. Comm’n*, 145 S. Ct. 1583 (2025).

²⁰ See, e.g., *Reed v. Town of Gilbert*, 576 U.S. 155 (2015); *303 Creative LLC v. Elenis*, 600 U.S. 570 (2023); *Chiles v. Salazar*, 146 S. Ct. 1010 (2026).

²¹ See, e.g., *Americans for Prosperity v. Bonta*, 594 U.S. 595 (2021).

²² *Christian Legal Society v. Martinez*, 566 U.S. 661, 706-741 (2010) (Alito, J. dissenting) (joined by C.J. Roberts and JJ. Scalia and Thomas); *id.* at 741 (“[T]oday’s decision is a serious setback for freedom of expression in this country. . . . I can only hope that this decision will turn out to be an aberration.”).

²³ See, e.g., *Fellowship of Christian Athletes v. San Jose Unified Sch. Dist.*, 82 F.4th 664 (9th Cir. 2023) (en banc) (rejecting school district’s claim that *Martinez* permitted its denial of recognition to religious student group).

²⁴ See, e.g., *InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA v. Univ. of Iowa*, 5 F.4th 855, 864 (8th Cir. 2021); *InterVarsity Christian Fellowship v. Bd. of Governors of Wayne State Univ.*, 534 F. Supp. 3d 785 (E.D. Mich. 2021).

C. Comments on the Draft Report's Recommendations for Chapter 6

1. Issue guidance on parental rights. CLS commends the Commission's recommendation that the Department of Justice issue guidance clarifying parents' authority to direct their children's religious upbringing in the K-12 educational context. The Center has been a long-time advocate of religious released-time programs for K-12 students and knows that many good organizations are eager to provide such programs to local public schools.

The Center would make several additional suggestions:

- a. Parents' right to "conveniently and frequently review curricular materials" would be greatly enhanced if those materials were available on each school's website. The guidance should encourage—or even require—that if possible.
- b. The guidance should be sent to all superintendents of public schools with the request that the superintendent make all teachers and administrators aware of the guidance.
- c. The guidance should be included in, or linked to, the Department of Justice's update of the Guidance for K-12 students in A.1.

2. Other parental rights recommendations. The Center supports the Commission's other recommendations regarding parental rights, including creating a hotline/portal, creating a parental rights task force, creating parental rights resources, as well as investigating and litigating parental rights violations. In regard to parental rights legislation, the Task Force might also develop model parental rights legislation for states and school districts to consider adopting. CLS would be happy to serve on the Task Force.

3. Teachers' rights recommendations: The Center applauds the Commission's recommendations regarding teachers' rights, including the right to engage in private religious speech while at school, to teach about religion when appropriate to the curriculum, to promote respect for the exercise of religious views and to address students by the pronouns that align with the students' sex at birth. Because Title VII often joins the First Amendment in protecting teachers' freedom of speech and religious exercise, it is appropriate that workplace posters be issued by both the Department of Justice and the EEOC. Given the particular risks that teachers run in defending their First Amendment rights, an award recognizing that courage of a representative teacher is appropriate.

Part II: Comments on the Draft Report's Key Recommendations and Other Recommendations in its Executive Summary and Appendix B

CLS and its Center strongly agree with the Commission's recommendation of "a recommitment to peaceful pluralism that includes religion's contributions to the public square and defends the free participation of religious Americans in our self-governing democracy."²⁵ We long to see broad bipartisan support for domestic religious freedom, as was true not so long ago. Passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act in response to the disastrous *Employment Division v. Smith*²⁶ was accomplished by a coalition of 68 organizations representing diverse

²⁵ Draft Report at 182.

²⁶ 494 U.S. 872 (1990).

faiths and political views as recently as 1993.²⁷ We hope to see a renewed commitment by those organizations to a bipartisan discussion of what the pursuit of pluralism and true religious freedom looks like.

Like the Supreme Court,²⁸ CLS and its Center have long promoted an understanding that the Religion Clauses are not in tension with one another but instead are a unity to promote religious freedom for all Americans. Like a team of strong horses, together they pull in the same direction to ensure the right of all Americans to conduct themselves in accordance with their deepest religious beliefs and identities. Religious liberty prevents the government from incentivizing or disincentivizing religious beliefs and practices.

We are grateful that the Commission quoted from our testimony the theme that has been CLS and its Center's polestar for five decades: "Our democracy depends on [government] teaching and modeling the essential lesson that the First Amendment protects everyone's free speech and religious beliefs, especially the speech and beliefs of those with whom we disagree."²⁹

Key Recommendation 1. Guidance clarifying proper understanding of the Establishment Clause: The Center believes that an *objective* statement "clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state" would be helpful to government officials at all levels, as well as to lawyers and other persons. Recent Supreme Court decisions, including the decision officially announcing the *Lemon* test's abandonment,³⁰ demonstrate the need for DOJ guidance. We do not understand the Commission's recommendations to be doing away with the Establishment Clause but as a good faith effort to apply Supreme Court jurisprudence to current religious freedom issues.

At least two models for the Department to consider in preparing guidance present themselves. The Department could take as its template the Attorney General's Memorandum of October 6, 2017, entitled "Federal Law Protections for Religious Liberty,"³¹ which contained a masterful, fair, and objective discussion of Supreme Court caselaw and federal statutes protecting all Americans' religious freedom.

A second model would be to explain succinctly the cases decided by the Supreme Court over the past century as to their holdings regarding the Establishment Clause. Guidance would be helpful for various reasons, including specifying which cases have been overruled, as has happened to several cases from the Court's "strict separationist" period of the 1970s and early 1980s, many of which were overruled in whole or in part in the 1990s and early 2000s. For good reason, many people, including experts in the religious liberty arena, seem confused as to the precedential status of many cases from the Court's strict separationist phase. Given that many executive departments and agencies adopted regulations based on cases from that period that have since been overruled or now conflict with the Supreme Court's jurisprudence enforcing the Religion Clauses, a memorandum explaining the actual holdings in the Court's Establishment

²⁷ Douglas Laycock & Oliver S. Thomas, *Interpreting the Religious Freedom Restoration Act*, 73 Tex. L. Rev. 209, 210 n.9 (1994) (listing groups).

²⁸ *Kennedy v. Bremerton Sch. Dist.*, 597 U.S. 507 (2022).

²⁹ Draft Report at 75; Second Hearing of the Religious Liberty Comm'n, Hearing Transcript, 177 (2025) (Statement of Kimberlee Colby).

³⁰ *Kennedy*, 597 U.S. at 534 ("this Court long ago abandoned *Lemon*").

³¹ 82 Fed. Reg. 49668, 49673 (Oct. 26, 2017).

Clause cases and which remain good law would be helpful for federal employees tasked with identifying such regulations.³²

Key Recommendation 2. DOJ, HHS, and EEOC should issue Know Your Rights Posters and FAQ for various groups of persons. CLS and its Center support this recommendation because some religious liberty violations are due to government officials' ignorance of the First Amendment's requirements. The posters and FAQ serve the dual purpose of both educating officials as well as those whose rights are being violated about their rights and whom to contact in order to learn how they might redress the violations. There is ongoing confusion among the public and government officials about the First Amendment's protections, as well as the protections available under various federal laws, including Title VII, RFRA, RLUIPA, and the EAA. While general concepts are important to understand, some simple and clear detail will be needed for the posters to serve their purpose. We also suggest that the posters make clear that religious protections apply to the religious expression and practices of both individuals and religious associations, a valuable concept that is too often misunderstood. We commend and share the Commission's hope that the FAQs will "help spark the conversation that can revive a deeper regard for our first freedom."³³

Key Recommendation 3. Public officials must provide written explanation of a person's alleged violation, including legal basis, within 30 days. While we are not entirely clear as to the full extent of the operation and application of this recommendation, we understand it to be a requirement that a public official who alleges a person under their supervision has improperly engaged in religious expression must provide a written explanation of the legal basis for the allegation within 30 days. In practice, we understand this to be a protection for federal employees whose supervisor threatens them with discipline for engaging in religious expression in the workplace or on their own time. Too often supervisors wrongly allege that an employee's religious expression is not permissible. This requirement would protect the employee by requiring the supervisor to give the employee timely written notice of the legal basis for the supervisor's concerns.

This requirement would be helpful in a number of ways. The supervisor will have to educate herself to make sure her concerns are constitutionally solid. Often she will discover that the employee's religious expression is protected. The requirement helps the employee by requiring she be given notice of a concrete allegation to which she will be able to respond by conforming her behavior to constitutionally protected standards or seeking legal counsel as to whether her behavior is constitutionally protected. The government will benefit from a quick

³² The Commission heard testimony that approximately 135 federal regulations are likely unconstitutional. Third Hearing of the Religious Liberty Comm'n, Hearing Transcript, 256 (2025) (Statement of Professor Nicole Stelle Garnett) ("At, the federal level, we identified 135 unconstitutional statutes and regulations, 41 of which restrict the religious liberty of private educational institutions, typically by requiring them to refrain from engaging in religious conduct as a condition of receiving federal funds. Many of these laws employ language that trace its origin to Lemon. All of these restrictions are unconstitutional."). See also, Third Hearing of the Religious Liberty Comm'n, Hearing Transcript, (2025) (Statement of Nicholas Reaves) ("[T]he Commission should urge federal agencies to repeal the arbitrary rules and regulations that restrict the government's ability to partner with faith-based organizations").

³³ Draft Report at 205.

resolution of misunderstandings regarding constitutionally protected religious expression which should benefit both the supervisor and the employee.

The Commission may wish to provide a fuller explanation of how this recommendation is intended to operate.

Key Recommendation 4. DOJ, HHS, and EEOC’s creation of reporting hotlines and online portals for reporting religious liberty violations. CLS and its Center believe that providing clear mechanisms for individuals and religious organizations to report religious liberty violations is important. As the recommendation notes, “increasing public awareness” is an essential part of establishing these mechanisms. It could involve additional promotion of existing reporting channels, or may involve launching a portal specific to religious liberty. We believe that in this process, ensuring privacy for complainants will be essential.

Key Recommendation 5. Nominate and confirm federal judges who have demonstrated courage in deciding religious liberty cases on the merits. CLS and its Center support this recommendation because too often in the past we have seen judges fail to follow First Amendment precedent to protect religious beliefs and practices that the judges themselves disfavor or believe the culture disfavors. While religious liberty should be protected by judges regardless of the political party of the President who nominated them or the Senators that confirmed them, the judicial appointments from the first Trump Administration have resulted in a Supreme Court and more lower courts (for example, the Ninth Circuit) that are more sensitive to the need to defend religious freedom on the merits.

Key Recommendation 6. DOJ’s creation of a religious liberty task force to track and prioritize litigation protecting religious liberty. CLS and its Center would welcome the establishment of a religious liberty task force at DOJ. We would hope that DOJ would increase its filing of statements of interest and amicus briefs in the lower federal courts. The government’s voice is never ignored and is frequently persuasive; therefore, it should be brought to bear in favor of religious freedom as much as possible. We respectfully suggest several specific ways that such a task force could take action:

- a. We recommend that the Religious Liberty Task Force for litigation request that the Office of Legal Counsel prepare a memorandum detailing the arguments in support of overruling *Employment Division v. Smith*.³⁴ The task force should identify cases in the federal appellate courts and the Supreme Court in which the Department should file statements of interest or amicus briefs in support of overruling *Smith*.

As the Center explained in an earlier submission to the Commission,³⁵ *Smith* greatly reduces protections for religious exercise by requiring minimal rational basis review for burdens on free exercise caused by neutral and generally applicable laws. Even after RFRA, *Smith* shifts the First Amendment’s leverage from religious citizens in favor of state and local bureaucrats who find religious freedom inconvenient.³⁶ *Smith* has functionally prevented courts from directly implementing the First Amendment’s

³⁴ 494 U.S. 872 (1990).

³⁵ See Attachment C, Letter from the Center for Law & Religious Freedom to Religious Liberty Commission dated Apr. 17, 2026, at 4-6 (summarizing the damage to all Americans’ free religious exercise caused by *Smith*).

³⁶ *Gonzales v. O Centro Espirita Beneficente Uniao do Vegetal*, 546 U.S. 418, 436 (2006) (“the classic rejoinder of bureaucrats throughout history: If I make an exception for you, I’ll have to make one for everybody, so no exceptions.”).

core purpose of protecting religious individuals' and institutions' freedom to live faithfully to their sincerely held religious beliefs. It places the government's thumb on the scales to weigh against religious freedom. It diminishes religious freedom. No matter how great the burden on religious freedom and how inconsequential the government's interest, *Smith* allows judges to rule against religious individuals and religious institutions if the law involved is neutral and generally applicable, rather than consider whether the law is the least intrusive means of advancing a government interest that is compelling.

As a practical matter, the concerns that seemed to drive *Smith* (such as the worry that religious adherents would regularly be placed "beyond the reach of" the law and thereby cause chaos in society) have not played out in practice after Congress and various states passed RFRA and its many state counterparts. *Smith* must be overruled if religious freedom is to be fully realized for all Americans. At present, Americans' religious liberty protections vary by the state in which they live, which is an irrational and arbitrary outcome in a country founded on the premise that religious freedom is a right given by God, not by government.

- b. We recommend that the Religious Liberty Task Force for litigation request that the Office of Legal Counsel prepare a memorandum detailing the arguments in support of overruling *CLS v. Martinez*.³⁷ The Task Force should identify cases in the federal appellate courts in which the Department should file statements of interest or amicus briefs in support of limiting the application of *Martinez* and in the Supreme Court in support of overruling both *Martinez* and *Smith*.³⁸
- c. We commend the Commission's recommendation that the Administration oppose federal legislation containing RFRA carve-outs.³⁹ We further recommend that the Task Force identify and remove any RFRA carve-outs that may have made their way into executive departments' and agencies' regulations, policies, guidance, waivers, or other official documents. The Task Force should request that OLC issue an opinion explaining why RFRA carve-outs undermine religious freedom, should not be adopted by any executive department or agency, and should be identified and removed by all executive departments and agencies.

Similarly, the White House should direct its Office of Legislative Affairs not to seek any RFRA carve-outs in legislation, to direct all executive departments and agencies not to countenance any RFRA carve-outs in legislation and to report any potential RFRA carve-outs in draft legislation, and to encourage all House and Senate committees to be vigilant and not advance any bill that has a RFRA carve-out.⁴⁰

- d. We recommend that the DOJ Task Force include a working group tasked with identifying and properly rescinding the 135 regulations that Professor Nicole Stelle Garnett identified as likely to be unconstitutional.⁴¹ Of course, the Administrative

³⁷ 561 U.S. 661 (2010).

³⁸ Draft Report at 209.

³⁹ Draft Report at 212.

⁴⁰ See Attachment C, *supra* n.36, at 3-4.

⁴¹ Third Hearing of the Religious Liberty Comm'n, Hearing Transcript, 256 (2025) (Statement of Professor Nicole Stelle Garnett)

Procedure Act must be scrupulously followed in abolishing these regulations in order to prevail in court against challenges to the rescissions. The task force would need to work closely with the executive departments and agencies' general counsel to ensure compliance with the APA.

- e. We recommend that the DOJ Task Force provide a report focused on the lessons learned regarding necessary protections for religious liberty from the federal response to the COVID pandemic. CLS and its Center believe that we are enough removed from the pandemic to attempt an objective analysis of the impact of the COVID pandemic response on Americans' religious freedom in the hope of giving thoughtful consideration of the actions needed to protect religious freedom should another pandemic or other national emergency occurs. The purpose is not to place blame or find fault with what was done in the past but to learn for the future.
- f. Consistent with the goals of such a DOJ Task Force, we support the Commission's recommendation to update the Attorney General's 2017 *Memorandum Regarding Federal Law Protections and Religious Liberty* to provide guidance to all executive departments and agencies that includes recent Supreme Court religious liberty decisions.⁴²
- g. We support the Commission's recommendation that DOJ issue guidance explaining how RLUIPA provides institutionalized individuals with the right to reasonable religious accommodations, including access to spiritual counseling, mentorship, and religious programming.⁴³

Key Recommendation 7. Combat anti-Semitism through enforcement of laws, litigation and civic education. For decades, CLS and its Center have partnered with Jewish religious freedom advocates to defend the religious freedom of Christians and Jews.⁴⁴ Religious freedom is essential to defeating the scourge of anti-Semitism. We commend the Commission's strong stance against anti-Semitism.

Key Recommendation 8. Protect religious Americans from government-led litigation targeting free exercise. CLS and its Center fully support the Commission's recommendation and suggest that it be part of the DOJ Religious Liberty Task Force's mandate in Recommendation 6.

Key Recommendation 9. Repeal the Johnson Amendment. CLS and its Center support the Commission's recommendation.

Key Recommendation 10. Order the Department of War to improve the religious accommodation process. CLS and its Center commend the Commission for its focus on the religious freedom of members of our military. The recent past has demonstrated the need to streamline and improve the religious accommodation process for those who fight for our freedoms, including our first freedom.

⁴² Draft Report at 210.

⁴³ Draft Report at 211.

⁴⁴ See, e.g. Brief of American Jewish Committee and Christian Legal Society as Amici Curiae Supporting Petitioner, *Goldman v. Weinberger*, 1985 WL 669068 (USSC 1985) (supporting right of military psychologist to wear yarmulke while on duty).

Key Recommendation 11. Continue efforts to restore the retirement or re-enlistment eligibility of service members who lost military jobs and benefits because of their religious beliefs about vaccines. CLS and its Center support the Commission’s recommendation to make whole military members who were denied their religious freedom during the COVID pandemic.

Key Recommendation 12. Honoring religious freedom heroes. CLS and its Center support the creation of a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty and First Freedom Hero Awards as recommended by the Commission.

Additional Commission Recommendations in Appendix B:

CLS and its Center do not offer a comprehensive look at the Draft Report’s additional recommendations, but we wish to highlight some recommendations we did not raise as part of our more detailed discussion of Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of the Draft Report in Part I.

1. Support Fruitful Partnerships for the Common Good.⁴⁵ CLS and its Center have been active in the development of the concept that partnership between government agencies and faith-based institutions are constitutional and desirable public policy. We heartily support the Commission’s recommendation that the Administration expand partnerships with faith-based institutions by utilizing faith-welcoming language in notices of funding opportunities, training faith groups on the grant application process, and directing grant reviewers to provide equal treatment to faith-based and secular groups. We agree that Agency Faith Offices should be directed to develop improved guidelines for the awarding of grants with greater solicitude for faith-based grant applicants.

2. Establish domestic religious liberty as a permanent policy priority. CLS and its Center were instrumental in passage of legislation establishing the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).⁴⁶ Indeed, the current Director of the Center, Steve McFarland, served as the first Executive Director of the USCIRF. A United States Commission on Domestic Religious Freedom could perform a function similar to the USCIRF of identifying federal, state, and local government laws, regulations, and policies that diminish religious freedom and propose solutions to address the government interests motivating the governmental actions while preserving individuals’ and institutions’ religious freedom. We recommend that the Commissioners be selected by the Congress and the President in the proportions used for the USCIRF, which are two-thirds by the Congress and one-third by the White House.

3. Establish Conscience and Religious Freedom Divisions in Executive Departments and Agencies. CLS and its Center commend the Commission’s recommendation that the President order the establishment of such offices and task them with the listed responsibilities.⁴⁷ We believe developing the kind of expertise necessary to address religious liberty concerns—including recognition, investigation, and enforcement—will result in more awareness of religious liberty violations. Such divisions could investigate internal violations by the agency itself and identify common threats. The presence of Religious Freedom Divisions would increase awareness and support for religious freedom in the federal government’s operations, and could expand out to the states and others utilizing federal funds administered by the agency. For example, such divisions could invite and evaluate complaints against state or local agencies

⁴⁵ Draft Report at 203.

⁴⁶ Draft Report at 206, 211-212.

⁴⁷ Draft Report at 208.

using grants or other federal financial assistance in a way that violates the religious freedom of religious organizations. In addition, we agree with the Commission's suggestion that such divisions would be able to take responsibility to implement this Report's recommendations in practical ways.

4. Provide EEOC Guidance on Title VII's protection of religious employers. CLS and its Center support the Commission's recommendation that the EEOC issue guidance on the scope of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act's protection of religious employers in §702(a) and §703(e)(1), and the maintenance of their religious identity and ability to carry out their mission in accordance with their religious beliefs.⁴⁸

5. Issue HHS Rulemaking to protect foster care services. CLS and its Center support the Commission's recommendation that HHS issue a rule ensuring religious organizations and families may provide adoption and foster care services without being compelled to violate their religious beliefs.⁴⁹

6. Support legislation ensuring faith-based groups may compete for federal grants on an equal playing field. CLS and its Center are thankful that the Commission adopted our recommendation that the Administration encourage Congress to protect the rights of faith-based groups and organizations, so that they are not forced to choose between their religious identity or receiving government funds that are provided to similarly situated groups with the same government-backed community goals.⁵⁰

7. Provide EEOC support for strategic litigation seeking to protect employee religious accommodation rights.⁵¹ CLS and its Center support the Commission's recommendation that the EEOC support strategic litigation that will further support for religious accommodation rights. The Center believes many employees do not receive appropriate consideration of their religious accommodation requests. This can occur when employers disregard employee requests, believing they are unimportant (such as a request for Sabbath observance), or when employers dislike employees or disfavor their particular beliefs.

Conclusion:

We once again thank the Commission for its robust commitment to practical steps that will advance Religious Liberty. We urge the Commission to consider these clarifications as it finalizes its Draft Report.

Sincerely,

Steve McFarland, Director
Lori Kepner, Senior Counsel
Kimberlee Wood Colby, Senior Counsel
Christian Legal Society, Center for Law & Religious Freedom

⁴⁸ Draft Report at 212-213.

⁴⁹ Draft Report at 213.

⁵⁰ Draft Report at 214.

⁵¹ Draft Report at 223.

8001 Braddock Rd., Suite 301
Springfield, VA 22151

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Attachment A

April 1, 2026

Re: Department of Education’s “Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools” (February 2026)

Introduction

For fifty years, Christian Legal Society (CLS) has defended the rights of students, parents, and teachers in public schools to engage in religious expression and conduct. For example, in 1984, CLS was instrumental in Congress’ passage of the Equal Access Act to protect the right of student groups to meet for religious speech, including prayer and Bible study, in public secondary schools.¹ In 1995, the Department of Education’s original guidance on religious expression in the public schools, which was sent to public school district superintendents, listed CLS as one of eight organizations “that can answer questions on religious expression in public schools.”² The original guidance has been updated multiple times over the years (collectively, “Guidance”). In 2020, during the first Trump Administration, CLS led a coalition of national religious groups in support of the Department’s adoption of regulations to protect religious student groups’ right to meet at public institutions.³ The Ethics and Public Policy Center (EPPC) works to promote religious freedom in American law, culture, and politics, including in public schools.

CLS and EPPC welcome the Department’s February 5, 2026, release of the updated “Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools.”⁴ Together we suggest the following opportunities to build upon the February 2026 Guidance to strengthen its protection for prayer and other religious expression by students, teachers, and parents in the public schools.

The Guidance, which has remained largely consistent in its content and much of its structural detail over the past 30 years, has provided stability that is beneficial for students and their families. The Guidance has educated school administrators, while also providing students, parents, teachers, and religious liberty advocates with persuasive authority to cite in their dealings with school administrators. For example, the 2020 Guidance released during the first Trump Administration has been particularly helpful to religious freedom practitioners in their efforts to protect the rights of students, parents, and teachers in public schools.⁵

As detailed below, we request that a future Guidance restore various material found in the 2020 Trump Guidance. These simple modifications would help enable the Guidance to retain its longstanding continuity and clarity upon which many stakeholders have come to rely.

¹ 20 U.S.C. §§ 4071-4074.

² Dept. of Educ., “*Religious Expression in Public Schools: A Statement of Principles*,” June 1998, at 10, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED416591.pdf>. The 1995 version is difficult to find online, but the 1998 version contains the same list of recommended groups.

³ 34 C.F.R. §§ 75.500(d) & 76.500(d).

⁴ <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/2026-guidance-constitutionally-protected-prayer-and-religious-expression-public-elementary-and-secondary-schools-113182.pdf>.

⁵ Dept. of Educ., “*Updated Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools*,” 85 Fed. Reg. 3257 (Jan. 21, 2020). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/01/21/2020-00876/updated-guidance-on-constitutionally-protected-prayer-and-religious-expression-in-public-elementary>.

1. The Department's Guidance Has Benefited Religious Freedom for 30 Years

The Department of Education's 1995 Guidance was a turning point because, for the first time, the federal government advised school administrators that private religious expression was protected on public school property. The Guidance addressed numerous specific topics that students, parents, teachers, and school administrators often encounter, including the requirements of the Equal Access Act's protection of religious student groups meeting for prayer and other religious expression.⁶

In 2002, Congress enacted 20 U.S.C. § 7904, requiring local school districts to certify annually to the Department that "no policy of the local educational agency prevents, or otherwise denies participation in, constitutionally protected prayer." Section 7904 requires the Secretary of Education to issue at least every two years guidance as to current law.

In 2020, the Trump Administration released strong guidance that tracked the Department's earlier Guidance. Specifically, its "Overview of Governing Constitutional Principles," § I.C, reiterated the critical distinction, emphasized in *Board of Education v. Mergens*,⁷ between government religious speech and private religious speech. The Department's prior Guidance carefully explained the Supreme Court's bedrock delineation between a student group's private religious expression, protected by the Free Speech and Free Exercise Clauses, and government officials' religious expression, potentially prohibited by the Establishment Clause. The 2020 Trump Guidance then applied this foundational distinction between government speech and private speech to specific scenarios. It tracked several specific topics that had been addressed in Guidance since 1995, including the Equal Access Act.

2. Proposed Modifications in Future Guidance

We respectfully request that future guidance restore beneficial material from the 2020 Trump Guidance, including the following.

"Principles Governing Religious Expression and Prayer" Section. Several paragraphs found in the 2020 Trump Guidance explained the critical distinction between private religious expression by students and teachers and government religious expression, as explained in *Mergens*. See 2020 Trump Guidance, § I.C, ¶¶ 1-4 ("Overview of Governing Constitutional Principles"). This material had been the focus of the Department's Guidance since 1995 and is essential to public school stakeholders' understanding of the proper protection of religious expression in the public schools.

"Specific Scenarios" Section. It would be highly beneficial to stakeholders if certain topics and language covered in the 2020 Trump Guidance were included in future Guidance:

1) Equal Access Act: Include a distinct section explaining the Equal Access Act's protection of religious student groups' ability to: a) meet during noninstructional time, including lunch and activity periods; b) access school media (bulletin boards, newspaper, and public address system); and c) maintain religious leadership requirements.⁸ See 2020 Trump Guidance, § IV, ¶¶ 1-6 ("The Equal Access Act").

⁶ 20 U.S.C. §§ 4071-4074.

⁷ 496 U.S. 226, 250 (1990).

⁸ Several federal court decisions have held that religious student groups meeting at public secondary schools may require their leaders to agree with the groups' religious beliefs. See *Fellowship of Christian Athletes v. San Jose Unified Sch. Dist. Bd. of Educ.*, 82 F.4th 664 (9th Cir. 2023) (en banc); *Hsu v. Roslyn Union Free Sch. Dist.*, 85 F.3d

2) See You at the Pole: Include specific mention in § III.B (“Religious Expression in Student Groups”) that “See You at the Pole” gatherings, an annual, nationwide event in late September, are protected, as noted in the 2020 Trump Guidance, § II.B (“Organized Prayer Groups and Activities”) and the 1995 Guidance.

3) Moments of Silence: Include affirmation that a moment of silence at the beginning of the school day is permissible, as found in the 2020 Trump Guidance, § II.D (“Moments of Silence”). The “Principles Governing Religious Expression and Prayer” section of the 2026 Guidance notes in passing *Wallace v. Jaffree*,⁹ which held a specific state’s “moment of silence” law unconstitutional. But *Jaffree*’s analysis was based on the “secular purpose” prong of the *Lemon* test—an analysis overruled in *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*.¹⁰ Even before *Kennedy*, numerous federal appellate decisions had upheld moments of silence after *Jaffree*.¹¹

4) Religious Excusals: Include affirmation that parental requests for religious excusals from school attendance or objectionable curriculum are to be accommodated, building upon the 2020 Trump Guidance, § III.D (“Religious Excusals”). This paragraph should be updated to briefly discuss *Mahmoud v. Taylor*’s¹² protection of the parental right to notice and opt out from curriculum that violates religious beliefs. Also include affirmation of the constitutionality of off-campus religious released time programs under *Zorach v. Clauson*.¹³

5) Religious Literature Distribution: Include affirmation of students’ right to distribute religious literature if other students may distribute nonreligious literature, as found in the 2020 Trump Guidance, § III.A (“Religious Literature”) and the 1995 Guidance.

6) Teaching About Religion: Include affirmation that classroom instruction may include teaching about religion in the curriculum in an objective, nondevotional manner, as found in the 2020 Trump Guidance, § III.B (“Teaching about Religion”) and the 1995 Guidance.

839 (2d Cir. 1996); *Fellowship of Christian Athletes v. District of Columbia*, 743 F. Supp. 3d 73 (D.D.C. 2024); see also, *InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA v. Univ. of Iowa*, 5 F.4th 855 (8th Cir. 2021) (university officials forfeited qualified immunity by derecognizing religious student group because of its religious leadership requirements); *Bus. Leaders in Christ v. Univ. of Iowa*, 991 F.3d 969 (8th Cir. 2021) (same); *InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA v. Bd. of Governors of Wayne State Univ.*, 534 F. Supp. 3d 785 (E.D. Mich. 2021) (same); *Christian Legal Soc’y v. Walker*, 453 F.3d 853 (7th Cir. 2006) (protecting religious student group but not addressing qualified immunity).

⁹ 472 U.S. 38 (1985).

¹⁰ *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602 (1971) (Establishment Clause violated if government action 1) has a religious primary purpose; 2) has a religious primary effect; or 3) creates excessive entanglement between government and religion). The Court explicitly abandoned the *Lemon* analysis in *Kennedy v. Bremerton Sch. Dist.* 597 U.S. 507, 534-36 (2022).

¹¹ See, e.g., *Sherman v. Koch*, 623 F.3d 501 (7th Cir. 2010); *Croft v. Texas*, 562 F.3d 735 (5th Cir. 2009); *Brown v. Gilmore*, 258 F.3d 265 (4th Cir. 2001); *Bown v. Gwinnett Cnty. Sch. Dist.*, 112 F.3d 1464 (11th Cir. 1997).

¹² 606 U.S. 522 (2025).

¹³ 343 U.S. 306 (1952). We suggest that the Department separately issue detailed guidance regarding school administrators’ obligations under *Mahmoud*, while briefly addressing *Mahmoud* in this Guidance.

7) Baccalaureate Ceremonies: Include affirmation that religious community groups may hold baccalaureate ceremonies in public school facilities that are otherwise available to community groups, as found in the 2020 Trump Guidance, § II.I (“Baccalaureate Ceremonies”) and the 1995 Guidance. Also affirm religious community groups’ right to meet with children after school on an equal access basis¹⁴ and to meet in school facilities on weekends and evenings.¹⁵

3. Proposed Clarifications in 2026 Guidance

The following clarifications in the 2026 Guidance would be helpful.

Teacher Speech. The *Kennedy* discussion in the “Principles Governing Religious Expression and Prayer” section could lead teachers to think that they may pray with students in contexts not addressed by the Court in *Kennedy*. The Guidance states that teachers may pray with students in the conduct of their work, but the *Kennedy* decision addressed a context in which the teacher was praying during his personal time. Because in some contexts teachers’ religious expression could be found by the Court to be unconstitutional government speech rather than protected private speech, the Guidance needs to explain the important distinction between protected private religious expression and government speech in the “Principles” section, as already noted. It also should highlight that the teacher in *Kennedy* was acting during a time when teachers were allowed to engage in personal speech.

Graduation Speakers. Too often, *personal* religious expression by an individual student or community member speaker at a graduation ceremony is censored. In some places, the Guidance could be read as suggesting censorship is required if private religious expression is part of the official activity of the school itself, or attendance is mandatory, or a public address system is used. None of these factors in itself justifies a school censoring personal religious expression by student or community member speakers at graduation or other school events, so long as the speaker selection process employs truly neutral selection criteria. *See* 2020 Trump Guidance, §§ II.G (“Student Assemblies”) & II.H (“Prayer at Graduation”).

Harassment. From 2019-2024, CLS represented a religious student group denied equal access solely because school employees deemed its orthodox religious beliefs to be harassment of LGBT-identifying students.¹⁶ Because religious expression is often targeted by school administrators as “harassment,” care needs to be exercised in suggesting that abstract harassment concerns outweigh constitutionally protected religious expression. For that reason, it would be helpful for future Guidance to omit the phrase “subject to the considerations in III.F,” in discussion of religious student groups (§ III.B (“Religious Expression in Student Groups”)) and religious dress (§ III.A (“Private Religious Expression by Students”)).

¹⁴ *Good News Club v. Milford Cent. Sch.*, 533 U.S. 98 (2001).

¹⁵ *Lamb’s Chapel v. Center Moriches Union Free Sch. Dist.*, 508 U.S. 384 (1993).

¹⁶ *Fellowship of Christian Athletes v. San Jose Unified Sch. Dist. Bd. of Educ.*, 82 F.4th 664 (9th Cir. 2023) (en banc) (religious student group won on free speech, free exercise of religion, and Equal Access Act claims). *See also*, *Fellowship of Christian Athletes v. District of Columbia*, 743 F. Supp.3d 73 (D.D.C. 2024).

4. Possible Next Steps

One. The Department could issue revised Guidance in light of the Court’s recent reaffirmation of *Mahmoud*’s protection of parental rights in *Mirabelli v. Bonta*,¹⁷ or any other future Court decision involving religion in the public schools. By adopting the proposed modifications mentioned above, grounded in important language from the 2020 Trump Guidance, the Department could ensure continuity with prior Guidance and increase the likelihood of the Guidance serving as a template for future administrations’ Guidance.

Two. Federal law, 20 U.S.C. § 7904, requires the Department to issue revised Guidance some time before February 5, 2028. Issuing revised Guidance before the beginning of the 2026-2027 academic year would allow the Department to issue additional revised Guidance in 2028.

Three. The Department of Education could request the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel to issue an opinion addressing religious expression in public schools.

Four. In addition to steps one and two, the Department could issue two supplementary but separate guidance documents, one focused solely on equal access for private religious expression by students, teachers, and community groups and the other focused on parental rights.

Sincerely,

Lori Kepner, J.D.

Senior Counsel

Center for Law & Religious Freedom

Christian Legal Society

PII

PII

Kimberlee Wood Colby, J.D.

Of Counsel

Center for Law & Religious Freedom

Christian Legal Society

PII

PII

Rachel N. Morrison, J.D.

Fellow and Director

Administrative State Accountability Project

Ethics and Public Policy Center

PII

PII

¹⁷ 607 U.S. ___, 146 S. Ct. 797 (March 2, 2026) (per curiam).

Attachment B

When Colleges and Universities Exclude Religious Student Groups: A Real Problem

Updated June 2026

[The following data is compiled from the experiences of several different religious student organizations. It is representative, not comprehensive.]

At many universities and colleges nationwide, religious student organizations have been threatened with exclusion from campus because they seek to authentically communicate, associate around, and live out their different faiths. They are often excluded because they require that their leaders agree with their religious purpose and are able to authentically teach their religious beliefs and practices. They can be excluded because schools try to exclude them from club funding or participation in club fairs or flyer distribution because they are religious. Not every school in this list is a public college or university, but they are included to show the breadth and depth of this problem, and to show the clear need for a solution.

This is a countrywide issue: This document is organized alphabetically by state and demonstrates that there are many specific issues that religious student organizations have faced on campuses around the country. We note, however, that there are many more unnamed issues that have occurred than those listed here. This document is focused on primarily registration issues (marked with **), but also includes some funding or fee issues (marked with †) and other policy restrictions used in a targeted manner (marked with ≠)

On typical campuses, hundreds of student groups meet to discuss political, social, and philosophical ideas. The student groups apply to the university administration for official “recognition” as a student group. Recognition grants benefits including the ability to reserve meeting space, access communication channels with students, and apply for funding. Without recognition, a group is stigmatized and finds it nearly impossible to exist on campus. Very often, as religious student organizations seek to register, their chapter constitutions face scrutiny beyond what is given to other groups. For example, one religious organization with student chapters noted in 2024 that, in the previous four years they had consulted legal counsel related to issues on sixteen different public colleges and universities, in order to get help navigating recognition issues, ranging from an actual denial to the threat of denial, or unusual bureaucratic hurdles to overcome.

Religious student organizations significantly enrich campus life. They provide emotional and spiritual support for students, improving wellbeing and mental health for students, and benefiting retention. They enhance campus diversity by contributing to the “marketplace of ideas” on campus. Religious groups typically are among the most ethnically diverse student groups on campus. They often spearhead service projects that give students opportunities to serve their campuses and communities. Excluding religious student organizations harms students and diminishes campus diversity. Some colleges have adopted policies that protect religious groups and their ability to choose their leaders according to their religious beliefs. Unfortunately, many colleges have punished religious student groups for their religious beliefs, speech, and conduct.

Many religious student organizations continue to face challenges that are not represented here; most such groups are small and do not have access to legal advice. Others prefer not to publicly share their challenges because they are concerned about drawing unwanted attention, don’t want to seem antagonistic to their school in any way, or are worried about repercussions.

Alabama

University of South Alabama**

A student group had to seek help from legal counsel for the organization when it faced derecognition due to its religious leadership standards. It had to formally negotiate with school officials in order to get registered.

Arizona

Arizona State University**

In 2004, the university denied a religious student group recognition because it required its leaders and members to agree with its religious beliefs. After the group challenged the university in court, the university revised its policy to allow religious student groups to require their leaders and members to share their religious beliefs. (*Christian Legal Society Chapter at Arizona State University v. Crow*, No. 04-2572 (D. Ariz. Nov. 17, 2004).)

Every couple years, when the CLS chapter seeks to re-register, they get questions again about their language. This occurred again in 2022, and required dialogue once again to clarify that it is appropriate for the chapter to have religious leadership requirements.

Embry Riddle Aeronautical College**

In 2018, a religious student group was refused recognition by the college because of its religious leadership requirements.

University of Arizona**

In 2010, the university denied recognition to a pro-life student group because the group's proposed constitution required that its members share its beliefs about the sanctity of human life. After receiving a letter from a legal organization, the university granted recognition to the group. Subsequently, in 2011, the Arizona Legislature protected religious student groups' ability to choose their leaders and members according to their religious beliefs. A.R.S. §§ 15-1863.

California

California State University**

The California State University comprises 23 campuses with 437,000 students. In the 2014-15 academic year, the University withdrew recognition from many religious student associations because they required their leaders to affirm the associations' religious beliefs. Some excluded groups had met for sixty years on Cal State campuses with religious leadership requirements. But under a new university policy, as a Cal State administrator explained, "What they cannot be is faith based where someone has to have a profession of faith to be that leader."

Eventually, Cal State retreated from its position and provided a letter that, under certain circumstances, religious groups' leadership selection processes could include questions about a candidate's religious beliefs. But the problematic policy remains on the books, and the religious groups remain on campus solely at the discretion of university administrators. In the past two years, some religious groups have experienced problems obtaining recognition on particular campuses. Also on the books is a decision by the federal Ninth Circuit that allowed

(but did not require) the university to exclude religious groups because they require their leaders to be religious. (*Alpha Delta Chi v. Reed*, 648 F.3d 790 (9th Cir. 2011).) This Ninth Circuit opinion leaves 25% of all college students in the nation unprotected.

The 23 California State University campuses are: California State University, Bakersfield; California State University, Channel Islands; California State University, Chico; California State University, Dominguez Hills; California State University, East Bay; California State University, Fresno; California State University, Fullerton; Humboldt State University; California State University, Long Beach; California State University, Los Angeles; California Maritime Academy; California State University, Monterey Bay; California State University, Northridge; California State University, Pomona; California State University, Sacramento; California State University, San Bernardino; ;San Diego State University; San Francisco State University; San Jose State University; California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo; California State University San Marcos; Sonoma State University; California State University, Stanislaus.

California State University, San Marcos †

In 2017, a pro-life student organization sought to bring a pro-life speaker to campus to speak on “Abortion and Human Equality” and the university denied funding to the group, even though it freely and broadly funded events with its favored views on the topic. After a lawsuit was filed, the campus changed its policies to incorporate viewpoint neutrality into its funding processes. While this case is not specifically a religious group, it is representative of the kind of funding restrictions many religious groups face but often decline to challenge. It took three years for the case to settle.

University of California, Davis ≠

A nondiscrimination policy at the University of California, Davis protected students regardless of their religious beliefs, unless they held Christian beliefs. The policy said: “Religious/Spiritual Discrimination - The loss of power and privilege to those who do not practice the dominant culture's religion. In the United States, this is institutionalized oppressions toward those who are not Christian.” In February 2011, after receiving a letter from a legal group, the university revised its policy.

University of California, Hastings College of the Law**

In 2007, a religious student group was denied recognition because it required its leaders and voting members to agree with its religious beliefs. The law school claimed to have a novel policy that required all student groups to “allow any student to participate, become a member, or seek leadership positions in the organization, regardless of their status or belief.” The Supreme Court ruled in 2010 that the law school could apply this policy to religious groups, but only if it applied the policy uniformly to all student groups. (*Christian Legal Society v. Martinez*, 561 U.S. 661 (2010).) This decision has created nationwide confusion on college campuses with severe repercussions for religious student groups, because many colleges claim they have this novel policy when they do not and instead are discriminatorily excluding only religious student groups from their campuses.

Colorado

Aims Community College**

In 2022, students wanted to start a chapter of a national religious organization but were told that they could not because the college had had a negative experience with a prior religious group. The chapter leaders then met with administrators and cited the 2020 federal regulation that protects religious student organizations, and the administrators then agreed to recognize the group.

In 2026, the college again denied recognition to an Intervarsity chapter, but they agreed to recognize the group once informed about current federal regulations.

Fort Lewis College ≠

In 2012, a religious student group was told that a college policy did not allow them to approach other students on campus to discuss spiritual topics. The problem was resolved through correspondence from legal counsel.

University of Colorado, Colorado Springs **

In the 2018-2019 academic year, a religious student organization, Ratio Christi, whose purpose is to articulate Christian apologetics in a campus environment was denied recognition by the University because of its requirement that its leaders agree with its religious beliefs. On November 15, 2018, the group filed a federal lawsuit against the university, which settled in favor of the student group in May 2019. The University agreed to change its policy to prevent discrimination and allow student groups to require that their leaders share and advocate for their religious beliefs.

University of Northern Colorado †**

In 2025, UNC refused to recognize an InterVarsity chapter because of the group's leadership requirements. The university relented when presented with the current federal regulation.

In the 2018-19 academic year, the Cru chapter was threatened with de-recognition unless it dropped its faith requirement for its leaders and submitted a constitution that in no way indicated that the organization *expected* its leaders to share its religious beliefs. The student leaders sought help from legal counsel for the organization. After sending a letter to the university, the university claimed it had an all-comers policy and said it could not accommodate the group, despite its language referring only to enumerated statuses. The group was finally recognized after it negotiated with administrators and reached a compromise as to the terminology it could use in referring to its expectations for leaders, though the whole experience left the religious group feeling uncertain.

In 2011, a religious student group was denied funding for a campus event due to a university policy that prohibited funding for “ideological, political, or religious activities.” The policy was eventually changed.

Florida**Florida Institute of Technology ****

In 2023, the university denied recognition to InterVarsity because of its religious leadership requirements for students. After sustained conversations, the university relented.

Florida International University**

In 2024, Florida International University refused to recognize a pre-existing InterVarsity chapter because of its religious leadership requirements. Upon extensive negotiation and invocation of current federal regulations, the university backed down.

Florida Polytechnic **

In 2020, the university refused to recognize an InterVarsity chapter until multiple rounds of engagement with legal counsel caused the university to change its position.

Florida State University **

In 2004, the university threatened not to recognize a religious student group because of its religious leadership requirements. After a letter from a legal organization, the university recognized the group.

Rollins College ** ≠

In 2013, a number of religious groups were de-recognized and could no longer hold Bible studies on campus because college administrators applied a policy that effectively prohibited religious student groups from having religious leadership and membership requirements. When several religious groups sought to once again be recognized in the 2018-2019 academic year, they faced the same challenges.

University of Florida **

In 2008, the university refused to recognize a religious student group because of its religious requirements for its leaders and members. When the group challenged the policy in court, the university revised its policy to protect the right of religious groups to have religious leadership and membership requirements. The university paid several hundreds of thousands of dollars toward the student group's legal fees. (*Beta Upsilon Chi, Upsilon Chapter at the University of Florida v. Machen*, 586 F.3d 908 (11th Cir. 2009), *vacating as moot*, 559 F. Supp. 2d 1274 (N.D. Fla. 2008).)

University of South Florida †

In 2015, the university implemented a new policy that effectively denied student activity fee funds to student groups with religious leadership requirements.

Georgia

Georgia Institute of Technology**

In 1997, a university threatened to derecognize a religious student group because of its religious leadership and membership requirements. The Georgia Attorney General issued an opinion that the university was violating the group's free speech rights. The university then recognized the religious organization.

University of Georgia **

In 2006, the university denied recognition to a religious student group because of its religious leadership and membership requirements. When the group challenged the policy in court, the university revised its policy to allow religious student groups to select leaders and members based on their religious beliefs. (*Beta Upsilon Chi v. Adams*, No. 3:06-cv-00104 (M.D. Ga. 2006).)

University of West Georgias**

In the summer of 2019, a religious student group was told by university administrators in the Center for Student Involvement that it would not be a registered student organization for the 2019-2020 academic year because of its religious leadership requirements. It had been a registered student group since 2014, although at that time, it had taken several months and the involvement of a legal organization to become a registered student organization. In August 2019, after a legal organization became involved, a high-ranking university official reversed the decision and registered the organization.

Idaho

Boise State Universitys**

In 2008, the university implemented a policy that would not allow religious student organizations to consider religion in selecting leaders. The student government required two religious groups to remove references to the Bible from their constitutions. The groups challenged the policy in court. The university agreed to recognize the religious groups and allow them to “limit leadership positions to students who share the same beliefs, values, and purposes” of the groups. (*Cordova v. Laliberte*, No. 08-543 (D. Idaho 2008).

In 2012, the university stated that it wished to return to a policy that would prohibit religious groups from having religious leadership requirements. In 2013, the Idaho Legislature protected the ability of religious student groups to have religious leadership requirements. Idaho Codes§ 33-107D.

University of Idaho College of Law ** †

In 2021, a CLS student chapter sought recognition as an official student group at the University of Idaho College of Law. The law school student government, which was delegated the authority to recognize student organizations, grilled the CLS student leaders for nearly an hour about their application for recognition. The student government’s questions focused on CLS’s religious beliefs. After two such student government meetings in which the CLS student leaders defended their religious beliefs, legal counsel for the CLS chapter sent a letter to the University, asking that the CLS student chapter be recognized. The letter relied on the federal campus access regulation, 34 C.F.R. §§ 75.500(d) & 76.500(d).

In 2001, a law school’s student government denied a religious student group’s request for student activity fees funding because the religious group required its leaders and voting members to agree with its religious beliefs. In deciding the religious group’s appeal, the student judiciary determined that the religious group could receive student activity fees funding while having religious leadership requirements.

Illinois

DePaul University**

In 2024, the university refused recognition to the existing InterVarsity chapter because of the group's religious leadership requirements. InterVarsity appealed the university's decision.

In 2026, the CLS chapter at DePaul continues to struggle to get its group recognized.

Knox College ≠

In 2019, a student activist group sought to get the Student Senate to derecognize the InterVarsity chapter each year for nearly two years because of the chapter's convictions around sexuality. The Senate approved a campus-wide referendum to vote on the chapter's recognition, a move which was eventually stopped by administration.

Northwestern University ≠

In 2015, several religious students were found to have violated campus policies against solicitation after university administrators defined "solicitation as "seeking to gain support for organizations or causes." The administrators concluded that students who initiated spiritual conversations with other students and invited them to a meeting violated university policy. The university punished the religious student group by imposing sanctions on it.

Southern Illinois University School of Law **

In 2005, law school administrators revoked a religious student group's recognition because it required its leaders and members to agree with its religious beliefs. The student group challenged the policy in court and won. (*Christian Legal Society v. Walker*, 453 F.3d 853 (7th Cir. 2006).)

University of Illinois **

In 1993, a law school threatened to derecognize a religious student group for its religious beliefs. When a faculty member wrote a letter on behalf of the religious group, the law school allowed the group to remain recognized. (Stephen M. Bainbridge, *Student Religious Organizations and University Policies Against Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation: Implications of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act*, 21 J.C. & U.L. 369 (1994).)

Waubonsee Community Colleges ≠

In 2023, the community college denied a faculty/staff group supported by InterVarsity recognition as an employee resource group, even though other identity groups (including race, gender, and sex) were permitted.

Indiana

Indiana University**

In August 2015, the university announced that it would change its policy so that religious student groups could no longer require their leaders to agree with the groups' religious beliefs. The university acknowledged that religious groups would not be able to choose their leaders

according to their religious beliefs but that fraternities and sororities would be allowed to discriminate on the basis of sex in their selection of members and leaders.

Twenty religious student groups, including Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, and Christian student groups, sent a letter to the administration expressing their concerns about the new policy and its impact on religious groups' ability to choose their leaders according to their religious beliefs. After seven months of communications from students, parents, alumni, donors, and state political leaders, the university announced that it would keep its original policy and allow religious student groups to have religious leadership requirements.

Ivy Tech Community Colleges**

A student group had to seek help from legal counsel for the organization when it faced derecognition due to its religious leadership standards. It had to formally negotiate with school officials in order to become registered.

Purdue University~~≠~~

In 2003, the university threatened to derecognize a religious student housing cooperative because it required its members to agree with the religious beliefs that defined the house. After receiving a letter from a legal organization, the university agreed to continue to allow religious housing cooperatives formed around religious beliefs.

Iowa

Central College **

In 2008, the college threatened to expel a religious student group from campus because it asked its leaders to agree to live according to its religious beliefs. Eventually, the college agreed to allow the group to remain on campus.

Cornell College **

In 2011, the college required religious groups to delete their religious leadership and membership requirements from their constitutions in order to remain on campus.

University of Iowa**

In 2017, the University derecognized a religious student group, which had met on campus for 25 years, because it required its leaders to share its religious beliefs. The group had been previously recognized for its outstanding service to the student body. The group filed a federal lawsuit to regain its recognition and was granted a preliminary injunction in January 2018. The university lost and appealed, also losing the appeal. *Business Leaders in Christ v. University of Iowa*, 991 F.3d 969 (8th Cir. 2021).

In July 2018, the University officially derecognized 38 other student groups, including Muslim, Sikh, Mormon and Christian groups. InterVarsity was among these groups, and was told that it could not require its leaders to agree with the group's religious beliefs. The Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the University of Iowa officials had violated a clearly established right when they derecognized the religious student organizations, and that they therefore had

forfeited qualified immunity. *InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA v. University of Iowa*, 5 F.4th 855 (8th Cir. 2021).

These court cases were not the first time concerns arose at the University of Iowa. For over a decade, religious groups have been targeted by other student groups for exclusion from campus because they require their leaders to agree with the groups' religious beliefs. In 2004, for example, the law school denied recognition to a religious student group because it required its members and leaders to agree with its religious beliefs. After several letters from a legal organization, the university recognized the group. But over the years, there has been a steady drumbeat of opposition to religious student groups on campus.

Kansas

University of Kansas †

In 2021, the student government denied a funding request for a religious student organization, noting that it could not grant a request if any of the funds would be used for religious purposes, thereby ignoring the reality of the limited open forum legal principles. The student leaders sought help from legal counsel for the organization. Legal counsel sent two separate letters requesting changes to the unconstitutional funding policy that singled out religious groups for different treatment. The student government changed its policy and granted the student group funding.

Washburn University School of Law ≠

In 2004-2005, a law school student government voted to punish a religious group for not allowing a student to lead its Bible studies even though the student admitted that he did not agree with the group's religious beliefs. When the religious group sought protection in court, the law school agreed to allow the religious student group to keep its religious leadership and membership requirements. (*Christian Legal Society Chapter of Washburn University School of Law v. Farley*, No. 04-4120 (D. Kan. Sept. 16, 2004).) In 2016, the Kansas Legislature adopted a law protecting religious student groups on public university campuses. K.S.A. §§ 60-5311 to 60-5313.

Louisiana

Louisiana State University**

In 2003-2005, the university denied recognition to a Muslim religious student group that had met on the LSU campus for many years. The university said that a new university policy required all student organizations to state in their constitutions that they would not restrict membership based on religious belief. After receiving a letter from a legal organization, the university restored recognition to the religious student group.

Maine

Bowdoin College **

In 2014, the college derecognized a religious student group because it required its leaders to agree with its religious beliefs, as it had done for several decades. Despite *The New York Times*' front-page coverage, the college derecognized the religious group.

University of Maine, Farmington~~§~~**

In 2010, the university threatened to deny recognition to a religious student group unless it removed from its constitution that the group's purpose was to evangelize. After fifteen months, the university agreed to restore its recognition.

Maryland**Johns Hopkins~~§~~**

In 2025, Intervarsity was targeted for disfavor. InterVarsity has been the only evangelical student organization at Johns Hopkins for decades. The Dean of Students office flagged InterVarsity's Graduate student fellowship and undergraduate student fellowship constitutions as discriminatory and is requiring removal of the statement of faith, which has already resulted in one group losing status and another being threatened. The situation remains unresolved.

Towson University †

In 2010, the Student Government Association voted to deny funding to a religious student organization, because it determined that the event that was to be funded was too religious.

University of Maryland – Baltimore County ** ≠

In 2022, the Graduate Student Association refused to recognize religious groups (including InterVarsity) because they were religious groups.

In 2024, the graduate school student government once again refused to recognize the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship graduate chapter because of its religious leadership requirements and because of its theological commitments. After significant negotiations, as well as through the filing of a Equity complaint with the university, the issue was resolved in InterVarsity's favor.

University of Maryland – Baltimore Law School ≠

In 2025, the Student Bar Association refused to recognize an InterVarsity chapter because of the group's affiliation with a national organization and a negative perception of the national organization's theological convictions. After significant negotiation with the Student Bar Association and the Dean of Students, the Student Bar Association permitted the group to be recognized.

Massachusetts**Harvard University**~~§~~**

In 2018, the university placed a religious student group on administrative probation because it required its leaders to agree with its religious beliefs.

Springfield Technical Community College **

In 2022, a religious student group was told they could no longer be recognized because their values didn't align with those of the university.

Tufts University ≠**

In 2000, the student judiciary voted to derecognize a religious student group because it required its leaders and members to agree with its religious beliefs. After a legal organization sent a letter, the administration restored recognition to the religious group. The issue arose again in 2014.

Michigan

Alma College, Michigan

In 2025, Alma college, a private liberal arts college, refused to recognize a Cru chapter because the group required its leaders to agree with its religious beliefs. The students were not able to form their group.

Eastern Michigan University**

In 2022, a religious student group was told they had to include language stating they would not use religious criteria in the selection of leaders “unless the student organizations’ restriction is shown to be specifically allowed by law.” The chapter received legal counsel on how to clarify that religious leadership criteria for religious groups is specifically allowed by law, actually enabling religious groups to be treated like other groups in being able to maintain an expressive identity. The group was then recognized. Most groups, however, would not be able to understand their rights, as most would understand the language to except only fraternities and sororities from the policy in relation to their sex-based distinctions.

Michigan State University **

In 2025 all groups were asked to sign a non-discrimination agreement which committed the groups to making both membership and leadership open to all, regardless of their beliefs. Student leaders could apply for an exemption to this requirement as a religious organization to reserve their leadership positions for those who agree with the religious purposes stated in their constitution. The group was granted the exemption and was able to register.

University of Michigans**

In 2012, the university derecognized a religious student group because it required its leaders to agree with its religious beliefs. In 2013, the university restored recognition to the religious student group. The university has a history, dating back to 1992, of sporadically threatening to exclude a religious group because it requires its leaders to agree with its beliefs.

Wayne State Universitys**

In 2017, after several months of trying to reason with the administration, a religious student organization that had been a recognized student group at the university since 1956 was derecognized because it required its leaders to agree with its religious beliefs. After a federal lawsuit was filed, the university restored recognition to the student organization, but continued to fight in court for the right to deny recognition to the group. It lost in district court, with the judge finding that the university had violated the free speech, freedom of association, freedom of assembly, and free exercise rights of the student organization. *InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA v. Bd. of Governors of Wayne State Univ.*, 542 F. Supp. 3d 621 (E.D. Mich. 2021).

Minnesota

Minnesota State University, Mankato ≠

In 2015, a student invited some of her dormitory neighbors to discuss religious ideas. A residential advisor told the student that she was violating a university policy that allowed students to prohibit “religious solicitation” on a dormitory floor by majority vote. Eventually the university repealed its policy.

University of Minnesota ** ≠

In 2024, the university’s business school student association initially refused to allow religious groups to form and then insisted that the nascent InterVarsity business school chapter become recognized as an interreligious group on campus instead. The InterVarsity chapter is continuing conversations with the business school student association.

In 2020, the university’s Graduate Student Activities office refused to allow religious groups, including InterVarsity, to participate in the activities fair. This policy remains in effect in 2024.

In 2003, the university denied recognition when another religious group refused to state in its constitution that its membership was open to all students regardless of religion. The group challenged the university policy. In order to settle the case, the university changed its policy to allow religious student groups to “require their voting membership and officers to adhere to the organization’s statement of faith and its rules of conduct.” (*Maranatha Christian Fellowship v. Regents of the Board of the University of Minnesota System*, No. 03-5618 (D. Minn. Oct. 24, 2003).)

In 1994, the university derecognized a religious student group because it required its leaders and members to agree with its religious beliefs. A professor at the law school led the successful effort to regain recognition for the group. (Michael S. Paulsen, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Limited Public Forum: Unconstitutional Conditions on “Equal Access” for Religious Speakers and Groups*, 29 U.C. Davis L. Rev. 653, 675 (1996).)

University of Minnesota, Carlson School of Business ≠

In 2024, the student government refused to recognize the proposed InterVarsity chapter, and the graduate school of business refused to permit religious groups from participating in new student activities fairs, claiming that there would be insufficient interest in a religious club. In year two of the conversation, the student government proposed approving an interfaith club instead with the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship chapter being subsumed in that group. Because of InterVarsity staffing limitations, this was left unresolved.

Missouri

Southeast Missouri State University **

In 2015-2016, the university denied a religious student group recognition because it required its leaders to agree with its religious beliefs. The group worked with the administration and the student government to secure a policy that would protect religious groups. In April 2016,

the student government voted *not* to adopt a policy that would protect religious groups. After the student government vote, five additional religious groups indicated that they would not be able to remain on campus if they could not require their leaders to agree with their religious beliefs. In October 2016, the university agreed that religious student groups could have religious requirements for their leaders.

Montana

Montana State University **

In 2022, the University refused to recognize a religious student organization's chapter because of the chapter's religious leadership requirements. It required the chapter to submit a constitution which did not include an explanation that religious leadership requirements were consistent with the university's nondiscrimination requirement.

In 2014, the university adopted a new policy that effectively prohibited religious student groups from having religious leadership requirements. The religious groups could not persuade the university to allow them to maintain their leadership requirements because of Ninth Circuit precedent.

University of Montana School of Law ** †

From 2007-2011, the law school student government denied recognition to a religious group because it required its leaders and members to agree with its religious beliefs. The religious group challenged the policy in court, but the district court ruled against the religious group because it was in the Ninth Circuit. The religious group dismissed its appeal when the law school agreed to implement numerous reforms to bring allocation of student activity fees into conformity with the First Amendment. (*Christian Legal Society v. Eck*, 625 F. Supp.2d 1026 (D. Mont. 2009), *appeal dismissed*, No. 09-35581 (9th Cir., Aug. 10, 2011).)

Nebraska

Nebraska Wesleyan University**

In 2025, a private school that celebrated that it welcomed people of all faiths and backgrounds delayed registering a Cru chapter because the Student Involvement Office didn't like some language in its constitution, including its leadership standards. With the assistance of attorneys and after adjusting some language, but retaining leadership standards, the group was finally able to register.

University of Nebraska, Lincoln †

In 2021, a Christian student organization called Ratio Christi wanted to bring in a Christian philosopher and professor to speak about the problem of evil and the existence of God. It requested funding to help with its event, but the university denied funding, saying it could not be used for "political and ideological events," though it had not applied that standard to other groups. Ratio Christi filed suit, claiming clear viewpoint discrimination in the policy's application and the distribution of fees. The case settled and the university changed its policy to make its fee distribution more viewpoint neutral.

University of Nebraska Omaha **

In 2010, the university told a religious student group that it must remove from its constitution its requirement that its leaders agree with its religious beliefs. After receiving a letter from a legal organization, the university agreed to recognize the group. The university also had told a different religious group that its students could not meet with students who had filled out a card indicating that they wanted to receive information from the group.

New Hampshire**University of New Hampshire, Franklin Pierce Law School ** ≠**

In 2022, the law school's Student Body Association asked inappropriate questions about a religious student organization's religious beliefs, with certain members appearing hostile to the chapter's views. Legal counsel wrote two letters clarifying the state of the law, and a misunderstanding about a certain precedent, and then the group was granted recognition.

New Jersey**New Jersey Institute of Technology † ≠**

In 2010, the college had a policy creating three tiers of student groups with the third tier automatically denied student activity fee funding, unlike the groups in the first two tiers. The third tier consisted largely of religious student groups.

Princeton University: **

For several years before 2005, the student government denied a religious student group recognition because it was religious. After a letter from a legal organization, the administration eventually granted the group recognition.

Rutgers University ≠**

In 2021, the Graduate Student Association refused to recognize multiple Christian groups as duplicative (one of which was an InterVarsity chapter). Two years of conversation with the university finally resulted in two Christian clubs being recognized.

In 2002-2003, the university derecognized a religious student group because it would not include language in its constitution that would prevent it from requiring its leaders to agree with its religious beliefs. In response to a court challenge, the university revised its interpretation of its policy to allow religious student groups to keep their religious leadership requirements. (*Intervarsity Multi-Ethnic Campus Fellowship v. Rutgers*, No. 02-06145 (D.N.J. 2002).)

Stockton University, New Jersey**

In 2026, the public university denied recognition and funding to a Cru chapter at Stockton University because Cru's constitution has criteria for leadership selection of student leaders that includes a commitment to uphold the religious beliefs and mission of the group. A resolution has not yet been reached and the group remains unrecognized.

New Mexico

University of New Mexico **

In 2020, the University refused to recognize a religious student group because of its religious leadership requirements. The student leaders sought help from the national organization, and after multiple conversations with administrators, the University backed down only because the organization reminded them of the federal regulation finalized in 2020 that protected religious student groups.

University of New Mexico School of Law **

In 2001, the law school denied recognition to a religious student group because it required its leaders and members to agree with its religious beliefs. After receiving a letter from a legal organization, the university revised its policy and recognized the religious group with its leadership and membership requirements.

New York**New York City College of Technology, Brooklyn****

In 2017, a religious student group seeking to register as a student organization was told that their constitution could not have any leadership requirements other than the basic GPA-type requirements the college has in place. They were asked to remove any such language in their constitution. The group was concerned about its association rights and asked for policies clarifying the requirement further. The administrator refused to give more details and just demanded that they remove all religious requirements for leaders or they would not be registered.

North Country Community College ≠

In 2005, a student was told by university administrators that she could not form a religious student group because of “separation of church and state.” After a letter from a legal organization, the university agreed to allow her to form a religious student group.

Pace University**

The law school denied recognition to a religious student group because it required its leaders and members to agree with its religious beliefs. After eighteen months of correspondence, including letters from a legal group, the law school eventually recognized the religious group with religious requirements for leaders.

State University of New York, Albany**

In 2016-17, a religious student group had difficulty achieving recognition from the Student Association due to a policy stating that any student must be allowed to be a member and run for office in any student organization, with no eligibility qualifications allowed to ensure suitability, knowledge or experience. The religious student group expressed concern about preserving its religious beliefs and mission, hindering its association rights, but the university continued to insist on the policy and asked for language changes in the constitution. The group achieved recognition after a convoluted process of updating its constitution, though it remained concerned that it would not be able to uphold its religious beliefs.

State University of New York, Broome County Community Colleges**

In February of 2026, SUNY-Broome County Community College denied recognition to InterVarsity because the student chapter requires student leaders to affirm InterVarsity's statement of faith. The school and the SUNY system were informed about current federal regulations that protect religious student groups but refused to change course. The issue has not yet been resolved.

State University of New York, Buffalo**

In 2011, the student government derecognized a religious student group because it required its leaders to conform to its religious standards of conduct. After seven months, the student judiciary ordered that the student government restore recognition to the religious group.

State University of New York, Cortlands**

In 2022, a religious student organization submitted revisions to its constitution that included statements that it expected its leaders to demonstrate knowledge of the national organization's teachings, and that the process would include asking applicants about their beliefs, the Student Government Association (SGA) asked the leadership to remove those statements, claiming it went against the SGA policy that said the SGA could oppose recognizing a group if "it is discriminatory in any way...". After legal counsel sent a letter detailing the state of the law and that the chapter wished only to preserve its religious identity, the chapter was re-registered and allowed to include the statements in its constitution.

State University of New York, Old Westbury ≠

Beginning in 2022, a group of students submitted a request for official recognition on campus. The request was denied because, according to university decision makers, the university already had a Christian group on campus and there could only be one club representing particular viewpoints. The group applied again in 2023 and 2024, receiving the same explanation and, in 2024, was also told that the group's conservative views were disfavored. Legal counsel sent a letter pointing out that the "only one club" policy was not being applied to secular organizations and therefore the school was treating religious groups differently, and also that the cited reasons were clearly viewpoint discrimination. The letter also pointed to the Department of Education's regulations requiring universities receiving federal grants to give equal treatment to religious student groups. Upon receipt of the letter, the university reversed its decision and recognized the student organization.

State University of New York, Oswegos**

In 2001, a religious student group was denied recognition because it required its leaders and members to agree with its religious beliefs. Eventually the university agreed to recognize the group with its religious leadership and membership requirements.

State University of New York, StonyBrook ** ≠

In 2025, Stony Brook University denied a Cru chapter registered status because it claimed that the language of the national organization around "evangelism, discipleship and outreach suggests a conversion-oriented approach. They claimed this was in violation of the "University's commitment to non-proselytizing engagement and our obligation to equal opportunity and non-discrimination." They also claimed that the group "duplicated" other religious groups. The students seeking to register the group did not believe the other religious

groups met their desires for a religious group that reflected their faith and beliefs, which is why they wanted to affiliate with Cru. They believed that the college was disfavoring them. Advised by attorneys, the students successfully appealed the school's decision and were finally recognized for the 2025-2026 school year, after several months of the year had passed.

Utica University ≠**

In 2024, the student government objected to the establishment of an InterVarsity chapter. After significant back-and-forth with student government and administration, the group was recognized.

North Carolina

North Carolina State ≠

In 2016, a student group called Grace Christian Life objected to a university solicitation policy that severely censored speech by requiring a permit for any kind of student speech or communication anywhere on campus. It was selectively enforced against groups that the university disfavored. The group filed suit and the district court issued a preliminary injunction halting the policy that covered non-commercial speech and could be used easily to target disfavored speech. A settlement was reached and the university changed its policy to no longer require a permit for non-commercial speech.

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hills**

In 2005-2006, the university denied recognition to a religious student group because it required its leaders and members to agree with its religious beliefs. The student group challenged the university's action in court. The university settled the case by adopting a policy that allows all student groups, including religious groups, to have leadership and membership requirements regarding beliefs. (*Alpha Iota Omega Christian Fraternity v. Moser*, No. 04-765, 2006 WL 1286186 (M.D.N.C. May 4, 2006); 2005 WL 1720903 (M.D.N.C. Mar. 2, 2005).) Nonetheless, for the next 8 years, religious groups at UNC were repeatedly told that the policy might be altered to no longer allow religious leadership requirements. In 2014, the North Carolina General Assembly enacted legislation to protect religious student groups on public college campuses. N.C.G.S.A. §§ 115D-20.1 & 116-40.12.

University of North Carolina, Greensboro **

In 2011-2012, the university denied recognition to a religious student group because it required its members to agree with its religious beliefs. The university recognized the group after it challenged the university policy in court.

North Dakota

University of North Dakotas**

In 2003, the university denied recognition to a religious student group because it required its leaders and members to agree with its religious beliefs. After several months, the university agreed to allow religious groups to take religion into account in selection of their leaders and members and restored recognition to the group.

Ohio

Case Western Reserve University**

In 2006, the university denied recognition to a religious student group until it received a letter from a legal organization. In 2013, the student government of a graduate school at the university denied recognition to a religious student group because of the “emphasis on God and especially because of the bible sessions” in its application for recognition. After a letter drafted by a legal organization was sent, the graduate school recognized the group.

Cleveland State University **

In 2018, the university derecognized a religious student group because it required its leaders to agree with the group’s religious beliefs, even after the group brought to the administrator’s attention that Ohio state law prohibited public universities from denying recognition to religious student organizations because of their religious leadership requirements. Eventually recognition of the group was restored.

The Ohio State University **

In 2003-2004, a religious group was threatened with derecognition by the OSU Moritz College of Law after a member of another student group demanded that it be derecognized because of its religious leadership and membership requirements. After months of discussions with university administrators, the religious group sought court protection. It dismissed its legal challenge after the university revised its policy to allow religious student organizations to have religious leadership and membership requirements. The religious group then met without problem from 2004 to 2010. (*Christian Legal Society Chapter of the Ohio State University v. Holbrook*, No. C2-04-197 (S.D. Ohio 2004 (dismissed when university changed its policy).)

In 2010, the university asked the student government whether the university should discard its policy and no longer allow religious groups to have religious leadership and membership requirements. After several public meetings on the issue, the student government urged the university to drop its protection for religious student groups and “endorse[d] the position that every student, regardless of religious belief, should have the opportunity . . . to apply or run for a leadership position within those [religious] organizations.” Having unleashed anti-religious sentiment on campus, the university eventually tried to compromise and retain protection for religious groups’ leadership requirements but not membership requirements. But the campus controversy continued. Ultimately, the Ohio Legislature resolved the issue by prohibiting public universities from denying recognition to religious student organizations because of their religious leadership and membership requirements. Ohio Rev. Codes§ 3345.023.

In 2025, the University once again flagged a Cru chapter’s constitution for review, saying that the nondiscrimination language had to say it applied to leadership and that they could not have religious leadership requirements. It was an easy solution with no conflict because of the Ohio law protecting religious student organizations. Based on the state law, OSU already had a policy carveout for religious organizations, so that they would be treated fairly

University of Toledo College of Law ** ≠

In 2005, the law school refused to recognize a religious student group unless it removed all scriptural references from its constitution. The university also required the group to pledge

not to choose its leaders and members on the basis of religion, even though the university actually had a written policy that allowed religious groups to do so. As a result of the group's challenge in court, the university recognized the group and agreed that student groups could have religious leadership requirements and include references to the Bible in their constitutions and bylaws. (*Christian Legal Society Chapter of the University of Toledo v. Johnson*, 3:05-cv-7126 (N.D. Ohio June 16, 2005))

Wright State University **

In 2009, the university denied a religious student group recognition because it required its voting members to agree with its religious beliefs. The religious group had been a recognized student group at the university for 30 years. After receiving correspondence from a legal group organization, the university restored the group's recognition.

Oklahoma

The University of Oklahoma **

In August 2011, the student government sent a memorandum to all registered student organizations, announcing a re-interpretation of university policy that would prohibit religious student associations from having religious leadership and membership criteria. After receiving a letter from a legal organization, the university agreed that a religious student group could require its leaders to agree with its religious beliefs.

In 2012, the university denied recognition to a religious student group because it required its members to agree with the group's religious beliefs. After receiving a letter from a legal organization, the university agreed to recognize the group. In 2014, the Oklahoma Legislature enacted protection for religious student groups. 70 Okl. St. Ann. § 2119.

Oregon

The University of Oregon ≠

For many years, religious groups have been sidelined and placed under the authority of a separate association. As a result, most groups do not actually register as student organizations, are treated differently in terms of how they can reach out to, involve students, and get funding. In addition, students don't have as many opportunities for leadership within religious groups. When a religious group sought recognition as a student organization in 2018, they were told they could not have religious standards for leadership.

Pennsylvania

Harrisburg Area Community College ** ≠

In 2022, the college objected to the Christian student group's doctrinal requirements for student leaders and insisted on onerous reporting requirements for campus ministry staff – including disclosing the conversations the staff had with student leaders. The group remains unrecognized as conversations continue.

Penn State ** ≠

In 2004, the university refused to recognize a Christian student group because the university claimed that its purpose was duplicated by other religious groups. The university had a policy that required all religious groups to be “unique.” The policy would effectively limit the number of Christian groups on the campus. After the group challenged the policy in court, the university recognized the religious student group and deleted its policy requiring “uniqueness.”

In 2005, however, the university adopted a policy that prohibited religious student groups from requiring their leaders to agree with the groups’ religious beliefs and standards of conduct. In response to another court challenge, the university revised its policy to allow religious groups to choose their leaders according to their religious beliefs. (*DiscipleMakers v. Spanier*, No. 04-2229 (M.D. Pa. 2005).)

Shippensburg University ≠**

A public university had an overbroad and vague speech code that encouraged reporting of anything subjectively considered ‘harassing’ which had previously been enjoined. The university then used that code to expel a religious student group because its faith-based leadership and membership requirements meant it was not “open to everyone” and purportedly violated the code. After the group filed a court challenge, the university settled the case and changed its speech codes so that religious and political groups could choose their leaders and members according to their beliefs.

Temple University **

In 2024, administrators at Temple University refused to renew the InterVarsity chapter’s recognition because of the group’s religious leadership requirements. After significant negotiation, the group remains recognized.

Temple University School of Medicine **

In 2013, a religious student group was told by campus administrators that it stood to lose recognition because it required its leaders to lead lives in accordance with its religious beliefs.

Rhode Island

Brown University**

In May 2026, members of an Intervarsity graduate student chapter attended a mandatory student activities meeting where they were told they had to add new “inclusive language” to their constitution. I prohibited the consideration of religious belief for both membership and leadership. The chaplain’s office confirmed that it meant that a leader of a religious group could be a member who does not identify with that religion. The issue has not yet been resolved.

South Carolina

College of Charleston ≠

In 2016-17, a religious student organization experienced different treatment than other student organizations both because religious groups were given a different process of approval that was required of them in order to access numerous benefits: getting registered, having access

to facilities, and getting funding for their events. The students and religious organization advisors learned to navigate within the system, though they were often frustrated by the process.

Charleston School of Law ≠

The Christian Legal Society chapter was attacked by the Equality Alliance for hosting a speaker who communicated a biblical understanding of marriage and sexual conduct.

University of South Carolina †

In 2008, a religious student group was denied access to student activity fee funding that was available to other student groups solely because it was religious. After the group challenged the policy in court, the university adopted a new policy that allowed all student groups to be funded on the same terms.

South Dakota

Western Dakota Tech Community Colleges**

In 2025, Western Dakota Tech denied recognition to an InterVarsity chapter because of the chapter's religious leadership requirements. After negotiation and being informed of current federal regulations that protect religious student groups, the college allowed the chapter to be recognized.

Tennessee

Vanderbilt University**

In 2011-2012, Vanderbilt University denied recognition to fourteen religious groups because they required their leaders to agree with the groups' religious beliefs. The university told one religious student group that it must delete five words from its leadership requirements if it wanted to remain on campus: "personal commitment to Jesus Christ." That group left campus rather than recant their core religious belief. The university told another religious student group that it was religious discrimination for the group to state in its constitution that it expected its leaders to lead its Bible study, prayer, and worship. Also, the university claimed it was religious discrimination for the group to require that its leaders affirm that they agreed with the group's core religious beliefs.

In 2013, Tennessee passed a law protecting religious student groups on public university campuses. T.C.A. § 49-7-156. The law does not apply to Vanderbilt University because it is a private university.

Texas

Texas A & M University**

In 2009, the university told a religious group that it would no longer be recognized because it required its members to agree with its religious beliefs. After a legal organization sent a letter, the university agreed to recognize the religious group with its religious membership requirements.

In 2011-2012, another religious group was told it must delete its religious requirements for its leaders and voting members from its constitution if it wanted to remain a recognized student group. After several letters from a legal organization, the university agreed to allow the group to be recognized with its religious requirements for leadership and membership.

University of Houston, Clear Lakes**

In 2021, the Christian student group Ratio Christi applied to be a registered student group but was denied based on the university's policy that prevented groups from choosing leaders who agree with their values and mission. Ratio Christi filed suit. The case settled and the university added language protecting the right of student organizations to require its officers to "subscribe to the tenets of that organization."

University of North Texas Dallas**

In 2016-2017, the law school delayed granting a religious student group recognition because of its religious leadership requirements. After 8 months, the university adopted a policy that protects religious groups: "A registered student organization created primarily for religious purposes may restrict officer positions to those members who subscribe to the registered student organization's statement of faith."

Utah

Snow College (Community college in Ephraim, UT) ≠

In 2012-13, Snow College administrators prevented a religious group from freely participating in a limited public forum it created by trying to control its expression. During the "Paint the Town" event where the school coordinates for clubs to paint windows of willing local businesses and promote the school's Homecoming event, a Christian student group called Solid Rock was assigned a window and used a cross as a focal point, and sharing a religious message that also incorporated the homecoming theme. An administrator told the group that they could not paint religious symbols and threatened to have someone wash it away if they didn't remove it. With legal help, the group clarified that its speech was not government speech, but private speech in a limited public forum, and the school changed its policy to avoid future viewpoint discrimination.

Vermont

Middlebury College **

In 2016, a religious student group was derecognized because of its theological beliefs.

Virginia

James Madison University †

In the fall of 2016, a religious student group was denied funding to help send students to a conference; in previous years, they had received funding. During the student government meeting addressing the appeal, the student group responded to one claimed basis for the denial. The discussion then turned to whether student activity fees should be used to support Christian beliefs. Many claimed they should not and then voted to deny the appeal. The discussion was

lively and heated among student government members. The experience demonstrated a clear lack of understanding of the Supreme Court's rulings on student activity fees and forums for speech.

Randolph-Macon Colleges ≠**

In 2017, A religious student organization was threatened with derecognition if it did not permit a student who disagreed with the chapter's theological positions to become a leader.

University of Mary Washingtons ≠**

In 2005, a student wanted to start a religious student group but could not agree to a university policy that would prohibit it from having religious leadership requirements. In the past, the university had denied recognition to any student group that was religious or political in nature. After receiving a letter from a legal organization, the university recognized the group. In 2013, the Virginia General Assembly passed a law to protect religious and political groups. Va. Code Ann. § 23-9.2:12.

University of Virginia ≠

In August 2021, several religious groups at the University of Virginia learned that the Student Council was requiring that all student organization submit an "Identity Inclusivity Disclosure Form" in the Fall Activities Fair, an important event for student organizations to introduce themselves to incoming students. The Student Council's form required a student organization to indicate whether it restricted its membership, leadership, programming, or activities based on the enumerated classes in the University's nondiscrimination policy. Regardless of its responses on the Form, a student organization would be allowed to participate in the Fall Activities Fair. However, if the Council decided that an organization did not respond honestly, an Honor Code charge could be brought, which could result in expulsion of the student officer signing the Form. Recognizing that the Form was targeting them, several religious organizations sent a letter to University leaders voicing their concerns. The Student Council withdrew the Form several days later.

Earlier in November 2020, the Student Council had adopted a resolution for its lobbyist to seek repeal of the Virginia law that protects religious and political student groups' right to choose their members and leaders according to their beliefs. To date, the state law has not been repealed.

Virginia Community College System ≠

A policy for Virginia's community colleges in 2014 required someone who wanted to speak on campus to be part of a student organization and to file a registration form with the college "four days in advance of the demonstration." The policy applied to all 23 community colleges and required this "prior registration." This policy was problematic because it both excluded individuals from speaking and also because it was a prior restraint on student groups. An individual student who had been told to stop preaching in an open space on campus because it violated school policy and he "might offend someone," filed a lawsuit. Virginia then changed the policy so students could speak in open areas of campus without being limited in time and place, and without having to register "four days in advance."

William and Mary College of Law ≠

In February 2021, the Christian Legal Society chapter (CLS) at the William and Mary College of Law invited a religious freedom lawyer to speak at its meeting. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was held on Zoom, and the speaker was in California. CLS publicized its meeting through the normal campus communication channels. Several student groups, calling themselves the Equality Alliance, published an open letter to the law school, urging the CLS student chapter to disinvite its speaker due to his work on religious freedom cases. CLS students received disturbing comments from their fellow students.

In an email to the law school community, the administration explained that student groups were allowed to invite speakers, even people whose views other students disliked. The campus access regulation may have helped administrators respect the CLS chapter's right to function on campus and prevented an escalation of the situation.

Washington

Highline Community College †

In 2007, a religious student organization was denied funding allocated for student organizations. They were told they were ineligible because the funds could not be used to fund religious activities. After a letter was sent from legal counsel, the college granted the group funding.

Spokane Falls Community College ≠

A Christian club was sponsoring a pro-life event in 2008. A student leader was told that it would not be allowed because "Washington is a pro-choice state," so she could not use reserve space in the student center for a pro-life display, even though other student clubs regularly used the same display case spaces to express their viewpoints on various issues, making it a limited public forum for student speech. She was told her view was too one-sided, and that they needed to also include pro-abortion information. Administrators also attended the group's meeting to pressure them not to hold the event. They were told they would be punished if people were offended. They filed suit in 2009, and the case later settled, with agreements to change various policies and Washington Code provisions.

University of Washington ≠

In 1997, a religious student organization was repeatedly treated differently than other groups because of its religious status. It was denied the opportunity to advertise the way other groups were allowed to do so, and its fliers were even removed. It was also subjected to different treatment in how rooms were allocated, and was denied an appropriate room for a large event it was having that was routinely given to other groups. The group was also threatened with having its club status removed. After a strongly worded letter from legal counsel, the university stopped targeting the group.

Wisconsin

Lawrence University ≠

In 2025, the Lawrence University student government refused to recognize the existing InterVarsity student chapter, claiming procedural violations in the application process but referring to the organization's doctrinal beliefs in the debate. The situation has been resolved in InterVarsity's favor.

Milwaukee School of Engineering **

The student government refused to renew recognition of a Christian student group because of its religious standards of conduct. After a legal organization sent a letter, the student government restored recognition to the group, as well as to a Muslim student group.

University of Wisconsin, Madison**

In 2022, a CLS chapter was seeking to re-register at the law school. They were asked to change some language in their constitution that a leader "must be a Christian." The group was told that they could require agreement with beliefs, based on the Regents' Policy 30-6, but could not require identification with a particular religion. This nonsensical distinction was confusing to the student leaders. After receiving a threat letter communicating the state of the law and noting precedent, federal regulations, and the logical meaning of the Regents' Policy, the chapter was able to re-register.

In 2006, The university derecognized a religious student group in part because of its religious leadership and membership requirements. When the group challenged its policy in court, the university had to change its policy. (*Madison Roman Catholic Found. v. Walsh*, 2007 WL 1056772 (W.D. Wis. Apr. 4, 2007).) The university then denied student activity fee funding to the religious group because its speech included prayer and religious instruction. The religious group won its court challenge to this viewpoint discrimination.

University of Wisconsin, Superior †

Badger Catholic was the largest Catholic student group at the University of Wisconsin campus and had received funding regularly for its activities until the university decided to no longer fund certain religious activities that were integrated into many of Badger Catholic's events. The University fought the case for years, with the court battle lasting from 2007-2010, but the Seventh Circuit confirmed that religious student organizations should not be singled out and excluded because of their religious content. *Badger Catholic v. Walsh*, 620 F.3d 775 (7th Cir. 2010).

Attachment C



April 17, 2026

Religious Liberty Commission
Office of the Associate Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

PII

We appreciate the work the Religious Liberty Commission (Commission) has been doing, seeking to clarify the importance of religious freedom and the current threats to religious freedom right here in our country. We at Christian Legal Society's Center for Law & Religious Freedom have defended the rights of individuals and organizations to practice and live out their religious identity and beliefs for over fifty years. We have advocated for the passage of important legislation like RFRA, RLUIPA, and the Equal Access Act. We defend the rights of students, student groups, teachers, and parents in public schools to engage in religious expression. We support religious organizations' right to be authentically religious by adopting policies and hiring based on religious beliefs. We pursue all these things because we believe that the unique religious pluralism of our country is a result of strong First Amendment protections; we must preserve these protections for future generations.

To that end, we offer a few specific suggestions for the Commission's consideration that could be effectuated with minimal cost and that will provide positive long-term advancement of the Commission's goals:

1. The White House Office of Legislative Affairs (OLA) should include two specific bills as part of its legislative priorities that will serve to advance its religious freedom goals: the Equal Campus Access Act of 2025 (S.2859 / H.R. 5505) and the Fair Treatment of Religious Organizations Act of 2026 (H.R. 1847).
2. OLA should also encourage all House and Senate committees to be vigilant and not advance any bill that has a carveout to RFRA.
3. The White House should ask DOJ's Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) to draft a memorandum detailing the arguments in support of overruling *Employment Division v. Smith*.¹ The White House should ask DOJ to file in cases in the federal appellate courts and the Supreme Court in support of overruling *Smith*.
4. The White House should direct the Department of Education to revise its "Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public K-12 Schools," released February 5, 2026, by restoring the first Trump Administration's Guidance,

¹ 494 U.S. 872 (1990).

released January 21, 2020. Among several things, the revised Guidance should emphasize how current law protects religious student organizations meeting on public secondary school campuses under the Equal Access Act and the First Amendment.

These suggestions merit particular focus as we detail below. In each section, we also mention the specific EO 14291 priorities that these suggestions relate to.

1. The White House Office of Legislative Affairs should include two specific bills as part of its legislative priorities that will serve to advance its Religious Freedom goals: the Equal Campus Access Act of 2025 (S.2859 / H.R. 5505) and the Fair Treatment of Religious Organizations Act of 2026 (H.R. 1817).

First, the OLA should include these bills as part of its legislative priorities. They advance widely supported religious freedom goals in the following ways.

The Equal Campus Access Act of 2025 (S.2859 / H.R. 5505) directly relates to the EO priority of the First Amendment rights of students. It protects free speech and religious freedom for college students at public universities all over the country. It will correct a decades-long pattern of public universities in all parts of the country excluding religious campus groups because of those groups' faith convictions and faith-based leadership standards.² In addition, it will help students find faith and belonging through religious student organizations. Students need healthy community and support for their time at college, and the presence of authentic faith-based groups can make a huge difference in providing belonging and meaningful connection, leading to better well-being and success.³ The bill states:

None of the funds made available under this Act may be provided to any public institution of higher education that denies to a religious student organization any right, benefit, or privilege that is otherwise afforded to other student organizations at the institution (including full access to the facilities of the institution and official recognition of the organization by the institution) because of the religious beliefs, practices, speech, leadership standards, or standards of conduct of the religious student organization.

This language is intended to hold public colleges and universities accountable so that they will follow First Amendment principles of religious freedom, free speech, and freedom of association in how they treat religious student organizations. The requested language will protect the

² See Statement of Kimberlee Wood Colby, Of Counsel, Christian Legal Society's Center for Law & Religious Freedom, at the U.S. Religious Liberty Commission Hearing on Religious Liberty in Public Education, Sept. 8, 2025 (available [here](#)); See also Fleshman, Benjamin, *How Do You Solve a Problem Like Martinez*, 29 Texas Review of Law and Politics 232 (2025).

³ 2022 Salesforce Connected Student Report, 3rd Edition, <https://www.salesforce.org/blog/2022-connected-student-report-third-edition/> (identifying belonging as a key foundation for student success); Foubert, John D., Grainger, Lauren U., "Effects of Involvement in Clubs and Organizations on the Psychosocial Development of First Year and Senior College Students," NASPA Journal, 2006, Vol. 43, no.1; Corlette, Naomi, *The Loneliness Gap Among Young Americans is Growing*, Harvard Political Review (April 23, 2025); Emily A. Greenfield and Nadine F. Marks, *Religious Social Identity as an Explanatory Factor for Associations between More Frequent Formal Religious Participation and Psychological Well-Being*, Int. J. Psychol Relig. 2007; 17(3): 245-259 (available at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2507864/pdf/nihms56430.pdf>).

religious freedom and expression of religious student organizations on public college and university campuses and will avoid protracted, costly, and needless litigation that disrupts student life and costs taxpayers.⁴ Instead, student groups will be able to point administrators to this language to resolve confusion and remain focused on serving their campus and community. The language is supported by a wide range of religious organizations of many religious backgrounds.⁵

It is common sense that religious student organizations on public university and college campuses should be able to authentically represent their faiths and religious identities by requiring their leaders to agree with their religious beliefs. This language is simple and clear protective language that will stop intimidation tactics and religious discrimination from happening when colleges try to exclude religious groups (a decades-long problem). The proposed statutory language does not increase federal oversight in higher education because it is a reasonable, one-sentence solution that does not require a college or university to adopt any particular policy but merely requires fair treatment of religious students.

The Fair Treatment of Religious Organizations’ Act (H.R. 1817) would directly and vitally implement the priority of the EO and this Commission of protecting the First Amendment rights of faith-based institutions. The Supreme Court has held that the IRS can revoke the tax exemption of a religious institution if the IRS Commissioner finds that the latter has a policy or practice that violates clear public policy. Obviously, revocation of the exemption would be fatal to almost any charity or church; the government could tax it into extinction and/or its donations would no longer be tax deductible to donors, thus drying up its support. This “nuclear option” cannot be left in the hands of future administrations who could revoke exempt status for any religious ministry or college that requires its staff and/or board to share its beliefs and conduct standards relating to homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and/or “gender transition” (gender dysphoria). The Supreme Court’s §1983 precedent [*Bob Jones University v. U.S.*, 461 U.S. 574 (1983)] drew the line at racially discriminatory policies of a faith-based university. H.R. 1817 would keep the IRS from extending that crippling threat to beliefs that faith communities have for millennia maintained about marriage and human sexuality.

2. OLA should encourage all House and Senate committees to be vigilant and not advance any bill that has a carveout from RFRA.

This action would directly advance the EO’s priority to protect “the First Amendment rights” of all groups, because the RFRA statutory rights are intimately tied to the First Amendment.

Three decades ago, a remarkable and diverse coalition found common ground to protect religious freedom for all. The result was RFRA—a bill that passed with overwhelming bipartisan support (97-3 in the Senate; unanimous consent in the House) in response to the Supreme Court’s decision in *Employment Division v. Smith*.

⁴ See, e.g., *InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA v. Univ. of Iowa*, 5 F.4th 855, 864 (8th Cir. 2021); *InterVarsity Christian Fellowship v. Bd. of Governors of Wayne State Univ.*, 534 F.Supp.3d 785 (E.D. Mich. 2021); *Fellowship of Christian Athletes v. San Jose Unified Indep. Sch. Dist. Bd. of Educ.*, 82 F.4th 664 (9th Cir. 2023) (en banc).

⁵ See Appendix 1, a letter of support for S.2859 / H.R. 5505, signed by 47 diverse organizations.

RFRA is crucial to protecting religious freedom. The White House should advocate to protect this landmark statute by communicating to Congress that it is an absolute priority that no legislative proposal in Congress pass out of committee or on the House or Senate floor if it carves out RFRA's application to any federal law or to the implementation of that law, whether statutory or otherwise. Regrettably, these carveouts have appeared in bills sponsored by members of both political parties. Nevertheless, no bill carving out RFRA has ever been signed into law, and it is important to ensure that remains true. Once a carveout is made for one interest, all interests will demand carveouts, fatally weakening RFRA.

Carveouts of RFRA are unnecessary because the law includes consideration of both the burden on religious exercise and the compelling government interest. RFRA's sensible balancing test says that the government may not substantially burden the exercise of the claimant's religious belief unless the government can prove that the burden serves a compelling government interest that is accomplished by the least restrictive means. It doesn't create a religious exemption for everyone from the challenged law—only for the specific religious claimant. And if the government's interest (e.g., national security) is compelling and cannot otherwise be accomplished in one specific case, then the government prevails. It will therefore not harm the government and will advance long-term religious freedom interests to preserve RFRA's full application to federal laws.

3. The White House should ask DOJ's Office of Legal Counsel to draft a memorandum detailing the arguments in support of overruling *Employment Division v. Smith*. The White House should ask DOJ to file in cases in the federal appellate courts and the Supreme Court in support of overruling *Smith*.

Working to overturn *Employment Division v. Smith* will support the EO priority of advancing “the First Amendment rights of pastors, religious leaders, houses of worship, faith-based institutions” and will likely bolster many of the other listed priorities as well. *Smith* greatly reduced protections for religious exercise by providing only rational basis review for burdens on free exercise caused by neutral and generally applicable laws. By focusing courts primarily on whether a law is neutral and generally applicable, *Smith* has caused free exercise analysis to often miss the forest for the trees, ignoring the First Amendment promise. The Supreme Court should overrule it.

“Government may neither compel affirmation of a repugnant belief, nor penalize or discriminate against individuals or groups because they hold religious views abhorrent to the authorities.”⁶ Free exercise protects the twin guaranties of “freedom to believe and freedom to act.”⁷ The text of the first freedom in the First Amendment is “free *exercise*.”

Smith has functionally prevented courts from directly implementing the First Amendment's core purpose of protecting religious individuals' and institutions' freedom to live faithfully to their sincerely held religious beliefs. Instead, *Smith* requires the courts—after noting a significant burden on religious exercise—to ask if the law involved is neutral and generally applicable rather than consider whether the law is the least intrusive means of advancing a government interest that

⁶ *Sherbert v. Verner*, 374 U.S. 398, 402 (1963) (citations omitted).

⁷ *Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 310 U.S. 296, 303 (1940).

is compelling. *Smith* did not have strong reasoning for this change, and it is inconsistent with the history of free exercise of religion. The ambiguity of the law because of *Smith*'s uncertain application has eroded the promises of religious protections *in practice*, allowing lower courts to be susceptible to partisanship in how cases are argued.⁸

Smith's "sweeping result" was to drastically alter free exercise doctrine and to fail to protect minority religions.⁹ The exceptions outlined in *Smith* have had to grow to provide protection for religious practice that *Smith* left vulnerable.¹⁰ Such efforts become a game, trying to find an exception to actually get to the logic of treating religious individuals and organizations in a manner that takes seriously their need for protection of religious exercise. Justice Gorsuch, in his *Fulton* concurrence, takes note of this very practice when he describes the complex "circumnavigation of *Smith*" in the majority's analysis.¹¹

By overturning *Smith*, courts would then have to apply strict scrutiny to free exercise claims in a careful, reasoned way. Applying strict scrutiny would simply result in allowing for religious exemptions that are historically grounded, common ways to prevent violations of fundamental rights.¹² Professor Stephanie Barclay suggests advocating for a version of strict scrutiny that would "take an objective approach to the threshold inquiry of the substantial burden test."¹³ She clarifies that strict scrutiny is *not* a vague or subjective balancing test where a judge just decides which value is more important.¹⁴ Instead, it asks, when there is a burden on religious exercise, whether the government has met its evidentiary burden by showing that its actions were necessary to advance the compelling interest it articulated.¹⁵

The concerns that seemed to drive *Smith* (such as the worry that religious adherents would regularly be placed "beyond the reach of" the law and thereby cause chaos in society)¹⁶ have not played out in practice after Congress and the states passed RFRA and its many state counterparts.¹⁷ In contrast, *Smith* itself has caused confusion and undermined the promise of free exercise. Cases prior to *Smith*, such as *United States v. Lee*,¹⁸ were able to protect government interests adequately by directly evaluating those interests alongside religious rights. *Smith* instead decreased

⁸ See, e.g., Zalman Rothschild, *Free Exercise Partisanship*, 107 Cornell L. Rev. 1067, 1126-1132 (2022) (noting "doctrinal confusion" in lower court decisions and describing the need for clarity about how to analyze religious discrimination in the free exercise context).

⁹ 494 U.S. at 892, 902 (O'Connor, J., concurring).

¹⁰ See, e.g., *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc. v. City of Hialeah*, 508 U.S. 520 (1993); *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, 593 U.S. 522 (2021); *Tandon v. Newsom*, 593 U.S. 61 (2021); *Kennedy v. Bremerton Sch. Dist.*, 597 U.S. 507 (2022); *Fellowship of Christian Athletes*, 82 F.4th 664; *Foothill Church v. Watanabe*, 3 F.4th 1201 (9th Cir. 2021).

¹¹ 593 U.S. at 621.

¹² See, e.g., Stephanie H. Barclay & Mark L. Rienzi, *Constitutional Anomalies or As-Applied Challenges? A Defense of Religious Exemptions*, 59 B.C. L. Rev. 1595, 1611 (2018); Douglas Laycock, *Regulatory Exemptions of Religious Behavior and the Original Understanding of the Establishment Clause*, 81 Notre Dame L. Rev. 1793 (2006).

¹³ Barclay, Stephanie, *Replacing Smith*, 133 Yale L.J. Forum 436, 450 (2023).

¹⁴ *Id.* at 456.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ 494 U.S. at 878.

¹⁷ See *Federal and State RFRA Map*, Becket, <https://becketfund.org/research-central/rfra-info-central/map/> (last accessed April 7, 2026).

¹⁸ 455 U.S. 252 (1982).

protections that had been recognized under free exercise. Government actors now often—instead of seeking to create policies that both respect religious exercise and acknowledge crucial government interests and goals—focus on creating neutral policies with no visible exceptions so that they cannot be challenged on the basis of free exercise concerns. Then, when facing challenges, government actors often resort to minimizing the importance of religious practice and seek to justify restrictions as neutral rather than acknowledge a religious burden as meaningful and directly addressing the tension it creates with certain government interests. These practices erode our ability to meaningfully pass on the value of religious freedom to future generations.

An OLC memorandum detailing the arguments in support of overruling *Smith* would further bolster the importance of this issue and confirm the strong reasoning and clear expectation that the government will not be harmed if *Smith* is overruled. The government will still be able to preserve its interests while supporting the stability of religious freedom in this country, which is a huge part of our strength.

4. The White House should direct the Department of Education to revise its “Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools,” released February 5, 2026, by restoring the first Trump Administration’s Guidance, released January 21, 2020. Among several things, the revised Guidance should emphasize how current law protects religious student organizations meeting on public secondary school campuses under the Equal Access Act and the First Amendment.

This request also directly relates to the EO priority of protecting the First Amendment rights of students and religious student organizations and will also advance the EO priority of “permitting time for voluntary prayer and religious instruction at public schools.”

In 1995, the Department of Education (Department) first issued guidance on religious expression in the public schools to all public school district superintendents. This guidance was a turning point because, for the first time, the federal government advised school administrators that private religious expression was protected, and must be respected, on public school property. The guidance addressed numerous specific topics that students, parents, teachers, and school administrators often encounter, including the requirements of the Equal Access Act, 20 U.S.C. §§ 4071-4074 (1984), and its protection of religious student groups meeting for prayer and other religious speech.

In 2002, Congress enacted 20 U.S.C. §7904, requiring local school districts to certify annually to the Department that “no policy of the local educational agency prevents, or otherwise denies participation in, constitutionally protected prayer.” Section 7904 requires the Secretary of Education to issue, at least every two years, guidance as to current law, as reviewed and certified by DOJ’s Office of Legal Counsel.

The Guidance, which has remained largely consistent in its content and much of its structural detail over the past 30 years, has provided stability that is beneficial for students and their families. The Guidance has educated school administrators, while also providing students,

parents, teachers, and religious freedom advocates with persuasive authority to cite in their dealings with school administrators.

In 2020, the first Trump Administration released strong guidance that has been particularly helpful to religious freedom practitioners in their efforts to protect students, parents, and teachers in public schools. The 2020 Trump Guidance tracked the Department’s earlier guidance from 1998 and 2003. Specifically, its Section§ I.C, entitled “Overview of Governing Constitutional Principles,” explained the critical distinction, emphasized in *Board of Education v. Mergens*,¹⁹ between government religious speech and private religious speech. The 2020 Trump Guidance carefully explained the Supreme Court’s bedrock delineation between a student group’s private religious expression, protected by the Free Speech and Free Exercise Clauses, and government officials’ religious expression, potentially restricted by the Establishment Clause. The 2020 Trump Guidance then applied this foundational distinction between government speech and private speech to specific scenarios. It tracked several specific topics that had been addressed in the Department’s guidance since 1995, including the Equal Access Act.

The White House should direct the Department to issue revised “Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools” that closely tracks the 2020 Trump Guidance. The revisions outlined below would enable the Guidance to retain its longstanding continuity and clarity upon which many stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, and school administrators, have come to rely.

Specifically, the “Overview of Governing Constitutional Principles” should again focus on explaining the critical distinction between government religious speech and private religious speech. This material is essential to public school stakeholders’ understanding of the proper protection of religious expression in the public schools.

The revised Guidance should also restore the specific scenarios that were included in the 2020 Trump Guidance but omitted from the 2026 Trump Guidance. Those scenarios include but are not limited to the following:

- 1) **Equal Access Act:** Restore the distinct section explaining the Equal Access Act’s protection of religious student groups’ ability to: a) meet during noninstructional time, including lunch and activity periods; b) access school media (bulletin boards, newspaper, and public address system); and c) maintain religious leadership requirements.²⁰ See 2020 Trump Guidance, § IV, ¶¶ 1-6 (“The Equal Access Act”). The majority of student prayer likely occurs during the meetings protected by the

¹⁹ 496 U.S. 226 (1990).

²⁰ Several federal court decisions have held that religious student groups meeting at public secondary schools may require their leaders to agree with the groups’ religious beliefs. See *Fellowship of Christian Athletes*, 82 F.4th 664; *Hsu v. Roslyn Union Free Sch. Dist.*, 85 F.3d 839 (2d Cir. 1996); *Fellowship of Christian Athletes v. District of Columbia*, 743 F. Supp. 3d 73 (D.D.C. 2024). See also, *InterVarsity*, 5 F.4th 855 (university of Iowa officials forfeited qualified immunity by derecognizing religious student group because of its religious leadership requirements); *Business Leaders in Christ v. Univ. of Iowa*, 991 F.3d 969 (8th Cir. 2021) (same); *InterVarsity*, 534 F. Supp. 3d 785 (Wayne State officials violated the rights of religious student group by derecognizing it because of its leadership requirements); *Christian Legal Soc’y v. Walker*, 453 F.3d 853 (7th Cir. 2006) (protecting religious student group’s right to hold religious leadership requirements but not addressing qualified immunity).

Equal Access Act. For that reason, it is essential that school administrators be made aware of the Act's protection of students' religious expression.

- 2) **See You at the Pole:** Restore specific mention that "See You at the Pole" gatherings (an annual, nationwide event in late September where students gather at the flagpole to pray for their school) are protected. See 2020 Trump Guidance, § II.B ("Organized Prayer Groups and Activities").
- 3) **Moments of Silence:** Restore affirmation that a moment of silence at the beginning of the school day is permissible. See 2020 Trump Guidance, § II.D ("Moments of Silence").
- 4) **Religious Excusals:** Restore the discussion of when religious excusals are required or permissible. See 2020 Trump Guidance, § III.D ("Religious Excusals"). This paragraph should be updated with a brief discussion of the Supreme Court's 2025 decision in *Mahmoud v. Taylor*²¹ protecting the parental right to notice and opt-out from curriculum that violates parents' religious beliefs. The "Religious Excusal" scenario should also include affirmation of the constitutionality of off-campus religious released-time programs under *Zorach v. Clauson*.²² The White House also should direct the Department to issue separate, detailed guidance regarding school administrators' obligations under *Mahmoud*.
- 5) **Religious Literature Distribution:** Restore affirmation of students' right to distribute religious literature if other students may distribute nonreligious literature. See 2020 Trump Guidance, § III.A ("Religious Literature").
- 6) **Teaching about Religion:** Restore affirmation that classroom instruction may include teaching about religion in the curriculum in an objective, non-devotional manner. See 2020 Trump Guidance, § III.B ("Teaching about Religion").
- 7) **Graduation and other School Events:** Restore affirmation that personal religious expression by an individual student or community member speaker at a graduation ceremony or other school event is permissible if the speaker is chosen based on genuinely content-neutral, evenhanded criteria and retains primary control over the content of his or her speech. See 2020 Trump Guidances §§ II.G-H ("Student Assemblies and Noncurricular Events" and "Prayer at Graduation").
- 8) **Baccalaureate Ceremonies:** Affirm that religious community groups may hold baccalaureate ceremonies in public school facilities that are otherwise available to community groups. See 2020 Trump Guidance, § II.I ("Baccalaureate Ceremonies"). Also affirm religious community groups' right to meet in school facilities on

²¹ 606 U.S. 522 (2025).

²² 343 U.S. 306 (1952).

weekends and evenings²³ and to meet with children after school on an equal access basis.²⁴

- 9) **Teacher Speech:** Update the 2020 Trump Guidance, s§ II.C (“Teachers, Administrators, and Other School Employees”) to include the holding in *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*²⁵ and its careful protection of teacher’s religious expression, including prayer, at a time when teachers are otherwise free to engage in personal expression.

Conclusion

Accordingly, we urge the Commission to include these priorities in its report to the White House Faith Office and the Domestic Policy Council. They are important steps toward furthering the cause of religious freedom in the United States and ensuring that we remain a country where people can freely practice their faith without fear.

Sincerely,

Steve McFarland, Director

Lori Kepner, Senior Counsel

Kimberlee Wood Colby, Of Counsel

Christian Legal Society, Center for Law & Religious Freedom

PII PII

²³ *Lamb’s Chapel v. Center Moriches Union Free Sch. Dist.*, 508 U.S. 384 (1993).

²⁴ *Good News Club v. Milford Cent. Sch.*, 533 U.S. 98 (2001).

²⁵ 597 U.S. 507.

From: Dwight Gillham <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Dwight Gillham

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:07:46 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a citizen that we maintain the separation of Church and State. Our pilgrim fathers fled Europe because of the church state union and persecution by kings and popes. They established religious freedom in this country to worship God according to the dictates of conscience.

Now is the time to stand tall for keeping Separation of Church and State. The book of Revelation foretells the attack on freedom of religion in the last days. Let's not let freedom die in our generation.

Thanks

Dwight Gillham
Athol, Idaho

From: "[REDACTED PII]" <[REDACTED PII]>

To: "[REDACTED PII]" <[REDACTED PII]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] My RLC Comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:08:5d -0400

Importance: Normal

I am strongly opposed to establishing state approved religions!
This will destroy freedom of religion and freedom of conscience.

USA was established by people of faith who were driven out or fleeing
counties that enforced state religions. State sponsored religions deny
freedom of conscience / religion which history proves leads to persecution
by the state religions.

Chuck Peck

From: Larry Hellmann <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Directive re separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:08:56 -0400

Importance: Normal

I oppose the directive to DOJ regarding the separation of church and state.

This is a well established constitutional guarantee that the government may not interfere with religious beliefs, or set up preference of one religion over any other religion.

The directive of the constitution is not to build a bridge, not to connect in any other way, but clearly not to prefer any one religion over another religion, or religious practice.

It is necessary that the DOJ follow the constitutional mandates under any administration, under every situation.

Sincerely,

Lawrence P Hellmann

[REDACTED] PII

From: David Caserta <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - David Caserta

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:10:08 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear brethren the bridge over the wall between church and state will be found in the pile of rubble where the wall once stood.

Fearful times are upon us with socialists, and religious factions, over running our borders. This is not by chance and the attack is against the wall. By artful cunning the enemy has made our defense appear our weakness.

The results of redefining the separation between church and state will be a widening of the gap between the have and have nots. The connection between faith and prosperity provided by the union of church and state will be professors without conversion. Hypocrisy will bring unrest and America will live through what France did in their revolution.

When freedom of conscience is removed Gods hand will be as well. The enemies of Freedom, Liberty, America have been working towards the goal of unifying church and state since our founding fathers firmly entrenched us in their division. Once state and federal governments start moving and being moved in behalf of the church, coercion of conscience and persecution will result. All fears will be realized.

No uniting Church and State.

State and Church uniting no.

God Bless America

Sincerely

David Caserta

From: Nenita Sprouse <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendations of Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:11:07 -0400

Importance: Normal

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the recommendations of the Religious Liberty Committee submitted to President Donald J. Trump on June 26, 2026. While we are mindful of the Committee's labors, which resulted in the 12 recommendations released June 26, certain of which we agree with, we write to voice our concerns and objections to the Committee's first and ninth recommendations [1] and its obviously insufficient consideration of the warnings of the Founding Fathers of the dangers of a union of church and state or the many lessons of history regarding same.

The Committee recommended that the Department of Justice "issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state." [2] At the formal release of the Committee's recommendations on the same day, Committee Chair Dan Patrick publicly stated that "the separation of church and state is not in the constitution" and that the phrase "has no constitutional basis." [3]

As citizens and students of history, and as Christians, we are alarmed lest the flawed and unconstitutional view of the Chair of the Committee of the so-called "proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and the separation of church and state" prove influential or worse, instructive, to the Department of Justice. If the Committee's opinion of the so-called "proper understanding" of the Establishment Clause is the same as that of its Chair, it is apparent that its understanding is not proper, but rather improper.

Founding Father, "Father of the Constitution", and fourth President of the United States, James Madison, contradicted Chair Dan Patrick's claim that the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution. Madison stated that "Strongly guarded as is the separation between Religion & Govt in the Constitution of the United States, the danger of encroachment by Ecclesiastical Bodies, may be illustrated by precedents already furnished in their short history." According to James Madison, the separation of church and state is in the Constitution. As to whether James Madison, who is the principal author of the Establishment Clause, or Dan Patrick, is the greater authority on this subject, we think it not difficult for reasonably minded people to ascertain.

Certainly, the Founding Fathers were all aware of the persecution of the Baptists, Quakers, Jews, and others in some of the colonies. They had seen firsthand the ear croppings, whippings, imprisonment, and hangings in Massachusetts and other colonies.

In Europe, the persecution of the martyrs is well documented. Today we take the Bible for granted but forget that William Tyndale was executed for translating the Bible into the English language, not by atheists but by religious bigots. It was a union of church and state that suppressed speech and the freedom of the press in England. It was a union of church and state that prohibited the work of translation of the Bible, which changed the world. It was a union of church and state that necessitated his flight to Europe. It was a union of church and state that killed him.

We respectfully ask that the Department of Justice, in considering the issue of public guidance of the separation of church and state, consider the history of William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania and early Founding Father, who was repeatedly jailed for his religious faith in England. The Pennsylvania Colony became a haven, not from atheist persecutors but from religious persecutors who did not believe in the separation of church and state. The same is true of Roger Williams, founder of the colony of Rhode Island, who was ordered arrested for declaring that the civil magistrate cannot

enforce the first table of the Decalogue. We ask that the Committee take into account the brutal public whipping of President Abraham Lincoln's five-time great-grandfather, Obadiah Holmes, in the Massachusetts colony, for the "crime" of religious dissent. Obadiah Holmes was not whipped by atheists. He was whipped by Puritan bigots who did not believe in the separation of church and state. We respectfully request that the Department of Justice consider this history in the issuance of public guidance on the subject.

We are concerned that the Committee neglected to take into account the impact of the separation of church and state on the other rights codified in the First Amendment. Free speech and freedom of the press, for example, owe their flourishing in the modern world in large part to the separation of church and state in America. Prior to the protections in the First Amendment, the Roman Catholic Church for centuries maintained a list of banned books called the Index Librorum Prohibitorum. The books were subject to confiscation, and the possession of them resulted in the punishment of the owner.

Unfortunately, the Committee makes no mention of the censorship in this context of Galileo and Kepler, Kant and Locke, John Milton and Maimonides, John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, David Hume and Edward Gibbon, and many others, all at the behest of the Roman Papacy, which is itself a union of church and state. Free speech in the Western world is the legacy of those who risked the wrath of a unified church and state, often at the cost of their lives. We would also ask that the Department of Justice consider the repeated modern calls from the papal power today for the censorship of the internet and the suppression of free speech, contrary to the First Amendment. [4] We have no doubt that the censorship of Galileo, Kepler, Milton, and others was prosecuted under the justification of the censorship of misinformation, also.

The Roman Church was not alone in this persecution, either. We would ask the Department of Justice in its formulation of public guidance on the separation of church and state to remember the religious persecutions carried out at the behest of John Calvin in Geneva against religious dissenters such as Michael Servetus, who paid with his life for his writings and teachings. Servetus was executed by a union of church and state. We are concerned at the public statements of those who would create such a system in America. [5]

Therefore, we respectfully ask, what proper guidance can the Department of Justice hope to give to the public on the "proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and the separation of church and state" if it is directed in its object by a Committee and a Committee Chair, who has neglected to more fully analyze the reasons for the separation of church and state, or the reasons why the United States codified the disestablishment of church and state in the First Amendment in the first instance?

The reference to the wall of separation between church and state is not only mentioned by President Thomas Jefferson in the letter to the Danbury Baptists, which, of course, it is. [6] What is often left out of the narrative is that Jefferson said that he personally believed that the principle of the separation of church and state is codified in the Constitution. Therein, Jefferson wrote: "Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church & State." [7]

James Madison wrote, "It is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties. We hold this prudent jealousy to be the first duty of Citizens and one of the noblest characteristics of the late Revolution. The free men of America did not wait till usurped power had strengthened itself by exercise and entangled the question in precedents. They saw all the consequences in the principle, and they avoided the consequences by denying the principle. We revere this lesson too much soon to forget it." [8]

Lastly, we object to the recommendation of the Committee that the Johnson Amendment be removed. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are mindful of Our Lord's words that we "render to Caesar what is Caesar, and to God the things that are God's." [9] Jesus Christ established the principle of the separation of church and state and taught that what belongs to God cannot be rendered to Caesar. The application of this teaching is that religionists, ambitious for civil power, and politicians, ambitious for their endorsement, are to be kept separate in the American system of politics, as the Constitution requires. The union of church and state results in the corruption of both, a result that neither should desire, and neither can afford.

Madison stated that "The number, the industry, and the morality of the Priesthood, & the devotion of the people have been manifestly increased by the total separation of the Church from the State." [10] And he was right. If the Johnson Amendment is removed, religionists who want civil power will publicly stump and promise their votes and congregational dollars in exchange for political favors, and the politicians will be doubtless all too eager to reciprocate in the form of legislation that the religionists desire, provided they will aid their attempts to gain office.

In his anonymous treatise published in the Boston Gazette, John Adams, later the second President of the United States, wrote that canon law was a tyrannical form of government, as was feudal law, but that the worst of all forms of governments was a union of the two. [11] And it was Madison who stated that, "In the Papal System, Government and Religion are in a manner consolidated, & that is found to be the worst of Governments."

We respectfully request, therefore, that the Department of Justice not adopt recommendations 1 and 9 of the Committee and that it adopt recommendation 1 of the Committee that it convene a public hearing, with written and oral submissions from the public, to more comprehensively study the question of the separation of church and state in history, and in American history in particular, a study which we would enthusiastically support.

We remain, Yours truly,

Nenita M. Sprouse

[1] <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/president-trumps-religious-liberty-commission-delivers-historic-report-draft>

[2] Ibid, [Emphasis added].

[3] <https://www.chron.com/politics/article/dan-patrick-church-state-constitution-viral-22323383.php>

[4] <https://reclaimthenet.org/pope-francis-calls-on-social-media-platforms-to-censor-more-misinformation>;

[5] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epAUKMwIWYB8>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMBiPlfx-UA>

[6] <https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html>

[7] <https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html> – Jefferson here is clearly referring to Congress. That Congress is prohibited by the Constitution from making a union of church and state.

[8] James Madison, Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments

[9] Matthew 22:21

[10] James Madison, Letter to Robert Walsh, March 2, 1819.

[11] John Adams, Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law, 1765.

<https://www.masshist.org/publications/adams-papers/index.php/view/PJA01dg2>

From: Holly Ewert <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:11:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

Hello,

I'm making an appeal for religious liberty, what I feel is one thing this nation was built on. People came here to America to be free from the dictation of the conscience in regard to worship. They wanted freedom to worship (or not to worship) according to one's conscience.

I have concerns for what is taking place in regards to separation of church and state, or changing what's in place for separation of church and state.

Because I am a Christian, I feel all the more that it is important to allow mankind to choose as his conscience dictates. This is God's intention for all mankind, to allow an individual to decide how, when, or what he wants to worship.

Thomas Jefferson even stated that religion is a matter "that lies solely between Man and his God".

Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,

Holly Ewert

"It is better to build a child...than to mend a man!!"

From: Michael Brandts <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Wall of Separation versus Bridge Metaphor and Implications

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:12:30 -0400

Importance: Normal

While I appreciate the commission's stated objective to protect and defend religious freedom, I feel that the draft report as currently constituted points legislators and policymakers in a direction that does not serve the stated purpose and will ultimately result in an order that compromises the authority of government and undermines the freedoms individual citizens and believers have come to value. The process followed by the commission relied upon the testimony of individuals who volunteered to tell their stories, sometimes painfully. However, there was a distinct failure to assess the degree to which the grievances enumerated necessitated a general and transformative revision of the current legal framework. Separation of church and state, regardless of the metaphor applied, is a necessary and essential principle that has been a foundational pillar of the American republic for two and a half centuries. As religious institutions become dependent on government to sustain and secure their existence, they will necessarily lose their independence and conscience. And as government and political entities extend favor to religious entities, they will come to expect support and then attempt to derive legitimacy from these institutions. Over time, increasing amounts of money will flow between these entities as religious organizations seek support for their initiatives and political candidates seek campaign support. This spiral destroys the spiritual authority of believers and entices political leaders to parlay their authority to preserve power. History is replete with examples of this decline. Separation of church and state secures both entities, ensuring they can operate most effectively and according to conscience in their respective spheres. While the "wall of separation" might not appear in the Constitution, the notion of a bridge between church and state is not hinted at anywhere in the text of the First Amendment. The risks of forging a bond between these two spheres far outweigh any perceived rewards. The commission failed to appreciate the historical basis for the current paradigm, nor did it justify a general and sweeping shift that would ultimately fail at the singular objective of securing religious liberty. I would ask that the commission reject the draft report as currently constituted and reopen the inquiry to seek counsel and guidance from broad and divergent authorities on the subject. If the stated objective of the commission is the protection of religious liberty, then the commission should seek to roll back any laws, structures, or policies that permit or encourage any interdependence between political and religious entities. Please do seek to strengthen religious liberty, allow our nation to serve as a model, and use your influence to secure this liberty for citizens of all nations.

Michael Brandt

From: Roxanne Shickich <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Freedom of conscience

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:14:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with the comments expressed by the pillars of freedom.

Our freedoms here in America can be found no where else in the world.

I don't want to lose any of my freedoms
One of them is to worship God as I believe.

Please keep church and state (government) separate.

Sincerely,

Roxanne Shickich

Sent from my iPhone

From: Dick Fleming <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious freedom and separation of church and state.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:16:10 -0400

Importance: Normal

It has been said that there is nothing in the constitution addressing the separation of church and state. This is true. The constitution creates specific authorities for the federal government with the understanding that any activity or authority not authorized by the constitution is not authorized by the constitution and therefore is not allowed. The bill of rights was argued by many as being not necessary because of this limitation. Many people knowing that those in power frequently want to increase their power and authority, insisted on specific limits. The bill of rights and subsequent amendments are generally specific limits to expansion of government power.

Many people in those revolutionary war days fled Europe to escape the carnage caused by religious authorities with civil power. The lack of freedom and peace caused by religious institutions with civil authority is well demonstrated by the current state of Iran. Killing a Jew or an American is considered a good thing, even with the collateral loss of hundreds of their own people. Blood lust is somehow tied to civil power in the hands of supposedly religious people.

I also agree that a religious people is a necessity for a successful republic. Allowing government to fund religious activity and allowing religious organizations to fund political campaigns results in the corruption of both the religion and the government.

From: Pernell Sullivan <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII, Pernell Sullivan <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] • PUBLIC COMMENT – “Preserve Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:16:32 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: THE_RELIGIOUS_LIBERTY_COMMISION_LETTER_13_JULY_2026_PLS.docx

- PUBLIC COMMENT – “Preserve Separation of Church and State” –
- Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick (Chair)
- Dr. Ben Carson (Vice Chair) and members.
-

Email Address: [REDACTED] PII; Submission deadline: Monday 7/13/26

Sample Email:

To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this public comment.

I appreciate the Commission's desire to protect the free exercise of religion. Religious liberty is one of America's greatest blessings because it recognizes that faith is a matter of conscience and that every person is accountable to God for his or her own beliefs.

Scripture teaches that civil government has an important role in maintaining justice and order. It also teaches that worship belongs to God alone. Jesus Himself distinguished between the responsibilities of government and the responsibilities of faith when He said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). This principle has served as a foundation for religious freedom throughout our nation's history.

I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve this distinction. Government best fulfills its role by protecting every citizen's freedom of conscience rather than promoting, endorsing, or compelling any form of religious practice. The rights guaranteed by the First Amendment protect not only those whose beliefs are popular, but also those whose convictions differ from the majority.

History repeatedly demonstrates that whenever civil authority becomes closely joined with religious authority, liberty of conscience is eventually weakened. The strongest safeguard for religious freedom is a government that neither interferes with sincere religious practice nor uses its authority to advance religious observance. Faith is most genuine when it is embraced freely, never through pressure or coercion.

As the Commission develops its recommendations, I encourage you to continue strengthening protections for the free exercise of religion while also preserving the constitutional principles that prevent government from establishing or favoring religion. In doing so, you will help ensure that Americans of every faith—and those of no faith—remain free to follow the dictates of conscience without fear of discrimination or compulsion.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and for your service to our nation.

Respectfully,

Pernell Sullivan

PII

Romans 13:11-14 "11 And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. 12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. 13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. 14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.



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- PUBLIC COMMENT – “Preserve Separation of Church and State” –
- Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick (Chair)
- Dr. Ben Carson (Vice Chair) and members.
-

Email Address: [REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]; Submission deadline: Monday 7/13/26

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Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and for your service to our nation.

Respectfully,

Pernell Sullivan

PII

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From: Wayne Hawley <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment- Separation of Church and State- Wayne Hawley

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:17:17 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a Christian, (a follower of Jesus Christ and His precepts) I believe in allowing God to work in INDIVIDUAL hearts to change our minds about Himself and what He desires to be in us, to make us fit for His heaven. (love for friend and foe and God supremely) Because of religious freedom in the United States, I was able to seek God in several different churches, before finding the one that seemed to be in total agreement with the Bible and spoke to my heart. I have now been a student of the Word for 55 years and am still learning who God is. But the point is: God will work His will out in everyone's life who wants Him. If there was a government or religious body directing what I could or should believe, I may not have found God's will for me. It would have been man's will.

From: antonia vollberg <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:26:01 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious liberty
members,

I hope this is not too late as I am pleading for religious Liberty for all people in this country, no matter what color race or belief! This would be in keeping with what founding fathers had intended! The right to believe and worship according to each person's conscience! This country was a gift from God for the thousands who escaped tyranny from kings and churches ! That will happen again, I fear.

Sent from my iPhone.

From: Joan Pettersen <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Continue separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:26:13 -0400

Importance: Normal

U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC

July 13, 2026

To Whom It May Concern:

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to urge the Commission to uphold the separation of church and state as a fundamental principle of religious liberty in the United States.

The First Amendment protects both the free exercise of religion and prohibits the establishment of religion by the government. This balance enables people of all faiths, as well as those with none, to live together in freedom and mutual respect.

When the government remains neutral in matters of faith, it protects religious liberty for everyone. It prevents governmental favoritism, preserves the independence of religious organizations, and protects citizens from official endorsement of any religion.

I respectfully ask the Commission to support policies that preserve these constitutional protections and ensure equal treatment for all Americans, regardless of religious belief.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Joan Pettersen
Corpus Christi, Texas

From: Sharon Patterson <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:27:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I respectfully urge you to uphold the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state, a cornerstone of our nation's commitment to religious liberty. America's founders, many of whom fled religious persecution and the coercive union of church and government in Europe, established a constitutional American system that protects the free exercise of religion while preventing governmental establishment or favoritism toward any faith. This framework has safeguarded both religious freedom and civil liberty for more than two centuries.

History consistently demonstrates that when the government promotes, funds, or enforces religious activity, it creates conditions that foster favoritism, diminish freedom of conscience, and place religious minorities and non-adherents at risk of discrimination and persecution. A government that remains neutral in matters of religion best protects the rights of all citizens, regardless of their beliefs.

I encourage the federal government to maintain complete neutrality in its relationship with religion. No religious group should receive preferential treatment or special governmental favor based on its faith. American policy should be guided by constitutional principles, national interests, and equal treatment under the law rather than religious preference.

The First Amendment protects both the free exercise of religion and guards against governmental establishment of religion. These complementary protections have enabled people of every faith—and those of no faith—to live together in freedom. Preserving this constitutional balance is essential to protecting the liberties of all Americans.

I respectfully ask that you continue to defend these founding principles by opposing measures that erode the separation of church and state and by supporting policies that preserve religious liberty, freedom of conscience, and equal protection for every citizen.

Thank you for your service and for your thoughtful consideration of these concerns.

Respectfully,

Sharon Patterson

From: sharonshills<[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:29:18 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPad Today is the last day that the public can comment on the religious liberty commissions report and findings that the 'the idea of separation of church and state is not in the constitution.'

You can make your voice heard by emailing:

[REDACTED] PII

For those who want to make their voice heard but dont want to type the email and do oppose church and state coming together you can copy the following email body a friend of ours typed up.

Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to oppose the claim that the separation of church and state is not a constitutional principle.

Although the exact phrase "wall of separation between church and state" does not appear in the Constitution, the principle is clearly expressed in the First Amendment, which forbids government from establishing religion while protecting the free exercise of religion.

This separation does not exclude Christians or other religious people from public life. It protects everyone by preventing religious institutions from gaining civil power and preventing government from controlling religion.

History repeatedly shows that when church and state unite, both are corrupted. The church becomes political, the state claims religious authority, and freedom of conscience is gradually replaced by religious pressure, discrimination and eventually coercion. This occurred under imperial Rome, medieval church-state systems, established Protestant churches and even in parts of colonial America.

Religious liberty is safest when the church is free to teach, persuade and serve, but has no power to enforce belief through government.

As a Christian, I am also concerned because Revelation 13 warns that religious and civil powers will unite again, leading eventually to forced worship, economic penalties and persecution against those who refuse to conform.

For this reason, replacing the wall of separation with a "bridge" between church and state is dangerous. It creates an easement through which religious influence may gain access to civil power and government may enter matters of faith and conscience.

I urge the Commission to defend both the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause, and to clearly affirm that government must neither suppress religion nor unite with it.

The separation of church and state is not hostility toward religion. It is one of the strongest protections of religious liberty ever established.

Respectfully,

From: Steven Martin <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission: Separation of Church and State Comments

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:30:43 -0400

Importance: Normal

Hello,

I'm writing in regards to the Commissions proposal that the separation of church and state is not supported by the constitution. I refer you to the Establishment Clause found in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." This statement is at times thought to only mean that the government shall not establish a state church. However, this also upholds the principle that the government would not support or negatively interfere with a given religion or church in any way, including giving tax dollars to religious institutions, for such financial support helps to establish, or at the very least helps to maintain those institutions. This has long been a core ethical principle that American Protestants have valued. This principle serves to help protect the religious rights of all US citizens and help prevent governmental intrusion into religious affairs of its citizens and places of worship. Jesus Himself declared to Pontius Pilate "My kingdom is not of this world..." - John 18:36. Jesus never supported any form of merger between religion and political entities. We live in a sinful world; thus, no government on our planet has the right to meddle in the religious affairs of its citizens; any such intrusion by a governmental body has no Biblical support and infringes on the religious freedom of all, and in particular minority religions. Governmental entanglement with faith tends to reduce moral precepts to political sound bites, and diminishes the spiritual health of religious entities. Fearing that the government might interfere with their religious liberties, the October 7, 1801 letter of the Danbury Baptist Association to the President of the United States warned that "it is not to be wondered at therefore; if those who seek after power and gain under the pretense of government and religion should reproach their fellow men - should reproach their order magistrate, as an enemy of religion, law, and good order." This letter generated a clear response from President Thomas Jefferson who was aiming to reassure the Baptist that their rights of conscience were secure. He referenced the First Amendment to the constitution, stating that the American people built a "wall of separation between Church & State" to protect religious freedom. Jefferson's metaphoric statement was rooted in his commitment to the First Amendment, designed to keep government out of religious affairs and ensure freedom of conscience.

- Protecting the Church from Government
- Protecting the State from the Church
- Limiting the federal government's role in religious matters

Thomas Jefferson and James Madison were two of the most ardent participants in framing the US Constitution and later the related Bill of Rights. Please do NOT move forward with the current RLC proposal.

Steven Martin
Dahlonega, GA

From: "Steve.Milj" <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Preserving the Constitutional Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:34:31e0400

Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing as a Christian who deeply values both religious liberty and the Constitution of the United States. I appreciate the Commission's desire to protect the free exercise of religion. However, I am concerned that portions of the Commission's recommendations appear to weaken the historic principle that government should neither establish nor favor any religion.

My concern is not that Christianity should have less influence on society. Rather, I believe Christianity is most faithful to its mission when it transforms hearts through conviction, not through the influence or power of civil government.

The First Amendment contains two complementary protections. The Free Exercise Clause protects every person's right to live according to their sincerely held religious beliefs. The Establishment Clause protects every person's freedom by preventing the government from aligning itself with or favoring one religion over another. These principles work together rather than competing against one another.

History demonstrates that whenever the institutional church and civil government become closely intertwined, both institutions suffer. Governments begin to use religion for political purposes, while religious institutions become tempted to rely on political power rather than the transforming work of God. The result is often diminished religious liberty for those outside the favored tradition and, eventually, for those within it as well.

As a Christian, I do not believe the church needs the power of the state to accomplish its mission. Christ established His kingdom through truth, love, service, and persuasion, not through civil authority. The New Testament presents a church that grows through faithful witness and the work of the Holy Spirit, even under governments that did not share its beliefs.

My concern is that if the federal government begins to move away from principled neutrality toward religion, it creates a precedent that could one day be used to favor a different religious movement or ideology. Constitutional protections should not depend upon which political party or religious majority happens to be in power at a given moment. They should protect the conscience of every American equally.

I respectfully urge the Commission to reaffirm both religion and freedom by preserving a clear distinction between the responsibilities of civil government and the mission of the church. Government best protects religious liberty when it neither suppresses religion nor elevates one faith above another.

As both an American citizen and a Christian, I believe that preserving this constitutional balance honors the vision of the First Amendment and protects the liberty of all people to seek and worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience.

Thank you for considering my comments and for your service to our nation.

Respectfully,
Steve Miljatovic

Steve Miljatovic
[REDACTED] PII

Sent from mobile device~Please excuse the brevity and any typos. Thanks!

From: Grant Mc Auley <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation, Johnson Amdmt, Funding – Grant McAuley

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:35:53 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Committee Members,

I am both a patriotic American and person of faith. I sincerely appreciate the recent concern of the Trump administration regarding religious freedom both in our country and around the world. I also appreciate the Committee's invitation for public comment regarding the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission.

I am writing to urge the Committee to carefully reconsider the following recommendations and conclusions of the Report:

1) That the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution

The Constitution makes no explicit mention of God, and Article VI forbids a religious test. These facts were noted and fiercely debated at both the Constitutional Convention and during the subsequent ratification process, and thus, there was ample opportunity to change this. Of course, the 1st Amendment contains the famous establishment and free exercise clauses that limit the powers of government with respect to religion.

Therefore, whether by the presence of explicit restrictions or the absence of explicit powers in religious matters, these documents describe a metaphorical line or distance that cannot be crossed by the state. In other words, while the word "separation" is not explicitly present - at least if correctly understood - the underlying idea is.

Over 130 years before Jefferson authored the Declaration, the great American Reformer Roger Williams wrote of the "wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world". He championed that both i) matters of religious conscience and practice are not within the sphere of civil government but belong to God alone, and ii) if the wall is removed the church would be corrupted by the world.

Persecuted by the state church in Massachusetts Bay, Williams went on to found Providence, Rhode Island and in 1643 secured an English Charter for the Rhode Island Colony. Unprecedentedly and remarkably, in the charter, Charles II, the Supreme Head of the Church of England, granted religious freedoms that even his own English subjects did not enjoy - including freedom to believe and practice their religion without conformity to the state-sanctioned church. In 1658, the Congregation Jeshuat Israel (which became the Touro Synagogue) the first American Jewish synagogue was founded in Newport, Rhode Island, by Sephardic Jewish families fleeing the Inquisition. In 1660, when

the Quaker Mary Dyer was hanged for non-conformity in Boston, Rhode Island was welcoming Quakers. Besides Jews and Quakers, Baptists and Catholics and other persecuted groups found refuge in the Rhode Island colony.

That "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" ensures that such religious beliefs and practices as well as those of all Americans are protected from state intrusion into the church, or church intrusion into the state. It is in this sense, the amended Constitution provides a "separation" of church and state.

2) That the Johnson Amendment should be repealed

The Baptist minister John Leland (instrumental in the alliance with Madison to advocate for the Bill of Rights) preached in a sermon "Guard against those men who make a great noise about religion, in choosing representatives. It is electioneering. If they knew the nature and worth of religion, they would not debauch it to such shameful purposes."

Repealing the Johnson Amendment would hijack the members and structures of the church into a political machine to elect temporal leaders and the expense of the eternal purposes of God's holy Church. In addition, as churches are beholden to the benefactor of their political favors, there would be great temptation to compromise principle.

In reference to the Johnson Amendment, Archbishop William E. Lori said, "As a general rule, it is not a good idea for churches to engage in partisan politics. I believe that, generally, that proves to be a great distraction from our central task and mission, which is to preach the Gospel. Furthermore, I think it would have a tendency to unnecessarily divide our congregations."

To borrow words from Roger Williams, the wilderness of the world would have another inroad to the garden of the church.

3) That government money should be used to sponsor or support explicitly religious institutions or activities.

I suspect that most people would gladly financially support their own faith. But should the state decide what religious group or project should be supported (or not) by public funds that belong to all citizens? Would not such a determination also amount to the state judging one religious belief or practice in favor of another? Would not recipients of government favors also be beholden to certain parties or elected officials?

In 1788 at the Virginia Ratifying Convention, Madison said "There is not a shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion. Its least interference with it, would be a most flagrant usurpation." In the Statue of Religious Freedom, Jefferson and the Virginia legislature agreed that no one should be required to financially support any religious institution. Roger Williams also

agreed. When an opponent inquired of Williams using the words of the Lord Jesus “Is not the labourer worthy of his hire? Williams replied “Yes, from them that hired him”.

Thank you for your careful consideration of these matters.

From: Louis Brown <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Cc: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS–Religious Liberty in Health Care-Christ Medicus Foundation (Louis Brown Jr. J.D. & Michael Vacca J.D.)

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:36:40 -0400

Importance: High

Attachments: Christ_Medicus_Foundation-Public_Comment_on_US_Religious_Liberty_Commission-7-13-2026.pdf; Policy_Agenda_for_Life_and_Religious_Freedom_in_Health_Care-February_2026.pdf

To The U.S. Religious Liberty Commission,

Please see the attached public comment, inclusive of the attached Policy Agenda for Religious Liberty in Health Care, concerning the Commission's Draft Report.

We would be grateful for acknowledgment of receipt of this public comment.

Please feel free to share this quote about the Draft Report as the Commission sees fit:

"The Christ Medicus Foundation applauds the U.S. Religious Liberty Commission's historic work and its Draft Report, inclusive of the 12 Recommendations to Strengthen Religious Liberty for All Americans. We urge the presidential Administration, the federal executive branch, Congress, states, political and faith leaders, religious organizations, and civic groups to use this report as a historic opportunity to defend religious freedom, advance religious exercise, and restore human dignity in health care and throughout civil society. By advancing religious liberty and the dignity of the human person, our country will come closer to fulfilling the promise of the American founding and achieving a civilization of love and justice in the United States." Louis Brown Jr., J.D., Executive Director, Christ Medicus Foundation

God bless you,

Louis

Louis Brown Jr., J.D.

Executive Director, [Christ Medicus Foundation](#)

Board Member and Vice President of Public Policy, [Catholic Health Care Leadership Alliance](#)

Fellow, [Center for Law and the Human Person](#), Catholic University School of Law

Fellow, Center for Religious Liberty, Catholic University School of Law

JMJ

Date: July 13, 2026

To: U.S. Religious Liberty Commission

From: Louis Brown Jr. J.D., Exec. Dir., Christ Medicus Foundation (CMF); Michael Vacca, J.D., CMF

Re: Public Comment on Draft Report of the U.S. Religious Liberty Commission

Executive Summary

Religious freedom in its highest form is the freedom to love, the freedom to love God and to love neighbor consistent with one's well-formed moral and religious convictions. The protection of religious freedom guarantees the freedom of all persons to love God and love their fellow citizens actively in civil society. Religious freedom is a basic human and civil right and one of three pillars, along with the right to life and right of conscience, that uphold human dignity in American civil society. The U.S. Religious Liberty Commission's work to restore the legal protection of and respect for religious liberty is vital to the United States because ultimately religious freedom helps secure the human dignity of all people. The Christ Medicus Foundation (CMF) commends the Commission for its Draft Report. We urge the Commission, the federal executive branch, and Congress to make the report the first stage of a whole of government mission to restore religious freedom and human dignity in health care and American society.

Thankfully, U.S. Supreme Court has helped to return freedom of religion to its foundational place in law and civil society. However, due to years of religious discrimination in law, culture, health care, education, and business, our country has work to do to live up to the promise of religious freedom in the Constitution. First, much of our country's health care system continues to undermine the religious freedom rights, medical conscience rights, and the religious exercise of patients, medical professionals, and religious health care entities. Second, despite numerous U.S. Supreme Court decisions to the contrary, states like Colorado continue to pass legislation or engage in regulatory actions that violate the religious freedom rights of health care professionals and impede the religious freedom of patients. Furthermore, some public school systems continue to disfavor religious freedom rights and parental rights that uphold the authority of parents to control their children's upbringing, including the directing of their children's health care.

CMF applauds the Commission's 12 Recommendations to Strengthen Religious Liberty for All Americans. We urge the presidential Administration, the federal executive branch, Congress, states, religious institutions, the academy, and civic groups to move forward to secure religious freedom and human dignity across the country. To further defend religious freedom in our nation's health care system, we encourage the presidential Administration, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and Congress to enact the actions in CMF's Policy Agenda for Life and Religious Freedom in Health Care.

Finally, while the judicial branch is responsible for interpreting the Constitution according to the express will of Congress and, through Congress, the American people as a whole, the Executive branch can and should issue clarifying guidance as to the proper interpretation and scope of constitutional rights, particularly when it is a matter of protecting foundational rights such as the right to religious freedom that are firmly rooted in the natural moral law. This is the approach President Lincoln took in the Dred Scott case. He made his position clear that the Supreme Court was wrong to exclude African American slaves from the protections of the Declaration of Independence. Likewise, this presidential Administration should be unafraid to point out when the courts error in matters of fundamental human rights.

All together, we must build a new culture of life in health care and caring

Religious Liberty in Health Care

The foundation of health care today in the United States and around the world is religious exercise: the belief that we as individuals, families, and communities have a religious and moral duty to care for the life and health of the sick and suffering, though it has no direct bearing on our personal wellbeing, because every person has inherent God-given sanctity and dignity. When the federal or state governments attack the religious exercise of patients and health care professionals or when secular health care systems or secular medical schools or nursing schools demonstrate hostility to the practice of religion, these government actors, regulators, health administrators, and higher education officials are actually attacking the very basis of health care and medicine itself.

During the presidential administrations of then President Obama and subsequently President Biden, the federal government and some state governments engaged in egregious religious freedom violations in the health care sector that harmed medical professionals, patients, and religious organizations while accelerating the already rampant religious and conscience-based discrimination in the health care industry. These two previous presidential administrations so damaged religious exercise in health care and compounded pre-existing hostility to religious faith in the health care space, that it may take many years to fully restore freedom of religion in the health care industry. The Draft Report's findings and recommendations demonstrate the gravity of these violations of religious freedom that have bolstered a culture of disregard, at best, and aggressive hostility towards the free exercise of religion in health care.

In this context, CMF firmly supports the Draft Report's recommendations. In addition to carrying out the Draft Report's recommendations, we encourage the presidential Administration and Congress to enact policy actions articulated in the Christ Medicus Foundation's attached Policy Agenda for Life and Religious Freedom in Health Care. Announced in February of 2026, CMF issued this Policy Agenda to advance the protection of human dignity and religious exercise in our nation's health care system.

The following are our more detailed comments on issues raised by the Draft Report:

First, without a private right of action to sue for violations of conscience and religious freedom, our country is unlikely to adequately protect the human and civil rights of religious freedom and conscience. Congress and states should pass laws which allow anyone with a legitimate well-formed concern about their conscience and religious freedom rights to seek a remedy in courts of law. Without the remedy of a possible civil lawsuit and damages, states and secular health care entities are likely to continue to disregard the civil rights of religious freedom and conscience.

Secondly, the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated the magnitude of the threat to religious liberty. Innocent Americans were coerced into taking a medical intervention against their conscience, including those who serve in our U.S. Armed Forces. During the COVID-19 pandemic, on numerous occasions individuals reached out to the Christ Medicus Foundation for help in securing religious exemptions from COVID-19 vaccines. These individuals, generally, were people of faith who were desperate to follow their conscience due to their religious objections to this medical intervention. Regardless of one's beliefs about the medical efficacy of the vaccines themselves, it is unjust that American workers, including members of the military and nurses and doctors, were penalized for their religious or conscience objections to taking a COVID-19 vaccine. In short, during the recent pandemic, the field of medicine became a hotbed of ideology and coercion that undermined the very objectivity of science and the sacred right to conscience.

and religious liberty. This coercion should never happen again. The Christ Medicus Foundation urges Congress to pass a law which upholds the right of individuals to exercise religious based and conscience-based objections to medical interventions consistent with the legitimate needs of states and the federal government to protect the health and safety of the nation.

Thirdly, the pandemic also illustrated the tenuous and inadequate respect for the Church and her mission of saving souls. During the pandemic, casinos (in Nevada) and other public establishments were open in some locations, but Churches were pressured to shut their doors or severely limit the number of those who could attend. What this reveals is a bias in some state governments and in the popular culture against people of faith and their need to receive the Sacraments of eternal life. At the heart of the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment is the right to worship God. This right was denied many Americans, and this too should never happen again. The Christ Medicus Foundation urges Congress and the Administration to secure respect for all Americans to worship God and practice their faith in the public sphere. In the Founding generation of America, there existed extraordinary conviction that religion was central to the survival of the American constitutional project, as evidenced by the Northwest Ordinance. Therefore, Congress and the Administration should make clear that the Establishment Clause is in the service of the Free Exercise Clause, and that its meaning does not extend beyond the literal meaning that the federal government cannot mandate one official religion for the United States of America. This is all that was intended and it is within the scope of the Administration and Congress to ensure respect for the freedom to worship and for religious freedom.

Fourth, without respect for parental rights, which is firmly rooted in the natural moral law and the history and tradition of the United States, there cannot be true religious freedom and conscience rights. No child should be socially transitioned to another gender without parental consent. Furthermore, as the Supreme Court correctly ruled in *United States v. Skrametti*, states have a right to ban harmful gender transition procedures that cause irreparable harm to children, violate parental rights, attack the proper autonomy of the family, and often violate the religious convictions of parents.

Religious Liberty at the State Level

Religious liberty is under grave threats within those state governments that are captive to gender ideology, abortion radicalism, and a throwaway culture of death in health care. For example, in Colorado, state government actions have seriously threatened the religious freedom rights of health care professionals, parents and families, religious nonprofits, and people of faith generally. Over the last several years, the Colorado state government has:

- undermined the religious freedom and medical conscience rights of patients and health care professionals;
- violated parental rights to determine their children's health care and wellbeing;
- pushed unethical and harmful gender ideology in health care that has seriously harmed young people and damaged the religious freedom rights of individuals and families; and
- undermined the family unit and parental authority.

In this year's legislative session alone, the Colorado state legislature passed the following which collectively violate the religious freedom rights of students (HB 26-1141), religious nonprofits that serve students (HB 26-1141), young people (HB 26-1322), and mental health therapists (HB 26-1322):

- HB 26-1141, Discriminatory Practices in Public Schools, which violates the religious freedom and freedom of speech rights of students, staff, and nonprofits at K-12 schools and even higher educational institutions who have Christian views on marriage, sexuality, and the human life of unborn children.¹
- HB 26-1322, Civil Actions for Conversion Therapy Survivors, permitting mental health therapists to be sued if they practice their mental health therapy consistent with a Christian and biologically based understanding of marriage and sexuality.²

Christ Medicus Foundation Recommendations

CMF strongly supports the recommendations of U.S. Religious Liberty Commission's Draft Report and encourages the Commission to consider our public comments and our law and policy guidance, herein. Above all, we encourage the presidential Administration, the federal executive branch, and Congress to enact the following actions in the near term:

- 1) White House: An Executive Order Promoting Religious Freedom in Health Care;
- 2) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: a multi-year HHS Religious Freedom Educational Initiative to advance religious exercise, religious freedom rights, and conscience rights in health care and to educate students studying in health care fields, health care workers, and health care entities about the religious liberty foundations of health care;
- 3) Congress: The Passage of the Conscience Protection Act;
- 4) HHS and U.S. Department of Education: A Multi-Year Joint HHS and Department of Education Parental Rights Campaign to educate parents, health care entities, and public education entities about constitutionally protected parental rights in health care;
- 5) Department of Education: The creation of Religious Freedom and Parental Rights Divisions, potentially within the Office of Civil Rights or within another pertinent office at the Department of Education, to enforce constitutionally protected religious freedom rights and parental rights in the public education system that dramatically impact the health and wellbeing of students nationwide.

¹ See HB 26-1141, <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/HB26-1141>; see also Colorado Catholic Conference, *Ask Governor Polis to VETO HB26-1141*, Action Alert, <https://www.cocatholic.org/take-action/action-alerts>.

² See HB 26-1322, <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/HB26-1322>; see also Colorado Catholic Conference, *Tell Governor Polis to VETO HB 26-1322*, Action Alert, <https://www.cocatholic.org/take-action/action-alerts>.

Winter 2026

2026 Policy Agenda for Life and Religious Freedom in Health Care

The Christ Medicus Foundation and the Catholic Health Care Leadership Alliance are issuing our 2nd annual policy agenda to uphold the life, human dignity, health and wellbeing of all Americans in our nation's health care system. Our country can safeguard the life, health, and dignity of the most vulnerable Americans – from the unborn to the poor, from immigrants to the underserved in rural and urban areas - only if we legally protect the right to life and the right of religious freedom in health care.

To empower a flourishing American society, our country must advance health care policies, standards of care, and bioethics that robustly respect the rights to life, conscience, and religious freedom for patients, consumers, health care professionals, and health care entities. The rights to life, conscience, and religious freedom are the foundational rights upon which all human and civil rights depend. The exercise of conscience and religious faith in medical care is vital to improving health outcomes, longevity, and overall wellbeing for the American people.

This policy agenda's objective is to educate citizens and policy makers about: (a) the urgent need to protect life and religious freedom and (b) to accelerate the participation of pro-life and religious-based health care professionals and health care institutions in the United States.

The 2026 Policy Agenda for Life and Religious Freedom in Health Care

- 1) Permanently Defunding Abortion Providers:** Congress should pass legislation permanently prohibiting any abortion provider, including Planned Parenthood, from receiving federal funding. The executive branch of the federal government should conduct maximum enforcement of the One Big Beautiful Bill's one year prohibition on funding of abortion providers, to the fullest extent of the law.

- 2) Unborn Children and Pregnant Mothers Health Fund ('Healthy Families Fund'):** Congress should pass legislation creating a temporary 2 year multi-billion fund to expand medical care for unborn children and pregnant mothers. This healthy families fund would provide project-based grants to life-affirming pregnancy centers, pro-life medical clinics, and other life-affirming health care entities – from health systems to specialty practices – to provide medical care to pregnant mothers, unborn children, and infants. Consistent with the principles of the Hyde Amendment, this fund would be restricted to financially supporting only those pregnancy centers and health care entities that actively protect unborn life. The fund would be prohibited from awarding grants to abortion providers.

- 3) **Restricting Chemical Abortion Pills:** The Presidential Administration should take new executive action to protect pregnant women from chemical abortion pills because these products have been proven to be unethical and unsafe for both unborn children and women. Such executive action should direct the FDA to adopt appropriate safety protocols to warn women of the serious dangers that chemical abortion products pose to women's health. Additionally, because of the harmful effects of chemical abortion pills, the FDA should announce a new regulatory framework that regulates chemical abortion products commensurate with the threat those products pose to health and safety.
- 4) **Advancing Restorative Reproductive Medicine as an Ethical Alternative to Unethical In Vitro Fertilization:** In Vitro Fertilization is killing an untold number of unborn children. Furthermore, IVF exploits, commercializes, and objectifies both women and unborn children. Regardless of the grave moral concerns about IVF, the IVF process often fails and traumatizes the very people who procure this method. Meanwhile, families across the country continue to struggle with infertility and rightly desire the gift of parenthood. The Presidential Administration and Congress should take action to restrict and regulate IVF. Couples have an important interest in ethically conceiving children. To support these couples, the Administration and Congress should enact regulatory, funding, and legislative measures to promote and expand the utilization of Restorative Reproductive Medicine. Restorative Reproductive Medicine is an ethical life-affirming approach that treats the underlying causes of infertility and helps couples to naturally conceive children.
- 5) **Strengthening Medical Conscience Rights:** The current Presidential Administration has demonstrated strong support and enforcement of conscience and religious freedom rights. The Administration should build on this strong record through a national medical conscience rights education and regulatory initiative. Through education and new verification procedures to ensure compliance with federal conscience laws, this HHS national medical conscience rights initiative would bolster conscience and religious freedom rights within the American medical culture (with an opportunity to create lasting change in the practice of medicine). Specifically, this initiative would educate and seek to significantly improve compliance with the Church Amendments, the Weldon Amendment, the Coates-Snowe Amendment, and other federal medical conscience and religious freedom laws. In addition to these executive branch actions, Congress should pass the Conscience Protection Act or another legislative vehicle that would enact a private right of action for health professionals to file a lawsuit in federal court if their conscience or religious freedom rights are violated.
- 6) **Fairness for Pro-Life and Religious Health Care Providers:** The Presidential Administration would achieve a potentially historic advancement in religious freedom by issuing an executive order on religious liberty in health care. This executive order should seek to achieve equal opportunity and fairness for pro-life and religious health care professionals and health care entities. This executive order would direct the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Labor Department to take all appropriate regulatory actions, including updated guidance and legal findings, to empower pro-life and religious health care professionals and health care entities to participate in the American health care market. This executive order

would seek to stop health insurers from discriminating against pro-life or religious health care entities including in contracts and reimbursement arrangements. This executive order would also work to stop discrimination against pro-life and religious students studying in health care fields, including but not limited to medical schools, nursing programs, and mental health programs. Congress should likewise pass legislation to increase the participation of religious health care entities in the health care space, end religious discrimination, and incentive religious Americans to enter the health care field.

- 7) Combatting Euthanasia by Expanding Health Care Civil Rights Protections:** The HHS' Office for Civil Rights should issue a new health care civil rights regulation to combat active and passive euthanasia. Patients with disabilities, who are elderly, who are organ donors, in hospice, or who are suffering from life threatening conditions are susceptible to discrimination, denial of legitimate medical care, overmedication, and other actions that may hasten their death. HHS should conduct new regulatory actions and guidance, pursuant to existing federal civil rights laws (including but not limited to the federal Rehabilitation Act) to protect vulnerable patients and to strengthen civil rights protections and enforcement.
- 8) Providing Affordable Life Affirming Health Care to American Families:** Congress should pass legislation to provide direct monetary support for vulnerable Americans to purchase their own health care plan. This legislation would boost health care affordability for people who are unemployed, uninsured, or who have a lower income. The prospective new law would be limited to the purchase of health care plans that are life-affirming and thus do not provide coverage for abortions and other anti-life procedures.
- 9) Providing a Life-Affirming Social Safety Net for the Underserved and Vulnerable:** The Administration and Congress should take action to restore the health care safety net. These actions to restore the safety net should include regulatory and market innovations that enable faith-based and community health systems, excellent secular health systems, state and local institutions to provide quality life-affirming and dignified care. Importantly, such action will require Congress and HHS to ensure that health systems, especially in underserved communities, have adequate federal funding to care for the most vulnerable.

The [Christ Medicus Foundation](#) shares Jesus Christ's healing love in health and wellness. We advance religious freedom for medical professionals and patients. We promote Christ-centered pro-life medical care. We offer our [CURO Catholic health and wellness program](#) for the medical needs and whole-person wellness of individuals and families. The Christ Medicus Foundation works to accomplish its mission through education on health care policy, supporting Christ-centered pro-life medical care, and providing Catholic pro-life health and wellness programs.

The [Catholic Health Care Leadership Alliance](#) is an alliance of faithful Catholic organizations that supports the rights of patients and professionals to receive and provide health care in accordance with the moral, ethical, and social teachings of Jesus Christ and His Church through ongoing evangelization, education, advocacy, and mutual support.

From: Marva <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment on the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:37:35 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am hoping with the date still being July 13, that it is ok to send this.

I am concerned that the plan for the bridge between church and state will create a compromise situation that will ultimately undermine the ability of the people of the United States in whatever religion to have freedom of religion and conscience while still allowing life, health, safety for all. People have come to this country to escape religious persecution and have freedom to worship God. People have been born and raised in this country with the ability to safely reside under the protection of separation of church and state where the state (headed by people) will not have the ability to determine what another person should believe - and persecute if that other person believes differently than the people in responsible positions in the state would believe.

For this country (having allowed this practice, that has in part made America great) to change by bringing in this bridge and continued compromise, will ultimately undermine the country and security for all peoples except the relatively few who would take away freedom from others who also make up the "We, the people".

Please do not promote this bridge. Please maintain the separation between church and state.

Thank-you for considering.

From: Tameka Gbaruko <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation Protects Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:37:48 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Committee:

A person should be free to choose their faith. I strongly object to any recommendation that appears to support the merging of church and state. The Constitution was designed to protect both religious freedom and the independence of government by keeping them separate. Please reconsider your recommendations and ensure they accurately reflect this fundamental constitutional principle rather than suggesting that church and state should be combined.

From: [REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]

To: " [REDACTED] PII " < [REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:39:38 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern,

Please do not violate our Religious Liberty. Our country (USA) was founded on Protestant Principles. Martin Luther (a German Monk) protested against Rome & the (Roman Catholic Church System). We have in the U.S. freedom of religion that has existed for 250 years.

1.) The God who created us gives us Free Will.

2.) God does not violate our right to choose. God respects our freedom of choice.

3.) God is Love

4.) Love demands freedom

To reiterate : Please uphold the separation of Church and State.

Concerned Citizen

From: Caryn Jordan <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment - Separation of Church and State - Caryn Jordan

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:40:38 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Committee:

I'm sorry that I didn't have more time to prepare for this; I was not aware that there was an open opportunity to make our voices heard, until lately. However, I'd like to write my general concerns and convictions and share them with you.

I believe the principle of separation of church and state is in the first amendment. Our country would not have been brought this far, functioning as we have, had the principle not been evident and practiced, as it has been for over 200 years.

I'm not a history buff, nor am I a legal expert, but a regular citizen who has enjoyed practicing my faith without any endangerment or persecution for over half a century. For that I praise my Heavenly Father: for the freedom that has blessed my life beyond measure. I can also appreciate those of other faiths and religions being able to do the same.... By freedom of choice. As long as there is peace while doing so.

I do not perceive that this area belongs to any other human being or governmental office, to have any say, so long as others' rights are not being forced to go against their conscience, and against the Constitution of the United States of America, as was drafted, and has been upheld to this day.

There is a sacredness of what belongs to God/Jehovah, and what He bestowed upon His creation: freedom of conscience.

It belongs to no government or committee, to decide what to dictate.

It seems historically that our high court has intervened to interpret the constitution in the past history concerning religious liberty. They may have not always got it exactly right, I'm not sure. But, I don't think any of that needs messed with. Why try to interpret, by a small group, what decades and centuries, of expert minds in constitutional law have contended? Do you really think you'll do better than all who have gone before you?

Why does the military need to be involved? That sounds ominous, right there.

I've got huge concerns over this committee's report, and where some of these summary points might lead. Innumerable people have died for our freedoms, to preserve them. Many people groups want to take advantage of those freedoms, with their own oppressive agendas. We are living in critical times, yes, but nonetheless "Let Freedom Ring!" Peacefully.

One last principle: "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's." Spoken by Jesus. THAT'S separation of church and state.

Thank you for opening the line for citizen involvement. I will trust God for the outcome.

Sincerity yours,
Caryn Jordan

Sent from my iPhone

From: " [REDACTED] PII " < [REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" < [REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE AND CHURCH-STATE SEPARATION - SYLVIA KNOCH

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:41:41 -0400

Importance: Normal

Hello White House Religious Liberty Commission,

Dear Commissioners,

I would like to express my sincere appreciation for your efforts to promote honor, decency, and respect for religious liberty in our nation. These are principles that have long contributed to the strength and stability of the United States, and I am grateful for your commitment to preserving them.

I would also like to respectfully offer a historical perspective that I hope will be helpful in your deliberations. History repeatedly demonstrates that when civil government uses the force of law to advance or enforce religious beliefs or practices, the result is not genuine faith but oppression. Throughout history—including in the United States—government involvement in matters of religion has too often led to the suppression of conscience, even when those in authority sincerely believed they were defending truth and promoting the public good.

The experience of the Puritans provides a meaningful example. In seventeenth-century England, many Puritans endured persecution at the hands of the Crown and the established Church of England because they sought to reform the church according to their convictions. In search of the freedom to practice their faith, many emigrated to America. Yet after establishing their own communities, they did not extend that same freedom to everyone. Instead, they created a Bible-centered commonwealth in which religious conformity was enforced by civil authority. Those who disagreed—including Quakers, Baptists, and Catholics—were fined, imprisoned, banished, and, in some cases, executed because of their religious beliefs. This illustrates how easily those who have experienced religious persecution can become persecutors when civil power is placed behind religious conviction.

The New Testament provides an even more profound illustration. Jesus Christ was condemned by religious leaders and executed through the authority of the Roman government. Those who sought His death believed they were defending God's truth, while the civil authorities exercised the power of the state to carry out the sentence. Their sincerity did not prevent them from committing a profound injustice. This account serves as a timeless reminder that when religious authority and civil authority become united, even those acting with the best of intentions may violate the very principles of justice they seek to uphold.

History consistently teaches that genuine faith cannot be produced by government authority. Matters of conscience belong to the individual and to God. Religious liberty is best protected when government safeguards every person's right to believe, worship, or decline to worship according to the dictates of conscience, without favoring or compelling any religious practice.

For these reasons, I respectfully encourage the Commission to continue defending the constitutional principle of religious liberty while carefully avoiding any action that could allow government coercion in matters of faith. America's commitment to freedom of conscience has been one of its greatest strengths, protecting people of every faith as well as those of no faith. Preserving that principle ensures that religious belief remains a matter of conviction rather than compulsion.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your thoughtful consideration of these comments.
Respectfully,

Thank You!

Sylvia Knoch

PII

From: Martha Ruggles <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Martha Ruggles

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:44:41 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a private citizen from Colton, California, because history bears out what happens to nations when basic freedoms are denied and religion is enforced. I ask you to weigh carefully what your recommendations will do to this country, not just in the next election cycle but across generations.

My first concern is drawn from Christian conviction itself, not from any secular objection. Christ divided all human duties into two jurisdictions when he said that what is Caesar's belongs to Caesar and what is God's belongs to God alone. Civil government was never given authority over the second category. When Jones testified before the Senate committee against the Sunday bill in 1888, he stated plainly that civil government is civil, and has nothing to do in the matter of legislation with religious observances in any way. The state's only legitimate question about any act is whether it is civil or uncivil, not whether it is religious or irreligious. Every recommendation that puts government behind a religious text, display, or lesson crosses the very line Christ himself drew.

My second concern is that rights cannot depend on how many people want them. If a majority vote can grant religious liberty, a majority vote can take it away, and then it was never a right at all but only a permission. Popular government exists precisely to protect the minority, since the majority can already protect itself at the ballot box. Even a congressional committee once affirmed that the Constitution regards the conscience of a solitary dissenter as sacred as that of the largest community. That most Americans favor a measure has never been sufficient warrant for putting government behind it, because religion was never a matter submitted to majority vote.

My third concern is that any law touching religion, even one meant kindly, ultimately destroys free exercise for everyone, including those it favors. Jones called it an impossibility to frame a law on religion that would not prohibit religion's free exercise. He warned that no man can safely consent to legislation favoring the very faith he professes, because in doing so he surrenders his own right to change his mind later if he becomes persuaded of something else. That is a quiet but devastating point: religious liberty includes the liberty to keep searching, and no legislature should be allowed to freeze anyone's conscience in place, favored or not.

Finally, there is no such thing as a neutral, non-sectarian religion for government to adopt. Even the Ten Commandments are not common ground, since Protestants and Catholics number and interpret them differently. J. H. Waggoner asked the question that has never been answered: with hundreds of religions professedly based on the Bible, whose version becomes law, and whose gets suppressed? Any mandated religious display or curriculum requires some official to decide, and at that moment the government has written its own creed and become a church council rather than a legislature.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together.

Respectfully,
Martha Ruggles
Colton, CA

From: Kimberly Miljatovic <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comments on Religious Liberty...

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:44:41 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing as a Christian and an American citizen who values religious liberty. I support protecting every person's right to practice and express their faith. However, I am concerned about efforts that may weaken the separation between religious authority and civil government.

Jesus did not teach the modern American constitutional doctrine in those exact terms, but He clearly distinguished the kingdom of God from political power. He said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's," and told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." He also refused political kingship and rejected the use of force to advance His mission.

These teachings show that civil government has a legitimate but limited role. It should preserve justice and protect freedom, but it should not control religion or use governmental power to advance a particular faith.

The Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause work together. One protects religious practice, while the other prevents government from favoring or establishing religion. Government neutrality is not hostility toward Christianity. It protects the church from political control and protects the conscience of every citizen.

As a Christian, I believe the church should advance through truth, love, persuasion, and the work of the Holy Spirit, not through political privilege or civil coercion.

I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve a clear distinction between the mission of the church and the authority of government. This protects both religious liberty and the integrity of the Christian faith.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Respectfully and Sincerely,

Kimberly Miljatovic

From: Bill Lewis <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION--
Public Comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:44:43 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Response_to_Recommendations_of_Religious_Liberty_Commission.docx

Please see attached letter.

Thank you.

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Via EMAIL: [REDACTED] PII

RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the commission's first and ninth recommendations [1]. As has been very well documented by numerous theologians, historians, and students of civil liberty throughout the Christian era, and especially by some of the "Founding Fathers" of the United States, the union of church and state, as exemplified by the Catholic Church, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Taliban in Afghanistan, and many others, results in corruption of both the government and the church. It is an unholy union, no doubt pleasing to the devil himself, as well as those who ascertain and retain power by such union. The leaders of the church are able to enforce their dogmas on the public by the force of government entities including police, the courts, and even the military, while the corrupt government also benefits by having religious leaders promote its political agenda, and encouraging support of the favored politicians and policies of whichever regime is in power. One would not have to be very astute nor to look very far to see many examples of what I am referring to.

Many of the Founding Fathers, including fourth President of the United States and "Father of the Constitution" James Madison, third President of the United States Thomas Jefferson, and second President of the United States John Adams are well known to have very clearly stated in writing their belief in the separation of church and state. Jefferson explicitly stated that he believed that the "establishment clause" had erected a wall of separation between Church & State. [2]

Most of us are aware of the fact that religion has flourished in the United States for nearly 250 years, protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution, which allows all of us to worship however and whenever we choose, or not to worship at all, if that is our preference. If the establishment clause were to be nullified, and the wall of separation between church and state were to be torn down, the best that we could hope for would be a general loss of religious participation by the public, as has happened in Great Britain and many other European countries, while the more likely outcome would be a return to enforced worship and religious indoctrination, of the preferred denomination of whichever political regime happened to be in power (for example, look at Texas, Florida, and other states which are enforcing the posting of the 10 commandments, reading of the Bible in schools, and other infringements on the prohibitions of the First Amendment). Worse outcomes might be a return to the religious intolerance and bigotry of the colonial period, or to the extreme intolerance and persecution (not to mention the inquisition), of the many centuries of papal supremacy. Or perhaps worst

of all, what if we ended up with a Christianized version of Sharia Law? Which translation of the Bible would be used and enforced? The reader might be thinking “who cares?”, but this is not a trivial question. Which day of the week would be the official Sabbath? Sunday, the Holy Day of the Catholic Church and its followers (most of the Protestant Denominations), Saturday, the Sabbath of Jews, Seventh-day Adventists, Seventh-day Baptists, Charlie Kirk before he was assassinated, and a few other smaller denominations? What if a Muslim, a Buddhist, a Hindu, an atheist, or (God forbid) a Satanist were to become President? Would the official Sabbath be changed to Friday? Or some other day of the week? Might Charlie Kirk have been burned at the stake for worshipping on his Sabbath, rather than the official one, had he lived long enough? Might an atheist President prohibit ALL religious worship? Don’t forget that has happened in France.

I would encourage you not to adopt recommendations 1 and 9 of the Commission, and to adopt recommendation 1, and convene a public hearing with oral and written submissions from the public, to more comprehensively study the question of the separation of church and state in history, especially in American history.

Yours truly,

Bill Lewis, MD

[1] <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/president-trumps-religious-liberty-commission-delivers-historic-report-draft>

[2] <https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html> – Jefferson here is clearly referring to Congress. That Congress is prohibited by the Constitution from making a union of church and state.

From: Higher Ground <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS– Religious Liberty Commission– Higher Ground

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:45:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Letter_to_commission_on_religious_liberty_PDF.pdf

Please see attached comment from our organization, Higher Ground, on the President's Religious Liberty Commission's Draft Report.

Thank you,

Monica Wilbur
Co-founder, Higher Ground



July 13, 2026

The President's Religious Liberty Commission
U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Associate Attorney General
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Re: Written Comment on The Religious Liberty Commission's Draft Report

Dear Members of the Commission,

We would like to introduce our unique work in K-12 education and offer comments in relation to the efforts of the Commission to protect the religious liberties and rights of conscience of America's students in both private and public settings.

Introduction

Higher Ground was founded by Natalie Cline and Monica Wilbur. Cline is a former Utah State Board of Education (USBE) member and Wilbur is a former teacher and candidate for the USBE. Higher Ground's efforts center on analyzing destructive secular influences in the public education system and advising parents and policy makers with actionable information to better protect children, strengthen family bonds, and safeguard God-given liberties.

Some of our organization's higher profile endeavors include:

- The exposure of the Biden Education Department's PRIDE-centered K-12 convening (featured in The Daily Caller, June 2023).
- Co-authoring a landmark Utah law, HB348 2023, which built on President Trump's Executive Order 13798, § 4 (May 4, 2017) to strengthen protections of students' rights of conscience and religious belief in K-12 schools.
- Crafting Utah's House Bill 399 of 2026 (*Prohibitions Against Student Character Tracking & Grading Act – PACT Act*), which prohibits schools from imposing sectarian or partisan tests, qualifications, or systems of thought and belief on students through Social Emotional Learning character trait tracking and grading, regardless of the extent to which these align or conflict with those taught at home.

Purpose of Comment

The Commission's aspirations to protect and expand religious liberty and the rights of conscience of students in the public square we call "school" are commendable.

Written Comment on The Religious Liberty Commission's Draft Report

Given our real-world experience in witnessing how educational institutions hostile to religious sentiment subvert the good intent of pro-faith policies in practice, we hope the Commission's final actions take into consideration the following:

1. The Commission's recommendations on pp. 77-79 emphasize the *positive* religious rights of students; however, it is often the negative religious rights of students which need just as much, if not more, protection from state encroachment, given the highly-politicized nature of today's schools.

Example: Anna, a 12th grade student, takes a compulsory end-of-year test online which contains inclusive questions that normalize genderqueer parenting. The format doesn't allow Anna to skip these ideologically-loaded questions, provide her with alternate questions, or refrain from participating in this portion of the test. Her choices are to be academically penalized for withdrawing from the test or to affirm the premise of a secular ideology as true although her sincere belief in biological binaries rejects it as false.

2. The Commission's recommendations on pp. 77-79 and 215 encourage schools to promote student expression of religious liberty through school-sponsored clubs with their members and leaders being required to meet religious requirements; however, this type of fiat raises both practical & Constitutional questions.

Example: Who will decide who administers these "religious tests"? If it's a government-run school, how is that not a 1A violation? If it's a party outside of the school, how will that party enforce such requirements given that often schools oblige club advisors to be school employees? How will either the school or the outside party enforce such religious qualifications on its club members without undermining the primacy of freedom of conscience which supposedly motivates the fiat in the first place?

3. The Commission's recommendations would better protect American students if they took into account two fast-moving, transformational trends of grave concern:

- a. The education system's universalized and unchallengeable use of secular, social-emotional competencies as a proxy for personal or familial values and belief systems.

Example: Schools are applying institutional definitions to traditional, faith-based virtues. A student in Utah was told that she was failing in "Integrity" in her class because she had turned in a few late assignments.

- b. Schools have been introducing easily digestible elements of mysticism, spiritualism, humanism, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, and even Occultism through seemingly harmless classroom "rituals" like mindfulness mantras and meditation. These practices are cloaked as academic exercises or as mental health preventions or interventions, and have become such a common, often student-led, part of school environments that very few students or parents recognize them as a form of state-imposed religion.

Written Comment on The Religious Liberty Commission's Draft Report

Example: A student successfully sues for being involuntarily and coercively exposed to Transcendental Meditation practices in Hudgins v. Board of Education of City of Chicago, No. 23.

4. The Commission's trust of teachers with religious topics on p. 216 should factor in the intense pressure applied to teachers to strictly transmit secular, institutionalized tenets entrenched in state standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessments. The term "sectarian" means rigid adherence to a particular sect, faction, or doctrine, and although 37 state constitutions explicitly forbid the sectarian control of state-funded schools, it's clear that the vast majority of state education systems across the country dogmatically align on certain secularized doctrines and practices (e.g., DEI, SEL). This means that even if teachers are given religious content like the 10 Commandments to teach, it's unlikely that content will be taught through a religiously deferential lens. Activist teachers, supported by an activist educational ecosystem, can deconstruct in an hour what took Moses days to receive – they will use your tax dollars to ensure your child sees your God through their eyes.

Conclusion

Thank you for this opportunity to address various points of interest on The Religious Liberty Commission's Draft Report. We put ourselves at the Commission's disposal for any further questions or consultation.

It's undeniable that freedom of religious belief and the rights of conscience of students and their parents are under attack. It's also indisputable that religious belief and conscience deserve special protection among our first freedoms enumerated in the Constitution of the United States of America. These things said, we urge caution that protection of these faith-based rights not create a new class of religious regulation. Instead, we ask that this Administration do two things:

1. Focus on viable, streamlined ways to fairly adjudicate current disputes over a student's ability to freely believe or refrain from coerced belief, according to the dictates of his or her conscience.
2. Decisively disincentivize schools and academic governing boards from instituting proxy belief or value systems through any variation of Social Emotional Learning.

Sincerely,

Monica Wilbur & Natalie Cline
Co-founders, Higher Ground

Kim Chandler
Granite School District Board of Education, Utah

Laurel Fetzer
Former candidate, USBE District 5

From: Edna ogegas <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Recommendations 1 and 9

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:46:39 -0400

Importance: Normal

I respectfully oppose Recommendations 1 and 9 of the Religious Liberty Commission's report.

The constitutional principle of the separation of church and state has long protected both religious freedom and freedom of conscience for Americans of all faiths and beliefs. Weakening this principle risks government entanglement with religion and undermines the protections guaranteed by the First Amendment.

I urge the Department of Justice not to adopt Recommendations 1 and 9. Instead, I encourage further public study and discussion of these issues, with careful consideration of our nation's constitutional history and the importance of preserving religious liberty for everyone.

Thank you for considering my comments.

EdnasAttiku

From: Stephanie Bonderczuk <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Strongly Oppose Any Effort to Repeal or Weaken the Johnson Amendment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:47:27 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Senators,

I am writing to you today as a constituent to express my strong opposition to any efforts to repeal or weaken the Johnson Amendment. I firmly believe that maintaining this long-standing provision is essential to protecting the historic separation of church and state, as well as preserving the integrity of both our religious institutions and our democratic process.

For seven decades, the Johnson Amendment has served as a vital safeguard. By ensuring that 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations—including churches, temples, mosques, and charities—do not endorse or oppose political candidates, the law protects houses of worship from becoming battlegrounds for partisan politics.

Allowing houses of worship to engage in partisan electoral politics would be deeply damaging for several reasons:

- **Preserving the Integrity of Faith:** Religion is at its strongest when it relies upon spiritual persuasion rather than political power. Introducing partisan endorsements into sanctuaries risks dividing congregations along political lines and eroding the sacred, unifying role that houses of worship play in our communities.
- **Preventing Political Dark Money:** Repealing the amendment would allow political donors to channel untaxed, unaccountable "dark money" through religious organizations to influence elections. This would fundamentally distort the purpose of charitable tax exemptions.
- **Maintaining Government Neutrality:** True religious liberty depends upon the government remaining neutral in matters of faith. When civil authority and religious institutions become entangled through political endorsements and campaign finance, the historic boundary between church and state is dangerously diminished.

Government is at its best when it protects the free exercise of religion for all citizens, not when it seeks to integrate religious institutions into the machinery of political campaigns. The preservation of religious liberty depends entirely upon maintaining the proper boundaries between civil authority and matters of conscience.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to protect the Johnson Amendment and reject any legislative efforts or interpretations that would weaken it. Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your dedication to upholding the principles of the Constitution.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephanie, MI resident

From: [REDACTED] PII

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:48:40 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft report <https://www.justice.gov/religious-liberty-commission/media/1449896/dl?inline>

I am very grateful for the positive turn this administration under President Trump has taken as far as religious recognition, respect and liberty are concerned. I also greatly appreciate the course correction concerning the "wall of separation" and the Johnson Amendment of 1954 which put religion in a defensive position. This was never the intention of the founding fathers or even Thomas Jefferson. It is a good start but much work is still required.

Faith and people's relationship with God was central to the establishment of this nation and still is. But they are very much under attack. The religions that came and flourished here maintained that we have the aid of God Almighty in the battle against our enemy, which is not flesh and blood but operates through it. So with the Lord's help He will guide us in the cultural war on religion.

I learned a lot from reading through the report. It was interesting that from the very beginning there were many different strongly-held beliefs, almost to the point of a non-start. So in one sense I believe we have done well in coming to a place of agreeable tolerance and respect. Religion (meaning 'bind together') is ironically very good at 'dividing up' but we have come a long way from the days of poor Mary Dyer, the Quaker to becoming much more like "the Rabbi of the Jews, locked in the arms of two ministers of the Gospel." that caused Benjamin Rush such delight.

The benefit and good that religious groups provide in humanitarian and charitable work as well as the modeling of strong families and virtues is undeniable. And there is great wisdom in the wording of the first amendment: **Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;** because to force is not God's way. He offers us free choice, He has given us freedom to choose. Which brings me to a very deep concern I have regarding religion which I did not see addressed in the report.

Religion is defined as **an organized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices**. My concern is with Islam, which I do not consider a religion but an ideology. I believe a religion invites and persuades by words and example but history has shown us that Islam practices forceful conversions and admits the goal of world domination. I have my set of beliefs but respect other's and co-exist with all of them. I feel they have a right to express their beliefs equally but I will say again, for the sake of our nation and the safety of women and children I do not support the Muslim religion in America.

I respectfully ask you to consider the facts on what Islam has done throughout history and is doing presently in many countries around the world. Sharia law is not compatible with the United States Constitution.

Thank you so much for all that you are doing for religious liberty!

Praying that He will guide you in all your undertakings!

[REDACTED] PII

From: Suzi Jones <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:48:50 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear member of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a very strong believer in separation of church and state. I am a Bible believing Christian and a member of a denomination that supports religious liberty for all.

I oppose any action to weaken the wall of separation between church and state.

From the early days of this country religious minorities from Europe found refuge in this land. They came from countries where the distinction between church and state was minimal or did not exist. Those who penned the first amendment were cognizant of the history of religious persecution and articulated our sacred right to have freedom of religion without coercion, freedom of speech and freedom of the press and freedom of our right to assemble.

This needs to continue.

I am also against repealing the Johnson amendment and do not want to see churches becoming more political. Our churches should be places that firmly uphold values of integrity and compassion and that are truly safe havens and places of sanctity and worship.

Making tax payers fund religious organizations is also something to which I am opposed.

Please carefully and prayerfully consider maintaining the separation of church and state that our founders articulated and promoted and that have kept Christianity flourishing for 250 years.

Sincerely,

Susan Jones

From: Lorie Saladinos <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:49:45 -0400

Importance: Normal

First I would like to say that I'm very thankful for the freedom we still have in this United States to worship as we wish.

Please I'm asking you this commission not to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. It will only lead to tyranny.

The wall was not a secular invention imposed on religion but built by people of faith to protect faith. The commission has recommended increasing funding of religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of these things if followed will bring the corruption of politics into the churches.

The U.S. learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better when church and state were separate.

Please consider these things as you go forward. There are thousands of people who have not commented but feel the same way that many of us do who were able to.

Sincerely, Lorie Saladino

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From: Jessica Kelley <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:50:33 -0400

Importance: Normal

Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to oppose the claim that the separation of church and state is not a constitutional principle.

Although the exact phrase "wall of separation between church and state" does not appear in the Constitution, the principle is clearly expressed in the First Amendment, which forbids government from establishing religion while protecting the free exercise of religion.

This separation does not exclude Christians or other religious people from public life. It protects everyone by preventing religious institutions from gaining civil power and preventing government from controlling religion. History repeatedly shows that when church and state unite, both are corrupted. The church becomes political, the state claims religious authority, and freedom of conscience is gradually replaced by religious pressure, discrimination and eventually coercion. This occurred under imperial Rome, medieval church-state systems, established Protestant churches and even in parts of colonial America.

Religious liberty is safest when the church is free to teach, persuade and serve, but has no power to enforce belief through government.

As a Christian, I am also concerned because Revelation 13 warns that religious and civil powers will unite again, leading eventually to forced worship, economic penalties and persecution against those who refuse to conform.

For this reason, replacing the wall of separation with a "bridge" between church and state is dangerous. It creates an easement through which religious influence may gain access to civil power and government may enter matters of faith and conscience.

I urge the Commission to defend both the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause, and to clearly affirm that government must neither suppress religion nor unite with it.

The separation of church and state is not hostility toward religion. It is one of the strongest protections of religious liberty ever established.

Respectfully,

Jessica Kelley

From: Jasmine Davis <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT— Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:52:53 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I write to request the maintenance of a separation of church and state. I believe it is for the safety of every US citizen, to preserve the liberty to serve God according to the dictates of their conscience.

Thank you for your service.

Jasmine D.
Ardmore,sAL

From: Al Jack <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:53:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Good_evening.docx

Sent from my iPhone

Good evening,

2000 years ago, the Bible prophesied that the United States would be in this position. The Bible in Revelation 13 states that there would be 2 powers. One, the first beast(kingdom/government) signified the Papacy and the other, the second beast, represented the USA. All of the reformers know that the first beast was the papacy. They also knew that the second beast would be founded around the year 1798, interesting.

I find it also interesting that the book *The Great Controversy*, which was written over 135 years ago explained the prophecy in Revelation 13 so well.

Anyway, as a child I became familiar with these prophecies and believed their significance, but didn't see any evidence of their fulfillment, until now. What you are planning to do will fulfill the prophecy of Revelation 13, which, if you are any type of Bible student you will understand that that prophecy foretells the receiving of the mark of the beast.

Here are a few quotes from the *Great Controversy*...

Romanism is now regarded by Protestants with far greater favor than in former years. In those countries where Catholicism is not in the ascendancy, and the papists are taking a conciliatory course in order to gain influence, there is an increasing indifference concerning the doctrines that separate the reformed churches from the papal hierarchy; the opinion is gaining ground that, after all, we do not differ so widely upon vital points as has been supposed, and that a little concession on our part will bring us into a better understanding with Rome. The time was when Protestants placed a high value upon the liberty of conscience which had been so dearly purchased. They taught their children to abhor popery and held that to seek harmony with Rome would be disloyalty to God. But how widely different are the sentiments now expressed!

The defenders of the papacy declare that the church has been maligned, and the Protestant world are inclined to accept the statement. Many urge that it is unjust to judge the church of today by the abominations and absurdities that marked her reign during the centuries of ignorance and darkness. They excuse her horrible cruelty as the result of the barbarism of the times and plead that the influence of modern civilization has changed her sentiments. [564]

Have these persons forgotten the claim of infallibility put forth for eight hundred years by this haughty power? So far from being relinquished, this claim was affirmed in the nineteenth century with greater positiveness than ever before. As Rome asserts that the "church *never erred*; nor will it, according to the Scriptures, *ever err*" (John L. von Mosheim, *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History*, book 3, century II, part 2, chapter 2, section 9, note 17), how can she renounce the principles which governed her course in past ages?

The papal church will never relinquish her claim to infallibility. All that she has done in her persecution of those who reject her dogmas she holds to be right; and would she not repeat the same acts, should the opportunity be presented? Let the restraints now imposed by secular governments be removed and Rome be reinstated in her former power, and there would speedily be a revival of her tyranny and persecution.

A well-known writer speaks thus of the attitude of the papal hierarchy as regards freedom of conscience, and of the perils which especially threaten the United States from the success of her policy:

"There are many who are disposed to attribute any fear of Roman Catholicism in the United States to bigotry or childishness. Such see nothing in the character and attitude of Romanism that is hostile to our free institutions, or find nothing portentous in its growth. Let us, then, first compare some of the fundamental principles of our government with those of the Catholic Church.

"The Constitution of the United States guarantees *liberty of conscience*. Nothing is dearer or more fundamental. Pope Pius IX, in his Encyclical Letter of August 15, 1854, said: 'The absurd and erroneous doctrines or ravings in defense of liberty of conscience are a most pestilential error—a pest, of all others, most to be dreaded in a state.' The same pope, in his Encyclical Letter of December 8, 1864, anathematized 'those who assert the liberty of conscience and of religious [565] worship,' also 'all such as maintain that the church may not employ force.'

"The pacific tone of Rome in the United States does not imply a change of heart. She is tolerant where she is helpless. Says Bishop O'Connor: 'Religious liberty is merely endured until the opposite can be carried into effect without peril to the Catholic world.' . . . The archbishop of St. Louis once said: 'Heresy and unbelief are crimes; and in Christian countries, as in Italy and Spain, for instance, where all the people are Catholics, and where the Catholic religion is an essential part of the law of the land, they are punished as other crimes.' . . .

"Every cardinal, archbishop, and bishop in the Catholic Church takes an oath of allegiance to the pope, in which occur the following words: 'Heretics, schismatics, and rebels to our said lord (the pope), or his aforesaid successors, I will to my utmost persecute and oppose.'"—Josiah Strong, *Our Country*, ch. 5, pars. 2-4. [SEE APPENDIX FOR CORRECTED REFERENCES.]

It is true that there are real Christians in the Roman Catholic communion. Thousands in that church are serving God according to the best light they have. They are not allowed access to His word, and therefore they do not discern the truth. [PUBLISHED IN 1888 AND 1911. SEE APPENDIX.] They have never seen the contrast between a living heart service and a round of mere forms and ceremonies. God looks with pitying tenderness upon these souls, educated as they are in a faith that is delusive and unsatisfying. He will cause rays of light to penetrate the

dense darkness that surrounds them. He will reveal to them the truth as it is in Jesus, and many will yet take their position with His people.

But Romanism as a system is no more in harmony with the gospel of Christ now than at any former period in her history. The Protestant churches are in great darkness, or they would discern the signs of the times. The Roman Church is far-reaching in her plans and modes of operation. She is employing every device to extend her influence and increase her power in preparation for a fierce and determined [566] conflict to regain control of the world, to re-establish persecution, and to undo all that Protestantism has done. Catholicism is gaining ground upon every side. See the increasing number of her churches and chapels in Protestant countries. Look at the popularity of her colleges and seminaries in America, so widely patronized by Protestants. Look at the growth of ritualism in England and the frequent defections to the ranks of the Catholics. These things should awaken the anxiety of all who prize the pure principles of the gospel.

Now remember this was written over 135 years ago

In the movements now in progress in the United States to secure for the institutions and usages of the church the support of the state, Protestants are following in the steps of papists. Nay, more, they are opening the door for the papacy to regain in Protestant America the supremacy which she has lost in the Old World. And that which gives greater significance to this movement is the fact that the principal object contemplated is the enforcement of Sunday observance—a custom which originated with Rome, and which she claims as the sign of her authority. It is the spirit of the papacy—the spirit of conformity to worldly customs, the veneration for human traditions above the commandments of God—that is permeating the Protestant churches and leading them on to do the same work of Sunday exaltation which the papacy has done before them.

If the reader would understand the agencies to be employed in the soon-coming contest, he has but to trace the record of the means which Rome employed for the same [574] object in ages past. If he would know how papists and Protestants united will deal with those who reject their dogmas, let him see the spirit which Rome manifested toward the Sabbath and its defenders.

Royal edicts, general councils, and church ordinances sustained by secular power were the steps by which the pagan festival attained its position of honor in the Christian world. The first public measure enforcing Sunday observance was the law enacted by Constantine. (A.D. 321; see Appendix note for page 53.) This edict required townspeople to rest on "the venerable day

of the sun," but permitted countrymen to continue their agricultural pursuits. Though virtually a heathen statute, it was enforced by the emperor after his nominal acceptance of Christianity.

The royal mandate not proving a sufficient substitute for divine authority, Eusebius, a bishop who sought the favor of princes, and who was the special friend and flatterer of Constantine, advanced the claim that Christ had transferred the Sabbath to Sunday. Not a single testimony of the Scriptures was produced in proof of the new doctrine. Eusebius himself unwittingly acknowledges its falsity and points to the real authors of the change. "All things," he says, "whatever that it was duty to do on the Sabbath, these we have transferred to the Lord's Day."—Robert Cox, *Sabbath Laws and Sabbath Duties*, page 538. But the Sunday argument, groundless as it was, served to embolden men in trampling upon the Sabbath of the Lord. All who desired to be honored by the world accepted the popular festival.

As the papacy became firmly established, the work of Sunday exaltation was continued. For a time the people engaged in agricultural labor when not attending church, and the seventh day was still regarded as the Sabbath. But steadily a change was effected. Those in holy office were forbidden to pass judgment in any civil controversy on the Sunday. Soon after, all persons, of whatever rank, were commanded to refrain from common labor on pain of a fine for freemen and [575] stripes in the case of servants. Later it was decreed that rich men should be punished with the loss of half of their estates; and finally, that if still obstinate they should be made slaves. The lower classes were to suffer perpetual banishment.

Miracles also were called into requisition. Among other wonders it was reported that as a husbandman who was about to plow his field on Sunday cleaned his plow with an iron, the iron stuck fast in his hand, and for two years he carried it about with him, "to his exceeding great pain and shame."—Francis West, *Historical and Practical Discourse on the Lord's Day*, page 174.

Later the pope gave directions that the parish priest should admonish the violators of Sunday and wish them to go to church and say their prayers, lest they bring some great calamity on themselves and neighbors. An ecclesiastical council brought forward the argument, since so widely employed, even by Protestants, that because persons had been struck by lightning while laboring on Sunday, it must be the Sabbath. "It is apparent," said the prelates, "how high the displeasure of God was upon their neglect of this day." An appeal was then made that priests and ministers, kings and princes, and all faithful people "use their utmost endeavors and care that the day be restored to its honor, and, for the credit of Christianity, more devoutly observed for the time to come."—Thomas Morer, *Discourse in Six Dialogues on the Name, Notion, and Observation of the Lord's Day*, page 271.

The decrees of councils proving insufficient, the secular authorities were besought to issue an edict that would strike terror to the hearts of the people and force them to refrain from labor

on the Sunday. At a synod held in Rome, all previous decisions were reaffirmed with greater force and solemnity. They were also incorporated into the ecclesiastical law and enforced by the civil authorities throughout nearly all Christendom. (See Heylyn, *History of the Sabbath*, pt. 2, ch. 5, sec. 7.) [576]

Still the absence of Scriptural authority for Sunday keeping occasioned no little embarrassment. The people questioned the right of their teachers to set aside the positive declaration of Jehovah, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God," in order to honor the day of the sun. To supply the lack of Bible testimony, other expedients were necessary. A zealous advocate of Sunday, who about the close of the twelfth century visited the churches of England, was resisted by faithful witnesses for the truth; and so fruitless were his efforts that he departed from the country for a season and cast about him for some means to enforce his teachings. When he returned, the lack was supplied, and in his after labors he met with greater success. He brought with him a roll purporting to be from God Himself, which contained the needed command for Sunday observance, with awful threats to terrify the disobedient. This precious document— as base a counterfeit as the institution it supported—was said to have fallen from heaven and to have been found in Jerusalem, upon the altar of St. Simeon, in Golgotha. But, in fact, the pontifical palace at Rome was the source whence it proceeded. Frauds and forgeries to advance the power and prosperity of the church have in all ages been esteemed lawful by the papal hierarchy.

The roll forbade labor from the ninth hour, three o'clock, on Saturday afternoon, till sunrise on Monday; and its authority was declared to be confirmed by many miracles. It was reported that persons laboring beyond the appointed hour were stricken with paralysis. A miller who attempted to grind his corn, saw, instead of flour, a torrent of blood come forth, and the mill wheel stood still, notwithstanding the strong rush of water. A woman who placed dough in the oven found it raw when taken out, though the oven was very hot. Another who had dough prepared for baking at the ninth hour, but determined to set it aside till Monday, found, the next day, that it had been made into loaves and baked by divine power. A man who baked bread after the ninth hour [577] on Saturday found, when he broke it the next morning, that blood started therefrom. By such absurd and superstitious fabrications did the advocates of Sunday endeavor to establish its sacredness. (See Roger de Hoveden, *Annals*, vol. 2, pp. 526-530.)

In Scotland, as in England, a greater regard for Sunday was secured by uniting with it a portion of the ancient Sabbath. But the time required to be kept holy varied. An edict from the king of Scotland declared that "Saturday from twelve at noon ought to be accounted holy," and that no man, from that time till Monday morning, should engage in worldly business.—Morer, pages 290, 291.

But notwithstanding all the efforts to establish Sunday sacredness, papists themselves publicly confessed the divine authority of the Sabbath and the human origin of the institution by which it had been supplanted. In the sixteenth century a papal council plainly declared: "Let all Christians remember that the seventh day was consecrated by God, and hath been received and observed, not only by the Jews, but by all others who pretend to worship God; though we Christians have changed their Sabbath into the Lord's Day." — *Ibid.*, pages 281, 282. Those who were tampering with the divine law were not ignorant of the character of their work. They were deliberately setting themselves above God.

All of these quotes were taken from the chapter "Liberty of Conscience Threatened".

The following Chapters tell how the USA will force Sunday worship and cause all to receive the mark of the papal authority (Sunday worship) on pain of death. This is where this country is headed. Read the book and any honest hearted person will see that Jesus himself has plainly said...But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. Matthew 15:9 & Mark 7:7

And what did the disciples say? Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. Acts 5:29

So to proceed with your agenda is in direct conflict with the expressed will of God, and everyone has to give an account of their lives in the judgement. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." 2 Corinthians 5:10

Prayerfully consider your actions as the will have a direct impact on the success or failure of this nation. A word from the prophet...When our nation, in its legislative councils, shall enact laws to bind the consciences of men in regard to their religious privileges, enforcing Sunday observance, and bringing oppressive power to bear against those who keep the seventh-day Sabbath, the law of God will, to all intents and purposes, be made void in our land, and national apostasy will be followed by national ruin.—The S.D.A. Bible Commentary 7:977 (1888). – {LDE 133.5}

From: THOMAS ANDREWS <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Cc: Pysician Folio ABPN <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:54:00 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chairman Patrick and Vice Chairman Dr. Ben Carson

Thank you for your concerns for Christians and other faiths. I have one concern. Jesus clearly said in Matthew 22:21 “Render to Ceasar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s”. I believe this is true separation of Church and State. I’m concerned with repealing the Johnson amendment as with out, it limits this separation. Finally, the tenor of controlling free speech in religious areas or subjects can be problematic if flipped.

Thank you.,

Thomas Andrews

Sent from my iPhone

From: Elaine Rosenberry <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty response

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:54:23 -0400

Importance: Normal

It is very important to keep religious liberty intact for everyone. The government must not have any power over one's conscious reasons to religion. We must keep the right to worship or not worship as our mind dictates and not law.

Respectfully

Elaine Rosenberry

From: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:55:17 -0400

Importance: Normal

July 13, 2026

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530
Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I want to let you know that I do believe that our US Constitution does proclaim the separation of church and state in the 1st amendment. That states that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;... That indicates that there will be a separation between law and religion.

Each person should be able to choose the way they worship God and not have a law dictating one way or another. We need to keep a separation between church and state.

Thank **you** for upholding the First Amendment in your presentation.

Sincerely,
Karen Hackett

From: alicia Heard Pullman <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:56:42 -0400

Importance: Normal

I object to the Religious Liberty Commission Report's dismissal and denigration of the metaphor of the "wall of separation between church and state."

This is a a turbulent season in the US and we are not connected as a nation. This disenfranchises Sabbath keepers.

Regards

From: Scott Aliment <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT on separation of Church and State draft report – Scott Aliment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:56:42 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Commission's draft report. After reviewing it, I am concerned that several of its recommendations move away from the constitutional principle that has protected religious liberty for generations: a government that neither establishes religion nor interferes with its free exercise.

The report's suggestion that the church and the state should "strengthen and support one another" is especially troubling. History demonstrates that when government becomes involved in promoting or favoring religion, it rarely remains neutral. Instead, it often privileges the beliefs of those currently in power, leaving religious minorities and those with different convictions at a disadvantage. Genuine religious liberty is strongest when government protects **everyone's** freedom of conscience without choosing winners and losers.

I am also concerned by recommendations that could expand government involvement with religious institutions or create the appearance that one faith tradition deserves special recognition or protection. Religious freedom belongs equally to every American, regardless of their faith, denomination, or whether they practice no religion at all. Government should safeguard that freedom through impartiality, not preference.

The First Amendment protects both the free exercise of religion and against government establishment of religion. Those principles are complementary, not contradictory. They have allowed people of many different beliefs to live together in peace while ensuring that faith remains a matter of personal conviction rather than government influence.

I respectfully urge the Commission to revise the report so that it more clearly affirms government neutrality in matters of religion and preserves the constitutional protections that have served our nation well. Religious liberty flourishes when individuals are free to follow their conscience without government endorsement, coercion, favoritism, or discrimination.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Scott Aliment

From: Neila Arouca <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS– Establishment Clause – Neila Souza

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:57:39 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a Texan who cares deeply about both Religion Clauses of the First Amendment, and I ask you to preserve them as a single, unified principle rather than allowing one to erode the other. My concern is not partisan. It arises from arguments Christians themselves have made, across generations, about where civil authority ends and the authority of conscience begins.

The oldest and most compelling of those arguments comes from Christ himself. When He said, “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s,” He distinguished between two spheres of human obligation and confined civil government to only one of them. Duties we owe to one another fall within the state’s legitimate authority; duties we owe to God belong to a realm no legislature may enter. A. T. Jones made precisely this argument before a Senate committee in 1888, insisting that civil government is civil and “has nothing to do in the matter of legislation with religious observances in any way.” He argued that there is a limit to legislative power, and that Christ Himself drew that boundary. The principle that follows is both simple and religiously neutral: government may ask only whether an action harms another person’s rights, never whether it is pious or impious. Murder and theft are punished because they violate the rights of others, not because they are sins. Any proposal that places the authority of the state behind a religious text, display, or lesson crosses the very line that Christianity itself established.

The second argument follows naturally from the first, and it should give pause to anyone who believes religious legislation will always favor their own faith. Jones argued that it is impossible to enact a law concerning religion without restricting someone’s free exercise, because every such law necessarily defines the religion it endorses—and every definition excludes as much as it includes. Even those who benefit from the law no longer practice their faith freely; they practice it by government permission, under terms that a future legislature may revise. Jones made the point personally: no one can safely support legislation favoring his own religion, because in doing so he surrenders the freedom to follow conscience should it later lead him elsewhere. He said he would oppose a law establishing his own day of worship just as firmly as one establishing his neighbor’s. That is the discipline this moment calls for from all of us.

The third argument answers the final claim—that government can safely endorse a generic, non-sectarian religion. No such thing exists in practice. Jones observed that even the Ten Commandments differ in numbering and wording between Protestant and Catholic traditions. J. H. Waggoner posed the unavoidable question: among the hundreds of traditions claiming the Bible, whose interpretation will be enforced, and whose will be set aside? Every governmental choice necessarily elevates one interpretation of Scripture over others, making human authority—not Scripture itself—the final authority. A congressional committee recognized this danger as early as 1830, warning that any such undertaking would transform the legislature into an ecclesiastical council, a role wholly incompatible with a body established for civil, not religious, purposes.

Protect the free exercise of religion for everyone, and keep the state out of the business of religion. Those two commitments cannot be separated. They stand or fall together.

Respectfully,

Neila Souza

Texas

From: Damien Lowrimore <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:58:48 -0400

Importance: Normal

Please consider church and state separation allows true American respect and freedom for all. Every other country that does not have this used the state to execute for religion. If we break this wall, it is inevitable that we will become a persecuting power as the church in the dark ages killed 50 million people plus; all in the name of Church and State. We Do Not Want That Here in America.
Thank you

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From: Loris [REDACTED] PII

To: " [REDACTED] PII " < [REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT / Separation of Church and States/ Lori L. Everett

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:00:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

There are many, many of us concerned citizens who are God-fearing Christians, and who are highly alarmed by what the RLC is doing. As a seventh-day Sabbath-worshipping Christian, it is devastating to me that the Commission is attempting to weaken and dismantle the separation of church and state. This is a freedom that US Citizens (should all) cherish, and a right that should never be flippantly tossed by the wayside.

Hear me out. Several things are cherished by my family: a relative of ours was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Elbridge Gerry is the gentleman; he along with 55 others put their lives on the line for the freedoms we have today. Beyond that, a group of individuals who came over on the Mayflower did so to separate themselves from the religious climate in England. Of that group, Captain Myles Standish is another relative held in high regard for historical reasons. Our family is aware of what went on historically, and we are aware of what liberties are being whittled away by actions we see such as those the RLC is injecting into a recommendation to present to our sitting president, Donald J. Trump.

It is alarming that the repeal of the Johnson Amendment is even being considered. Doing this will only further politicize America's churches, which is counter to the separation of church and state as provided for by our Constitution. With all due respect it is appropriate that the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced. PLEASE CONSIDER THIS!

Additionally, it is alarming that religious organizations engaging in religious activities potentially are looking at having governmental funding expanded. This is blatant disregard to the separation of church and state. Religious non-profit activities should NOT be funded by the government. Religious education and religious clubs on public campuses should NOT be given governmental funding. Again, these mentioned examples are blatant examples of separation of church and state not being adhered to. In essence, if a religious entity needs funding to operate on a secular campus (clubs, education), or if a religious non-profit activity needs more money to operate (NGOs overseas, for example), the religious entity ("church") should provide that funding. Not the government ("state"). Period.

Finally, as an American citizen with (Ashkenazi) Jewish lineage, I find it quite troubling to see the special treatment given the entirety of the Jewish peoples as well as the state of Israel. The US government should maintain complete neutrality in its relationship with religion. Any religion. Including the Jewish religion.

Religious liberty is the bedrock of all of our liberties. Please review all history to see the effects of the "state" dictating what the "church" is allowed. Keep the separation. It protects more than it constrains.

Respectfully,
Lori L. Everett
Parrish, FL

From: Ikemba Balogu <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT -- Preserve Separation of Church and State -- Ike

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:02:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this public comment.

I appreciate the Commission's desire to protect the free exercise of religion. Religious liberty is one of America's greatest blessings because it recognizes that faith is a matter of conscience and that every person is accountable to God alone for his or her own beliefs.

Scripture teaches that civil government has an important role in maintaining justice and order. It also teaches that worship belongs to God alone. Jesus Himself distinguished between the responsibilities of government and the responsibilities of faith when He said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). This principle has served as a foundation for religious freedom throughout our nation's history.

I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve this distinction. Government best fulfills its role by protecting every citizen's freedom of conscience rather than promoting, endorsing, or compelling any form of religious practice. The rights guaranteed by the First Amendment protect not only those whose beliefs are popular, but also those whose convictions differ from the majority.

History repeatedly demonstrates that whenever civil authority becomes closely joined with religious authority, liberty of conscience is eventually, if not immediately, weakened. The strongest safeguard for religious freedom is a government that neither interferes with sincere religious practice nor uses its authority to advance religious observance. Faith is most genuine when it is embraced freely and individually, never through pressure or coercion.

As the Commission develops its recommendations, I encourage you to continue strengthening protections for the free exercise of religion while also preserving the constitutional principles that prevent government from establishing or favoring religion. In doing so, you will help ensure that Americans of every faith—and those of no faith—remain free to follow the dictates of conscience without fear of discrimination or compulsion.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and attention to this vital matter.

Respectfully,

Ike

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

From: Andrew Rasmussen <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTs- [CHAPTER 2] – [ANDREW RASMUSSEN]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:04:40 -0400

Importance: Normal

Thank you for giving the public the opportunity to express their ideas related to the July 26, 2026 draft of the Religious Liberty Commission Report. As a citizen of the United States of America, and a person of faith who values religious liberty, I can appreciate taking time and effort to explore a pillar of our country so worthy of continued consideration and maintenance. The freedom of individuals to believe and practice as they choose without coercion has been a primary cause of the flourishing of our country.

In Chapter 2 of the report, the Commission wrote of the historical background out of which the Founding Fathers emerged to frame the Constitution. Further on, the report touches on how people have used notions incorrectly derived from the idea of separation of church and state to suppress religious expression, trampling on the rights of individuals in hurtful ways. The report then speaks of the concept of a “wall of separation between church and state” as a repressive concept hijacked from Jefferson’s original intent, now functioning more like the Berlin Wall. The chapter ends with a vision of building bridges between the church and the state.

These core subjects, in connection with recommendation 1 of the report, are the focus of my comment.

First, I want to bring out some historical context the report contains, and draw some conclusions related to how we address misunderstandings of the 1st amendment. Regarding the historical background of the Founding Fathers, mention is made of Mary Dyer, executed for sharing her religious beliefs in 1660. The report observes that, besides extreme punishments, “other practices included ‘using their political power to establish tax-supported churches, to ban competing ones, and to require church membership as a condition for holding public office’—all hallmarks of a religious establishment that the U.S. The Constitution would later prohibit”(pg 36).

The report identifies the lineage of this religious intolerance: the political landscape of Europe, where “the power of government” was used “to crush disfavored ideas and disfavored people”(pg 37). Given historical information from the report, the following conclusion can be drawn: the restrictions of religious liberty that the Founding Fathers were cognizant of were, by vast majority, caused by religious groups. Mary Dyer was condemned by religiously motivated laws. The General Court's Anti-Quaker Laws (1656) illustrates the charged, religious motivation of the government at the time, beginning with “Whereas, there is a cursed sect of heretics...” The history of religious intolerance in Europe is largely a history of religiously motivated persecution. This was, most certainly, the foremost concern the Founding Fathers had relating to freedom of religion. By looking at the historical environment out of which the Founding Fathers emerged, I do not think that **anyone** need long guess at the primary aim of the religion section of the 1st amendment. The framer’s primary concern was this: preventing any religious group from using the government to restrict or persecute those that differed from them. The government’s legislative power was not to be used by any church. And, neither was the government to use the church for political ends. If we downplay the continued threat of this in our day, we will cease to be a nation that is safeguarded against repeating these errors.

The idea that the only major threats to religious liberty in the USA today are from people who are against religion will create the environment which will make that very idea itself not true. In other words, the primary original intent of the 1st amendment is still a desperately needed function, and any move to clarify that amendment must be handled extremely wisely, so that the original intent is not destroyed. We do not have the luxury of assuming that the primary original intent isn’t as critical now. I’m not advocating for the persecution of religious people by non-religious people to continue. **I am advocating we must not make any move that would open the door to religiously-backed persecution while we are trying to close the door to religious suppression. We must avoid opening the door for the other extreme even by using language or metaphors that would hint that that door might be openable.**

I say the above understanding that, as various testimonies in the report highlight, people who belong to faith-organizations are not the only ones with a human nature that is quick to trample on the freedoms of others.

Chapter 2 highlights the sad situation of Mr. Vaughan and the faith-based dog tags he provided. The individual in that situation who required the removal of religious content from the website and the tags did not have a valid Constitutional reason to do so, because the company was Mr. Vaughan's personal domain, and the dog tags were voluntarily chosen by the servicemen, and therefore honoring their own choice over their personal domain.

It is true; there are some people who do not subscribe to a particular religious belief and do not want the inconvenience or irritation of the public expression of religious ideas by others. Regardless of whether this, or another, motivation is present, individuals have misunderstood the 1st amendment, and the related wall of separation analogy. **These misunderstood concepts have been weaponized against the constitutional expression of faith in public, and this is a problem that most certainly needs correction.** I am not advocating that these issues aren't addressed in proper ways.

I am pleased to hear of the initiative to restore the pensions, benefits, and eligibility of servicemen who had these wrongfully removed due to religious beliefs regarding the Covid-19 vaccine. I believe that people should respect the rights of others to express worldviews freely in the public sphere, whether that worldview is religious or not. As a follower of Jesus who comes from a denomination with a history of facing religious persecution for its biblical beliefs, I wholeheartedly desire that religious liberty for all will be maintained and enhanced. And it is with that aim in view that I write the following sentiments.

In Thomas Jefferson's famous letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, he wrote:

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should '**make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,**' thus building a wall of separation between Church & State."

Jefferson uses the wall analogy to describe the effect of the 1st amendment. He did that for a reason. **We should not be quick to discard or change the analogy because of its misuse.** We must understand what he actually meant, and then spread that understanding. Unfortunately, people who are not religious in the normal sense of the word have misunderstood and misapplied this metaphor to suppress public expression of faith. This is totally opposed to what Jefferson had in mind. But, just here is a large problem: **instead of understanding and owning the wall analogy as the Founding Fathers understood it, it seems that people of faith have accepted the meaning given to it by people who are against expression of religion.** And as a result, people of faith are eager to get rid of the metaphor. They wish to "throw the baby out with the bath water."

That is not the solution. The solution is to reclaim the right understanding of the separation of church and state. In an attempt to clarify the clause, one must be clear on what exactly the wall is meant to keep out. I believe that the main function of the religion clauses is to keep church authority out of the state, and to keep state authority out of the church. To be certain, Jefferson never thought that people of faith shouldn't fill roles in the government. And, he certainly never thought that people shouldn't express their beliefs in public arenas. The wall isn't to keep people from crossing. It isn't to keep any individual's proper influence, as an individual, out of the state. Although I might be oversimplifying, the wall is meant to keep authority, on both sides, where it belongs. As Jefferson stated, the state is to stay in the realm of actions, not thoughts or opinions.

The report states that the misunderstanding and misapplication of the wall concept was "much more like a 'Berlin wall' of separation than the respectful and mutually appreciative boundary Jefferson had envisioned." And, here is my first major conclusion. Why, then, when **the issue is in the misunderstanding of the concept's name, and not in the concept itself**, are we as United States citizens going to abandon the historical position of the Founding Fathers for another sentence-limited-concept. **If the phrase, "wall of separation of church and state," has taken on an unfortunate life of its own, being used to crush religious expression in public, can we be sure that the phrase, "building bridges between church and state," will not also take on a misunderstood and damaging life of its own?** Are we sure that this phrase will not also be misunderstood and misapplied by future generations to crush the expression of certain religious persuasions in favor of another religion? Can we be sure this will not happen? History does not afford us the luxury of thinking so.

The solution will not be in redefining what religious liberty is, but in returning to what it was meant to be at the founding of the country. The fact that people misuse the metaphor for a concept that is itself sound is no reason to get rid of it. Getting rid of the separation of church and state because it is misunderstood is like removing a signpost altogether because nearsighted people can't read it. The traveller still needs a sign! Instead

of removing it, why not give them a pair of glasses to read it. There is nothing wrong with the concept of “a wall of separation of church and state.” There is everything wrong with how it has been interpreted, both by religious and non-religious people alike. If the idea of a wall has been misunderstood, the idea of bridges most certainly will be misused. Changing the language will not fix the problem.

Therefore,

Given that religious intolerance has most commonly and most violently come from religious groups in history,

And given that one extreme is the most favorable breeding ground for the rise of the other extreme,

And given that, as attested to by several of the report’s statements, **misunderstanding** of Jefferson’s wall analogy, and **not** the original concept itself, is a major factor in the suppression of religious expression,

And given that every slogan or catchphrase is vulnerable to misuse and misinterpretation, especially the older it gets,

I would plead with the Department of Justice and the Commission to be extremely, dare I say painfully, careful in matters connected with the first recommendation of the report to “instruct the Department of Justice to issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state”(pg 12). We cannot afford to treat the threat of religiously-motivated persecution as all in the past, and make policy changes and statements only aimed at intolerance from non-religious sources. Both sources of intolerance must be continually considered. Neither threat is going away. There must be a thorough investigation of the circumstances and causes of previous religious persecution. Analysis of Roger William, founder of Rhode Island, and his writings and influence on the thinking of the Founding Fathers is needed. The investigation must also include the arrests that have happened in the USA, since the signing of the Constitution, over religious grounds. Also needing analysis are the pushes for religious laws in our nation’s history. These things happened well into the 1800’s, and the spirit that inspired them is alive and well today.

On a specific note, it is not wise to labor to tear down the metaphor of the wall of separation between church and state. Jefferson’s letter clearly states that a wall was erected by the 1st amendment. We do not have the right to remove the ancient landmarks. **But, we do have the right and duty to bring proper understanding of those landmarks. All citizens need to understand what that wall was meant to prevent, and what it wasn’t. The analogy has been misunderstood. But that doesn’t mean that the analogy is bad.** I believe that an effort to bring proper understanding of the separation analogy will be vastly superior to changing the analogy to that of a bridge, and then struggling to maintain a proper understanding of that analogy. It will be misused.

And, separate from the above comment, a final note specifically to my Christian friends in decision-making positions. We as Christians need to remember that Jesus had the opportunity to use force to advance his kingdom. When people wanted to force him to be king, he refused (John 6:15). Later, Jesus also told Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36). We need to be careful not to see the government as the ultimate solution to any problem. True religion does not need the state to prop it up and nurse it along. If it does, it is not true religion. Those who are Christians can afford to handle church-state relations in a way that errs on the side of caution regarding creating openings for religious organizations of any persuasion to have undue influence over the state. To Christians, and thinking people everywhere, neglecting extreme caution in this matter will lead to disastrous results we didn’t think were possible.

Keep upholding freedom,

Andrew Rasmussen



From: Wynn Kaiser <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] please keep us free

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:05:20 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I cannot support your Pillar of Freedom proposal. On paper it may initially have an appearance of offering a plausible solution to current challenges. But in effect, it would greatly undermine and damage one of the greatest strengths of our nation, that of the separation of church and state matters.

As a senior with a longstanding love of my country, an active member of my community, as well as being a believer in Christian values rooted in God's Word, I beg you to completely discontinue any further consideration of the Pillar of Freedom.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my opinion here.

From: soanny martin <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:12:41e0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom This May Concern,

I am reaching out because I am a citizen that is very concerned about my religious freedom and it being taken away. I have clear on what you stance is on this matter, and I am very disappointed that one of the very important stance that this very country was founded on is in matter of fact being taken lightly. Church and State must be kept separate. Our founding fathers realized the importance of this.

If there is no separation between church and state, this country would not have been born. The fact that people immigrated and left their home country so they could worship freely and how they wished is important to keep in mind and not forget. The very Constitution which America is based on implies this. James Madison stated "The number, the industry, and the morality of the priesthood and the devotion of the people have been manifestly increased by the TOTAL SEPARATION OF THE CHURCH AND STATE." You should keep this in mind as you think about how important the separation of church and state is.

To summarize the importance, I will finish with another quote. "The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries."- James Maddison. Let's not forget our past history, rather let's learn from history so we don't commit the same mistakes. History is the best teacher... let's keep church and state separate, just the way it was intended for this wonderful country.

Thank you for your time,
Soanny Martin
Sent from my iPhone

From: Carl Freman <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:12:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

I fully support the Separation of Church and State. Therefore please submit my signature to the support thereof. Unfortunately I am deployed to assist in disaster relief on Saipan and Guam and have limited resources to write a full response to support this important issue. Respectfully submitted Carl Freman

From: Doug Wakefield <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment-separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:13:34 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am writing this as a very concerned US citizen, as we just recently celebrated our nations 250th anniversary declaring the separation from British rule some of the concerns 250 years ago as people came to this country was wanting to live where they would have religious freedoms and could worship any way they felt best, at any time that they felt to be right, without any government influence or pressures. During the dark ages, where Church and state shared their influences upon the people, people were forced to worship a certain way, and there were penalties for those who did not adhere. What keeps this country free is our churches are able to govern themselves and how they best see fit to worship God, while our government entities focus on governmental affairs. when Church and state are brought together, there will be "a church" of which will determine the proper way as well as the proper time to worship, and that takes away religious freedoms for those who disagree with the "standard" of one particular church. Let's not go back to the dark ages. Our for fathers, I believe we're divinely inspired to put into our constitution that Church and state should be separate, and they were very very wise to do so, we should learn from our past, not just repeat it. Please reconsider the recommendations that are given in this report and lets keep Americans free to worship in the manner that they believe to be right, without governmental, and financial influences. Thank you very much for hearing me.

Doug Wakefield
Denver, Colorado

From: miroslav stanic <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:14:17 -0400

Importance: Normal

Inline-Images: image.png

SO JESUS TOLD THEM,
“GIVE TO CAESAR WHAT
IS CAESAR’S, AND TO GOD
WHAT IS GOD’S.”
- LUKE 20:25



Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am concerned! Very concerned! Even alarmed!

By explicitly asserting that there is no separation of church and state because that exact phrase isn't present, reveals the extent of purposeful closing of the eyes to the obvious. We cannot arrive to safe, and certainly not to great places, with our eyes closed. We cannot ignore the history without groping in to repeat it. There IS separation between church and state. There has been! And there has been the purpose for it! Here it is, in the words of the Father of the Constitution, president James Madison:

"The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe with blood for centuries."

The present recommendations of the Religious Liberty Commission, unless arrested, will be heading to ceaseless strife and complete undoing what made America great and free, in the first place. If MAGA will ever succeed, the flag of liberty of conscience needs to keep waving over American shores and the walls of separation between church and state must remain standing.

Sincerely,
Miroslav Mike Stanic

From: "[REDACTED PII]" <[REDACTED PII]>

To: "[REDACTED PII]" <[REDACTED PII]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:17:41 -0400

Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern:

Please note that I, my wife, and my two voting sons, do hereby appeal that the effort to redefine, and establish any clause, or legislation, to build a "bridge", "pathway", or "connection" between church and state, be permanently abolished, and done away with. There must be a permanent, separate, division between these institutions.

Respectfully,

WWM, TAM, CNM, VEM

From: Bob Greer <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT (Separation of Church and State), Bob Greer

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:17:42 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I agree with the Pillar of Freedom's comments, Please! reconsider your current understanding of this foundational principle that was a critical part of our founder's understanding of the Freedom to worship who, how, and when. Liberty of Conscience is a Freedom for all mankind, that is a historical Fact, the founding of this country has proven that... all of our ancestors came to this new land to flee from various persecution's, which included Religion. I'm asking this Commission, Not to allow the legislation of any form of Religious activities, it will lead to an inevitable repeat of Religious persecution to any believers or non-believers, that choice is yours...and is mine...

Sent from my T-Mobile 5G Device

Get [Outlook for Android](#)

From: Jean Marie Smith <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment—Separation of Church and State—Jean Marie Smith

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:17:42 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chairman Patrick, Vice Chairman Dr. Carson, and members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

It is with deep respect and appreciation for the government of our nation that I submit this letter. I am grateful for its willingness to carefully consider citizen input in order to best provide for the needs of the people who reside here.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts that were put into the Religious Liberty Commission Report. Its comprehensive and reverent treatment of the subject of religion, liberty and justice is reflective of our country's high standards and the diversity of those affected regarding religious practices. Each of your time and effort to do your best before God, President Trump and fellow citizens is evident.

I would like to humbly offer two comments.

First, in considering the Ten Commandments, written by the finger of God (Exodus 31:18), I believe they are a summary of "the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). I see the first four commandments as an illustration of a love relationship between God and an individual person (Exodus 20:1-11). The last six Commandments illustrate a love relationship between persons (Exodus 20:12-17). I appreciate that our government ensures the protection of its citizens through legislation against crimes such as theft, assault and battery, and murder. I believe it is right for a government to protect its citizens through legislation related to the last six Commandments. Regarding the first four Commandments; however, these refer to a private relationship between God and an individual person, which I do not believe should have any legislation in order to preserve true religious liberty.

Second, according to the Word of God, when God's Son lived on this earth He declined using the government or a leadership position to further His religion. Rather, He taught that the kingdom of God is within (Luke 17:21). He helped the people with their physical and emotional needs, and by Love enacted won hearts to God. In my understanding, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6) summarizes God's principle relating to belief in God and a particular religion.

Thank you again for your committed service to God and to our country.

Respectfully,

Jean Marie Smith

From: Michelle King <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:18:38 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am deeply concerned to read that the Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between Church and State with a "bridge."

The wall of separation wasn't built by secularists to keep religion down but believers to keep the Church pure and free. With respect, building a bridge is a danger to religious liberty at its very foundation. As a person of faith, I find the idea very alarming!

Breaking down the wall of separation by building a bridge doesn't strengthen the Church; it opens the door for Government money and political stuff to march right in to the Church, until Churches are competing for grants and doing the bidding of politicians instead of to God. History is clear about what happens when Church and State join. Just read about the Dark Ages and the Reformation out of it. That's why we have **enjoyed** the freedom we have had for the last 250 years in America! People sought out a land of freedom and liberty. Freedom and liberty to follow the dictates of one's own conscience and to serve God according to one's own conscience.

God never forces **anyone** to love Him, or to go to Church, or to be religious in any way and no Government should have any say in **anything** that pertains to religion and liberty of conscience. Please keep the wall. It protects the Church far more than it constrains it.

Sincerely,

Jessica Meidell

Ardmore Oklahoma

From: Siraye Dessie <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Revision of constitution

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:20:25 -0400

Importance: Normal

I don't support the revision of the constitution.
Thank you

From: Dwayne Gibson <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Keep Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:20:26 -0400

Importance: Normal

Members of Religious Liberty Commission

I would strongly encourage you to keep the separation of Church and State as strong ever. I don't have to tell you why Church and State has been separated and now more than ever it needs to remain how the founding fathers suggested. Church should not influence the State/Government and the Government should not dictate to the Churches. Each have their special influence of importance but separately.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter

From: Teriz Chuljian <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comments on Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:21:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I would like to express some concerns I have regarding the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission.

To begin, I will quote the masterpiece of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

And also from *Congressional documents (U.S.A.), serial No. 200, document No. 271:*

"The framers of the Constitution recognized the eternal principle that man's relation with his God is above legislation, and his rights of conscience inalienable. Reasoning was not necessary to establish this truth; we are conscious of it in our own bosoms. It is this consciousness which, in defiance of human laws, has sustained so many martyrs in tortures and flames. They felt that their duty to God was superior to human enactments, and that man could exercise no authority over their consciences. It is an inborn principle which nothing can eradicate."

I am a tenth generation descendant of Roger Williams, a man who braved persecution, banishment, and hardship because of his belief in the sacredness of freedom of conscience. I am concerned that, although the term "separation of church and state" has been abused, doing away with this principle, which seems to be under consideration, will imperil the freedom that the American people have enjoyed over the last 250 years. Until the principle of the First Amendment was established in our great nation, there was rarely a time when citizens had the privilege of living according to their own convictions without fear of persecution, if these differed from the majority or from the established religion. Studying the history of the Middle Ages leaves one aghast at the atrocities committed in the name of religion aided by the state.

A modern example, I believe, of the dangers resulting from the combining of church and state, is the teaching of origins in public schools which promulgates a specific belief. Because the topic of origins is fundamentally religious in nature, I believe it is unconstitutional for schools to teach this topic. Generations have been educated in skepticism of the Biblical account because the state assumed the position of teaching evolution—and thus promoted anti-Christian and anti-Biblical thought. This is a result of the combining of the state with the "religion" or belief of atheism.

What separation of church and state means to me:

1. The state doesn't tell the church what it can or cannot do or give preference to one religion/denomination over another
2. The church does not use the state to force its creed on the people
3. There is freedom for people to exercise their religion—there should be no restriction of religious expression within certain bounds, as the First Amendment states, "peaceably..."
4. The free exercise of religion is limited by the laws relating to the last six of the 10 Commandments. Thus a religion which brings physical harm to others must be brought to justice. An example of this would be

female mutilation (such as practiced by the Muslim religion).

Religion flourishes much more when it is chosen rather than forced. Forced compliance to religion fills the church with people who are not worshiping in sincerity and truth. I believe religious reformation best begins in the heart of the nation—the home.

Another question we should ask is—Will these new recommendations be beneficial to religion if those who promote progressive ideology get the upper hand? Could these changes be used against liberty of conscience?

I sincerely hope you will consider these concerns and pray that freedom may prevail in time to come,

Teriz Chuljian

Iron City, Tennessee

From: Andrew Herolds <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Religious Liberty and the American Story – Andrew Herold

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:22:18 -0400

Importance: Normal

I respectfully submit this comment regarding the recommendations contained in the Religious Liberty Commission's report.

Religious liberty is best protected when government neither favors nor disfavors religion, when religious institutions remain independent from political control, and when individuals are free to practice—or decline to practice—religion according to conscience. Several recommendations in the report appear to depart from those principles.

First, the report recommends increased governmental financial support for religious and faith-based nonprofit organizations. Although religious organizations may perform valuable charitable work, direct government funding can create dependency, invite governmental oversight, and blur the distinction between private religious ministry and public governmental activity. Financial support may also favor larger, politically connected, or officially recognized religious organizations over smaller or less influential faith communities.

Benjamin Franklin addressed this concern directly in an October 9, 1780, letter to Richard Price:

“When a Religion is good, I conceive that it will support itself; and, when it cannot support itself, and God does not take care to support, so that its Professors are oblig'd to call for the help of the Civil Power, it is a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one.”

Franklin's words remain relevant. A religion that depends upon the government for its financial support, advancement, or protection from competing beliefs risks exchanging spiritual independence for political influence. Government support does not strengthen religion. It entangles religion with the state and places religious institutions at risk of governmental control.

Second, the report supports governmental financial assistance for religious education. Public funding of religious education raises serious concerns regarding governmental neutrality, accountability for public funds, and the use of taxpayer money to advance religious instruction. Citizens should not be compelled to financially support the teaching of religious beliefs with which they may disagree. Religious education is most secure when it remains voluntary, privately supported, and independent from governmental influence.

Third, the recommendation to repeal or weaken the Johnson Amendment should be rejected. Instead, the Johnson Amendment should be fully and consistently enforced. Churches and religious nonprofit organizations receive significant tax benefits on the condition that they remain outside partisan political campaigns. That limitation protects both the public and religious institutions themselves.

Houses of worship should be places of faith, service, community, and moral reflection—not tax-subsidized extensions of political parties, candidates, or campaign organizations. Permitting churches and other tax-exempt religious organizations to endorse or oppose candidates would expose congregations to political pressure, divide faith communities, encourage partisan fundraising through religious institutions, and allow tax-deductible contributions to be used indirectly for political campaigning.

Selective or nonexistent enforcement is also damaging. A law that remains on the books but is routinely disregarded invites abuse, favors organizations willing to test the limits, and undermines public confidence in both the tax system and religious institutions. The answer is not repeal. The answer is clear guidance and fair,

consistent, and nonpartisan enforcement against churches and religious nonprofits across the political and theological spectrum.

Religious organizations and their leaders remain free to speak about moral issues, public policy, legislation, and matters of conscience. Religious leaders may also participate personally in political activity in their individual capacities. What tax-exempt institutions should not be permitted to do is use their charitable status, resources, pulpits, or donor networks to intervene directly in partisan campaigns.

The Johnson Amendment therefore should not be repealed, weakened, or ignored. It should be fully enforced as an important safeguard against the politicization of religion and the religious capture of partisan politics.

Fourth, the report appears to single out one religious tradition for special governmental recognition or protection. The government should protect the rights of all people of faith, as well as those who profess no religious faith. Religious liberty cannot be administered fairly when one religion, denomination, or theological perspective is treated as more authentically American, more deserving of protection, or more closely aligned with the government than others. Special governmental preference for one faith inevitably diminishes the equal standing of other religious communities.

I also strongly disagree with the report's apparent effort to rewrite American history by minimizing the nation's longstanding commitment to the separation of church and state. While the precise phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear in the Constitution, the principle is firmly established in the First Amendment's prohibition against governmental establishment of religion and its protection of the free exercise of religion.

The absence of that exact phrase from the constitutional text does not make the principle historically invented, constitutionally insignificant, or unclear. Many settled constitutional principles are expressed through the meaning and operation of the Constitution rather than through a particular modern phrase. The Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses together reflect a deliberate judgment that religion is protected most effectively when government does not establish, control, sponsor, finance, or officially prefer it.

Recasting American history to suggest that the country was founded upon governmental sponsorship of a particular religion is neither historically honest nor protective of religious liberty. America's religious character has been shaped by the faith of its people, not by the establishment of an official governmental faith. The distinction is essential. Freedom of religion flourishes because the government lacks the authority to dictate or promote religious belief—not because government is authorized to advance a favored religious tradition.

Finally, the report recommends efforts that could result in the government promoting the Commission's particular religious, historical, or ideological perspective to the American public. The government should educate citizens about their constitutional rights, including freedom of religion. It should not, however, use public authority, public schools, or public resources to inculcate a preferred religious ideology or a revisionist and contested interpretation of American history. Government-sponsored ideological instruction is inconsistent with genuine freedom of conscience.

Religious liberty does not require government sponsorship of religion. It requires governmental restraint, equal treatment, historical honesty, and respect for the independence of religious institutions and the conscience of every individual.

I therefore urge the Commission and relevant governmental authorities to reject recommendations that would:

1. Direct public financial support toward religious institutions or religious activity;
2. Use public funds to subsidize religious education;
3. Repeal, weaken, or decline to enforce the Johnson Amendment, thereby transforming tax-exempt churches and religious nonprofits into partisan political organizations;
4. Provide preferential governmental protection or recognition to one religion;

5. Promote a governmental religious ideology to the American public; or
6. Rewrite American history in a manner that denies or minimizes the constitutional principle of separation between church and state.

The government's responsibility is not to advance religion, manage religion, define acceptable religion, or revise history to justify religious preference. Its responsibility is to protect the freedom of all people to believe, worship, speak, associate, and live according to conscience, consistent with the equal rights of others.

From: Ludween Pierre <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment- Response to the Religious Liberty Commission report on June 2026– Ludween Pierre

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:23:47 -0400

Importance: Normal

Good evening members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Since the inception of the United States, our forefathers envisioned this country as “the land of the free and the home of the brave”, as quoted in our national anthem. The US prides itself on providing & upholding certain rights for its inhabitants. Such rights include religious freedom.

As a US citizen & a member of a Christian denomination, I am respectfully asking that the recommendations listed in the Religious Liberty Commission report be reconsidered. Separation of church and state is strongly implied Constitution & should not be done away with. It has always allowed individuals to practice their religious beliefs freely. Please do not replace the wall of separation between church & state with a bridge.

I object to the following recommendations suggested by the Religious Liberty Commission report:

- funding religious non-profit activities
- funding religious education and religious clubs on public campuses
- repealing the Johnson Amendment, which restricts church’s political activities

If these recommendations are allowed to go forward, the freedom of both church & state **will** be severely jeopardized. Please retract the recommendations and allow religious liberty to flourish for US inhabitants. Thank you for your time & consideration.

Be well,
Ludween Pierre MD, MPH

From: Cheryl Campbell <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:24:31 -0400

Importance: Normal

I do not agree with the Separation of Church and State.

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

From: tsionf <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >, "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state to be kept

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:25:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear All,

The separation of church and state is a cornerstone of American freedom, rooted in the principles of the Constitution.

The Commission's report raises important concerns that deserve careful consideration.

The First Amendment guarantees every person's right to practice—or not practice—a religion without the government favoring one faith over another. Every individual must remain free to worship according to the dictates of his or her own conscience. Anything less is not true freedom of conscience.

Jesus Himself said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Christ never used the power of the state to advance His kingdom. Instead, He appealed to the heart. Only the Holy Spirit can transform hearts; no government, institution, or individual can do that. Matters of faith must never be compelled.

I respectfully ask you to consider my dissent and preserve the existing separation of church and state. Protecting freedom of conscience protects the rights of every American, regardless of faith or belief.

Thank you

Tsion Sebat

From: Eliza Pace <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Chapter 9 / Healthcare Conscience – Eliza Pace

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:26:18 -0400

Importance: Normal

Please include clear protections for traditional midwifery and faith-based birth practices in the final report. Religious families should not face unnecessary burden or discrimination when choosing care consistent with their beliefs. Federal guidance should support conscience protections, parental rights, and culturally grounded maternity care. I am one of many families who chooses to not have any formal maternity care because I live in a state that does not allow a provider who can legally provide maternity care that is consistent with my religious and spiritual beliefs. Traditional midwifery being protected as a national heritage would solve this issue. It is of the utmost importance to my family and community.

Thank you,

Eliza Pace

From: Paula Hines <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendations of Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:28:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to express my opposition to the recent changes regarding religious liberty.

As a Christian who strongly believes in the constitutional right to religious freedom, I am deeply concerned about how these modifications may impact the ability of individuals and organizations to practice their faith freely. I believe that true religious liberty must be protected and preserved for all.

Coming from England, I realize how the lack of liberty affected the first settlers coming to this nation, also in search of religious freedom. Since that is one of the core principles this country is founded on, it would directly override the original intents of our Founding Fathers if our religious rights were to be overturned.

I do love this country, and I appreciate the fact that America offers a chance for me to practice Christianity in a way that allows me to honor God and keep a clear conscience.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our nation.

Sincerely,

Paula Hines

From: Andrae Allison <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Religion Liberty Committee - Andrae Allison

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:29:42 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

The findings in the religious liberty commission is deeply troubling. This nation strive because of the simple fact that there are religion as well as civic freedoms. The wall of separation of church and state is to keep each institution in its realm. The state's purpose is to protect the citizens freedom. The suggestion of the commission to build a bridge will eventually erode the underline principle of the US constitution. Please reconsider the conclusion of the commission of and thanks for the opportunity to share my thoughts.

Sincerely Andrae Allison

From: Sharolyn Snyder <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation between church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:36:00 -0400

Importance: Normal

To whom it concerns

Please revise the report to support a clear and consistent separation between Church and state. Maintain and enforce the Johnson amendment.

Thank

Sharolyn Snyder

Sent from my iPhone

From: Amanda Rose <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Amanda Rose

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:36:54 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I would like to respectfully express my concern regarding the draft report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission. I am a Christian and appreciate the motivation to promote Christianity in our country. However, because of many examples in history and because of Bible prophecy, I do not believe that the government should be the power that pushes for revival. I believe that using any type of force or coercion to get people into religion opposes Biblical principles. The God of the Bible is a God of love. His patience with us is evidence of that. Force and coercion are Satan's tools. I urge you to consider leaving all governmental power out of religion. Otherwise, we risk losing so much of what God has blessed us with and returning to the Dark Ages.

Revelation thirteen speaks of a lamblike power who "causes" people to "worship". It may seem innocent like a lamb, but the results of its enforced worship are disastrous.

Amanda Rose
Spring City, Tennessee

From: "WENDELL SLATTERY" <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] comments on Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:39:06 -0400

Importance: Normal

Hi,

I have several concerns regarding the report.

I do support finding a way to deal with schools and educators that violate the religious Constitutional rights of students. I am aware that from time to time some schools and educators take it upon themselves to violate those rights. They need clear guidance to avoid doing this.

But I also see that there are distortions of history in the report. The founding fathers of this country came from Europe where religious persecution had raged for centuries. This came about because the state supported the religious beliefs of the dominant church of that time. History clearly shows that whenever government lends its power to churches in whatever way it decides to do to support them or their beliefs, it is inevitable that persecution will ultimately happen. America was not founded to be a place where this was to happen and it must be avoided. We may be an exceptional nation, but human nature being what it is, if we go down the same road, we will not be able to avoid the same outcome. Therefore, I urge that you not tear down the wall of separation of church and state. The phrase, separation of church and state indeed is not in the Constitution, but its very clear from the wording of the first amendment that the principle of it indeed is there. This wall cannot and must not prohibit people, whether in government or private citizens, from exercising their right to religious beliefs and practices, but at the same time, we must not remove that wall in an effort to fix the problems of this nation. Removing the wall will end in disaster for this nation.

I also am aware that the founders of this nation intended that there be a wall separating church and state. Jefferson made that clear in the things he wrote about this. I won't go over the details, but please do not distort that history with this report.

Jesus himself made it very clear that the church is to have nothing to do with the power of the state. Here is what he said:

Mat 20:25 But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

Mat 20:26 But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

Mat 20:27 And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

Mat 20:28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

After explaining the state exercises authority over others, he went on to say, "it shall not be so among you." His words could hardly be said any plainer. The church is not to use state authority over others, but logically it is to rely upon God for its power and authority. When you open the door for the state to lend its authority to the church, you go directly against what Jesus taught. He had good reasons for saying this, for he well knew what would be the result if they did what he said not to do.

God has richly blessed this country over the past 250 years and I am glad I am an American and was born here and that for several generations back my ancestors were also born here. But if by any means you tear down the wall separating church and state, you will go directly against what Jesus said not to do, which means you go directly against the highest authority in the universe. If you do this, you will ultimately find that at first the problems will seem to diminish, but in the end, God will remove his blessing from this nation and what will be done will prove to be a disaster for this country. Therefore, it is very important that this nation preserve our religious freedom and avoid doing anything to diminish or remove the wall separating church

and state. That wall has proved to be a blessing to the religions of this country over the course of our history.

Years ago I worked with a man who was a civil engineer. He was born and raised in Canada. He said he had traveled all over the world working on various engineering projects and he said he had discovered that the Americans have a definite advantage that nobody else had. He said they were more creative and able to do things that others could not. I asked him why he thought this was the case. His reply surprised me. He said, "It is the religious freedom you have in America that makes the difference!" I said, "Well, you have freedom in Canada too." To this he said, "Yes, we do have, but there is a state church in Canada and even with some degree of freedom, it still has its influence that takes us down a notch and less than equal in abilities to Americans." I have often thought about that conversation in the years since I last saw him. I have never forgotten that he made it clear that it is our religious freedom that makes America exceptional. This also makes it clear that if you compromise it in any way, you will destroy that exceptionalism.

I know that this nation is being tested by the events of recent years, but if we stay the course and turn away from tearing down the wall separating church and state, in the end things will be righted again and we shall continue as a great nation. The problems may seem insurmountable, but God still sits on his throne and ultimately will fix things if we do the right thing. Tearing down that wall in any way will be the wrong thing to do. Let us not go down that road.

Thank you for your time,

Wendell Slattery

From: Rachelle Richey <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment Religious Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:39:40 -0400

Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern. Churches do not belong in the government as we have seen in the past what this has done to religious freedom for all. Those who have opposed the church back in the dark ages were killed, due to them not bowing down to the church system. If this passes the same system back in the dark ages will emerge as they are trying to do now and history will repeat itself. As American citizens we have the right to worship freely if you pass this we will not be able to worship freely and many of us will die, of course it will not seem like it they will give people a choice, but we all know that won't last long and it will become a law which know one will be able to buy or sale, and it will eventually become a death degree that many people will not follow. Pleas reconsider this bill because it is not what you think know matter what they wrote. It has Satan written all over it. Read the book of Daniel and Revelation the truth is their open your eyes and heart to Jesus Christ the truth is there.

Thank you,

Rachelle Richey

From: Leila Miller <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty concerns

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:42:50 -0400

Importance: Normal

DearsRLC,

I agree with Piller of Freedom, and strongly vote to implement their advice to maintain yours and my religious freedoms that were given to us from United States of America and our founding fathers. Thank you so much,
Leila Miller

From: Christy Mendelow <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

To: "[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]" <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report – Colonel Richard J. Mendelow (Ret)

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:43:04 -0400

Importance: Normal

Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission.

I read the report because religious liberty matters. It always has.

I'm a Jew who believes that Jesus is the Messiah. I served nearly five decades in the Marine Corps and Marine Corps Reserve before retiring as a Colonel. Today, I'm a commercial airline pilot. I'm also the founder of *Courageous Christianity*, a teaching ministry dedicated to equipping Christian warriors to think biblically, live courageously, and engage today's culture with truth and love, and the host of *Courageous Christianity with Richard Mendelow*, a radio show and podcast which anchors that ministry.

Those experiences have taught me something very simple.

Whether you're flying an airplane, leading Marines in combat, teaching the Bible, or governing a nation, reality doesn't change because we don't like it. We ignore it at our own peril. As such, I sincerely appreciate the work of this Commission. The future of this nation depends on it.

Our reality, as Americans, is that the First Amendment doesn't establish religion. It prohibits Congress from establishing a state religion while protecting the free exercise of religious beliefs. Those two principles have allowed Americans of every faith—and those of no faith—to live together in remarkable freedom for 250 years.

Religious liberty isn't simply the freedom to worship. It encompasses every aspect of the practice of religion. It protects what we believe, how we express our religious beliefs, how we educate our children, how we operate our ministries and businesses, and how we serve our communities. If government or cultural bullying is allowed to decide which religious beliefs may be expressed publicly and which must remain private, religious liberty is lost.

That's not a political statement. It's a constitutional one. And it's the reality of our present situation.

This isn't merely a question for government. It's increasingly a question for corporate America. Many employees today work in environments where they are expected to participate in or acquiesce to messaging promoting particular social or political causes simply to navigate their workplace. Company intranets, required training, internal communications, and corporate campaigns increasingly promote viewpoints on sexuality and gender that many people of faith cannot affirm because of sincerely held biblical convictions.

Where is the equal respect for religious liberty?

When was the last time employees logged into a company intranet and found a corporate message affirming the teachings of Jesus Christ or encouraging biblical truth? If corporations are going to champion inclusion, shouldn't that include employees whose worldview is shaped by Scripture?

Religious liberty doesn't disappear only through government action. It can also be diminished when cultural or corporate pressure makes people of faith feel their convictions are welcome only if they remain silent.

Religious liberty isn't tested when everyone agrees. It's tested when someone respectfully lives according to convictions that others reject. That's the freedom the First Amendment was written to protect.

Recent Supreme Court decisions, including *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District* and *Groff v. DeJoy*, remind us that the free exercise of religion deserves meaningful protection, not merely symbolic recognition. Those decisions recognize that Americans should not be forced to leave their faith behind when they enter the workplace or the public square.

Whether in government, the corporate setting, or the public forum, religious freedom must be aggressively guarded!

Recently, two San Francisco Giants players wrote Bible verses on their Pride Night hats because they were uncomfortable appearing to endorse a message that conflicted with their Christian convictions. The organization publicly apologized to members of the LGBTQ community who were offended by the players' decision.

That raises an important question. Where was the concern for the players' religious convictions?

Religious liberty cannot mean protecting one sincerely held belief while treating another as something for which an apology is required. If Americans are truly free to live according to conscience, then that freedom must extend to Christians and others whose beliefs may not align with prevailing cultural views.

Acknowledging America's Judeo-Christian heritage is not the same as establishing a national religion. History is history.

The influence of the Bible on America's founding documents, institutions, and public life is well documented. Thomas Jefferson's 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptists addressed protection of the church from government interference. It did not erase religion from public life. Likewise, in *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States*, the Supreme Court examined centuries of historical evidence and observed that those materials "add a volume of unofficial declarations to the mass of organic utterances that this is a Christian nation." Whether one agrees with every aspect of that opinion or not, history should be examined honestly, not selectively.

As a Christian, I believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Scripture tells us to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Notice that it doesn't tell us to choose between truth and love. It commands both. Love without truth isn't biblical love. Truth without love isn't biblical truth.

One of the strengths of this report will be its recognition that religious liberty deserves protection. My encouragement is that the final report leaves no ambiguity about why.

In closing, religious liberty isn't a privilege granted by government. It is a God-given right that government has a constitutional responsibility to protect. The rights protected by the Constitution don't belong only to Christians. They belong equally to Jews, Muslims, Hindus, atheists, and every other American. That's precisely why religious liberty is so important. Protecting my freedom protects yours, even when we profoundly disagree.

If America loses religious liberty, everyone loses. Not just Christians. Everyone.

As such, I would encourage the Commission to continue emphasizing what history and Scripture both teach. Freedom requires responsibility. Rights require virtue. Self-government requires people willing to govern themselves.

The Bible reminds us, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17). Freedom, however, was never intended to become license. It calls each of us to pursue truth, exercise responsibility, respect the rights of others, and remain faithful to our convictions.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

I appreciate the Commission's willingness to address an issue that is fundamental to the future of our Republic. My hope is that the final report will strengthen the constitutional protections that preserve religious liberty not only for this generation, but for generations yet to come.

Respectfully,

Colonel Richard J. Mendelow, USMC (Ret)

Founder, *Courageous Christianity*

Host, *Christianity with Richard Mendelow*

From: Betty Rivera <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:45:31e0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission:

I would like to voice my support for separation of church and state and reject the Commission's directive for the DOJ to redefine the Establishment Clause.

My belief is that in past history, whenever governments are involved with legislating religion, persecution arises. I believe that when Church and State unite, laws will be made that will take away my freedom to worship according to my religious beliefs.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Betty Rivera
New Jersey