



The United States Department of Justice Religious Liberty Commission

Summary of Recommendations from the First Hearing

June 16, 2025

The first hearing created a foundation for the subsequent hearings by establishing that religious liberty—and the religious piety of the American people that it enabled to flourish—has been paramount to our republic since our nation’s founding. The following summarizes witnesses’ recommendations to the Commission.

Summary of Recommendations

1. **First Amendment.** Restore an originalist understanding of First Amendment Religion Clauses’ broad and complementary protections for religious liberty and faith-based institutions.
2. **Religions as a Public Good.** Affirm religion and the work of faith-based institutions as public goods.
 - Rescind any laws or regulations treating faith-based institutions less favorably than similar secular institutions.
 - Eliminate program requirements that condition faith-based institutions’ participation in general public programs on the renunciation of their faith identity.
3. **Public Understanding and Appreciation of the First Amendment.** Secure religious liberty for future generations through education and cultural change.
 - Promote a cultural shift in public appreciation for the First Amendment and religious liberty.
 - Promote a change of heart, particularly in the youth, toward a love for religious liberty and its critical role in protecting all freedoms.

4. **School Choice and Parental Rights.** Develop school choice programs and parental rights legislation, as these work together with religious liberty.
5. **State and Local Threats and Opportunities.** Identify religious freedom opportunities and threats at the state and local level.
 - Numerous speakers noted that flagrant First Amendment violations typically arise at the state or local, rather than federal, level.
 - At the same time, bad precedent is often best challenged through state legislative or other action aligning with new, more accurate First Amendment interpretation.
6. **Regulatory Burdens and Restrictions.** Ensure government action facilitates, rather than burdens, the work of faith-based organizations.
 - Reduce unnecessary regulation and restrictions on faith-based ministries.
 - Witnesses specifically cited the harms of the Johnson Amendment, as well as administrative burdens on federal funding recipients.
 - Reestablish the Department of Health and Human Services Conscience and Religious Freedom Division, and ensure other federal agencies have similar divisions in place.
7. **COVID-19 Lessons Learned.** Review religious freedom violations during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure long-term safeguards are in place to prevent a recurrence of such violations.