

From: Carla Wilcher <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:19:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dept of Justice, Please keep separated Church and State. Our first Amendment tells us that the government should not be involved in religion and this movement of joining Church and State will take us in an area that the Constitution avoids. C Wilcher

From: Ron Knapp <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Wall Seperating Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:19:07 -0400

Importance: Normal

To those who are concerned;

Please keep the church and state from joining forces. The alliance of any kind of collaboration to further an agenda respecting any type of religion should not be in this country. I could never endorse activity of such a nature. Any favor showed to any type of religious endorsement for whatever reason is biased and will not be in our best interest.

Thank you for considering this view.

Sincerely, Ron Knapp

From: Janet McNiel <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to the June 26 Report of the President's Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:20:10 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing to respectfully express my definite disagreement with the Commission's recommendation regarding the subject of the separation of church and state in the USA. This report recommends that the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment be reinterpreted to diminish the historic separation of church and state. This 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, not to civil government.

The First 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. Together they have made the United States a great example of religious liberty.

Thomas Jefferson famously described this constitutional principle as "a wall of separation between Church and State". He was describing a principle already embedded within the First Amendment: that the government possesses no rightful authority to establish, direct, or compel religious observance.

James Madison, often called the "Father of the Constitution", in his 1785 Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments, 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.

Benjamin Franklin expressed that true religion persuades by truth and love, not by legislation or coercion.

These principles are not just constitutional- they are biblical. They are deliberate safeguards designed to preserve liberty of conscience for every individual.

Jesus Christ declared, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21). Government possesses legitimate authority over civil matters, but worship, doctrine, and the relationship between an individual and God remain beyond its lawful reach.

History shows us that whenever church and state have been joined, the result has been persecution, division, and the suppression of religious liberty.

Any current proposals to weaken the separation of church and state are potentially a threat to religious liberty.

Government is at its best when it protects the free exercise of religions, not when it defines, directs, or advances it. Likewise, religion is at its best when it relies upon loving persuasion rather than political power.

For these reasons, I respectfully recommend 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 the Bible, affirmed by the architects of our Republic, and essential to preserving liberty now and for the future.

Thank you for your consideration,
God Bless you.

Janet McNiel

From: Joni Butts <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - The Divinely Ordained Principle of Separation of Church and State - Joni L. Butts

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:20:15 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission Members:

I write to you simply as a Bible-believing Christian,--an American citizen who is thoroughly grateful for the religious freedom that we enjoy in this country. This is a gift given by God Himself to every person who has ever lived: the right to believe and worship according to the dictates of their own conscience. Therefore, religion is an extremely personal matter between the individual and God: it is a matter of conscience. God allows each person to choose to worship Him, or to choose to worship another, or even to choose not to worship any god at all.

Truly, God has given us The Ten Commandments to regulate our relationship with Him and with our fellowman. The last six give guidance on how to treat each other--from honoring our parents, to not stealing from others or even killing them. The laws of the land are based on these and should be enforced by the government in a fair and just way to help citizens willingly choose to be law-abiding citizens.

But the first four commandments highlight our relationship with God. Again, He would have us choose Him of our own free will, without coercion from anyone. This is why He included the principle of Separation of Church and State in His holy word, as seen in the following Bible texts:

"Choose you this day whom ye will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." --Joshua 24:14

"Wherefore, my beloved,... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." --Philippians 2:12

"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 22:21

Clearly there are divinely designated matters for the government to handle [Caesar's], and for the church to handle [God's]. God "separated" these matters so there would be no confusion. The founding fathers of this country recognized this, and knowing that our Heavenly Father is indeed "the only wise God" as stated in Jude 25, they sought to clarify this principle in their writing of the Constitution--itemizing clearly the governmental acts that would keep it in tact, and keep the church and the state from interfering with each other. Sadly, world history has shown the cruelty and injustice that result when government inserts itself into religious matters, or the church turns to the state to settle matters of conscience. Religion morphs into a series of unjust requirements that will eventually bring unfair treatment or punishment to those who do not comply.

So since this nation was founded on the promise of religious freedom and God has blessed her for 250 years to champion its cause, as the Religious Liberty Commission, please refrain from any actions or recommendations that would make our nation appear hypocritical in any way. Please do all that God allows to be done to uphold this blessed gift now, and for generations to come.

Sincerely,
Joni L. Butts
Riverdale, GA

From: Iron Revengers <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:20:39 -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,

- ruffthanos

From: Billy Thompson <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Mergance of Church and Stete

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:20:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

Greatly perturbed by lack of info to public on this issue and the silence, including short time to respond. While we agree with premise of increasing religion in our society, we do not want government involved in a free choice of our direction (free choice) to worship. We know how government works and rarely is Government effective. It's not only part of 1st Amendment but biblical thru other studies forbidden to merge church and state. Those saying contrary or that it's a lie are misguided and using it as a sales tactic. This country was founded on freedom of choice and this intervention from government will eventually lead to government control of buying/selling goods unless we follow the government way of thinking including persecution of its people. It's already written in scripture and while we will not stop those things that happen before Jesus's return, we want to slow them down as to have many other lives saved. Joining church and state formally is a detriment to our country no matter how far reaching right advocates sell it. Its may sound well intended but it is not as will governments next mandate of a Sunday law or worship that's already being discussed worldwide!

Sincerely, William R. Thompson II

From: Roberta J <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:21:22 -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.

Furthermore, whenever there is/was a combination of church with state, religious persecution has ALWAYS resulted. My ancestors came to this country to escape religious persecution from a church/state system.

Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep our institutions and ourselves and our families free. Sincerely,

Roberta Jupp
Lexington, South Carolina

From: yo yo <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:22:17 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Government

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,

-typrime

From: Shay Capolupo <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:23:34 -0400

Importance: Normal

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the recommendations submitted by the Religious Liberty Commission to President Donald J. Trump on June 26, 2026.

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the Commission's first and ninth recommendations, both of which address the separation of church and state. The Commission 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 Commission's recommendations that same day, Commission 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 a citizen of the United States of America and a Bible-believing Christian, I hold the Constitution—and the rights and liberties it protects—in the highest regard. My concern is that reinterpreting the separation of church and state, or asserting that it has "no constitutional basis," may invite history to repeat itself and expose Americans once again to the dangers associated with the union of religious and governmental authority.

We would do well to heed the wise words of Founding Father James Madison, who stated:

"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."

Madison recognized that religious liberty is most secure when the government does not interfere with matters of faith and religious institutions do not control civil policy. He appealed to history to establish this principle. He was well aware of the persecution suffered by Baptists, Quakers, Jews, and other religious minorities in several of the colonies.

If we allow this protective wall between church and state to be weakened or removed, we risk the very encroachment Madison warned against.

Many who support a closer union of church and state claim that their position is rooted in Christian faith. While the idea of the church directing the affairs of the state may appear appealing, it is not a biblical principle. Jesus affirmed a distinction between civil and religious authority when He declared, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21).

It was through the violation of this principle that the Roman Catholic Church became united with the Roman government. In *History of the Christian Church*, volume 3, page 327, we read:

"The Roman church-state's power became supreme in Christendom in 538 A.D. Due to a letter of the Roman emperor Justinian, known as Justinian's decree, which set up and acknowledged the bishop of

Rome as the head of all churches. It gave the Roman church political power (civil power), as well as ecclesiastical power.”

The consequences of this union were devastating. Over the centuries, countless Christians and other religious dissenters suffered persecution, imprisonment, and death under a corrupt religious-political system. This history demonstrates the danger that arises whenever ecclesiastical institutions are permitted to wield the coercive power of the state.

The Bible warns in Revelation 13 that, in the last days, a governing power will form an image to the beast that came before it. I share the conviction of many Christian Americans that the first beast represents the Roman Catholic papacy, that the image to the beast represents a union of church and state, and that the United States of America is in danger of forming such an image.

“And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. . . . And he had power to give life unto 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 13:12, 15).

This prophecy presents a solemn warning against the use of civil authority to enforce religious observance. Whatever one’s interpretation of the prophecy may be, its underlying warning is clear: when religious institutions obtain the coercive power of the state, liberty of conscience is placed in grave danger.

For these reasons, I respectfully object to the Commission’s interpretation of the Constitution, which underestimates the vital importance of the separation of church and state. I therefore urge the Department of Justice to uphold this protective wall and safeguard our nation from the dangers that arise when religious and civil authority are united.

Sincerely,

Shay Capolupo

From: Freedomz Rainz <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and State - Bridge

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:24:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Committee Member,

Each Person on this Planet, the United States in particular, the Bastion of freedom in the World, should be free to pursue (any) faith or no faith, there should not be a state established, preferred faith or religion, government should continue to adhere to it's neutrality in its relationship to (any) religion or Faith.

Jesus clearly showed the principle that God prefers, and this was demonstrated in the following verses where it is recorded he said.in Matthew 22:19-22 (KJV)

"19 Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. 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. 22 When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way."

The founding Fathers underlined and reinforced this principle in the Constitution's first establishment clause; that Government should not establish or support a national or State religions or prohibit the free exercise of an Individual's religion or faith.

Please continue to support this principle and do not establish a bridge for, or give life to despotism; in any form, by establishing a bridge to a potential or actual erosion of religious liberty in this Country.

From: Paul Astleford <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Religious Liberty - Paul Astleford

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:24:32 -0400

Importance: Normal

Keep Church and State separate!

Paul Astleford

[REDACTED]
PII PII
PII

From: Terea <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom/Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:26:31 -0400

Importance: Normal

Hello,

I fully agree with Piller Of Freedom's report and their comments! It is un-American to take away our freedom of religion! This is one of the many things that makes America great. Please do not take this freedom away from us! Many have died for this country and the freedoms many like me have been blessed to have.

Regards

From: Neville Peter <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Thoughts From a Concerned Citizen

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:26:32 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

First I want to commend you for your concern for Christians in this country who may have not been treated fairly and have been denied their right to practice the free exercise of their faith. As a Christian myself, I value this right and consider it a great privilege to be a citizen of this country. It is for this reason I write to you to express my concern in regards to your declaration that there is no separation between church and state.

In His sermon on the mount Jesus makes an amazing statement that we would do well to remember. It is the overarching principle that according to Jesus, undergirds both Judaism and Christianity. Here is the statement. Whatever you would have others do to you, do also to them. (Matthew 7:12)(Luke 6:31)(Leviticus 19:18) It is a great thing to be able to practice my Christian faith openly, but the first amendment of the Constitution of our great country already assures me the free exercise of my faith both publicly and privately. It doesn't only afford me this right, but it afford every citizen this right as well.

To declare the separation between church and state to be over would be a violation of this principle. I freely admit that the world does not work this way and this principle does not come naturally. We humans have to learn how to live according to this principle. Jesus showed humanity how to live this principle out practically and as a result, he went to the cross, giving the world an opportunity to have eternal life. I freely admit that living like this puts Christian's at a disadvantage in this world, but have believers ever had worldly advantages? Didn't our Lord let us know that what they did to him, they will do to us?

History has already shown us what happens when the state is directed by the church. Persecution always follows sooner or later. It was for this very reason that the First Admendment was added to the constitution of our great country. The separation clause has allowed Christians to preach the gospel freely and convert many. This is what has made America great. To repudiate the separation clause would be destroying the most fundamental pillar of our society and removing the reason why God blessed our nation.

To summarize, declaring the establishment clause a thing of the past would be to violate one of the most basic principles of Christianity and would also make America like Qatar, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and many other non-Christian countries in which freedom of religion is not permitted. you are declaring freedom for Christians, but not for any other person who has another faith which is blatantly inconsistent and borderline hypocritical. The lawlessness we see in our country and in our world today will never be fixed by the state. It is the Gospel of Jesus christ that changes all who come to Him for rest. This peace, this rest can only be received by choice. Our Lord promised to return and when He does, all who have decided to refuse his invitation to be restored will see their error and acknowledge the righteousness of God resulting in their eternal exclusion from the new Heaven and Earth he will create.. God values the ability that he gave each person to choose and as a believer, I value this wonderful gift as well. I urge you to do the same.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

Music Soft Sacred and Soulful

[HTTP://nevillepeter.com](http://nevillepeter.com)

From: Carlos <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Carlos Lorenzo

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:27:42 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a citizen of this great United States, I urge you to reconsider your report recommendations to use government money to fund religious activities and to repeal the Johnson Amendment. I wholeheartedly believe that following these recommendations will erode the separation of church and state.

Churches should not take money from the government because this will cause a conflict of interest, leading them into partisan politics and making them susceptible to political corruption. When churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of God, this will be detrimental to the country and communities of faith. Separation is a guardrail for the freedom of conscience of people of faith. Strong faith makes for strong citizens, strong citizens make for strong communities, and strong communities make for a strong nation.

By Keeping church and state separate we will keep both free.

Kind Regards,
Carlos Lorenzo

From: Frank Rask <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Franklin Rask

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:28:04 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am sorry to hear of the desire to break down the wall of separation of church and state. Even though it is not labeled that way in the constitution, it is given clarification as mentioned in the 1st amendment.

There is mention of building a "bridge "between church and state. As I remember, the history of the Dark Ages is riddled with abuse and tyranny by those "bridge builders" (Pontifex Maximus) who did build a "bridge" between church and state. Even the protestants in the latter of those times did evil towards one another when the majority anywhere ruled the state.

That is why this nation stood out like a lighthouse of refuge to the faiths of those times in all countries. It stood out as a place they could worship God in peace according to the dictates of their own consciences. This is where we are today. This is who we are today, enjoying the concepts of Freedom that were purchased at such a great cost of blood and sacrifice by those who paved its way.

We NEED to keep church and state separate.

Let us still stand as a beacon of hope to all countries as we now are.

Please keep the Johnson Amendment. Give it some clarification if necessary. But keep religion clean by not trying to fund the ones that cater to political aims and programs. Keep their hands out of the cookie jar !

From: Anita Powell <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:28:22 -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,

Anita Powell

Snowflake, AZ

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

From: Grace Torres <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] I would like to humbly but with a plea to 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.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:28:31 -0400

Importance: Normal

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

I would like to humbly but with a plea to 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.

Sirs, I would like to ask the questions why has the American public only given 15 days to comment on this profound subject matter that involves our religious liberty.

I would also like to ask the question why has this subject matter been kept so quiet where everyone I speak to has not heard of it?

The next question I'd like to ask if we already have in place our first amendment that expresses what our founding fathers believed and instituted why would we be tampering with what has made America great — religious freedom!!

That we have in place, in the first amendment our —Inalienable right to follow the dictates of our conscience. This amendment has been guided by God for those whom believe in him. This is concept has made our country strong having our freedom of religion and speech.

Thomas Jefferson famously described this constitutional principle as "a wall of separation between Church & 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 conscience.

Thomas Jefferson famously described this constitutional principle as "a wall of separation between Church & 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.

I plead again , please leave in place our separation of Church and STATE.

Thank you for considering my comments as I have been an American citizen for 69 years.

Grace Torres
God Bless America

From: David Smith <[REDACTED] PII>

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Sabbath

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:28:58 -0400

Importance: Normal

The only commandment YahWeh said to remember is the Sabbath day, not the first day of the week (Sunday).

Exodus 20:1-21 KJV

[1] And God spake all these words, saying, [2] I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. [3] Thou shalt have no other gods before me. [4] Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: [5] thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; [6] and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. [7] Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. [8] Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. [9] Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: [10] but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: [11] for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it. [12] Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. [13] Thou shalt not kill. [14] Thou shalt not commit adultery. [15] Thou shalt not steal. [16] Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. [17] Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's. [18] And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. [19] And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. [20] And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. [21] And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.

<https://bible.com/bible/1/exo.20.1-21.KJV>

From: Maniwar <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comments - Daniel LaFlair

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:29:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Department of Justice:

Thank you for receiving public feedback on the Religious Liberty Commission's recommendations of June 26, 2026. Thank you for your willingness to do something about the seemingly lopsided agenda of certain administrations.

While we support portions of the Commission's work, we write to register our objection to Recommendations 1, 5, 7 and 9.

Our first concern involves the proposed DOJ guidance on the Establishment Clause. At the public release of the recommendations, Commission Chair Dan Patrick asserted that the separation of church and state has no basis in the Constitution. This claim is contradicted by the very men who framed the First Amendment. James Madison, its principal author, wrote plainly that the separation between religion and government is "strongly guarded" in the Constitution, and Thomas Jefferson affirmed that the American people, through the First Amendment, had built a wall of separation between church and state. John Adams also signed the Treaty of Tripoli in 1797, which stated that the government of the United States is "not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion." Any guidance shaped by the Chair's mistaken premise would rest on an improper, not a proper, understanding of the Establishment Clause.

We witness a church and state union via history in our past throughout Europe via the Roman Catholic Church and then in Ireland through the Church of England and in England itself. The end result for everyone of them was the government establishment of both churches which led to the same types (and even greater) of human rights violations, in varying degrees. History further provides a historical witness of this in the former Japanese empire with its established Shinto religion and again in a more modern sense, in the communist countries with their established form of leader and government worship. And how can we ignore the religious government of Iran in which there is a war which we're currently engaged in. History explains why the Founders erected that wall of separation. Church-state unions—not atheism—imprisoned William Penn, banished Roger Williams, publicly whipped Obadiah Holmes, executed William Tyndale for translating the Bible into English, silenced Galileo, Milton, and many others through censorship, and burned Michael Servetus in Calvin's Geneva. Free speech and a free press flourished in America largely because church and state were kept distinct. Madison warned that citizens must "take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties," and we take that warning seriously.

If one delves further into it, history of a united church and state clearly reveals that The Church of England following in the Roman Catholic Church's persecutorial footsteps where Latimer, Ridley, Cranmer, and so many others died at the hands of those who claimed to follow the humble Jesus who rebuked His disciples when they wanted to call down fire on a Samaritan village that didn't accept Him. In Switzerland, Germany, and the Low Countries, Anabaptists were persecuted by secular authorities motivated by both Protestant and Catholic forces. In America, Rhode Island was founded by Roger Williams who was forced to flee in the dead of winter because of his religious views, including his belief that church and civil government should remain separate. Rhode

Island became an early model of religious liberty, and those principles later influenced the American commitment to religious freedom and the separation of church and state.

Second, we object to repealing the Johnson Amendment. Although we're not fans of the Johnson Amendment and find flaws with it, we more strongly believe the Bible reveals Christ Himself distinguished what belongs to Caesar from what belongs to God. Removing this safeguard would invite churches to trade endorsements and congregational resources for political favors, corrupting both religion and government. Madison observed that religion in America has thrived precisely because of its total separation from the state.

We therefore respectfully ask that the Department decline to adopt Recommendations 1, 5, 7 and 9, and instead convene public hearings, with written and oral submissions, to study the history and meaning of church-state separation more thoroughly. We would gladly support and participate in such a study.

Respectfully submitted,
Daniel LaFlair
Business Owner, Georgia

From: Cynthia Reid <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation Of Church and State.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:29:34 -0400

Importance: Normal

Public Comment-
Separation Of Church and State-
Cynthia Reid

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 appealing 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 the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,
Cynthia Reid
New Britain, Connecticut.
Sent from my iPhone

From: bobbywash29@ [REDACTED] PII

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Protect Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:30:16 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to express my strong support for maintaining the separation of church and state. This principle is not an attack on religion—it is one of the greatest protections ever established for both religious faith and individual freedom.

Throughout history, whenever civil government has united with religious authority, the result has too often been persecution, discrimination, and the suppression of conscience. Faith is a matter of personal conviction and must never be compelled or enforced by the power of the state. Government best fulfills its role when it remains neutral, protecting the rights of all people to worship according to their conscience—or not to worship at all.

Many of the early settlers came to America seeking refuge from religious persecution. They left nations where governments favored or enforced particular religious beliefs, denying people the freedom to follow the dictates of their own conscience. Their desire was not merely for a new homeland, but for the liberty to worship God without government interference. Those same liberties remain just as precious today as they were at our nation's founding.

The freedoms guaranteed by our Constitution have allowed people of every faith—and those of no faith—to live together in peace. Preserving the separation of church and state ensures that no religious group is given governmental power over another and that every citizen enjoys equal protection under the law.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Religious Liberty Commission to continue defending the historic principle of church-state separation. It has safeguarded religious liberty for generations, and it remains essential to preserving the freedom of conscience that has long distinguished our nation.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to protecting this fundamental liberty.

Sincerely,
Bobby Washington

From: Joseph Piresson <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Pr. Joseph Piresson

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:30:59 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing as both a pastor and a citizen to express my deep concern regarding the Commission's recommendation to replace the historic wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge."

The strongest protection for both religion and government is not a closer partnership between them, but a clear separation that preserves the integrity and independence of each. Because the Commission exists to safeguard religious liberty, I respectfully ask that it champion the constitutional principles that have protected liberty of conscience for generations, rather than recommend policies that increase government involvement in religion.

The First Amendment has served our nation well by protecting both the free exercise of religion and preventing governmental establishment of religion. The separation of church and state was never intended to diminish faith, but to protect the church from government control and the government from religious entanglement.

History repeatedly demonstrates that when church and state become closely aligned, both suffer. Government involvement in religion invites political influence and favoritism, while churches risk compromising their spiritual mission. The church is strongest when it relies on the power of God rather than the power of the state.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to reject proposals that would encourage government funding of religious activities or further weaken the separation of church and state. Taxpayers should not be compelled to support religious organizations whose beliefs they do not share, nor should the government decide which religious groups receive public support.

America's commitment to religious liberty has protected people of every faith, and those of no faith, for generations. The wisdom of our Founders was to protect both church and state by keeping each independent of the other.

Religious liberty is never strengthened when religion gains political power; it is strengthened when every person's conscience remains free. History teaches that the church is strongest when it stands beside the state, not when it stands under it or rules over it. When church and state remain separate, both remain free.

I respectfully ask you to preserve this priceless legacy of religious liberty for future generations.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully,

Pr. Joseph Piresson

From: Rudy Fallang <[REDACTED]>

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:31:50 -0400

Importance: Normal

July 13, 2026

To the Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing to formally submit my comments and outline several pressing legal concerns regarding the draft report, "Americans' First Freedom." While the Commission's dedication to preserving the First Amendment is evident, the proposed recommendations raise significant constitutional issues, particularly regarding the delicate balance between the Establishment Clause and general free speech limitations.

The report advocates for a sweeping reinterpretation of the separation of church and state, specifically targeting policies that prevent government-funded institutions from imposing religious doctrines on the broader public. While protecting the internal, faithful mission of religious organizations is a bedrock constitutional principle, we must be highly cautious of how the Commission's proposals might inadvertently expand free speech restrictions in the public square.

By recommending that institutions receiving federal funding operate with expansive exemptions from established civil rights, healthcare, and educational standards, the state risks effectively deputizing private religious enforcement. This creates a fraught legal environment where the free speech and conscience rights of dissenting citizens, employees, and students could be severely restricted under the guise of an institution's overarching religious liberty. True religious freedom ensures the government does not silence individuals, but it cannot be weaponized to silence others in publicly funded arenas.

Furthermore, the recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment fundamentally alters the statutory nature of tax-exempt entities. Removing this restriction does not merely protect the pulpit; it risks transforming houses of worship into unregulated conduits for partisan political campaigns. This policy shift would heavily entangle the state's tax apparatus with religious and political speech, blurring the lines of government endorsement.

Our constitutional framework relies on a vital, historical balance. It absolutely guarantees that the state will not suppress individual religious exercise, but it equally demands that the government does not establish, fund, or coerce religious orthodoxy. I strongly urge the Commission to reconsider and revise its recommendations to ensure that efforts to protect religious liberty do not inadvertently foster state-sanctioned free speech restrictions for the broader American public.

Sincerely,

Rudy Fallang

Billings, MT

From: Vladimyr Jean-Pierre <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State - Vladimyr Jean-Pierre

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:31:57 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am a Bible-believing Christian. Christianity has flourished in the United States for 250 years precisely because of this separation. From the very earliest days of European colonization of this land, religious minority sects, including the Baptists and Anabaptists, found refuge here from persecution in nations where the distinction between church and state was blurred or did not exist. The history of persecution and the firm beliefs of numerous Christian denominations and groups informed the founders of this nation, including James Madison, who penned the glorious First Amendment, which articulates our most treasured and sacred rights, and arguably defines the cornerstone of what indeed has made this nation "great" and drawn millions of hard-working people to its shores.

Secularism has too often taken the form of a militant anti-Christian force in academia and the media, attacking the expressions of those whose beliefs are informed by a Biblical worldview. When instances of persecution arise on account of expressions of faith or actions taken that are informed by faith, the government must seek to protect such expressions and actions. However, history informs us that allowing the government's hand in promoting faith does not result in the greater flourishing of faith. Violating the Establishment Clause often results in violation of the Free Exercise Clause. We can look to the earliest examples of such attempts in America as in Massachusetts Bay Colony, where dissenters were punished and clerics who preached "heretical" doctrine were banished. Hence Roger Williams fled and eventually founded Rhode Island Colony, where religious freedom was guaranteed to Catholic, Protestant, Jew, and atheist alike.

A recent example of how violating the Establishment Clause resulted in violation of the Free Exercise Clause can be found in your Commission's own history. Carrie Prejean, informed by her Catholic faith, expressed concerns with how Zionism is impacting United States policy toward Israel and our military actions, including the Iran War which has cost American lives. Members of your Commission found her expressions offensive, and the result was that she was CANCELED. This illustrates the fact that uniting "church" and "state" results in the "state" being forced to decide religious doctrine, and marginalizing or canceling those who do not conform.

Making taxpayers fund religious organizations as well as repealing the Johnson Amendment are equally bad ideas that will result in weakening the true witness of Christian churches, whose Leader's entire life illustrated the fact that His Kingdom is not of this world.

Sincerely,

Vladimyr Jean-Pierre

From: Michael Fullere [REDACTED] PII

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Report - Separation Of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:33:07 -0400

Importance: Normal

Reference Thomas Jeffersons Letter to the Danbury Baptists January 1 1802

Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html> in which he clarified that the Constitution, in declaring their legislature "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between Church & State.

Full TEXT:

Jefferson's Letter to the Danbury Baptists

The Final Letter, as Sent

To messers. Nehemiah Dodge, Ephraim Robbins, & Stephen S. Nelson, a committee of the Danbury Baptist association in the state of Connecticut.

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.

Library of Congress

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

Thankyou

Michael F

From: Ryan Tucker <[REDACTED] PII>
To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII>
Cc: "Bush, Mary Margaret (OASG)" <[REDACTED] PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- PROPOSED REVISIONS TO DRAFT REPORT-
ALLIANCE DEFENDING FREEDOM
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:33:19 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: 2026.07.13_ADF_Comment_on_RLC_Draft_Report.pdf
Inline-Images: nb_logo_emailsig_lineadf_v5_8856172d-aa4b-4ef5-a0a5-4d68c4db0164.png

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Attached is ADF's comment on the Religious Liberty Commission's Draft Report.

Respectfully,
Ryan Tucker



Ryan Tucker
Sr. Counsel, Director of Center for Christian Ministries
[REDACTED] PII (Office)
[REDACTED] PII (Fax)
[REDACTED] PII
www.ADFlegal.org

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July 13, 2026

Religious Liberty Commission
U.S. Department of Justice

Submitted via **PII**

RE: Comment on the Religious Liberty Commission's Draft Report

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Alliance Defending Freedom (“ADF”) respectfully submits this comment on the Commission’s draft report and recommendations. ADF is the world’s largest legal organization committed to protecting religious freedom, free speech, the sanctity of life, parental rights, and marriage and family. For more than 30 years, ADF has pursued strategic victories to secure lasting change in law and culture, including 20 cases at the U.S. Supreme Court. As an ADF Senior Counsel, I am honored to serve on the Commission’s Advisory Board of Lay Leaders along with Kristen Waggoner, ADF’s CEO, President, and Chief Counsel, who serves on the Advisory Board of Legal Experts.

ADF commends the Commission for producing an important and timely defense of America’s first freedom. We offer these comments to help the Commission turn sound principles into durable protections that officials can implement.

I. The Johnson Amendment: Specify Durable Rulemaking.

The draft report rightly recognizes that the Johnson Amendment continues to chill religious leaders’ ability to guide their communities. The report’s Top 12 Recommendations include “Repeal the Johnson Amendment” at pages 23 and 201, and Chapter 8 recommends, at page 128, that the Administration support legislation repealing the Johnson Amendment, that Treasury issue guidance clarifying that the Johnson Amendment does not reach religious speech by houses of worship and faith-based nonprofits, and that DOJ support strategic litigation challenging the Johnson Amendment’s constitutionality. Appendix B similarly recommends, at page 220, repeal legislation, Treasury guidance, DOJ litigation support, and an investigation into the weaponization of the IRS against houses of worship and religious organizations.

The recommendations for legislation, litigation, and investigation are right. With respect to legislation, ADF agrees that the Administration should support the repeal of the Johnson Amendment. Additionally, ADF encourages the Administration to support the Free Speech Fairness Act, which would protect churches and religious organizations' ability to engage in customary speech and activities without fear of punishment.

The draft report and a Treasury press release laudably propose IRS guidance. But the recommendations for "guidance" are not sufficiently precise, and thus risk bypassing durable solutions for superficial measures that a future administration could easily reverse.

The Treasury Department and the IRS issue several types of documents with varying degrees of authority and durability: regulations, revenue rulings, and informal enforcement guidance. The optimal course is to initiate formal rulemaking to create or amend Treasury regulations. This would produce a public, reviewable, and durable rule confirming that the First Amendment bars the IRS from chilling or punishing sermons, pastoral teaching, voter education, or other religious guidance by churches and faith-based nonprofits. In the meantime, at a minimum, the IRS should issue a new revenue ruling, vacating unconstitutional guidance within prior revenue rulings on the Johnson Amendment (including Rev. Rul. 2007-41), and interpreting the Johnson Amendment to protect religious speech and activity. Finally, as already recommended, the IRS should also issue updated informal guidance, vacating unconstitutional guidance within prior documents (including IRS Pub. 1828), and clarifying that the Johnson Amendment cannot restrict churches' and religious organizations' right to speak.

II. The *Trinity Lutheran* Trilogy: Codify the Rule and Audit Every Agency.

By God's grace, ADF was privileged to win a landmark victory for religious liberty in *Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia, Inc. v. Comer*, 582 U.S. 449 (2017). That case established a key principle: the government violates the Free Exercise Clause when it excludes religious observers from otherwise available public benefits because of their religious character or activity. The Supreme Court has reiterated this principle several times over the last decade. *Espinoza v. Mont. Dep't of Revenue*, 591 U.S. 464 (2020); *Carson v. Makin*, 596 U.S. 767, 778–81 (2022); see also *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, 606 U.S. 522, 561 (2025).

The draft report—at pages 62, 203, 212, 216—rightly recognizes the need for an Equal Treatment Rule and legislation ensuring that faith-based groups may compete for federal benefits on equal terms without giving up

their religious identity or abandoning their religious activities. The report also notes that Notre Dame Law Professor Nicole Stelle Garnett identified 364 statutes and 104 regulations that discriminate against religion in public programs, including 135 unconstitutional federal statutes and regulations. Those findings call for a detailed implementation plan.

The final report should name and enforce the rule established in *Trinity Lutheran* trilogy of cases. The Commission should add the following language to the recommendations at pages 62–64 and 211–14:

“The Administration should support federal legislation codifying the principle established in the Trinity Lutheran trilogy: when government makes a public benefit available to private participants, it may not exclude or penalize an otherwise eligible religious observer because it is religious, because it engages in religious exercise, or because the benefit would be used for a religious purpose. Such legislation should include an express private right of action, damages, attorneys’ fees, and appropriate injunctive and declaratory relief.”

The Commission should further recommend:

“The Administration should direct every federal agency to conduct and publish a comprehensive review of all regulations, guidance documents, notices of funding opportunities, grant terms, contracts, accreditation conditions, licensing standards, and program rules to identify any provision that explicitly or implicitly excludes, disadvantages, or conditions participation by religious organizations or individuals based on religious status, religious character, religious activity, or religious use of funds. Each agency should be directed to revise, rescind, or replace any such provision; to report the results to the Department of Justice; and to certify that future program materials will comply with the principle established in the Trinity Lutheran trilogy.”

This addition would make the Equal Treatment recommendation actionable across the federal government. It would also fit the report’s own plan for agency Conscience and Religious Freedom Divisions to audit policies, identify discrimination, and oversee remedies.

III. Establishment Clause Guidance: Give Officials a Safe Harbor.

The report’s first Top 12 Recommendation urges DOJ to issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and the so-

called “separation of church and state.” Appendix B similarly recommends that DOJ update the Attorney General’s 2017 Memorandum Regarding Federal Law Protections and Religious Liberty and issue guidance on religious expression in the public square, including employees’ religious speech, religious imagery, partnerships with religious institutions, and public religious exercise. Chapter 13 also recommends that DOJ educate Americans on the true meaning of the Establishment Clause

The final report should make this recommendation operational. DOJ should issue public guidance and an Office of Legal Counsel memorandum explaining the Establishment Clause after *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*. The Supreme Court has abandoned *Lemon* and the endorsement test; courts now look to historical practices and understandings, not to whether a hypothetical observer might perceive endorsement. The guidance should give officials, school districts, agency counsel, and grant administrators a safe-harbor checklist: what the Establishment Clause forbids, what it permits, and what it does not require government to censor.

The Commission should add the following implementation language:

“DOJ should issue Establishment Clause guidance explaining that *Lemon* and the endorsement test no longer govern; that government need not, and may not, display hostility toward religion; that equal treatment of religious and secular participants in public programs does not establish religion; that offense is not coercion; and that historical practices and understandings govern questions involving religious expression, religious imagery, religious accommodations, public acknowledgments of religion, and partnerships with faith-based organizations. The guidance should include a safe-harbor checklist for federal agencies, states, municipalities, and government-run schools.”

This guidance matters because risk-averse officials often suppress religious expression out of misunderstanding, not legal necessity. Specific DOJ guidance would reduce needless conflict, prevent unconstitutional exclusion, and make it harder for later administrations to revive obsolete restrictions.

IV. Religious Liberty Task Force: Add Public Accountability.

The draft report recommends that DOJ create a Religious Liberty Task Force to track and prioritize litigation protecting religious liberty, and Appendix B recommends agency Conscience and Religious Freedom Divisions tasked with responding to complaints, enforcing religious-liberty laws,

auditing policies, recommending remedies, issuing public reports, issuing guidance, and implementing the report's recommendations. These recommendations are among the report's most important structural proposals.

The final report should add accountability measures so these entities do not become symbolic. The Task Force and agency divisions need deadlines, reporting obligations, escalation authority, and a cross-agency implementation tracker. The report should also connect these bodies to the concrete tasks discussed above: Johnson Amendment rulemaking, *Trinity Lutheran* compliance reviews, Establishment Clause guidance, federal grants reform, private-sector enforcement, healthcare conscience protection, and military accommodation reform.

The Commission should add the following language at pages 208–10:

“The Religious Liberty Task Force should maintain a public implementation dashboard tracking each recommendation in this report, the agency responsible, the action required, the deadline, the status of implementation, and any public guidance, rulemaking, litigation, or enforcement action taken. Each agency Conscience and Religious Freedom Division should submit a 90-day implementation plan, a six-month audit report identifying discriminatory policies or programs, and an annual public report describing complaints received, investigations opened, policies revised, enforcement actions taken, and unresolved barriers requiring White House or DOJ action.”

This addition would make the final report a governing tool, not just a statement of principle. It would also help the Administration preserve religious-liberty gains beyond an agency announcement.

Conclusion

The President's decision to establish the Religious Liberty Commission is a breath of fresh air. The Commission hearings highlighted the central importance of religious liberty to our great nation, and also revealed the many ongoing threats to our first freedom.

The Commission's draft report identifies many of the most urgent threats to religious liberty in American life. The recommendations above would make the final report more concrete, more enforceable, and more useful to the officials charged with implementation. We respectfully urge the Commission to retain the report's strong commitments, add the recommenda-



tions proposed here, and ensure that every recommended agency action remains anchored to the First Amendment, RFRA, and equal treatment.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. J. Tucker', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ryan J. Tucker
Senior Counsel
Alliance Defending Freedom



ADFLEGAL.ORG

From: Sheila King <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Public Comment/Separation of Church and State-Ms Sheila Carnell-King

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:33:19 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Sheila King <[REDACTED] PII >

Date: July 13, 2026 at 7:42:30 AM CDT

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: Public Comment/Separation of Church and State-Ms Sheila Carnell-King

To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Please keep church and state separate

There is no need to bridge the gap for your political purposes.

I agree with The Johnson Amendment, as it is widely understood, is an important safeguard against nonprofits and all houses of worship using their tax exemptions

Religious freedom is and should be to always allow all mankind to be free to choose who to worship and how to worship as well when to worship.

Thank for your time

Ms Sheila Carnell-King

Alexander City Al

Sent from my iPhone

From: Sherry Wiedemann <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Sherry Wiedemann

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:34:09 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen who takes both halves of the First Amendment's religion clauses seriously, and I ask the Commission to weigh four arguments that together make the case for keeping government out of religious matters entirely.

The first argument is one many commissioners may not expect from a religious-liberty advocate: it comes from Christ himself. When Jesus said 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, and civil government was given only one of them. As Jones testified before a Senate committee in 1888, "There is a limit to the lawmaking power; and that limit is the line which Jesus Christ has drawn. The government has no right to make any law relating to the things that pertain to God, or offenses against God, or religion." The test this yields is simple and religiously neutral: government may ask whether an act injures a neighbor's civil rights, never whether it is religious or heretical. Any recommendation that puts government behind a religious text, display, or lesson crosses the very line Christ himself drew.

Second, rights that depend on majority approval are not rights but permissions, and permissions can be withdrawn as easily as granted. The Religious Liberty Library tract on the limits of civil authority makes the point directly: "that which is subject to the will of a majority is not a right." Popular government exists to protect minorities, not to enact the preferences of majorities against them. Jones told the Senate committee plainly, "the people, I care not how many there are, have no right to invade your relationship to God, nor mine." Wide public support for official religious observance is no more a warrant for it than wide public support would be a warrant for silencing a religious minority.

Third, and most rigorously: government derives its powers from what the people delegate, and no person can delegate his relationship to God to anyone else. Nobody can authorize another to believe or worship on his behalf. Since religious power was never something the people could give, it was never something government could receive. No government will ever stand at a final judgment to answer for the souls of its citizens, and it cannot rightly claim a responsibility it can never be called to account for. Jones drew the sharpest conclusion available to him: whoever presumes to exercise jurisdiction over another's religious belief claims a prerogative that God himself declines to use.

Fourth, this separation was not a later invention but the founders' deliberate design, urged on them by churches that had suffered under establishment. 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." The founders did not wait for full establishment before objecting to its first appearance; they denied the principle at its root, as the Memorial and Remonstrance shows, and a commission that claims their authority for state-sponsored religion must reckon with their 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,
Sherry Wiedemann

Sent from my iPhone

From: Edwin Perez <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Edwin Perez-Lopez

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:35:22 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Being a citizen of the United States of America, I certainly know there was never a separation of Church and State since the beginning of America. Nevertheless, reading about how the separation of Church and State wants to be established hurts physically, mentally and more importantly spiritually. As of the Christian faith I would greatly appreciate it if this separation of Church and State is never established by the United States of America.

Sincerely,
Edwin Perez-Lopez
Pensacola, Florida

From: Kam Ferguson <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - [Religious Liberty Commission Rpt Response] -
Kam Ferguson

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:35:29 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Resp_to_Religious_Liberty_Commission_Rpt.docx

Good afternoon Commission members!

My response to your thorough report is attached:

Thank you for your extensive time and effort in this vital matter!

Kam Ferguson, Michigan resident

p.s. If one or more of you would like to speak with me directly, I will provide my cell #.

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

7/13/2026

Thank you for your extensive and persistent work to further religious liberty. As a lifetime Bible student in my 50's, I've read through your report and agree with much of what it shares. Many changes are needed as this report makes clear and the commission's recommendations lay out.

My areas of concern include:

- * The report states that "we are a self-governing democracy." We're a constitutional republic, where the minority (in #) still have all their rights and remain protected, not a democracy where the majority rules at the expense of the minority. Quite frankly, the commission's own actions toward commission member Carrie Prejean, who asked tough questions regarding Zionism vs anti-Semitism, show the dangers of church and state uniting. The commission's eagerness to protect a particular religious group resulted in Ms. Prejean's first amendment rights being violated in public service. She was removed from the commission for her questions and statements.
- * Concerns in the educational arena are real and require attention. In your eagerness to level the playing field, please heed the lessons already learned. Colleges and universities have known since the 1970's that receiving government money through student loans and grants comes with a price: you have to do things the way that same government directs. That guidance has increasingly become anti-God, not neutral. Controlling guidance always comes with taxpayer dollars, period, end of sentence! Recommending to expand that control through school choice vouchers to grades K-12, which enters the property tax arena in local governing bodies, will only further the problem of government interference in how schools operate. Let there be ZERO tax dollars going to any non-public school. This is the only safe path for religious bodies to fully exercise their rights to operate according to mission. Hillsdale College stands as a vibrant example of this fact.
- * Many problems that this excellent report cites derive from the mistaken idea that the wall of separation between church and state equates to "freedom from religion" not the true freedom OF religion. Secular Humanism, which underpins the radical ideology of many government/education officials, is effectively freedom from any god, and thereby violates the rights of those who believe in God. The constitution protects the rights of both equally. The US Constitution has been egregiously violated many times in public service, especially in the past 15 years. Solution? Enforce the laws already established. More laws will not bring greater liberty, especially with poor enforcement of current laws!
- * The Johnson Amendment is only a symptom of the real problem. No church is to be under the authority of ANY government entity, including the IRS. The free exercise clause especially prevents the government from managing churches in any way, including the tax deductibility of donations made to those churches. Churches make a mistake when they take 501-c-3 charity status and voluntarily put themselves under the authority of the federal government. Non church entities should be under that charitable status and related law body, not churches. That is unconstitutional. Address the underlying problem, not the Johnson Amendment. The testimonies cited are excellent examples of US Constitution, First Amendment violation, not simply the Johnson Amendment which itself violates the First Amendment right of church members and pastors.

* Physical attacks and mass shootings in public places, including churches, will not be resolved by more laws. Until existing laws against such actions are rigorously enforced, and reliably result in the death penalty, these attacks will continue and increase.

* When the churches seek government support, even to be an equal player with non-religious entities, to help accomplish their mission, they rely on the arm of flesh, not the arm of God. The Bible calls this adultery, as the church is Christ's bride and to look only to Him for resources to accomplish their God given mission. It may start small, yet this practice grows until it is not only money from the government flowing to the churches, but also the church works to use government power to accomplish their mission/enforce their doctrine. The horrors of the Dark Ages will be repeated, as Revelation 13 makes very clear, and we must guard against such developments.

Thank you for reading my concerns and factoring them into the final report.

Kam Ferguson, Michigan resident.

From: Rita Villegas <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment- Rita Villegas

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:35:36 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As citizen and a person of faith I was alarmed to read the Religious Liberty Commission's Report. The separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, and it is what has made America the great nation and world leader it has become. This separation is grounded in the Constitution and it's central to our freedom, and as such it should remain. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government funds and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. I request that the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced. If both of these recommendations, are followed it will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. I request complete neutrality in the government's relationship with religion.

Sincerely,

Rita Villegas

From: BEVERLEY PATTERSON <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious literally

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:35:45 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone

From: "L. Larsen" <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:35:54 -0400

Importance: Normal

Although the words "Separation of church and state" do not occur in the Constitution, the principle is found in the First Amendment, which begins, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." Everyone in the United States of America is free to practice the religion of their choice, or no religion at all. Congress should not pass any laws telling people what to believe, or how to practice their beliefs. Politicians should not have the power to give preferential treatment to one religion over the others. America will cease to be free if and when this happens. What if Congress were to pass a law requiring everyone to attend services at a Muslim mosque on Friday? That would be unconstitutional and un-American. What if Congress were to pass a law requiring everyone to attend services at a Jewish synagogue on Saturday? That also would be unconstitutional and un-American. What if Congress were to pass a law requiring everyone to attend services at a Christian church on Sunday? Likewise, that would be unconstitutional and un-American.

Here's a reminder to all Americans who use the Bible as the foundation of their faith and practice: Jesus Christ said, "Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them... (and) teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (See Matthew 28:19-20.) He also said, "IF you love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15) Please notice that He NEVER said: Go into all the world and pass laws forcing people who DON'T love Me to keep My commandments.

Leena Larsen

From: Tim Cook <[REDACTED] PII >

To: <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:35:54 -0400

Importance: Normal

See below. Sent to wrong email address.

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

Begin forwarded message:

On Monday, July 13, 2026, 3:31 PM, Tim Cook <[REDACTED] PII > wrote:

Good afternoon to this distinguished group. My intention of this email is to have this group reconsider the direction of building a bridge between Church and State. Many of this group rely on the God fearing founding fathers on other topics of why and what the United States of America was established by. Freedom of any State interference when dealing with freedom of how to worship and when. It's easy for me to open up my Bible and see how Jesus dealt with this topic. He never moved away from allowing freedom of choice for all believers and non believers. He broke down the Jewish leadership dictatorship because the rules and laws is not part of Gods plan. God has 10 commandments which he added one more the greatest of them all "To love one another ". Government will never be able to follow what God has asked us to be. When government gets involved history will swing back around and prove that government gets in the way of religious freedom. I sincerely ask for you to lead government for the people. Not bridging church and state together. Follow the Lords plan not any government leader or church leader. Self comes into play when men/women are involved trying to help God. He has it covered and that's why He established the United States of America. He needs our personal individual free relationship with Him not the State. Thank you for considering. Please do not move forward with the bridge.

Tim Cook

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

From: Marlene Jones <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Pillars of Freedom

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

Importance: Normal

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

[Sent from Yahoo Mail on Android](#)

From: Michael Stough II <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Michael Stough II

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:36:11 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

While I applaud the desire to protect the religious liberty of all those residing in the United States, the Commission's report is troubling in that it seeks to develop a "bridge" instead of maintaining a separation of church and state.

I believe sincerely that when these two elements are brought together in the hopes of creating a stronger freedom, it actually lessens it. If anything the uniting of church and state only corrupts both.

For example: I see the revoking of the Johnson Amendment as a solid example of this principle. As a pastor, I've never endorsed a specific candidate to any office in either public or private spaces. I have always only advocated that the way a person votes at the ballot box is a decision they make based on prayer with our Creator and study of His word. The pulpit and the church are spaces which are sacred to God and the furtherance of His kingdom, not the kingdoms of this world.

Sincerely,
Michael Stough II
Springfield, OH

From: Bozhidar and Yordanka Popov <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:37:48 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission

As citizen and a person of faith I was alarmed to read the Religious Liberty Commission's Report. The separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, and it is what has made America the great nation and world leader it has become. This separation is grounded in the Constitution and it's central to our freedom, and as such it should remain. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government funds and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. I request that the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced. If both of these recommendations, are followed it will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. I request complete neutrality in the government's relationship with religion.

Sincerely,

Yordanka Popov

From: Mary Fisher <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fw: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:38:57 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: RE__RECOMMENDATIONS_OF_RELIGIOUS_LIBERTY_COMMISSION.eml

I am responding to the opportunity to voice my concerns regarding number one and number nine of the recent proposal by the Religious liberty committee. The above attachment by J Cameron I stand in agreement with. His concerns- thoroughly cover the issues to be considered. Our forefathers- that we're instrumental in forming the Constitution understood the of necessity of church-state separation. They were not far removed from the persecutions of the past, and understood/experienced-as we often cannot-the terrible results to undermining true liberty. May God help you as you duly consider many voices being raised against #1, and #9 proposal. Thank you, Mary Fisher

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone

Get [Outlook for Android](#)

[REDACTED]

PII

From: Kae Borrero <[REDACTED]>
To: Mary Fisher <[REDACTED]>, Mary Fisher <[REDACTED]>
Subject: RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 09:17:44-0400

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.

I agree with the above statement, voicing my concerns.

Yours truly,

Mary Fisher

From: David Toppenberg <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

To: [REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Keep church and state separate

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:39:01 -0400

Importance: Normal

Keep church and state separate as in the current constitution. Don't break something that has worked for 250 years. Make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise there of.

Thanks,

David Toppenberg

From: Lynn Bandel <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Separation of Church and State-Lynn Bandel

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:39:20 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty commission:

I am very grateful for the opportunity to be heard.

As a Christian citizen myself, I really appreciate the efforts made to protect religious liberty.

However, I have serious concerns regarding the report delivered on June 26, 2026.

I respectfully disagree with the point 1 and 9, because I am afraid that those two would have an opposite effect, and in fact weaken the religious liberty that needs strengthening.

Removing the wall between the church and state, and having a bridge instead, would be dangerous. Because it is very clear when we study history, that whenever religious power and political power joined together, those who had convictions that were different from that religion were persecuted.

Countless martyrs in Europe were victims of that union. Persecution happened even in our own country before the proper separation was established.

Please keep church and state separate. Keeping them separate would keep the churches pure, and keep the government free from the danger of being influenced, or worse, controlled by certain religious groups that gained power.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Lynn Bandel
Eighty Four, Pennsylvania

From: texakm <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:39:30 -0400

Importance: Normal

Our founding fathers spent a lot of time discussing the issue of the church and religious freedom when they were organizing the foundations of our nation 250 years ago. Many religious groups sought refuge in the new world and this new place called America because they sought some place that they could worship in freedom from government control.

Because of practices in other places where the state or country set up a religion for the whole country, any minority religion or religious belief was not always allowed to practice their different religious beliefs. They either stayed and were subject to discrimination or persecution or they moved to where they hoped they could worship the way they wanted to without any government interference.

All of this information was taken into consideration by our founding fathers when they established religious freedom and the separation of church and state in our founding documents.

Today there are some who believe these principles need to be changed because they do not fit the views of the common people today. People today do not have the depth of analysis that our founding fathers went through when they established our laws and documents to establish this country. Change is fine when the reasons for that change has been thought through to the depth that our founding fathers went through.

The arguments being presented do not reveal any great depth of analysis and seem to be more a matter of feeling that things need to change and the proposal of the changes lack real analysis of why these proposed changes would improve over our existing principles in our country's founding documents.

I am strongly against the proposed changes in the matter of separation of church and state. I have a lot more respect for our founding fathers and their thoughtful deliberations 250 years ago that apply just as well today.

Alvin K. Murashige

[REDACTED] PII

[REDACTED] PII

[REDACTED] PII

From: Trudy Brajnikoff <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Religious Liberty Commission – Gertrude Brajnikoff

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:39:33 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Sirs/Madams,

I, unfortunately, do not have time to read and digest the material in question on my own, but I do believe in religious freedom, not only for my own Christian faith, but all faiths which value and respect the rights and lives of individuals.

In order to keep religious freedom intact here in the United States of America, we need to keep a firm separation between churches and our government. When the two become buddies, people are persecuted and we are all harmed. All we have to do is look at Hitler or communist countries to see what happens when the government controls what people are allowed to think about others.

Thank you,
Gertrude Brajnikoff

From: Gee Woods <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comments to The Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:39:36 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Religious_Liberty_Commission.pdf

Please see my attached comments to The Religious Liberty Commission's report.

Thank you.

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for giving Americans the privilege to respond to your report. Although I respect your work and attention to making America a great nation by separating church and state, I do not agree with it. I have loved this country and pray for it and its leaders constantly. This country was founded upon religious freedom and the people's right to worship God according to their conscious. It is a truth that pilgrims and several other colonists came to this new world seeking religious freedom. What sets America apart and makes it great is the fact that people are not in competition and persecuted for their religious beliefs.

The First Amendment 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." As Americans we know that the First Amendment means that the U. S. cannot establish an official religion because then it would deny others the ability to choose their own religion. It also means that a person can practice his or her own religious beliefs, which also means that the government can't tell them what to practice. In both cases church and state are kept separate. Anytime the government is involved in enforcing its religious beliefs on the citizens, there is no religious freedom, and our pioneers lost their lives to see that its people had the right to practice religion according to the dictates of their hearts.

My dear Religious Liberty Leaders, I beg you to reconsider maintaining the wall of separation for reasons mentioned above, including those cited by PillarofFreedo.org: The Commission's attempt is marked by making two primary types of recommendations. The first is the repeal of the Johnson Amendment which will further politicize America's churches, and the second is the expansion of funding of religious organizations engaging in religious activities. Both of these recommendations are counter to the separation of church and state as provided for by the Constitution.

Again, thank you for giving Americans a voice in this matter. God bless you dear leaders.

Sincerely,

Gwendolyn Woods

From: Heidi Wells <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Freedom of religion- should be freedom of faith?!By what law? How

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:39:47 -0400

Importance: Normal

Thank you for listening to our concerns and allowing us to interact w/ your commentary!

I believe in the concept of separation of church and state- our freedom and liberty. But my concern is the religion of one group determines the laws of government - which reduce or negate our very own freedoms which are supposed to be part of the Constitution of the United States. For instance- Sharia Law promotes the killing of all infidels- anyone who chooses not to believe in their religion. All Jews and Christians! What kind of freedom is this? And many Christians believe that since there is a separation of church and state- they don't need to vote on anything political. They think that their freedoms are guaranteed! They don't realize that giving up a vote, allows

Government to take over our freedoms! So which is more important for our freedoms to reign- the constitution or new laws? What are the safe guards for keeping Communism and Socialism, out of governmental, ideological "freedoms" from taking over our country!??? None of these thoughts have been addressed! All the arguments proposed are only historical. And look where that has taken our country- we now are threatened w/ Sharia Law, terrorist groups that can claim this faith or that faith- w/ now government supported laws. Freedom Rings out!!!! Where?? I've had 3 generations of family members that have fought for this country's freedoms!! Why are terrorists, communist, and socialist (doctrine, ideology and "faith") allowed to ruin this country?

How do you solve this problem?

Sent from my iPhone Heidi

From: Robert Nordman <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re-interpretation of 1st amendment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:39:50 -0400

Importance: Normal

I have read the Pillars of Freedom document and agree with it.

The church meddling in politics or politicians setting religious policy has always ended up on dangerous ground.

Robert F. Nordman, PA-C

From: Timothy Stowell <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Timothy Stowell

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:40:54 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

As a citizen of the United States of America, joining church and state concerns me due to the history of what happened when church and state united. I believe that once church and state unite, and the churches take government money, the corruption of politics automatically comes with it. If this happens, I am afraid that events from the past will be repeated and there will be no religious liberty. It violates individual rights and persecution of a group will happen when they go against what the church and state implements when contrary to their beliefs. "Foxe's Book of Martyrs" is a good reference to read about what happened in history.

I agree with the comments made by the Pillar of Freedom. With that in mind, I am appealing that you reconsider the recommendations.

Timothy Stowell
Cleburne, Texas

From: edward lopez <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] In Support of the Establishment Clause and the Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:40:57 -0400

Importance: Normal

Eduardo Lopez
New York, NY

[REDACTED] PII
July 13, 2026

Dear Members of the Commission,

I am writing to respectfully express my strong support for the separation of church and state.

This constitutional foundation is the best protector of true religious freedom in America. It ensures that the government does not endorse or favor any specific faith, and it equally safeguards people of all religious beliefs and no religious belief at all. Our democracy thrives when the government remains neutral, allowing every citizen the personal dignity to worship or not as they see fit.

I urge you to uphold this longstanding principle in your recommendations, ensuring that religious liberty remains a right guaranteed equally to all Americans.

Sincerely,

Eddie Lopez from New York City

From: Michele Williams <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:41:01 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Member,

I agree with Pillar of Freedoms Comments. Please implement them. I believe we should have separation of church and state. Our beliefs should not be for the state or anyone to decide but ourselves. Please keep this wall between church and state. Thank you for your consideration.

~ Respectively, Michele Williams

Mountain View, Arkansas

From: Elaine Egbert <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:41:08 -0400

Importance: Normal

I believe in the seperation of church and government enteties. The government should not run the churches, or donate funds to any of them. Nor should the church attempt to run the government. They should be two separate enteties.

Thank you...and may God bless America!

Elaine Egbert

From: Anthony Hernandez <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] I agree with pillar of freedoms comment!

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:41:13 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with pillar of freedoms comment,thank you.

From: Janet Lamberton <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Janet Lamberton

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:41:23 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

My name is Janet Lamberton, and I write from Selah, Washington, as someone who has watched this country offer refuge to people who once lived under threat simply for worshiping according to conscience. That blessing did not come from government establishing the right religion. It came from government having no religion to establish at all. I ask the Commission to keep that inheritance intact for everyone, of every faith and none.

I hold this view first as a matter of the Christian teaching many commissioners themselves honor. Christ divided human duty 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 entrusted with one of those jurisdictions, not both. It may ask whether an act injures a neighbor's person or property; it has no authority to ask whether an act pleases or offends God, because that question belongs to a court no legislature sits on. When government sponsors a religious text, display, or lesson, it is not being too devout for a secular office — it is trespassing across a line its own faith's founder drew, and no amount of good intention changes whose land that is.

I also believe this exclusion runs deeper than any single clause of the Constitution. Our government exists by the consent of the governed, built from powers the people delegated to it. But no person can delegate his own relationship to God — I cannot authorize anyone else to believe, worship, or answer for my soul, any more than I can hand someone else my conscience to carry. If the power was never given, it could never be received. The First Amendment did not invent this boundary; it simply wrote down what was already true from the moment free people formed this government. That is why the defense that a measure falls short of creating an official national church misses the deeper point: government was never granted jurisdiction over religion in the first place, whether or not it goes so far as to establish a single denomination.

Finally, history teaches that coercion cannot manufacture faith, and state favor corrupts the very religion it tries to help. A law can compel attendance; it cannot compel belief, and forcing outward compliance breeds hypocrisy rather than conviction. James Madison surveyed fifteen centuries of state-established Christianity and found, in his own words, "pride and indolence in the clergy; ignorance and servility in the laity; in both superstition, bigotry, and persecution." Even General Grant, no theologian, counseled leaving religion to the family altar, the church, and the private school, keeping state and church forever separate. Any faith that needs the government's help to survive has already lost something more valuable than survival.

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

Respectfully,
Janet Lamberton
Selah, WA

From: Bob <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Robert Baker

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:42:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Robert Baker

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

By tearing down separation of Church and State you will actually be uniting Church and State. Historically this has always led to persecution through laws influenced by the majority religion of a country. Even minority versions of the same religion (such as Christianity) as well as other religions in that country are pressured to conform to religious laws that may violate their conscience. To avoid violating their conscience they must break the law which leads to punishment. But it is really persecution because it was the majority religion that influenced the state to adopt the religious law.

The reason the pilgrims came to America was to escape this type of persecution by the majority religion who influenced the civil government to enforce their dogmas. The constitution was framed by people much closer to the horrendous religious persecution of the Dark Ages than we are today. The first amendment to the constitution was designed to make it impossible for the state to make a law that impacted the practice of religion. We call this "Separation of Church and State" but it wasn't intended to make the state godless. Rather, it was simply intended to prevent the state from making religious laws. As soon as the state makes a law enforcing some form of worship they have become a religious power. Persecution inevitably follows.

The First Amendment has served us well for 250 years. I see no reason to change or circumvent it now.

Sincerely,

Robert Baker

From: Jeff B <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment for draft religious liberty report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:43:19 -0400

Importance: Normal

Editors:

The draft report is shoddy, poor quality, sophmoric, one-sided, and lacks critical review. Where were the people who should have been called for review? Why does the history focus on present day Christian mythology? Why has so much history been ignored, such as Pilgrims fleeing Europe to avoid being persecuted by other dominant religious groups? Then ignoring that some Pilgrims came here and re-established persecution they fled? Why haven't the opinions of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison regarding religions been incorporated? Why has the First Amendment thinking for church-state separation been overlooked?

No report on religious liberty can be considered of value when the writers short change the Bill of Rights history. And when report writers do not call on many other expert people, religious or not religious, for critical review.

If the Commission doesn't do a thorough job, the report will become a laughingstock.

From: Joshua <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:43:37 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of Freedom.org that church and State need to remain separate.

From: Jenny Findlay <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:44:16 -0400

Importance: Normal

Our country was founded on the principle of separation of church and state. This is intrinsic to my way of life. Church is where I go to get away from government interference and enjoy my religious freedom to worship God. As a Christian, studying the Bible and its lessons as well as Jesus teachings and experiencing the indwelling Holy Spirit as my Comforter and Helper is totally separate from the State who can't protect my soul and give me eternal life. Man made law and government interference can never give me that as the Founding Fathers agreed when they established the Republic if we can keep it as Benjamin Franklin spoke. Render unto the State what is theirs but render unto us what belongs to God. Two separate and distinct things that need to be kept that way to protect our religious freedom.

Sent from my iPhone

Sent from my iPhone

From: Marvin Mosher <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] The government should never try to legislate religion. When ever the government down through history had gotten involved this way. Persecution of the people who disagree have been persecuted.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:44:38 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone

From: lindacakes <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Sunday observance. Our country has always had division of church and state. This new Sunday push is not going to bring our country together. I'm a Sabbath keeper, not Jewish but a Sabbath..Saturday observing Christian. This is very concerning to me.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:44:45 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sent from my Galaxy

From: Megan Smyrniotis <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:46:07 -0400

Importance: Normal

I have been invited to submit a public comment in regards to the separation of church and state. Jesus said to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. The idea is that obligations to honor governmental requirements and God's requirements are both important but separate. In past ages, historically, church and state partnerships have resulted in millions of lives lost such as in the dark ages by the Roman Catholic system towards Protestants. The founding fathers knew of the importance that separation of church and state provided as a protection for the faith-based consciences of their fellow men. I do not want any relaxing of that clear and marked line of separation of church and state, except that government continue to protect the freedom of conscience of every American to carry out their religious convictions and preserve the protection of American religious freedoms without overreach of any governmental or civil bodies that seek to force or require special requirements of a religious nature for American people. Thank you.

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From: Law S <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Protect faith

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:46:29 -0400

Importance: Normal

Leave people alone , no place for tyranny, this country is built on freedom and what comes of it, closing doors is so hypocritical of our freedom. May peace be with you!
Sincerely,

From: makena Kinyua 254 <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Object

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:46:39 -0400

Importance: Normal

I object

Sent from my iPhone

From: Felesha Robinson <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Commento- Religious Liberty – Felesha Marsland

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:47:01 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Religious_Liberty_Commission_Letter_Felesha_Marsland.pdf

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Please find my attached public comment regarding religious liberty and the importance of protecting freedom of conscience.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate the opportunity to submit my comments.

Respectfully,

Felesha Marsland

Letter to the Religious Liberty Commission

To the Honorable Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Grace and peace to you.

I write as a Christian who deeply values both the Word of God and the God-given liberty of conscience. I appreciate the opportunity to submit comments regarding religious liberty in America.

The principle of religious liberty is not merely a constitutional ideal; it is rooted in Scripture. Throughout the Bible, God invites worship but never compels it. Joshua declared, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15). Christ Himself said, "If any man will come after me..." (Matthew 16:24), demonstrating that true faith is always voluntary. Even in Revelation, God appeals to humanity rather than forcing obedience (Revelation 3:20).

History repeatedly demonstrates that whenever civil authority unites with religious authority to compel worship, liberty suffers. The persecutions of the Middle Ages, the state churches of Europe, and the suffering of countless believers throughout history remind us that coercion in matters of faith produces oppression rather than genuine conversion.

The founders of the United States understood this lesson well. The First Amendment protects both the free exercise of religion and prohibits the establishment of religion, recognizing that government functions best when it protects every person's freedom of conscience equally.

As a student of Scripture, I am also mindful of biblical prophecy. Revelation 13 warns of a future power that seeks to compel worship through civil authority. While sincere Christians may differ in their prophetic interpretations, the principle remains clear: worship that is enforced by the state is contrary to the example of Christ.

Therefore, I respectfully urge the Commission to uphold religious liberty in its fullest sense—not merely the freedom of one faith tradition, but the God-given freedom of every individual to worship according to conscience or not to worship at all, without coercion, discrimination, or governmental compulsion.

America has long served as a beacon of religious freedom because it recognized that conscience belongs to God alone. My prayer is that future generations will continue to enjoy that same sacred liberty.

Thank you for your service and for considering these thoughts.

Respectfully,

Felesha Marsland

From: Jim Wilson <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - RLC - James Wilson

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:47:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

Religious Liberty Commission,

As a United States citizen, I
do not want this commission to diminish or undo Separation of Church and State in our
country.

Separation of Church and State must be protected and maintained.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

James Wilson

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

From: Richard Thomason <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Richard P. Thomason

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:47:10 -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, corruption of politics may come 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. I believe this keeps both free.

Sincerely,

Richard P. Thomason
Goodlettsville, TN

Richard

From: Zion Hickman <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Zion Hickman

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:47:15 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a concerned young person to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would bridge the gap between church and state — especially with using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment. This country is not your ordinary country, it was founded by principal and not by the ambition to control peoples mindsets and religion! This was the true dream for America that our founding fathers had in mind! Religious liberty is what makes this country great!

“Among all the religious persecutions with which almost every page of modern history is stained, no victim ever suffered but for the violation of what government denominated the law of God.

To prevent a similar train of evils in this country, the Constitution has wisely withheld from our government the power of defining the divine law. It is a right reserved to each citizen.”

1829 U.S. Senate Committee Report

We must uphold the principles of freedom. Of true freedom. Religious freedom.

“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.”

Please allow us to keep these rights. To remain free. As a young person the only way the future will be bright is to have religious liberty for all.

Thank you for reading and hearing our concerns.

Sincerely,

Zion Hickman

From: Dennis Sykora <[REDACTED]>

To: "[REDACTED]" <[REDACTED]>, DENNIS SYKORA <[REDACTED]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:47:58 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to express my concern about recommendations made in your draft report that would weaken the separation of church and state. As a person of faith, I believe the principle of separation between church and state is one of the greatest protections for both religious liberty and our constitutional system.

The Constitution was designed so that the church could not control the state, and the state could not control the church. This separation has allowed faith to flourish freely, without government interference or political favoritism. It protects the independence of religious communities while also protecting the rights of each American to practice, or not practice, their faith according to their own conscience.

God gives each person the freedom to choose whether to follow Him. Genuine faith cannot be created or sustained through government power. Throughout history, when governments have enforced religion or when churches have exercised political authority, the result has too often been persecution, corruption, and division. Our nation's founders understood these dangers and established constitutional safeguards to prevent them.

When the government becomes involved in promoting or funding religion, it raises an unavoidable question: whose religious beliefs will be favored? Governments often respond to political pressure rather than timeless religious truth, placing faith at risk of becoming another political tool. Religious freedom is strongest when people are free to believe, worship, and live according to their convictions without government coercion or preferential treatment.

Please preserve the separation of church and state. It is not a barrier to faith, rather, it is a safeguard for religious liberty, ensuring that every American remains free to worship according to their conscience. Protecting that freedom protects both our churches and our nation.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

Dennis Sykora

From: Bob Thompson <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comments on the draft report of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:48:29 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

History has repeatedly shown that societies suffer when church and state work closely together.

Please seriously consider revising your draft proposal in which you suggest our government should further disregard the traditional and longstanding principles of our first amendment: Keeping the government out of running churches and keep the churches out of running government.

It is precisely because a bridge has been built that further erosion is felt to be necessary: Because the state has acknowledged atheistic, evolutionary secular humanism (which is a religion being based solely upon subjective speculation and belief) as the primary established belief system that we now find ourselves in a position where we feel we need to extend that power to other religious philosophies, taking us directly back into the dark ages the founders of this country sought to exit through removing any religion from establishment while allowing every citizen and public official to directly influence the nation through the maintenance and expression of their personally held beliefs and their character.

If a philosophy is viable it does not need the government to fund, promote and force it upon the citizenry. Government involvement in religion cannot help by become coercive.

Why should public tax funds support any religious organization? If the adherents do not have sufficient conviction to support it themselves, why should the nation as a whole? We allow a tax deduction for religious contributions already. Why should a tax payer that believes in one thing have to support an organization that believes another?

If we want to further support religious choice in education, simply exempt people who do not use the public school system from that portion of taxation.

Also, who decides orthodoxy? The majority? The politically and financially powerful? This completely undermines the basic premise of our constitution that a minorities's rights have the same protection as the majority (within civil bounds). I spent a number of years serving in a pastoral capacity in the Republic of Ireland. I observed through their history and current social atmosphere that established churches only lead to oppression and the loss of personal freedom. We see this history repeated in Europe through the Roman Church and then in Ireland through the Church of England. In the end government establishment of both churches led to the same types of human rights violations, in varying degrees. We see this in the former Japanese empire with it's established Shinto religion and in the communist countries with their established form of leader and government worship.

Our foundational principle of the separation of church and state dates back to Roger Williams and Rhode Island. It is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a recent doctrine. Any church/state coalition, like Dr. Frankenstein's creation in Mary Shellys literary allegory, becomes a beast that consumes all we hold dear.

If there is anything history has taught us it is that a government establishing religion (belief system based on philosophical or metaphysical principles) of any kind leads to severe suppression of minorities and chilling abuse of the power that attends the government establishment. I believe we are seeing this now with the establishment of the evolutionary, secular humanist, religion as the accepted social norm in our education, government and institutions. Please, do not further weaken our first amendment but strengthen it. I believe, informed by the testimony of history, that any move toward bridging religion with government will only further weaken the already tottering basic human right of liberty of conscience and freedom of speech we believe is an inalienable human right.

Respectfully,
Robert Thompson
Chapel Hill, NC

From: nicholas eason <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] "America's First Freedom" Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:48:48 -0400

Importance: Normal

Good Afternoon

i know you are busy and i will not take much of your time.
i have heard and seen proposal as well as several of those in response.

Here is mine
I am no scholar of any type.
I do believe that you folks know very well what you are up to.
and, why.
History over and over shows what happens when church and state join hands.

persecution to death for those who do not comply or even simply disagree.

You all know this and yet you persist in going down the wrong path on this subject.
Even your so-called allegiance to "the scriptures" makes your determined path plainly wrong.
BUT, you are determined to do what YOU, THINK IS RIGHT.

As it stands, my disagreement i expect will have little to no effect on your decisions.
Youve already made up your minds.
your allowing comment is mere formality.

know this.
You know you are wrong.
You know the history.

Its like communism/socialism, there is no right application.
Always ends in death and destruction.

Prophecy in the Bible, already maps your direction annnd how it will end up.
IF, and you will, continue down this path, you are in for a very unpleasant
"end of times" pre advent of our
Lord annnd Savior.

To save yourself(s)
Id confess, repent and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide/lead you to HIS truth.
but
You have to listen, trust and obey.

just sayin'

nick
  

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From: Helene Thomas <[REDACTED] PII >

To: Dave Goswicko <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:48:54 -0400

Importance: Normal

Well done. Praise the Lord.

Hélène Thomas

The greatest want of the world is the want of men--men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall. {Ed 57.3}

On Mon, Jul 13, 2026, 3:17 PM <[REDACTED] PII > wrote:

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 the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

The separation of church and state protects religious freedom for everyone, prevents government-enforced religion, and ensures that public resources treat all citizens equally. Maintaining this boundary prevents sectarian conflicts, upholds democratic equality, and safeguards the integrity of religious institutions from political corruption. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Key reasons to oppose the breakdown of church-state separation include:

1. Protection of True Religious Liberty

- **Freedom for all faiths:** When the government is neutral toward religion, citizens are free to practice their faith—or hold no religious beliefs—without facing persecution, favoritism, or state-sponsored coercion. [1, 2]

- **Preventing religious favoritism:** Eroding this boundary allows the government to elevate specific religious doctrines (such as Christian nationalism) in the public sphere and marginalize minority faiths or secular worldviews. [1, 2]

2. Safeguarding the Integrity of Religion

- **Avoiding political corruption:** Entangling faith with government power tends to corrupt religion, turning houses of worship into partisan instruments and diluting spiritual messages to fit political goals. [1, 2, 3, 4]
- **Preventing state control:** Historically, the founders sought to protect churches from government interference, taxation, and state control. Repealing rules like the Johnson Amendment can pressure clergy to endorse candidates simply to keep their tax-exempt status. [1, 2, 3, 4]

3. Preserving Civil Equality and Rights

- **Equal treatment under the law:** Government services and public funds are intended to serve everyone. Blurring the lines often results in public money being directed to specific religious groups or enables institutions to legally discriminate based on conscientious or religious objections. [1, 2, 3, 4]
- **Preventing sectarian division:** If the government embraces religious preferences, politics inevitably becomes a battle over which faith gets to rule, leading to increased polarization, discrimination, and sectarian friction. [1, 2]

4. Constitutional Integrity and Public Education

- **Protecting public schools:** Separating church and state ensures that public education remains focused on academic excellence rather than the theological indoctrination of specific sects. [1, 2]
- **Historical precedent:** The concept of the "wall of separation" is deeply rooted in the U.S. Constitution's **Establishment Clause**, which was specifically designed to prevent the federal government from establishing an official state religion. [1, 2]

Sincerely,

David B. Dunkin

David S. Goswick

From: Rhonda Bandy <[REDACTED] PII>

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Rhonda Bandy

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:49:04 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for receiving comments from the public on the draft report. I write to ask the Commission to uphold the separation of church and state — the arrangement that has kept faith in America both free and strong. Freedom of conscience was given to man by God in the Garden of Eden. It was so important that God let us choose, even though He knew we would choose incorrectly. We must never take this right away from each other. My reasons are these:

The two religion clauses are one shield. As Jones warned the Senate in 1888, “It is impossible to frame a law on the subject” ❖

From: W C <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] religious liberty commission report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:49:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

Hello Religious Liberty Commission Panel,

I thank you for the opportunity to comment on the recent report issued on the subject of religious liberty issued by this panel. As a devout Christian, I am often disturbed by the signs of moral decay commonly observed in our current society.

However, I must give voice to my deep concerns regarding the content and apparent intent of the document under discussion.

Much is made in the report of Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptist Church, but a clear understanding of the importance of the first amendment of the U. S. Constitution is not possible if we disregard the historical record.

Jefferson's letter does no more than concisely state the example of Roger Williams' and John Clarke's successful experiment of liberty of conscience in the formation of Providence, Rhode Island, which is memorialized in the granite edifice of the Rhode Island statehouse by these words; "TO HOLD FORTH A LIVELY EXPERIMENT, THAT A MOST FLOURISHING CIVIL STATE MAY STAND, AND BEST BE MAINTAINED, AND THAT AMONG OUR ENGLISH SUBJECTS, WITH A FULL LIBERTY IN RELIGIOUS CONCERNMENTS".

James Madison also expressed the necessity of separation of church and state in his 'Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments' in 1785, in which he clearly expresses the absolute need for the individual freedom to obey the dictates of one's own conscience without any hindrance or help from government.

Isaac Backus, Baptist minister and delegate to the Massachusetts Constitutional ratification convention in 1787, stated that the Bible and reason showed that religion was always a matter between God and the individual, and attempt to add the force of law to religious matters would invade "the essential prerogative of our Lord Jesus Christ".

The history of this world provides no example of true freedom resulting in any combination of governmental and ecclesiastical power, only the inevitable result of persecution of minorities by the

majority, (who are usually influenced by a vocal elite group or individual). If the first amendment is weakened or ignored in any way, this will again be the result.

The chief reason the United States is the country most blessed by the God of Heaven is precisely because our founders separated the church and the state so each could perform their tasks successfully and allow each individual the privilege of having a personal saving relationship with Jesus Christ; indeed, no other saving relationship with Christ is possible than a personal one.

I am compelled to point out this fact from the Holy Scriptures, as related in the Gospel of John chapter 6: *John 6:15 When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone. KJV.*

I firmly believe that any attempt to “politicize” the Gospel of Jesus is the same situation as related in that passage. Jesus also said; *John 18:36 Jesus answered, 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: but now is my kingdom not from hence. KJV.*

The wisdom of the separation of church and state was pleasing to Almighty God as it allowed each individual to come to Him of their own personal conviction. Let us not damage the establishment Christ endorsed for any political or commercial interests. Let our government serve us by allowing God’s people to serve Him in freedom, truth and love.

Respectfully,

William E. Cain Jr.

From: Achitaz Zenith <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment- separation of church and state-Erin Banks

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:49:24 -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 endorse using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

Churches need to remain independent of the government and not take a stake in partisan/bipartisan politics, nor should they receive money that would entice them to do so. 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. Churches and it's constituents help to maintain the morality of society.

Separation was introduced to us by our forefathers in the constitution to protect our freedom of speech and to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here in this great country. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free and from following the trends of one another. This is a check and balance between the two, as intended.

Thank you for your consideration,

Erin Banks

Loma Linda, California

From: Gregory White <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Cc: Gregory White <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:49:31 -0400

Importance: Normal

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 Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a Christian who takes the Bible seriously, from cover to cover (yes the earth was created in six days – recently, and marriage is between one man and one women...), it is with interest that I learned of the Commission's draft report. I would that every person in the United States were a Christian. And I, too, am very concerned that the religion of secularism is trying to silence Christians.

The beloved apostle John says: "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." I John 2:6 KJV. Paul speaks similarly: Be ye followers of me, even as I also *am* of Christ." I Corinthians 11:1 KJV.

As I study Jesus' life and ministry in the gospels, I can find not instances were He either tried to coerce people to follow Him, nor where He tried to use the government to aid in His ministry. It seems to me that if the United States were to try the "Christianize" America via the government, it would be doing just the opposite of what Jesus did. And the Christians thus made, would be nothing but hypocrites.

I think the secularization of American has come about, not because of failures on the part of the government to promote Christianity, but because myself, and people like me, who call ourselves Christians have failed to truly live as Christians, and failed to seek to bring others to Christ through the persuasion of love – and love cannot be commanded..

Thus, I cannot, as a Christian, support bringing church and government together.

As for the Johnson amendment, I can not discern any manner in which said amendment prevents me from free religious speech. What it does, is prevent me from asking someone who disagrees with my religious views from being required to support my views. Thus, the Johnson amendment actually protects religious freedom.

Sincerely,

Gregory A. White

From: Zion Hickman <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Zion Hickman

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:50:08 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a concerned young person to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would bridge the gap between church and state — especially with using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment. This country is not your ordinary country, it was founded by principle and not by the ambition to control people's mindsets and religion! This was the true dream for America that our founding fathers had in mind! Religious liberty is what makes this country great!

“Among all the religious persecutions with which almost every page of modern history is stained, no victim ever suffered but for the violation of what government denominated the law of God.

To prevent a similar train of evils in this country, the Constitution has wisely withheld from our government the power of defining the divine law. It is a right reserved to each citizen.”

1829 U.S. Senate Committee Report

We must uphold the principles of freedom. Of true freedom. Religious freedom.

“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.”

Please allow us to keep these rights. To remain free. As a young person the only way the future will be bright is to have religious liberty for all.

Thank you for reading and hearing our concerns.

Sincerely,

Zion Hickman
Athol, Idaho

From: Rita Kirimaua-Su'a <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:50:19 -0400

Importance: Normal

Aloha Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

As a football mom, a public school teacher here in Hawaii, and a proud member of our community, I am writing to urgently ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state. Specifically, I am deeply concerned about the proposals to use government funds for religious activities and to repeal the Johnson Amendment.

Every single day in my classroom, I work to create a safe, inclusive environment for children from all walks of life, faiths, and backgrounds. Our public schools and our communities thrive because we respect those differences. Introducing taxpayer funding into religious activities threatens that balance.

When houses of worship begin relying on government money or engaging in partisan politics, the divisive nature of politics inevitably follows. Instead of focusing on faith and community, churches risk competing for funding and answering to politicians.

The separation of church and state isn't a secular attack on religion; historically, it was championed by people of faith to *protect* religious freedom from government interference. It is precisely what has allowed diverse faith traditions to stay vibrant and strong in our country and across our islands.

For the sake of our keiki, our schools, and our communities, please keep church and state separate. That is the only way we can ensure both remain truly free.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,

L. Rita Kirimaua-Su'a

Mountain View, HI

From: Bree Langieo [REDACTED] PII

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Brigitte Lambros

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:50:42 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was troubled to learn that the Commission is considering replacing the "wall of separation" between church and state with a "bridge." With respect, I believe this approach is fundamentally misguided—and, as a person of faith, deeply concerning.

The wall was not constructed by secularists to diminish religion; it was established by believers to protect it. Its purpose is to preserve the independence and integrity of religious institutions. A bridge, by contrast, risks inviting government influence into the life of the church—through funding, political pressures, and competing interests—until religious communities find themselves accountable not only to their convictions, but to shifting political priorities.

History offers many examples of the consequences when church and state become too closely aligned, and those outcomes have rarely served either well.

I respectfully urge you not to dismantle this safeguard. The wall of separation protects religious freedom far more than it restricts it.

Sincerely,

Brigitte Lambros
Fairbury, Illinois

From: Gary Benton <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Gary Benton

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:50:54 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the religious Liberty commission, I would like to ask that you maintain separation between church and state. History shows us that when the state controls the church or the church controls the state, very bad things happen.

Thank you

Gary Benton

From: Nikolas Nartowicz <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – DRAFT REPORT COMMENTS – AMERICANS UNITED FOR SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:52:27 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: 2026-07-13_AU_Comments_for_Religious_Liberty_Commission_Draft_Report.pdf

Good afternoon,

Please find attached a PDF of written public comments submitted on behalf of Americans United for Separation of Church and State regarding the draft report of the Religious Liberty Commission.

Thank you,

Nik Nartowicz

Nik Nartowicz

he/him

Lead Policy Counsel

Americans United for Separation of Church & State | [au.org](https://www.au.org)

[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]

PII

July 13, 2026

Via Electronic Mail to **PII**

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

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

On behalf of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, we write to provide comments on the draft Religious Liberty Commission report.

Founded in 1947, Americans United is a nonpartisan educational and advocacy organization dedicated to preserving the constitutional principle of church-state separation, which is the foundation of true religious freedom for all Americans. We fight to protect the right of individuals and religious communities to practice religion—or not—as they see fit without government interference, compulsion, support, or disparagement. We represent people of all faiths and none and have a network of more than 380,000 members and supporters across the country.

Americans United is the only organization in the country dedicated solely to defending and promoting the separation of church and state. Our 79-year legacy of protecting religious freedom and expertise as an organization staffed with constitutional lawyers means that we have been uniquely positioned to respond to this Commission's efforts from its inception. Because of this expertise, we submitted extensive comments ahead of each of the Commission's meetings.

The Commission's Recommendations Were a Foregone Conclusion

Since its inception, the Commission and its objectives have been biased. This is clear from the very makeup of the Commission itself, which has no ideological diversity, consists almost exclusively of Christian members (and one Orthodox Jewish rabbi), and has no representatives of other minority religions, the nonreligious, or interfaith communities.¹ As a result of this bias, the tone, tenor, and recommendations of the report could have been guessed at the outset of the Commission's work. Indeed, after its first hearing, the Commission released a set of recommendations, several of which were about issues discussed at later meetings.²

¹ Americans United and Democracy Forward have filed a lawsuit challenging the Commission on behalf of a multifaith coalition. One count alleges that the makeup of the Commission violates the Federal Advisory Committee Act, which requires the membership of advisory committees to be fairly balanced in terms of viewpoints represented. Compl., *Interfaith Alliance v. Trump*, No. 1:26-cv-01075 (S.D.N.Y. Feb. 19, 2026).

² Religious Liberty Commission, [Summary of Recommendations from the First Hearing](#) (Jun. 16, 2025).

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The work of the Commission is a master class in confirmation bias. The Commission did not hear testimony from anyone that could have had an opposing viewpoint because it did not want its predetermined positions challenged. Instead, it sought out witnesses that would confirm its preexisting narrative about religious liberty. The draft report notes that the Commission received input from more than 100 witnesses, but it does not disclose that the majority were Christian and nearly all were ideologically aligned.

The Commissioners left many necessary voices out of the conversation. They avoided or did not seek out stories from students who were forced to pray by their teachers or coaches or from families whose public schools lost funding to private school voucher programs. They did not invite members of the military who were rejected by a chaplain after asking for counseling that was not faith-based or private sector employees who faced discrimination by their for-profit employer because of the employer's religious beliefs. The Commission failed to hear from government employees who were pressured to participate in religious activities to keep their job. And no testimony was heard from people who were denied access to healthcare because of someone else's religion or families wanting to foster a child that were turned away because of the taxpayer-funded provider's religious beliefs.

The report makes passing reference to, but does not meaningfully engage with, the thousands of pages of comments received from the public. This includes comments from Americans United addressing all seven Commission hearings, as well as from other organizations that work on religious liberty issues, such as the Sikh Coalition, Interfaith Alliance, the American Humanist Association, and the Secular Coalition.

Furthermore, the Commission released the draft report—a 224-page, single-spaced document with 575 footnotes—with a comment deadline just fifteen days later, despite the intervening special July 4th holiday celebrating the 250th anniversary of the United States. Even without the holiday, 15 days is not nearly enough time to address the errors and deficiencies in such a large report.³ Setting such an expedited timeline supports our conclusion that the Commission is not interested in meaningful comments or critiques on its work.

The Commission's threadbare work extends beyond ignoring public input. The overwhelming majority of the report simply restates testimony given by witnesses, regurgitating what was said as fact without assessment or analysis. It uses unexamined anecdotes to develop sweeping recommendations for all Americans. The report makes broad and conclusory statements about history, legal principles, and even what Americans believe. It certainly does not compare and contrast differing viewpoints and perspectives, consider diverse theories about the law, or wrestle with legal scholarship on religious freedom. Moreover, given the fact that the draft report misinterprets—either negligently or willfully—Americans United's comments from December 1, 2025, to support conclusions that are inapposite to anything we said, it would be easy to conclude there are other similar errors throughout the report.⁴

The report amounts to no more than a wish list for those who would seek to destroy the separation of church and state and thereby undermine religious freedom for all. It's supported

³ For example, in order to give the public a meaningful opportunity to comment on proposed regulations, comment periods for regulations governed by the Administrative Procedures Act "should generally be at least 60 days." Exec. Order 13563 § 2(b) (Jan. 18, 2011); Exec. Order 12866 (Sept. 30, 1993) (The comment period "in most cases should include a comment period of not less than 60 days.").

⁴ We request the Commission to remove the three misleading citations to our December 1, 2025, comments from its final report.

by cherry-picked witnesses whose stories were repeated as gospel. What's left is a blueprint detailing how to abuse the power of government to privilege and promote one narrow version of Christianity.

The U.S. Constitution Guarantees the Separation of Church and State, Which Is a Fundamental Right and Vital to Democracy

The Principle of Church-State Separation Is Enshrined in the U.S. Constitution

During the event at which the Commission released the draft report, Chair Patrick claimed that the term “separation of church and state” has no constitutional basis.⁵ Similarly false claims have been made by other members of the Commission who oppose the principles of church-state separation and religious freedom for all.

If the Commission read Americans United's previous comments,⁶ it would be well aware that the principle of the separation of church and state appears in American history, traditions, and Supreme Court precedent, even if the exact phrase does not appear in the Constitution. To couch church-state separation as an idea that only “took off in the mid-twentieth century” in order to disenfranchise people of faith in America is demonstrably ludicrous. Thomas Jefferson, who authored the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom that served as the model for the First Amendment, first used the metaphor in an 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptists, and it has since become synonymous with the First Amendment.⁷

Moreover, the concept of church-state separation has long been recognized by American jurisprudence—even if the Commission seems to cherry-pick its Supreme Court precedent like it did its witnesses, lionizing some while calling for the administration to support litigation to overrule precedent it finds inconvenient. The Supreme Court first adopted the metaphor of “the wall of separation of church and state” in *Reynolds v. United States*, the very first case where it interpreted the religion clauses of the First Amendment.⁸ After that, the Court used the metaphor “in 1947, 1948, 1961 (three times), 1962, 1963, 1968, 1973, 1977, 1982, and again and again in countless concurrences, dissents, and lower court opinions.”⁹ These repeated references that span decades reflect that the wall of separation has long been an important touchstone in understanding the relationship between religion and government under the First Amendment.

And if lacking explicit reference in the Constitution is the Commission's test, then we wonder what their position is on the fact that “God” is also never referenced. The Constitution is a wholly secular document, containing no mention of Christianity or any deity or specific religion. It refers to religion only twice: to prohibit religious tests for office in Article VI and to protect religious freedom in the First Amendment.

⁵ Haajrah Gilani, [Dan Patrick challenges separation of church and state through federal policy proposals](#), Houston Chronicle (Jun. 26, 2026).

⁶ See Americans United's June 14, 2025 [Comments on the Religious Liberty Commission's first meeting](#) for further details on the history and meaning of religious liberty and church-state separation.

⁷ Letter from Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States, to the Danbury Baptist Association, Connecticut. (Jan. 1, 1802) (on file with the Library of Congress, June 1998 - Vol 57, No. 6).

⁸ 98 U.S. 145, 164 (1878).

⁹ Andrew L. Seidel, Bad History, Bad Opinions: How “law office history” is leading the courts astray on school board prayer and the First Amendment, 12 N.E. U. L.R. 248 (2020).

Church-State Separation Is Vital to Protecting Our Freedoms and Democracy

Church-state separation, as grounded in the text of the First Amendment, is the principle that guarantees true religious freedom and protections for all Americans, religious and non-religious alike. Religious liberty protects all of us by ensuring the government cannot tell us whether, when, where, or how to worship. Given this country's robust, foundational commitment to the separation of church and state, it makes perfect sense that the United States is among the most religious and religiously diverse nations in the world.

Properly construed, the separation of church and state means that no one should ever have to live under the laws of someone else's religion. It is a promise that our laws should always have a secular rationale in order to avoid imposing the religious beliefs of one group of people onto another. Equally, it promises that no one should have to pay for another person's religion or religious education. The separation of church and state ensures that we enjoy true religious freedom in this country and promises us certain rights. We have the right to a government that does not fund, promote, or disparage religion generally, nor any faith in particular. We have the absolute right to believe what we want about God, faith, and religion. We have the right to act on our religious beliefs, so long as those actions do not harm others. We have the right to have no belief and not be forced to believe or engage in religious activity.

Some people criticize church-state separation by claiming that it curtails religious freedom when, in fact, the opposite is true. Church-state separation is good for religion, houses of worship, and people of faith, as well as the nonreligious. It protects religious communities from government intrusion and protects the right of individuals to believe or not, without interference from the government, as long as their actions don't harm others. Many religious denominations, organizations, and clergy members cherish this founding principle. Notably, the Commission failed to invite anyone from those communities to testify at its hearings.

Church-state separation is a core tenet of our democracy that protects people's equal rights. It makes sure everyone can get the same access to public schools, hospitals, and government services, no matter what their faith or beliefs are. No one gets special treatment, and no one is left out. The First Amendment relies on the Establishment Clause and Free Exercise Clause working together to protect our rights; disrupting that communion endangers the separation of church and state and threatens the very foundation of equal protection and religious freedom for all. Ultimately, the Commission's report suggests that their core tenet is that religious freedom for some is more important than religious freedom for all.

Conclusion

America is a greater nation when we protect religious freedom for all, not just for some. America is a stronger nation when we are all free to believe or not, as we see fit, and to practice our faith — without hurting others. America is a more just nation when the government does not elevate the religious beliefs of some over the rights of others. Americans United remains steadfast in our work, as we have for nearly eighty years, to fight back against threats to true religious freedom.

We urge the Commission to withdraw its report and instead undertake a more balanced and rigorous analysis of the challenges facing religious freedom today. Such an effort should include appointing properly qualified representatives from various faiths and people of no faith and testimony from a broad and diverse range of scholars, faith leaders, advocates, and members of

minority faiths and nonreligious communities. The Commission should also focus on strategies to combat religious extremism, government promotion of and favoritism towards particular faiths, and efforts by political leaders to weaponize religion to undermine the freedoms and rights of others. We are confident that such an undertaking would lead to solutions that address the real threats to religious freedom today: religious extremists and leaders who weaponize religion to harm others.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alessandro Terenzoni', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Alessandro Terenzoni, Esq.
Vice President of Public Policy

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nik Nartowicz', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Nik Nartowicz
Lead Policy Counsel

From: Ronald Reginaldi <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:52:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Ronald F Reginaldi

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As we witness the rapid decline in our society, the call by many to “get back to God” is valid. To suggest that the way to do so is to abolish the separation of church and state is not, I believe, the will of God. This country was a refuge for those fleeing religious persecution in cooperation with the “state: so many years ago. They were seeking a country without a king and a church without a pope. When the government and the church unite to have sway over the consciences of the populace, we will once again see the horrors of the Dark Ages when millions were persecuted and killed for refusing to abide by the dictates of the church. Worship and service to our God cannot be forced as He seeks the hearts of those who love Him willingly. If not willingly, then it truly is not love. For those who believe in a God of mercy, justice, and love, our part is to be witness on behalf of such a One. God’s government seeks to win souls through the power of His love. He makes clear the consequences of violating His law but has always given us the freedom to make that choice whether or not to do so.

From: Tim Swift <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Submittal of Comment on President's Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report July 13, 2026

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:53:07 -0400

Importance: Normal

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE Via EMAIL: [REDACTED] PII

RE: July 13, 2026 RECOMMENDATIONS OF 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. 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.

Respectfully Submitted

From: Moy Joseph <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Protect Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:53:42 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to share my support for keeping church and state separate as the Forefathers of this country wanted it.

I believe the separation of church and state is one of the most important principles in the U.S. Constitution because it protects everyone's religious freedom. The First Amendment says the government cannot establish a religion or stop people from practicing their faith. This means every person has the freedom to believe what they choose without the government favoring one religion over another. It also protects people who do not follow any religion, making sure everyone is treated equally under the law.

As someone who was born in Haiti and has lived in the United States for the past 12 years, I have seen how people from many different backgrounds and religions can live together in the same communities. That diversity is one of America's strengths. Keeping the government separate from religion helps make sure no one is treated differently because of their beliefs. At the same time, churches and other religious organizations are free to worship and serve their communities without government control. I believe that protects both religion and democracy.

For these reasons, I hope RLC will continue defending religious liberty by supporting the constitutional principles that protect freedom of conscience, equal treatment under the law, and the separation of church and state. These principles have helped make the United States a place where people of different faiths and beliefs can live together with respect and equal rights, and I believe they should continue to be protected for future generations.

Moy Joseph

From: Family Health Missions <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:54:34 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear
religious Liberty Commission,

I strongly object to any law or commission of any suggestions to a law that would hinder in any way the separation of church and state.

The Bible teaches a separation of church and state (Matthew 22:17-22), and the Constitution supports the separation of church and state therefore religious liberty for all. Earthly governments may not force the conscience or usurp the place reserved to God alone.

With that being said I completely object to any law or amendment that would usurp from God's people or any people the freedom of conscience.

Sincerely
Mark Moore

From: Margin Flores <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Margin Carcache

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:55:15 -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,
Margin Carcache
Vernon, CT

From: Charlene Bridgeman <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Charlene Castillo

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:55:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen of Deridder, Louisiana, with a simple conviction I learned in my own faith walk: church and state need to be kept separate, because persecution usually follows when they are not. God gave each of us a free will, and no law can force a person to worship Jesus, or anyone else, against that will. That conviction shapes everything I say below.

Consider what any law favoring religion actually does. It does not simply help religion in general; it must define which religion, and every definition includes some believers while excluding others. Even the favored believers are no longer free — they practice their faith by permission of the state, on terms a future legislature can rewrite. As one writer of the period 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. I would ask any commissioner who welcomes state sponsorship of their own creed to consider that they are also handing that same power to whoever holds office next, including those who may not share their beliefs at all. A law is not a wall; it is a lever, and levers get picked up by other hands.

Some argue that strict separation is a modern invention, foreign to the founders' intent. The record says otherwise. It was the churches themselves — the Baptists, the Presbyterians, the Quakers — who pushed hardest for separation, because they had felt establishment pressing down on them from underneath. Madison, who drafted the First Amendment, told the Virginia ratifying convention plainly that there is not a shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion, and that its least interference with it would be a most flagrant usurpation. That is not silence by accident; it was separation by design, out of respect for religion, not hostility toward it. A commission that wants to claim the founders for state-sponsored religion carries the burden of explaining away Madison's own words.

Finally, I believe coercion cannot produce genuine faith. Forcing a person to sit in a pew does not put worship in his heart; it only teaches him to perform. Madison himself examined nearly fifteen centuries of state-established Christianity and found the fruits to be pride and indolence among clergy, ignorance and servility among the laity, and everywhere superstition, bigotry, and persecution. Even General and President Grant counseled that religion belongs to the family altar, the church, and private conscience — supported by private contribution, not government power. A faith that needs the police to fill its pews is confessing something troubling about itself, and the churches most eager for state help today are often the ones with the most to lose when that help is withdrawn, or turned against them.

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

Respectfully,
Charlene Castillo
Deridder, Louisiana

Sent from my iPhone

From: Brian Christensen <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Brian Christensen

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:55:34 -0400

Importance: Normal

Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing to comment on the Commission's draft report, and I want to say plainly: I'm asking you to defend both religion clauses of the First Amendment — no establishment, and free exercise — with equal vigor. Neither one gets to win at the other's expense.

It bothered me to read that the Commission wants to "bridge" the wall of separation between church and state. I've turned that word over more than once, and I keep landing in the same place: that's backwards from what the founders intended, and backwards from what many of us who hold faith seriously actually believe. I say this as a person of faith myself, and I disagree with the idea wholeheartedly. That wall was never built to keep religion down. Believers built it so the church could be free. Weakening it doesn't strengthen the church — it opens the door to control by government and by religious leaders alike, until churches are competing for grants, answering to the state, and members are voting in ways shaped more by political pressure than by conscience.

Here's why this matters to me:

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." A highway bill can rest on popular support. A religious one cannot — because religion was never something we put up for a vote in the first place.

There is no generic religion for the state to adopt. Even the Ten Commandments are contested ground. As Jones put it, "the difference between Protestants and Catholics with respect to the decalogue is irreconcilable." Any mandated display has to pick a version — which means the government ends up refereeing between faiths. That's exactly what the Establishment Clause exists to prevent.

Separation was the founders' deliberate design — and the churches themselves asked for it. 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'd ask the Commission to honor that design rather than explain it away.

Force can make hypocrites. It has never once made a Christian. And state sponsorship corrupts the very faith it claims to favor.

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."

Protect free exercise for everyone, and keep the state out of the business of religion. Those two commitments aren't in tension. They stand or fall together, always have.

Respectfully,
Brian Christensen
Davenport, IA

From: Scott Mallory <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:56:06 -0400

Importance: Normal

I oppose the union of church and state as this country was founded for freedom of religion. The government should not be telling me who I can worship and how I can worship. Please consider our founding fathers. And the started this country and why they left europe for the very things that you're trying to impose, thank you
Scott A Mallory

From: makena Kinyua 254 <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Objection

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:56:17 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

History shows us what happened in Europe and in most countries around the world when religion and government became intertwined. It led to persecution, which is why Christians fled to the United States — to have the freedom to worship.

Knowing the history of the past, the Founders of this country established the Constitution to separate church and state, and that principle has been the bedrock of this nation. Separation of church and state protects freedom.

Please keep church and state completely separate. As the Bible says, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17). The Bible teaches the separation of church and state.

From: AA <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] President Commission on Religious Liberty draft report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:56:25 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and all the commission members

We are opposed to the recent RLC report that threatens our religious liberty. With history regarding this very issue, we know all too well what happens when you move to remove religious liberty to worship who how and when we want. It breaches thought and conscience freedoms.

Thank you for reconsidering

From: Stanley/Crystal Tschritter <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Crystal Tschritter

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:56:59 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

This letter is an urgent appeal to each of you to please uphold the separation of church and state that I have appreciated as a citizen of the United States of America for 70+ years. I pray that my children and grandchildren will be free to worship according to their conscience and the Holy Bible.

History has repeatedly shown that without a wall of separation between church and state, freedom of worship is taken away and persecution follows.

Thank you for your consideration of my request, as well as others that understand the importance of separation of church and state.

Sincerely,
Crystal Tschritter
Tucson, AZ

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

From: Jessica Rouse <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment-Separation of church and state-Jessica Rouse

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:57:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

The United States has historically supported separation between church and state to protect both religious freedom and government neutrality. This principle is rooted in the First Amendment, which prohibits government establishment of religion while protecting free exercise. Influenced by experiences with state-controlled churches in Europe, founders like James Madison and Thomas Jefferson believed religion and government should not control one another. The phrase “wall of separation” describes this concept, though Americans continue to debate its exact boundaries.

Please continue to recognize and honor the historical importance of separation of church and state in the USA. Thank you.

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

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - [David Qualls]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:57:08 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing as an American citizen and a person of Christian faith to express my deep concern regarding proposals that would weaken the historic separation of church and state by replacing what has long been described as a "wall of separation" with a "bridge."

The principle of separation was not established to diminish religion or to exclude faith from public life. Rather, it was championed by many believers who understood that the church is strongest when it remains free from government control and political entanglement. This separation has protected both religious liberty and civil liberty throughout our nation's history.

When government funds religious activity or churches become closely aligned with partisan politics, both institutions are placed at risk. Churches may find themselves dependent upon government resources, subject to political pressures, or divided by partisan loyalties. Likewise, government risks favoring some religious groups over others, undermining the religious freedom of all.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to reconsider recommendations that would erode this important safeguard, including proposals to expand government funding of religious activities and to repeal the Johnson Amendment. While well-intentioned, such measures would invite an unhealthy blending of church and state that history has repeatedly shown to be harmful to both.

One of America's greatest blessings has been its commitment to protecting the free exercise of religion without allowing government to direct, finance, or favor religion. This principle has enabled faith communities of every kind to flourish according to conscience rather than political influence.

Please preserve the separation of church and state. It is one of the surest ways to protect both religious freedom and the integrity of our faith.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these concerns.

Respectfully,
David Qualls

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

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment--Draft Commission Report--Ken Sampson

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:57:11 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Letter--Religious_Liberty_Commission_13_July_2026.docx

Inline-Images: image001.jpg

13 July 2026

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide insight to your recent "Draft Report." Your invitation promotes dialogue, deliberation and analysis that are in keeping with the best of our Nation's traditions. Thank you.

The eloquence and phrasing of the report; argument, readability and "action plan" concreteness; and overall beautiful packaging of the 224-page document gives credible voice to some too often marginalized. To me however, the findings seem limited in scope, confined in appeal, and corrosive to National unity.

The Committee's definition of religious liberty appears to focus on the religious rights of certain, favored religious groups, rather than the expansive freedom within--and from--religion that we enjoy as citizens and friends of these United States of America. The makeup of the Commission consists of too many of the same predictable, partisan personalities that appeal to the religious base of our current administration.

To read selected accounts of the nearly 100 oral testimonies brought before the Commission was to hear of disheartening religious concerns. Yet, the overall testimony seems to amplify testimony of a select few **out of proportion** to more threatening, at risk, religious freedom restricted populations of our Nation.

I recommend the following:

Redefine Commission Scope. Rename your delegation the "Religious Freedom Commission." Or, redefine "liberty" in its most widely used sense--"freedom or release from arbitrary control" rather than focusing on the "sum of rights and exemptions possessed...by individuals." This redefinition may broaden your audience, and project a gracious, open-hearted appeal, beneficial to the well-being of all our citizens.

Expand Commission Composition. The "Religious Benefits to Society" ("conscience of the state, source of civic virtue, strong families, community bonds," page 30 and following) come not only from a limited, partisan religious base. Rather, our collective strengths as a Nation, from our very beginnings, have drawn heavily from the wide-ranging variety

found within our shared religious heritage. Acknowledge this inclusive reality. Invite main-line Protestants, and progressive Catholic, Jewish and Muslim leaders, and other retired Armed Forces Chiefs of Chaplains, to serve on or testify before the Commission. Many of these leaders have actively championed, and continue to advocate for, the religious liberty concerns of the marginalized, threatened, and excluded.

Intentionally Broaden Oral Testimony Participation. My special concern is for the vulnerable with in our land: Muslim and GLBTQ/Trans citizens, and detainees within Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities. This is especially critical, in that the President of the United States habitually speaks in disparaging and dehumanizing terms concerning our Muslim neighbors. Religious identity is foundational to some, if not many, of our GLBTQ and Trans friends, yet too often they experience harsh exclusion by certain religious persuasions. Limiting religious exercise rights for detainees within ICE facilities communicates a callous disregard for this foundational freedom fostered within our country.

Thank you again for this invitation to contribute comment to your report. Though retired from active-duty Chaplaincy within the U.S. Army, I write in my advisory capacity as a "Chaplain for Life," as a "Chaplain for the common good" (I Corinthians 12:7), and as a citizen of this great land.

Kenneth L. Sampson

Kenneth L. Sampson
Chaplain (Colonel) US Army (RET.)



Kenneth L. Sampson
Chaplain (Colonel) US Army (RET.)



Home: PII
Cell: PII

"Unity Over Self"

13 July 2026

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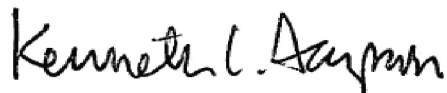
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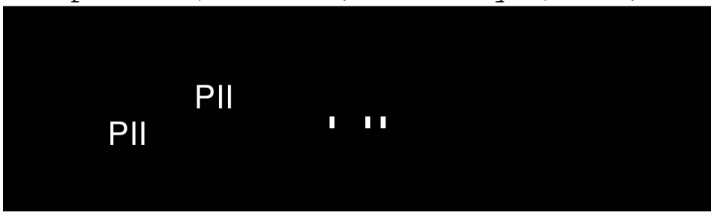
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Kenneth L. Sampson
Chaplain (Colonel) US Army (RET.)



PII PII ' "

From: Scott Ingersoll <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church & State –Scott Ingersoll

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:57:31 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a Christian, and having grown up and lived in many other parts of the world, the one thing I value after my Christian heritage is the privilege of being a citizen of the U.S.A. and the freedoms it has given me like no other country in the world! I fully understand why many people risk their lives to try to come to this wonderful country, and one of the blessings of our constitution has been our freedom to worship as we choose without Government involvement because of the separation of Church & State.

As a 16 year old, returning to the States in 1971 after growing up on a mission station, way out in the bush of Africa, my family and I spent two and a half months traveling around Europe, with much of the time spent traveling behind the “Iron Curtain” through many of the “East Block” countries under Soviet control back in those days. Dad had read several books about religious persecution taking place in Socialist countries, with pastors being thrown in prison for preaching what the Bible taught, and he wanted to see it that was really true. It was in Romania that he found his answer confirming what he had read, but that experience has left a indelible impression on me through the years, and since then I have visited Russia, taught English in China, and this year spent most of the month of February in Cuba, and let me tell you, those experiences have only compounded my love for America, what it has stood for, and the freedoms we are blessed to have all these years! But recently I am hearing that there is an aggressive movement to change what has stood firm as a rock for 250 years!

I see it as an attack that would weaken that wall of separation between 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, but you already know all of that. You know the churches would 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 so that the government is not telling us what we should or should not believe, or what day we should or should not worship, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong in this country, though not as strong as I would like, but that is up to me to do something about, not the government.

As I have already stated, I deeply appreciate the wonderful freedoms I have been granted as a citizen of this blessed country, so please keep church and state separate! That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,

Scott Ingersoll

Whitwell, Tennessee

From: Karen Lamberton <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Karen Lamberton

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:57:37 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a Bible-believing Christian from Pasco, Washington, who treasures the freedom of conscience God has given me and this country has protected. I have dear friends who fled the former Soviet bloc so they could worship without government looking over their shoulder. That history makes me watch carefully whenever government proposes to get closer to religion, even in the name of helping it.

I ask the Commission to consider that any law touching religion, even one meant to favor it, ends up limiting free exercise. Such a law must define which religion or practice qualifies, and that definition necessarily excludes some believers while placing the included ones under permission rather than freedom. A well-known witness once told a Senate committee that it is impossible to frame a law on the subject of religion that will not prohibit the free exercise of religion. I would add that no one should want to write today's convictions into law, since doing so forecloses tomorrow's freedom to be persuaded otherwise by Scripture or conscience. Whatever faith the Commission might favor now, the same machinery could someday be turned against it.

I also ask the Commission to remember that our separation of church and state was not an accident or a later invention hostile to religion, but a deliberate choice made out of respect for it. The Baptists, Presbyterians, and Quakers who had suffered under establishment were among the strongest advocates for keeping government out of religious matters. James Madison, who drafted the First Amendment, 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 with it would be a most flagrant usurpation. He and his contemporaries did not wait for a full establishment to object; they resisted the principle at its very first appearance. A commission claiming the founders intended otherwise bears the burden of explaining away Madison's own words.

History also shows why the first step matters so much. When the Roman state first legislated a religious observance, it set in motion a process that ended in persecution and the Inquisition, not because anyone planned that outcome, but because the principle once granted contains its own conclusions. As one historian put it, if the first step be taken, the last step is then as certainly taken, for the last step is in the first. No one today proposes anything like the Inquisition, but the danger lies in conceding that government may define and promote religious duty at all.

Finally, I ask the Commission to remember that rights come from the Creator, not from majority vote. If a majority can grant religious liberty, a majority can also take it away, which means it was never truly a right. Popular government exists to protect the minority, the individual conscience, precisely because majorities need no protection at the ballot box. As one Senate witness argued, the people, however many there are, have no right to invade another's relationship with God. Popular support may justify many laws, but never a religious one, because religion was never meant to be subject to the 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 Lamberton
Pasco, Washington

Sent from my iPhone

From: Carl Arosarena <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:57:51 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Sirs and Madams,

I am respectfully opposing the Draft Report of the Religious Liberty Commission and its recommendations.

Religious Liberty, protecting individuals' right of conscience and guaranteeing free expression of one's faith (or lack thereof), is a fundamental right bestowed by God. The founders of this nation understood this vital truth and enshrined it in the U.S. Constitution when stating "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Though the very name of this Commission speaks of seeking to ensure such liberties, I feel the very opposite is at play.

Religious Liberty as defined and practiced in this nation historically has been to ensure all have free rights, access, benefits, and privileges for worship without impinging or depriving others of the same rights. The position of this Committee appears heavily biased towards a certain "brand" of Christianity at the exclusion of other Christian denominations or non-Christian faiths and sects. This is not in harmony nor in the "spirit" of true Christianity taught, spoken, and lived by Jesus Christ Himself, Who openly welcomed, and accepted all men, being the Saviour of the world (**John 4:42**); or of that which is written in the Scriptures which makes plain the separation between church and state:

"My kingdom is not of this world [Jesus]:..." **John 18:36**

"...Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."
Matthew 22:31

"Which now of these three [a Levite, a priest, a despised Samaritan], thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?"

And he said, He that showed mercy on him [the Samaritan]. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise." **Luke 10:36, 37**

The Johnson Amendment, which ensures that no political preferences or endorsements are to be made from the clergy's pulpit is under discussion for repeal by this Committee. I believe this is wrong! The Amendment bore merit when first passed, and in no way impinged upon one's free exercise of faith. The same holds true today!

Any attempt to direct public funds through taxation to private institutions such as parochial schools which do not benefit the public at large, and further have no obligations for supporting special needs or disabled students, a just and honorable duty taken up solely by public institutions, is fundamentally wrong! Public funds should go to public schools.

Please consider my strong objections to your report!

Sincerely,
Carl Arosarena

From: Linda Prins <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church & State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:57:53 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern -

Our country was founded on basic principles: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. In the First Amendment, it states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". America was never meant to be a theocracy - nor do we need or want to be told whom, where, or when to worship.

It is very concerning that the US is even considering uniting church and state. The separation enables all Americans to practice their beliefs in private and in public. All through history, the joining of church and state has done nothing but cause strife.

I will end with a quote from a modern prophet: "Men must not arrogate to themselves authority over the human conscience that God has not entrusted to them." Prayerfully consider your vote; you will ultimately answer to God for your decision.

Respectfully,

Linda Prins

From: judy <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] The Commission on Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:58:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Commission on Religious Liberty, Thank you for this opportunity to comment regarding this topic.

Foremost, I praise God for Great America, and as we uplift His holy 10 Commandments as James 1:25 teaches, Jesus said "But whoso looketh into the "perfect Law of Liberty", and continueth *there in*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

Commissioners, I pray the beautiful (cymbolic) Bells of Religious Liberty will continue to chime our biblically modeled religious freedom as we move forward into our great future in Jesus!

Thank you kindly and,

God Bless America!

Ms. Judy

From: [REDACTED] PII [REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and State RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:59:04 -0400

Importance: Normal

Hello there,

I can see that the direction of our government is going towards a terrible destruction. And it is quite ridiculous in nature too. The nature of the Christian is to love and to draw others with this love. The follower of Christ will not pride, coerce, or force anyone at any point. The only reason to unite Church and State would be to bring force into the teachings. We can see this already done in our history with Pagan Rome in the time of Christ. These are heavy matters we are considering. Please think of others and not only yourself when handling this decision. As government officials, you are to serve and protect your neighbors/the people. As followers of Christ we are commanded to do the same. But uniting the Church and State will surely be misrepresenting Christ and His mission for the human race. He will come again once everyone has made their choice. But when Church and State unite and force becomes in place, choice is removed. This is a heavy matter you have before you and it will have devastating consequences to the eternity of many people. Please don't make this decision hastily or under the influence of another. It's your decision and you will be judged for it. May the God of heaven keep you and bless you always.

Sincerely,
Lover of your soul.

Sent 12:58 pm PST 7/13/2026

From: Kenny/Chris Shelton <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Committee Regarding the Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:59:45 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Letter-

Feedback_to_the_Religious_Liberty_Committee_Regarding_the_Separation_of_Church_and_State.docx

Below is a Word Document with our feedback for your Committee's vital decision. I've also included "a cut and paste" version in this email as well.

Thank you for your time to please consider other issues concerning this vital decision.

Sincerely,
Christine Shelton

To:

Religious Liberty Committee Regarding the Separation of Church and State

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback concerning **any proposal that would weaken or abolish the historic principle of the separation of church and state. We respectfully urge the Committee to preserve this foundational safeguard, not because it diminishes religion, but because it protects both religious liberty and civil government.**

Throughout Scripture, God has never desired coerced worship. Love and obedience can only exist where there is freedom of conscience. From the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve were given the freedom to choose, to Christ's invitation, "If any man will come after Me..." (Matthew 16:24), the Bible consistently presents faith as a voluntary response to God's love—not a requirement imposed by civil authority. Your intentions may not be imposed civil authority at this time, but **there is no doubt that this will be an opening wedge for that to occur.**

Jesus Himself established a clear distinction between the responsibilities of civil government and the claims of God when He declared, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). His kingdom, He explained, "is not of this world" (John 18:36). **Christ never authorized the civil power to enforce religious observance. Instead, He appealed to conscience through truth, love, and the work of the Holy Spirit.**

History provides sobering testimony regarding what happens whenever church and state unite.

For centuries, governments that merged political authority with religious authority often suppressed dissent, punished minority beliefs, and denied freedom of conscience. During the medieval period, **countless individuals suffered imprisonment, torture, confiscation of property, exile, and death because they dared to worship according to their understanding of Scripture.** Whether one considers the Inquisition, the persecution of the Waldenses, the Huguenots, the

Reformers, the English Puritans, Baptists, Quakers, or many others, the pattern remains tragically consistent: **whenever the state assumes the authority to enforce religious doctrine, liberty inevitably suffers.**

It was precisely because of these painful experiences that many of America's earliest settlers crossed the Atlantic seeking a land where they could worship according to conscience rather than government decree. They did not flee religion—they fled religious coercion/persecution.

America's Founding Fathers understood these historical lessons remarkably well. Having studied both Scripture and history, they recognized that civil government and organized religion each perform vital but distinct roles. They therefore established constitutional protections that would prevent either institution from dominating the other.

Thomas Jefferson famously described the First Amendment as building “a wall of separation between Church & State,” emphasizing that government should neither establish religion nor interfere with its free exercise. This phrase is recorded as having been written in a 1902 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association to explain his interpretation of the First Amendment. James Madison likewise warned that history demonstrated the dangers of religious establishments, observing that such unions had too often produced “pride and indolence in the clergy; ignorance and servility in the laity; and in both, superstition, bigotry, and persecution.”

The First Amendment reflects this wisdom:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

These words have protected believers and non-believers alike for nearly two and a half centuries. They safeguard every church by preventing government favoritism while protecting every citizen’s right to worship—or not worship—according to conscience.

The separation of church and state has never been intended to separate God from society or faith from public life. Rather, it separates governmental power from religious authority so that neither institution corrupts the mission of the other. Religion flourishes best when supported by conviction rather than coercion.

Current discussions about reducing these protections should be approached with great caution. History teaches that the erosion of religious liberty rarely occurs suddenly. It often begins with seemingly well-intentioned efforts to promote morality, national unity, or shared religious values. Yet once civil authority is empowered to determine or enforce religious practice, those who hold minority beliefs eventually find themselves vulnerable. At the writing of this letter, there is a small group in Central Asia that has been facing persecution from governmental authorities. The “Christian Broadcasting Network,” CBN, has presented this particular Christian persecution case in their reporting. Originating in the Soviet era, the *True and Free Reform Seventh-day Adventists*, a splinter group from the organized SDA Church, are a group that refuses to compromise their beliefs or register with the state. Because of this, the government of Kyrgyzstan has officially banned them as an “extremist” organization. But this isn’t just a legal battle—it is a physical war against believers. Despite an international outcry, Pastor Pavel Shreider, 66-years old, was imprisoned in November of 2024. During interrogations, five officers beat him severely. He was repeatedly struck with an iron pipe to try to coerce a forced confession of wrong doing. The beatings were so severe that he now suffers from a traumatic brain injury and cognitive impairment. They wanted Pastor Shreider to admit that he had committed crimes under his leadership and that the teachings of his church amounted to illegal religious extremism and promoted religious hatred. Pastor Shreider and his congregation maintained that the charges were entirely fabricated by the state to suppress their unrecognized religious group and justify banning the church by labeling them as “extremist.” He was finally released in March of 2026. Sadly, another church member, Igor Tsoy (Choy), was tortured with a stun gun and choked with

cellophane bags by officers trying to force him to testify against Pastor Shreider. On April 9 of 2026, authorities (the National Security Committee--NSC) abruptly deported the brain-injured pastor, driving him to the land border and banishing him from his own home country. His wife, Nelya, lovingly chose to leave Kyrgyzstan with her husband. It is reported that they are currently seeking political asylum. According to reports from human rights organizations like Forum 18, the secret police processed Pastor Shreider's removal without providing official deportation documents or placing physical marks or stamps in his passport. Sadly, the persecution hasn't stopped with him. Just this summer, courts ordered more members of this small flock into pre-trial detention on charges of producing "extremist" materials, while over a dozen other members have been aggressively interrogated and threatened with prison time simply for their association with the church. **They are facing years behind bars for practicing their faith—a faith that commentators reporting on this persecution are baffled to find fault with.**

The rights of conscience are indivisible. If government may compel one person's religious practice today, it may compel another person's tomorrow. Liberty cannot remain secure if it depends upon belonging to the religious majority.

From a biblical perspective, genuine worship must always be voluntary. God desires willing hearts, not compelled compliance. Civil governments possess legitimate authority in matters of public order and justice, but the conscience belongs to God alone.

Our nation has been uniquely blessed because it recognized this distinction. The preservation of religious liberty has allowed churches, ministries, and individuals of every faith to proclaim their beliefs freely without fear of government control or religious persecution. **Weakening these protections risks repeating mistakes that history, and what is currently taking place in Kyrgyzstan, will be repeated in this great land of ours that touts to be “the land of the free and the home of the brave”!**

As students of both Scripture and history, we should remember that every generation inherits the responsibility of preserving liberty for the next. Religious freedom is not self-sustaining; it survives only when carefully protected.

For these reasons, **we respectfully urge the Committee to oppose any effort that would diminish the constitutional separation of church and state or weaken the protections afforded by the First Amendment.** Preserving these principles honors biblical freedom of conscience, respects the hard-earned lessons of history, fulfills the vision of America's founders, and helps ensure that future generations may continue to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and for your continued commitment to protecting one of America's most precious liberties.

Respectfully,

Pastor Kenny Shelton & Christine Shelton
Behold the Lamb Ministries

To:

Religious Liberty Committee Regarding the Separation of Church and State

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Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and for your continued commitment to protecting one of America’s most precious liberties.

Respectfully,

Pastor Kenny Shelton & Christine Shelton
Behold the Lamb Ministries

From: Lakeila Sheppard <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:00:15 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing regarding my concern for the future of religious liberty in the United States. I do not agree with any recommendation for the Department of Justice or any other branch of government to break down our Constitution, especially the First Amendment!

This country was founded on religious liberty principles. God Himself, giving us the ability to escape religious persecution by providing a place that was not governed by a king nor a pope. Many came to the United States to worship or not worship according to their own conscience. Millions have flocked to this country based on those principles alone.

God has given us the freedom to choose who we will serve and He does not force us to worship. He desires us to worship Him out of our love for Him. Love for God can not be legislated. Therefore, government should continue to be free from religion: favoring one faith over another, or coercing citizens into religious participation; as well as continue to give us freedom of religion: protecting individuals' rights to practice any religion—or no religion at all—without state interference.

Kindest regards,

LaKeila Sheppard

From: "PII" <PII>

To: "PII" <PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- Separation of Church and State- Michelle Smith

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:00:16 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I agree with the Pillar of Freedom's response to your commission report. I also want to add that the separation of church and state does not diminish religion. Rather, it protects religion from political manipulation and protects government from religious domination. It preserves both religious liberty and civil liberty for all Americans.

As citizens committed to the Constitution, we should resist any attempt to blur the line between religious institutions and governmental authority. The lessons of history are unmistakable: whenever church and state become united, individual liberty suffers. Preserving their separation remains essential to protecting freedom, equality, and justice for every American.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

Michelle Smith

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

From: K C <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Kenneth Combs

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:00:31 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen and a believer who is convinced that the strongest defense of true worship is a government that never touches it. As I understand it, we cannot, by our own accord, tell each other by law how to worship God. True worship comes from the heart, from being genuinely grateful for what the Lord has accomplished through his sacrifice on the cross, for each of us who longs for his presence in our lives. No statute can produce that gratitude, and no statute should try.

This conviction is not borrowed from secular philosophy; it comes from Christ himself. When he said to

From: Barbara Seidler <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:00:36 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom This Concerns:

As a United States citizen, I am opposed to ending the wall of separation between church and state. Our founding Fathers set this in place in Amendment 1 To The Constitution Of The United States Of American. I quote "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or a bridging 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 although this does not use the exact phrasing of "a wall of separation between church and state", the concept is there.

The U.S. Government is to be governed for and by the people. Matters of conscience and religion are individual responsibilities.

I urge you to take this Commission very seriously.

Respectfully,

Barbara Seidler

From: Camille Walker <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Camille Walker

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:01:19 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

The Commission's proposal to replace the church-state "wall" with a "bridge" is highly alarming to me as a believer. This separation was originally built by people of faith to keep churches independent, not to suppress religion. Connecting the two invites government money and political influence into houses of worship, forcing churches to answer to politicians instead of God. History proves that joining church and state corrupts both. Please preserve the wall that protects religious freedom.

Sincerely,

Camille Walker

Matteson, IL

--
["For the Father Himself loves YOU..." John 16:27](#)

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

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Darla Gibson

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:01:31 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen who believes we owe obedience to the laws of the land unless those laws conflict with the word of God. A national Sunday law would do exactly that. God commands the seventh day to be kept holy, and no act of Congress can rightly overrule that command upon my conscience. This is not a preference I hold lightly; it is a duty I owe my Creator, and I ask the Commission to understand that any proposal touching the day or manner of worship strikes at that duty directly.

Consider first where rights come from. If religious liberty exists only because a majority permits it, then a majority can also take it away, and it was never a right at all — only a revocable favor. The American theory has always been the opposite: rights are inherent, Creator-given, and placed in the Constitution precisely so they cannot be undone by election returns. Popular government exists to protect the minority, since the majority can already protect itself at the ballot box. However many citizens favor a Sunday law, or any religious measure, that number gives them no authority over my relationship to God, nor mine over theirs.

There is a deeper reason government cannot touch this ground: it was never given the power in the first place. Our government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed, but no person can delegate his conscience to another. I cannot authorize any official to believe for me or worship for me, so that power was never mine to hand over, and never the government's to receive. No government will stand before God's judgment to answer for my soul, and therefore no government can rightly assume responsibility for it.

Even a law that favored my own convictions would destroy the very liberty it claimed to protect, because it would concede that religion is a fit subject for legislation — and majorities change. A man who consents to legislation establishing his own faith gives up his right to ever be persuaded otherwise, should further study of Scripture lead him to a fuller truth. I would oppose a law enforcing my own day of worship as firmly as one imposing another's, because the wrong lies in religious legislation itself, not in whose belief it favors.

Finally, and most importantly to me as a Christian, Christ himself drew this line: render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. Morality belongs to God; civility belongs to the state. Government may ask whether an action injures a neighbor's rights; it may never ask whether an action is religious, irreligious, or heretical. Our forefathers crossed an ocean for the freedom to worship as conscience and Scripture direct, not as government decrees, and history shows that whenever civil power has legislated religion, persecution has followed.

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

Respectfully,
Darla Gibson

Sent from my iPhone

From: Julie Bunn <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment-separation of church and state- Julie Bunn

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:02:00 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I was troubled to read that the Religious Liberty Commission wants to create a bridge between church and state. The founders of our country put this wall between church and state to protect religious liberty as they had left to start here anew because of religious persecution due to the church and state being intertwined. In other countries, now and throughout history, when church and state were intertwined there is and has been loss of religious freedom and religious persecution. Please keep the wall between church and state as it helps protect religious freedom.

Sincerely,

Julie Bunn

Dublin, CA

From: Barbara Rousseau <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Barbara Stephens

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:02:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a citizen from Chattanooga, Tennessee, who cares deeply about keeping government and religion in their proper places. This matters to me because of how I read my Bible: God gave man the freedom to choose, even the freedom to choose wrongly. If our Creator does not force belief, I do not see how any government agency has the standing to try.

This conviction is not secular to me; it comes from Christ himself, who 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 men, but never over duties owed to God. When a Sunday-law bill came before the U.S. Senate in 1888, a witness named Jones testified plainly that civil government is civil, and has nothing to do with religious observances in any way. The test that follows is simple: government may ask only whether an action injures a neighbor, never whether it is religious or irreligious. Any recommendation that puts this Commission or the government behind a particular text, display, or religious lesson crosses the line Christ himself drew. That is not an insult to faith; it is a defense of the line Christianity itself teaches.

I also believe rights come from the Creator, not from majority vote. If a vote can grant religious liberty, a vote can just as easily take it away, and then it was never truly a right at all, only a permission on loan. Our Constitution was written to place conscience beyond the reach of election returns, because popular government exists to protect the minority, not merely to enact the will of the crowd. When told that most Americans favored a certain religious observance, Jones answered that the people, no matter how many, have no right to invade another person's relationship with God. Congress's own committee said something similar in 1829, holding that the conscience of a single dissenter is as sacred as that of the whole community. Popularity may justify a highway bill. It cannot justify a religious one.

Finally, I believe any law touching religion, even one meant kindly, ends up harming free exercise. To pass such a law, government must first define which religion it favors, and any definition excludes someone, while even those included are now practicing their faith by permission rather than by right. As Jones warned, no man can safely support legislation favoring his own faith, because in doing so he gives up his own freedom to change his mind later if he becomes convinced some other path is true. Believers who welcome government favor today are handing a tool to whichever administration comes next, friendly or not.

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

Respectfully,
Barbara Stephens
Chattanooga, TN

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

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Darla Gibson

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:03:17 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen who believes we owe obedience to the laws of the land unless those laws conflict with the word of God. A national Sunday law would do exactly that. God commands the seventh day to be kept holy, and no act of Congress can rightly overrule that command upon my conscience. This is not a preference I hold lightly; it is a duty I owe my Creator, and I ask the Commission to understand that any proposal touching the day or manner of worship strikes at that duty directly.

Consider first where rights come from. If religious liberty exists only because a majority permits it, then a majority can also take it away, and it was never a right at all — only a revocable favor. The American theory has always been the opposite: rights are inherent, Creator-given, and placed in the Constitution precisely so they cannot be undone by election returns. Popular government exists to protect the minority, since the majority can already protect itself at the ballot box. However many citizens favor a Sunday law, or any religious measure, that number gives them no authority over my relationship to God, nor mine over theirs.

There is a deeper reason government cannot touch this ground: it was never given the power in the first place. Our government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed, but no person can delegate his conscience to another. I cannot authorize any official to believe for me or worship for me, so that power was never mine to hand over, and never the government's to receive. No government will stand before God's judgment to answer for my soul, and therefore no government can rightly assume responsibility for it.

Even a law that favored my own convictions would destroy the very liberty it claimed to protect, because it would concede that religion is a fit subject for legislation — and majorities change. A man who consents to legislation establishing his own faith gives up his right to ever be persuaded otherwise, should further study of Scripture lead him to a fuller truth. I would oppose a law enforcing my own day of worship as firmly as one imposing another's, because the wrong lies in religious legislation itself, not in whose belief it favors.

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Respectfully,
Darla Gibson

Sent from my iPhone

From: Rachel A <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Rachel Anderson

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:03:54 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a citizen of this free country and a person of religious faith, it is concerning to me to hear statements minimizing, or perhaps tearing down, the wall of separation between church and state. I fully support protecting religious freedom; but I fear combining, or creating a bridge between, church and state will have the opposite effect. My ancestors immigrated from Switzerland to Pennsylvania in the 17th century in order to escape religious persecution. This was one of the first colonies to embrace the separation of church and state. Our founders understood that religious freedom was foundational to civil liberties and protected our religious liberty in the first amendment to the constitution. The state having power over the church or the church having power over the state will end in persecution of all kinds. Please reconsider your position and uphold the wall of separation between church and state.

Sincerely,

Rachel Anderson
Cincinnati, Ohio

From: Brian Parham <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Report Response

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:04:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

The first and greatest of all the rights of men is religious right. And religion is the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it. The first of all duties is to the Creator, because we owe our existence to Him.

It is impossible for any person to delegate or transfer to another any relationship or duty, which he owes to his Creator.

The Constitution logically excludes religion in every sense, and in every way. No government can ever account to God for any individual. No man can have faith for another. Therefore, no government can ever assume any responsibility in any way in any matter of religion.

June 12, 1776, The House of Burgesses of the Colony of Virginia, adopted a declaration of rights, composed of sixteen sections, every one of which in substance afterward found a place in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The sixteenth section reads:

" That religion, or 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, and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience."

I don't agree that a bridge should be built between church and state. The duty of the civil government is between man and man, and the state has no right to legislate the duties between man and God.

Respectfully,

Cheryl Parham

From: Lou Wolcik <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Lou Ellen Wolcik

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:04:38 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I don't want anyone telling me how to worship my Creator, and I don't want my government trying, either. I write as a private citizen from Alturas, California, because I believe both halves of the First Amendment's religion clauses protect the same thing, and I ask you to keep that protection whole.

My first reason is one that Christians themselves have long recognized. When Christ was asked about paying tribute, he divided human duty into two jurisdictions: what is owed to Caesar, and what is owed to God. Civil government was given authority over the first, never the second. Nineteenth-century witnesses who pressed this point before Congress put it plainly: there is a limit to lawmaking power, and that limit is the line Christ himself drew. The state may ask only whether an act injures a neighbor's rights; it has no business asking whether an act is religious, irreligious, or heretical. Every proposal that puts government behind a particular text, display, or religious lesson steps across that line into territory that belongs to God alone, whatever pious purpose is offered for it.

My second reason concerns where rights come from. If a right exists only because a majority voted for it, then a majority can vote it away, and it was never a right to begin with. Our tradition holds instead that rights come from the Creator and are given to individuals, which is precisely why they are written into a Constitution beyond the reach of election returns. Popular government is instituted to protect the minority, not to overrule it, because the majority can already look after itself at the ballot box. Even a lone dissenter's conscience was once recognized by Congress as entitled to the same protection as the whole community's. Popularity may justify a highway bill. It cannot justify a religious one, because religion was never a matter for majority vote.

My third reason is historical. The very first Sunday law was issued by an emperor while he still held a pagan religious office, and the alliance of ambitious clergy with ambitious rulers that followed did not stop at that first, modest measure. It grew into a persecuting state church and eventually into the Inquisition. As one writer of that history put it, if the first step is taken, the last step is already taken, for the last step is contained in the first. No one today proposes anything like the Inquisition. No one ever does, at the beginning. The danger is not that today's modest measure is the end of the road; it is that the end of the road is already implied in the principle such a measure concedes.

My fourth reason is the one I find hardest to ignore. Any law favoring religion must first define which religion it favors, and that definition always includes some believers while excluding others. Even those included no longer practice their faith freely; they practice it by the government's permission, on terms a future legislature can change. A believer who welcomes state endorsement of his own creed today is handing the very same power to whoever holds office tomorrow, of whatever faith or none. As one nineteenth-century advocate insisted before Congress, he would oppose a law enforcing his own day of worship exactly as strongly as one enforcing his neighbor's, because the wrong lies in religious legislation itself.

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

Respectfully,
Lou Ellen Wolcik
Alturas, California

Sent from my iPhone

From: Donald Keele Jr <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Don Keele Jr

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:05:20 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

As a Christian pastor, I'm writing to urge you to reconsider any recommendations that would weaken the separation of church and state, including the use of public money to fund religious activity and the repeal of the Johnson Amendment.

That wall of separation protects both the country and the church. History shows what happens when religious institutions become too entangled with state power: faith is pressured to serve politics, and politics borrows the language of faith to sanctify itself. In Nazi Germany, many churches were compromised by their closeness to the regime, while those who resisted were marginalized or punished. That kind of entanglement does not strengthen religion. It makes religion vulnerable to capture by the state.

Separation of church and state is not hostility toward religion. It is one of the reasons faith has remained free and strong in this country. It keeps government from controlling the church, and it keeps the church from becoming another arm of political power.

Please preserve the separation of church and state. That is how we keep both faith and democracy free.

Sincerely,

Don Keele Jr

Calhoun, GA

--

Don Keele Jr

BetterDay Ministry Consulting LLC

[REDACTED] PII

<https://betterdayministryconsulting.com>

[REDACTED] PII

From: Sandy Moran <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:05:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

I am imploring serious consideration of suspension of efforts to eliminate the clear segregation of Church and State. Joining Church and State jeopardizes the freedoms of Christians worldwide wide.

Our great country was founded on an effort to secure freedom from the kingship of a church/state governance when the pilgrims fled England.

James Madison notes separation of church and state to be a virtue and will exact a greater purity the less they are merged together.

The Papal System is a mix of government and religion and was found to be the worst.

It was the Church and state united that crucified Jesus Christ.

The lines need to be drawn clearly here in these great United States. Church & State must be kept separate at all costs.

Respectfully,

Sandra M Moran
A concerned United States Citizen
Sent from my iPhone

From: Caryn McCall <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION REPORT

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:06:33 -0400

Importance: Normal

Hello,

I'm writing to state my objection in regard to removing the safeguards of the wall of separation between church and state and repealing the Johnson Amendment. This is a really bad idea. History shows us what happens when church and state are United. It's called "The Dark Ages" and no one in their right mind would willingly want to go through that again. It always ends in persecution, and if you go down this path the same thing will happen. God has his sphere and the government has theirs. The Bible says to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's. They are never to be bedfellows. The government's place is to legislate the last six commandments of the Decalogue, never the first four. When the government gets involved with religious matters it tramples on the conscience of men. This will be the result if you go forward with the committee's recommendations.

Sincerely,

Caryn McCall

From: Sheila Solie <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to the US Religious Liberty Commission Draft Proposal

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:06:37 -0400

Importance: Normal

My husband and I want to object to the Religious Liberty Commission's draft recommendation to bridge the gap between church and state.

The Constitution may not specifically specify the separation of church and state, but the First Amendment guarantees the freedom of religion.

Our founding fathers wanted religious liberty for ALL. As a free country we currently have the right to worship who and when we want. The Government should not make policies to govern our worship. When that bridge is made, who is going to decide how and when and who we worship? The God of Heaven does not force worship. As Christians who worship on Sabbath, the 7th day of the week, which is not the most popular day of worship for many Christians, we do not want Washington to force worship when and how it chooses.

Greg and Sheila Solie

Altamont TN USA

From: "Adrienne B. Elder" <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Adrienne Elder

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:07:02 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a citizen of Nichols Hills, Oklahoma, who cares about keeping both halves of the First Amendment's religion clauses intact, because I believe they are one principle rather than two rival claims.

Any law touching religion, even one meant to help a favored faith, sets a precedent that a future majority can wield against that same faith. The moment government legislates on religion, it must define which religion or practice qualifies, and that definition necessarily excludes some believers while placing the rest under permission rather than free exercise.

As one nineteenth-century witness put it before the Senate, "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 that no man can safely support legislation favoring his own creed, because in doing so he surrenders his right to follow his conscience should it later lead him elsewhere. That is not a partisan point; it applies equally to whichever faith holds the majority today, since the machinery of religious legislation does not come with a guarantee about who will control it tomorrow.

I also worry that government sponsorship would not strengthen religion but corrode it. Faith is heart-work, and law reaches only the body. Compelling attendance or observance breeds hypocrisy, not conviction, since as one writer of the era observed, forcing people indoors or into a pew "will not make Christians of them; it is possible it might make hypocrites of many, but Christians of none."

History bears this out: Madison's own survey of fifteen centuries of established Christianity found that establishment produced "pride and indolence in the clergy; ignorance and servility in the laity; in both superstition, bigotry, and persecution." A faith that needs the state's help to survive is confessing its own weakness, and the churches that welcome such help stand to lose the most from it.

Finally, this is not a new question for our government to settle. Congress faced it directly in 1829 and 1830, when Sabbatarian petitioners asked it to legislate Sunday observance. The Senate committee of that day made clear that civil government has no business deciding matters of religious truth, since its authority is civil, not religious, in nature. The House committee went further, warning that if government may define one point of religious duty, it may just as well define them all, down to the forms of worship and the support of the clergy. That same report drew the line that still defines us: "What other nations call religious toleration, we call religious rights."

A commission proposing to define religious duty today would be overturning not a modern court ruling but an official act of Congress passed while Madison himself was 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,
Adrienne Elder
Nichols Hills, OK

From: Brenda Albrecht <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Government has no authority over religions convictions

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:07:44 -0400

Importance: Normal

Hello,

Religion is a matter which lies solely between a person and God. A human being owes account to **no one else** for his faith or his worship.

Government has no authority to tell me what to believe, or how to worship.

Thank you.

Brenda Albrecht

From: Taisha Nicholas <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Taisha Nicholas

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:08:38 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I respectfully object to the recommendations contained in the report recently presented to the President of the United States. I believe there should not be any bridge considered to bring together the longstanding principle of separation between church and state.

Although the phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear verbatim in the Constitution, the principle is rooted in the protections afforded by the First Amendment. This separation has helped safeguard one of America's greatest freedoms: the liberty of conscience. It ensures that every individual has the right to practice their faith—or choose no faith at all—without government interference or coercion.

As a person of faith, I deeply value the freedom to worship according to my beliefs. I am grateful to live in a nation where no government authority can dictate how, when, or whom I should worship. Every American deserves that same freedom.

I am concerned that weakening these longstanding protections could open the door to government favoritism toward certain religious viewpoints, ultimately diminishing the very religious freedom that Americans seek to preserve.

Religion and government should remain distinct institutions. The church should not govern the state, and the state should not govern the church. Any effort to blur the boundaries between the two risks undermining the religious liberty that generations of Americans have cherished and defended.

Protecting both faith and freedom requires maintaining a clear separation between religious institutions and governmental authority.

Respectfully,

Taisha Nicholas

Gruethli Laager, Tennessee

From: "3 A.M. Films" <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment on the commission's report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:09:26 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for your willingness to study one of the most precious rights known to mankind—the freedom to worship God according to the dictates of conscience. Religious liberty is not merely another constitutional principle. It is the foundation upon which all other freedoms rest.

As a documentary filmmaker researching the history of religious liberty, I have spent hundreds of hours examining the historical record. One lesson appears repeatedly across nearly two thousand years of history: whenever the church acquires the coercive power of the state, persecution inevitably follows. History is remarkably consistent.

The Roman Empire initially persecuted Christians because religion and government were inseparable. Refusing to honor the state religion was viewed as an act of political rebellion.

After Christianity became closely united with the civil government, the roles gradually reversed. Those once persecuted eventually gained the power to persecute others who differed from them. During the Middle Ages, dissenters were imprisoned, exiled, tortured, and executed because civil governments enforced religious conformity. Whether one examines the medieval Inquisition, laws against so-called heretics, or the suppression of Bible-believing reformers, the pattern remains unchanged: civil authority became the enforcement arm of religious authority.

The Protestant Reformation did not entirely escape this pattern. In many regions, Protestant governments repeated the same mistake by using civil power to compel religious conformity. Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans, Anabaptists, Baptists, Quakers, and many others all experienced periods in which the dominant church used government power against religious minorities. The names changed, but the principle remained the same.

Even America's colonial experience confirms this lesson. Several colonies established state-supported churches. Citizens were taxed to support denominations they did not attend. Dissenting ministers were fined or imprisoned, and many believers suffered penalties simply because they worshiped differently. These experiences profoundly influenced America's founders. They understood from both European and colonial history that genuine faith cannot be produced by legislation and that government should never decide matters of conscience. (Congress.gov)

The First Amendment was therefore not written to protect government from religion. It was written to protect religion from government and government from becoming an instrument of religious coercion. James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, Roger Williams, and many other early defenders of religious liberty understood that faith loses its purity when supported by civil power, while government loses its impartiality when it favors one faith over another. (The Library of Congress)

Our documentary traces this recurring historical pattern. The issue is not whether religion should influence individual lives—people of faith have every right to bring their convictions into public life. The danger arises when the machinery of government is used to enforce religious practice or punish religious dissent. History has already conducted this experiment many times.

Whether in imperial Rome, medieval Europe, state churches following the Reformation, or several of the American colonies, the outcome has been strikingly consistent. Whenever church and state unite in matters of conscience, liberty diminishes, minorities suffer, and persecution follows.

The founders of the United States sought to break that historical cycle. Their solution was neither hostility toward religion nor hostility toward government. Rather, they recognized that both institutions flourish best when each remains within its

own God-given sphere.

As you continue your important work, I respectfully encourage the Commission to allow history to be its guide. The historical evidence does not suggest that closer institutional union between church and state has produced greater liberty. It demonstrates precisely the opposite.

Religious liberty survives only when government protects every person's freedom of conscience equally, without favoring one denomination over another and without granting civil authority the power to enforce religious belief.

I am concerned about the following recommendations made in the recent report released by the Religious Liberty Commission: 1. Using public funds to support religious nonprofit activities; 2. The use of public funds to support religious education and religious clubs on public school campuses; 3. The repeal of the Johnson Amendment, which limits the political activities of churches and other tax-exempt organizations.

Please, in consideration of preserving the principles of our constitution, which has served us well since the beginnings of our great nation, I respectfully request that the Johnson Act remain in place. Religious liberty is best preserved when all people, regardless of their religious persuasion, have the freedom to worship according to the dictates of their conscience. Religion and government need to remain separate. The Government should not be involved in funding religious activities. May God bless you and may God bless America.

Respectfully,
Art Humphrey

Sent from my iPad

From: Abbi Papendick <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment: Total Opposition to the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:09:50 -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,

Abbi Papendick
Red Bluff, CA

From: Joy Anderson <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:10:15 -0400

Importance: Normal

This committee should not be allowed.
It is a direct violation of the Constitution.

Sent from my iPhone

From: Kimber Dailey <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] preserving separation between church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:10:47 -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,

Kimber Dailey

From: Lee Folkman <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State / Establishment Clause
– Lee Folkman

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:11:50 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

I submit this comment on the Draft Report in support of genuine religious liberty for all Americans, as protected by the First Amendment. While I appreciate the report's attention to challenges faced by people of faith, I have serious concerns about its critique of the "wall of separation" metaphor and push toward "bridges" that risk blurring essential boundaries.

The principle of separation, though the exact phrase "wall of separation" is not in the Constitution, is deeply rooted in American history and directly informed the First Amendment. Roger Williams, founder of Rhode Island, advocated for a "hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wilderness of the world" after being banished from Massachusetts Bay Colony for opposing religious conformity enforced by civil authorities. Rhode Island became a haven for religious dissenters, establishing early separation to protect both church purity and individual conscience.

Similarly, Virginia's Statute for Religious Freedom (1786), drafted by Thomas Jefferson and championed by James Madison, disestablished the official church and protected citizens from compelled support of religion or punishment for their beliefs. This statute explicitly rejected government coercion in matters of faith and served as a primary model for the First Amendment's religion clauses.

Many early colonists fled to America precisely to escape religious persecution under state-enforced religious laws in Europe and even some colonies. The Founders designed the First Amendment to prevent the repetition of such tyranny here—ensuring government neutrality so that no religion could be imposed through legislation. I strongly support individuals, including public servants, freely expressing their personal religious beliefs. However, I oppose any efforts to inject specific religious preferences or laws into public policy in ways that erode these protections or compel observance.

The report should reaffirm the balance: robust free exercise alongside a strong Establishment Clause that maintains separation and neutrality. This framework has enabled America's religious pluralism to flourish. Recommendations that weaken it risk undermining the very liberty the Commission seeks to defend.

Thank you for considering this perspective.

Sincerely,
Lee Folkman

From: Akilah Ballard <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State and Religious Liberty – Akilah Ballard

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:11:55 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

I am submitting this comment because I am concerned about the direction reflected in the Commission's draft report.

I am a Christian, a wife, and a mother. My faith influences how I live and how my husband and I raise our family. I want my child to understand the Bible and to develop a genuine relationship with God. However, I do not believe that placing religious messages in government institutions or using public policy to give greater visibility to Christianity will accomplish that goal.

In fact, I fear it may do the opposite.

Christian faith should be persuasive because of the truth it teaches and the lives of those who practice it—not because it has obtained the support of political power. When Christianity becomes closely identified with government, political parties, or government policy, it becomes increasingly difficult for people to distinguish between following Christ and supporting a particular political movement.

That concerns me deeply.

I also question what precedent is created when Christians ask government to take a more active role in promoting religious ideas. We may feel comfortable when the religious message being displayed is familiar to us. But we must consider whether we would be equally comfortable if a future government used the same authority to elevate beliefs with which we strongly disagree.

The answer cannot simply depend upon who currently holds office or which religious group currently represents the majority.

I want my family to be free to practice and share our faith openly. I want that freedom strongly protected. But I do not believe Christianity needs government sponsorship in order to remain influential in American life. The responsibility of teaching faith belongs first to families, churches, and individual believers.

I respectfully ask the Commission to carefully reconsider any recommendations that further merge religious advocacy with governmental authority. Please protect the freedom of Americans to live their faith without turning government itself into a vehicle for advancing religious belief.

As a Christian, I believe the distinction matters—not because faith is unimportant, but because it is too important to become dependent upon political power.

Respectfully,

Akilah Ballard

"The mind assimilates to that which it feeds upon."

From: Chris Burns <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Chris & Mary Burns

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:12:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

It was difficult to read that the Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." With all due respect, that is exactly backwards — and as a person of faith, I find the idea very concerning.

The US Constitution clearly states, "That Congress (which translates the state) shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.... This statement is a direct result of the United States not wanting to follow in the footsteps of Great Britain and understanding the importance of keeping church and state separate because religious persecution will surely follow as it did back in Europe when these two authorities came together. That's one of the primary reasons the Colonies were first established and in part the American revolution was fought and why the United States, this great experiment of government was eventually established. This great republic prided itself in keeping these key elements separate which greatly contributed to this great nation's success and failure for any country who tried to incorporate this unpleasant marriage.

The Constitution goes on to say, "... or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". Religious freedom has been under attack for many years in this country and this report will do nothing to slow the assault. There's been a short reprieve during this current administration but this report could easily act as a spring board to justify attacking any religion that is not aligned with the

context of this report. It happened most recently during the pandemic when churches were shuttered and big box stores, liquor stores, and bars were allowed to continue to remain open. This is the exact thing that can happen when a government is given too much sway in the area of religious freedom. For example laws that limit when or what day people can worship because

that faith is deemed a threat to the accepted religion of the day.

So its important that this separation of church and state is preserved and not meddled with by building a bridge between the two.

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,
Chris & Mary Burns
Naples, Florida

From: Scott Smith <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report - Scott Smith

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:12:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

Committee members:

I want to thank you for taking on the task of considering religious liberty in the United States of America. I sincerely appreciate the time and effort that you have invested in this.

I have been a public school educator in Michigan for over 25 years, 21 years at the collegiate level teaching primarily chemistry, math and physics, and have encountered students from many religious beliefs, from atheists, Christians, Muslims, and others. I have always been respectful of their beliefs and have been very careful not to interject my personal beliefs during lectures.

I am a Christian, but I also strongly believe that the US Constitution supports freedom to have Liberty of Conscience, and that our forefathers came to the United States and established our constitution to escape the injustice of the tyranny against freedom of choosing their own way of worshiping our creator, or even to not believe in a Higher Power. The Establishment Clause clearly protects individuals and communities from government-imposed religion, official religious favoritism, and coercive alliances between church and state. Religious liberty is secure only when these principles are honored.

I strongly appeal to your common sense, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among theses are Life, *Liberty* and the pursuit of Happiness".

In my personal opinion, one thing that makes America a great nation is our freedom of choice and to believe and follow the dictates of our conscience.

Thank you for supporting Religious Liberty in the United States of America.

Scott Smith
Michigan

From: "Ellen McDaniel-Weissler" <[REDACTED]>

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Report of "Religious Liberty" Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:12:55 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Sir or Madam:

This report is appalling. It is a despicable collection of Christo-fascist garbage, issued in an attempt to railroad Americans into turning their backs on the Separation of Church and State, which is one of the bedrock principles of American policy. Please throw this report into the trash, where it belongs. Those who wrote it have no interest in preserving religious liberty, only in forcing their own twisted vision of a single religion, Christianity, down the throats of everyone else, by dressing up theocracy and trying to call it religious liberty. They should be ashamed. Jesus certainly would be.

Namaste,

Ellen McDaniel-Weissler
LaVale, Md

Get [BlueMail for Mobile](#)

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

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment--Draft Commission Report--Ken Sampson NO Address or Phone

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:12:58 -0400

Importance: Normal

Inline-Images: image001.jpg

13 July 2026

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide insight to your recent "Draft Report." Your invitation promotes dialogue, deliberation and analysis that are in keeping with the best of our Nation's traditions. Thank you.

The eloquence and phrasing of the report; argument, readability and "action plan" concreteness; and overall beautiful packaging of the 224-page document gives credible voice to some too often marginalized. To me however, the findings seem limited in scope, confined in appeal, and corrosive to National unity.

The Committee's definition of religious liberty appears to focus on the religious rights of certain, favored religious groups, rather than the expansive freedom within--and from--religion that we enjoy as citizens and friends of these United States of America. The makeup of the Commission consists of too many of the same predictable, partisan personalities that appeal to the religious base of our current administration.

To read selected accounts of the nearly 100 oral testimonies brought before the Commission was to hear of disheartening religious concerns. Yet, the overall testimony seems to amplify testimony of a select few **out of proportion** to more threatening, at risk, religious freedom restricted populations of our Nation.

I recommend the following:

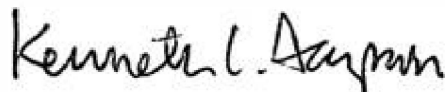
Redefine Commission Scope. Rename your delegation the "Religious Freedom Commission." Or, redefine "liberty" in its most widely used sense--"freedom or release from arbitrary control" rather than focusing on the "sum of rights and exemptions possessed...by individuals." This redefinition may broaden your audience, and project a gracious, open-hearted appeal, beneficial to the well-being of all our citizens.

Expand Commission Composition. The "Religious Benefits to Society" ("conscience of the state, source of civic virtue, strong families, community bonds," page 30 and following) come not only from a limited, partisan religious base. Rather, our collective strengths as a Nation, from our very beginnings, have drawn heavily from the wide-ranging variety found within our shared religious heritage. Acknowledge this inclusive

reality. Invite main-line Protestants, and progressive Catholic, Jewish and Muslim leaders, and other retired Armed Forces Chiefs of Chaplains, to serve on or testify before the Commission. Many of these leaders have actively championed, and continue to advocate for, the religious liberty concerns of the marginalized, threatened, and excluded.

Intentionally Broaden Oral Testimony Participation. My special concern is for the vulnerable with in our land: Muslim and GLBTQ/Trans citizens, and detainees within Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities. This is especially critical, in that the President of the United States habitually speaks in disparaging and dehumanizing terms concerning our Muslim neighbors. Religious identity is foundational to some, if not many, of our GLBTQ and Trans friends, yet too often they experience harsh exclusion by certain religious persuasions. Limiting religious exercise rights for detainees within ICE facilities communicates a callous disregard for this foundational freedom fostered within our country.

Thank you again for this invitation to contribute comment to your report. Though retired from active-duty Chaplaincy within the U.S. Army, I write in my advisory capacity as a "Chaplain for Life," as a "Chaplain for the common good" (I Corinthians 12:7), and as a citizen of this great land.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kenneth L. Sampson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Kenneth L. Sampson
Chaplain (Colonel) US Army (RET.)

Kenneth L. Sampson
Chaplain (Colonel) US Army (RET.)

"Unity Over Self"

From: Hendrikus Hietkamp <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - OBJECTION TO THE STATEMENT OF
SEPERATION OF CHURCH AND STATE - Hendrikus HIETKAMP

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:13:18 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the honorable Chair Patrick, Vice-Chair Dr. Ben Carson and the members of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty:

RE: Separation of Church and State Not Constitutional

Our Lord Jesus Christ, when on earth, assigned to church and state their boundaries. By the statement "Give to Caesar, what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God" He gave to every man the right to serve God according to his conscience – at the same time acknowledging the right of the state to govern civil affairs; or said in another way: It is the duty of the church to concern herself with spiritual matters – and stay out of the realm of the state – as it is the duty of the state to concern itself with civil matters – and stay out of the matters of the church.

Whenever in history these boundaries were crossed and the church usurped powers that belonged to the state alone – or vice versa – when the state took the right to control the church – it resulted in injustice, suffering, war and bloodshed. This is the reason why men said farewell to the Old World where the separation of church and state was *not* honored and joyfully left everything behind not knowing what awaited them in the New World – except that it would be a country where they would be free to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience. Thus before the Constitution there was the principle of separation of church and state that became integrated into the Constitution.

It is with regret and astonishment to read the Commission's report on the denial of religious rights and the suffering involved. While there is a dire need to address these abuses, let the state beware of using its judicial powers to legislate in the realm of religious belief.

Any blurring of these boundary lines will sooner or later lead to the same result – injustice and suffering. Since prevention outweighs any cure I respectfully submit the request to the Religious Liberty Commission to use its influence to keep state and church as distinctly separate as possible and instruct both entities as to their duties and privileges.

Respectfully
Hendrikus C. Hietkamp

From: Rob Frohne <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Comments

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:13:27 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Commission,

I would like to voice my opinion that the separation of religious things from state things is absolutely essential for the freedom of all Americans. Your commission seeks to erode this. Please do not do that! The First Amendment says, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". You may not be Congress, but it makes sense that the president or any other government entity that does this takes the liberty of some away by this act. Religion is a thing that is difficult to prove right or wrong, and many have strongly held opinions on what is right and wrong based on their religious beliefs. Let's stick to things that can be proven to be healthy for everyone and cannot be viewed as arbitrary by anyone.

Thanks,

Rob

--
Rob Frohne, PhD PE

[REDACTED]
PII
PII

From: Andrea Proksch <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State - Andrea R. Witt

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:13:35 -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 they end up answering to politicians instead of to God and feeling a sense of dependence on the government rather than on God who is the Giver of life and everything needed to support it.

Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith and our founding fathers built it to protect faith, and it's the reason the US has become the leading nation in the world.

Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,

[Andrea R. Witt]

[US citizen living abroad in Germany]

From: V <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:14:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

From: Yolanda Butts <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:14:04 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission

Every man wants to be free! Especially as it relates to their faith and religion. I agree with the Pillar of Freedom comments concerning this topic. Please reconsider the recommendations in your report. Please keep church and state separate.

Sincerely

KimdB.
Atlanta, Georgia

From: Mary Fifer <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State - Mary Fifer

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:14:06 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am in agreement with the statement made by Pillar of Freedom and request that you give it your attention and ask that you will implement his suggestions.

Sincerely,
Mary Fifer
Vale, Oregon

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)

From: "PII" <PII>

To: "PII" <PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Objections to RLC

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:15:25 -0400

Importance: Normal

I want to officially object to the RLC REPORT and it's conclusion against the wall of separation between church and state. I do not want any bridge built between church and state. I support the positions advocated by pillaroffreedom.org in their objections to the RLC REPORT SINCERELY Don Johnson PII

PII

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

From: sara neeleyo [REDACTED] PII

To: [REDACTED] PII [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:15:32 -0400

Importance: Normal

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT –

Separation of Church and State – [Your Name]

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for taking the time to review this vital matter of separation of church and state. Since childhood I have appreciated the stories of how William Penn and Roger Williams established their states and have purposely visited the sites with my daughter for history sakes, noting what makes America great—its understanding of freedom for all. Initially a place of freedom for a few and then as the principles of freedom were further flushed out, a land of freedom for all. After 250 years we do not want to lose what came with great sacrifice. The lessons from other countries will reveal the ultimate outcome if we do.

I'm writing as an American citizen, requesting your reconsideration of some of the recommendations stated in your report that I believe would weaken the separation of church and state. The two that I am particularly addressing are using government money to fund religious activities and the possible repealing of the Johnson Amendment.

I attended parochial schools during my high school years, at great sacrifice to my family. But because it was worth it, my family (on one income, in addition to my after school work) was able to allow me to graduate with a bill that was clear and teachings that were clear. My younger brother simultaneously was in parochial schools and too young to work so I know the sacrifice which often has to be made to receive the education that one desires, but I also KNOW that it is not the government's place to provide the funds for me to receive my parochial education in the same way that I would not like my taxes to provide for others whose ideology/philosophy I may disagree. In this beloved nation, noted for its freedom, freedom to choose is allowed but not with financial support. Loose strings become ropes and then steel cables. I am desirous of keeping a firm line of separation.

On a similar vein, I do not see the place of politics in churches and believe that churches are established to worship God and are not established to promote political agendas. IF the Johnson amendment is adjusted, I believe the churches will have to answer to the politician/current government vs answering to God (as established by God). The Johnson amendment was established for a reason and needs to stand! Separation of church and state allows freedom for the church and freedom and the church not

Thank you for consideration of my convictions,

Sincerely,

Sara Neeley

Tennessee

From: jennifer lingerfelt <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment to the RL Commision

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:15:47 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Commission on Religious Liberty,

Due to time constraints, I will not have time to write my own thoughts. Please consider, instead, the comments of Pillar of Freedom. It is my desire that you implement their suggestions.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Lingerfelt

From: Joan LaCelle <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:15:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern,

I am against the recommendation to remove the separation of Church and state.

It is part of our constitution in the Amendments and alluded in to the constitution. The Government needs to stay out of Religion and the Church needs to not petition the Government on Religious matters.

Whenever Government has been involved in the Religious sphere, it has been an unfortunate disaster. I am asking that you remove this from your recommendations to president Trump.

Thank you, Joan

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

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Separation of Church and State-LaNaya Achord

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:16:15 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing as a concerned citizen of faith to urge you to preserve the separation of church and state, rather than replacing this essential "wall" with a "bridge."

History demonstrates the detrimental effects of combining church and state, which ultimately compromises the liberty of conscience. Our country was founded by those seeking the freedom to worship and live according to their own conscience, free from the interference and coercion of a state church.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this critical matter.

Sincerely,

LaNaya Achord

From: Destined to Stitch <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment- Separation of Church and State - Destinie

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:16:45 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Commission,

This is in response to the Commission's attempt at repealing the Johnson Amendment and the expansion of funding of religious organizations engaging in religious activities. Both of these recommendations are against the separation of church and state as provided for by the Constitution. When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches will end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God. As a citizen, that is bad for both the church and country. Separation is not a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed here in America. Please keep church and state separate.

Thank you,

Destinie

From: Cynthia Clark <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to: Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:17:25 -0400

Importance: Normal

History clearly shows that where Church and State are combined persecution of minority religious groups soon follows. The Separation of Church and State that our forefathers wisely placed in our government has given us protection from the control of our religious practices by the dominant religions. We ask that you protect our religious liberty by guarding the wall of separation between church and state from destruction.

Sincerely,
Rodney and Cynthia Clark

Sent from my iPhone

From: Lisa Brandreth <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:17:43 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Commission,

The question of whether the church and the state should unite is ultimately a question of authority and conscience. While both institutions can contribute to the well-being of society, history repeatedly shows that when civil government enforces religious belief or practice, religious liberty is compromised. The persecution of Reformers and Anabaptists during the Protestant Reformation, among others, illustrates this reality. These examples reveal a consistent pattern.

Scripture consistently reveals that God never forces the human conscience. Christ Himself says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" (Revelation 3:20). He invites; He does not compel. The Lord, in His perfect character, respects the freedom He has given every person to choose whether to receive or reject Him. That is how He loves.

Any attempt to bring about religious renewal through governmental authority or legal mandate misunderstands the nature of true faith. If belief is produced through pressure, coercion, or the power of the state, it is not faith born of the Holy Spirit. It may satisfy those who want outward conformity and the appearance of unity, but it cannot produce the outcome they are seeking: transformed hearts and genuine spiritual renewal. Such a movement would not be a genuine revival from God but a counterfeit, one that Scripture repeatedly warns against: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8–9).

Throughout the Bible, God calls people to choose Him freely. "Choose this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15). Even Jesus lamented over those who rejected Him rather than forcing their obedience (Matthew 23:37). The kingdom of Heaven advances through conviction, love, and truth, not through civil power.

For this reason, any effort to merge the authority of the church with the authority of the state is ultimately damaging to a people. Laws can regulate conduct, but they cannot convert the heart. No legislation can create authentic worship or sincere devotion. Matthew 22:21 reads, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

I respectfully urge you to reconsider. America should never exchange freedom of conscience for compelled religion. A nation that enforces faith ceases to reflect the God who grants every person the freedom to choose. Rather than becoming a nation under God, it risks becoming a nation under coercion and religious pretense.

True revival and true freedom of conscience have never begun in legislatures. It begins when hearts willingly surrender to God.

With Respect,
Lisa C.

From: Gary Holback <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:17:57 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Religious_Liberty_7-13-26.doc

Thank you for reading and considering my concerns

July 13, 2026

SUBJECT - Separation of Church and State - Gayle Holback

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a natural-born citizen of the USA, I am writing to express serious concerns regarding the recommendations that were made in your recent report on Religious Liberty.

The original settlers of America, Pilgrims, came here to escape the oppression in Europe that came from the combination of church and state. They desired civil and religious liberty and so our government was set up with separation of church and state as a foundational principle.

Some of the recommendations in your report are designed to weaken the principle of church and state separation. I especially object to the following:

1. Funding religious non-profit activities
2. Funding religious education and religious groups on public campuses
3. Repealing the Johnson Amendment, which restricts churches' political activities.
4. Special treatment given to certain nations and/or religions

I would strongly urge our US government to take a neutral stand in regards to religion. Religious freedom means that every citizen can choose whatever religious beliefs that fit his/her life circumstances. Or, every citizen can choose to hold no religious beliefs whatsoever. Religious freedom means there should be no positive or negative government interference.

I would recommend that churches that participate in or exhort their members to participate in and/or support political activities should lose their 501C3 status.

Freedom of speech means being able to express personal beliefs, principles and convictions. Since freedom of speech is guaranteed by our constitution, why was Carrie Prejean removed from the commission simply because she expressed ideas contrary to the popular opinions of some members of the commission? What is happening to our freedom of speech???

Jesus taught "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" This is the bible foundation for separation of church and state. And I believe this is the way the government of the USA should operate.

Thank you for taking your valuable time to read this letter.

Sincerely,
Gayle Holback
Yellville, AR

From: Carrie Jalloh <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT—SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE—Carrie

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:18:32 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commissions:

I am deeply troubled at the prospect of eroding parts of the first amendment, namely the establishment clause.

History tells the tale of what happens when this wall of separation is replaced with a “bridge.” The result is tyranny and oppression. This beautiful country was founded upon the premise of freedom, including the freedom to exercise whatever religion (or non-religion) one might deem important to them. One reason early settlers came to this land was to escape the religious persecution of their native lands.

By moving forward with this recommendation, we open the door to the restriction of the liberties of conscience we now enjoy. No one should be forced to abide by one religion or no religion at all (this may not be the case now, but a step in this direction). Even our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ does not force people to follow Him. If we want to be a nation under God, we must follow His example in this way.

I sincerely ask that you reconsider the recommendation in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state.

This is the land of the free. Let it remain this way.

From: "PII" <PII>

To: "PII" <PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:19:08 -0400

Importance: Normal

This country was founded on the freedom of religion due to the persecution against these freedoms in the England. Many fled to the New World for freedom to worship as each one desired and was led by God. It is part of our constitution and should be abided by. No one religion should decide for the whole country. FREEDOM

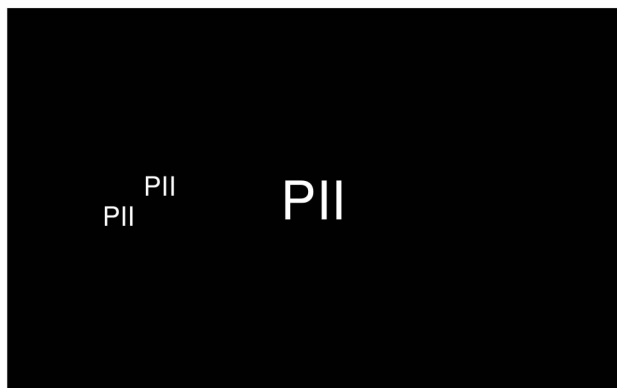
I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them.

Thank you

Kind regards,

IF DOCUMENT(S) is(ARE) ATTACHED, PLEASE CONFIRM RECEIPT.

Genie



Sent with [Proton Mail](#) secure email.

From: James Lewis <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Personal opinion; TO THE COMMISSION, THANKS,BUT WE ALREADY HAVE RELIGIOUS LIBERTY. REMEMBER THE CONSTITUTION, THAT DOCUMENT THAT SPELLS OUT OUR GOD GIVEN RIGHTS. WHAT CHANGED? THIS COMMISSION IS UNNECESSARY AND REDUNDANT. I TAKE MY COMMANDS FROM JESUS CHRIST AND NOBODY ELSE.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:19:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

Mr President Trump, please reconsider this course of action. Please don't listen to the poor advice you're receiving. Some in your cabinet are not as they seem.

Sincerely Yours,
James Lewis a past supporter.

From: Ada Leiss <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:19:30 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Commission on Religious Liberty Members -

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to submit comments regarding the Commission's work.

As a United States citizen, I am truly blessed by the freedoms protected by the Constitution, especially the freedom of religion.

As a Seventh-day Sabbath keeping Christian, I believe that worship and practicing our faith must always be voluntary.

I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve the separation of church and state. That public funds not be used for religious matters and that the Johnson Amendment remain in place.

As we have read, "when Thomas Jefferson first invoked the phrase (the wall of separation between church and state), he explained why it was important," and I agree with his point:

"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,'"

- Thomas Jefferson

As a dear friend said, "Religious liberty is among America's most precious freedoms", and I pray this freedom, to worship God as our conscience dictates, will be protected for future generations.

Thank you for your service to our nation.

May "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." as you deliberate.

God bless the United States of America!

In God We Trust,
Ada Leiss

From: Brittany Parker <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Brittany Parker

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:19:43 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I normally don't write letters to my representatives in public office. In fact, I usually am quite content and happy to not even engage in political discussions with family and friends. It can be quite divisive with so many individuals taking a personal offense to each and every topic addressed; I want to talk about subjects that don't cause tension and derision. As a stay-at-home mom and certified teacher, I try to focus instead on topics that interest and benefit our children: play, food, safety, independence, education, etc. That is what makes me happy, and it makes our family environment flow smoothly and efficiently, happily and fulfilled.

I remember growing up in a similar environment with my parents doing their best to guide and direct us, keeping us blissfully ignorant of the divisiveness of politics. I remember going to church every week and spending that time as a family worshiping God our Creator. The time was spent happily as we read from the Bible, spent time together, and spent time in nature. There was no hint of politics because these issues were kept separate. That was very important to my parents, and it is very important to me to raise my family in a similar environment.

Family history was a topic that always fascinated me. As I spoke with my grandmother and created family trees to see the history of where my family came from, I remember with pride and joy how happy I was to learn of a very important family ancestor: Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island.

Roger Williams founded Rhode Island to escape the religious persecution in the other colonies, to create a safe haven for religious tolerance, and to create a distinct separation between the church and the state to avoid one having an influence over the other. After being banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony due to his dissenting views, Roger Williams purchased land from the Narragansett Indian tribe and founded Providence Plantations, which later became known as Rhode Island.

The new colony was founded on a couple of foundational principles:

1. Religious Freedom. Unlike the surrounding colonies that enforced strict Puritan beliefs, Roger Williams wanted a place for individuals to be able to go to worship as their conscience dictated.
2. Separation of Church and State. Roger Williams argued that civic life and spiritual beliefs should be kept entirely and completely separate, strictly divided to protect the integrity of both religion and government and, therefore, keeping both from corrupting each other.

Many individuals from various faiths (such as Baptists, Quakers, and Jews) fled other colonies for Rhode Island, fleeing the strict theocracies to settle in a land that formed government purely on civil law rather than religious law. Roger Williams' "radical ideas", his "dangerous opinions" that no civil magistrate should have authority over religious matters and that no religious institution should dictate the laws and political policies served as a foundational idea on liberty that heavily influenced our First Amendment to the United States Constitution: ideas about liberty of conscience, spiritual equality, and democratic governance. This separation of church and state at the foundational level allowed individuals to worship as their conscience dictated and was critical in the freedom that we still have today.

This freedom and separation of church and state was important to our founding fathers, and it is vital to maintaining our freedoms today. As a mother concerned for the freedoms of my children, I am eager that this separation of church and state be maintained. I am intent that this separation, the freedom to worship as my conscience dictates, is not infringed on so that future generations can also worship as their conscience dictates just as our founding fathers intended. As Roger Williams saw the value and importance of this separation, so too do I.

So, while I don't normally address my representatives in government office, this topic is near and dear to my heart. It is vitally important that we maintain a strict separation of church and state so as to maintain our freedoms for generations to come. I cannot simply sit and be idle while this freedom and separation is at risk. I feel compelled by my conscience to address this issue. I completely object to funding religious non-profit activities and organizations. As a certified teacher, I also object to funding religious education and religious clubs on public campuses. I object to repealing the Johnson Amendment, which restricts a church's political activities. I object to the special treatment given to Jewish people and the state of Israel. I insist that the government be completely separate and neutral in its relationship to religion. I insist that the Johnson Amendment be fully and completely enforced.

As freedom of religion and the separation of church and state was important to our founding fathers, so too should it be important to us today. For the sake of ourselves and future generations, for the preservation of worshiping as our conscience dictates, for preventing either the government or a religious entity from corrupting the other, we must maintain this separation. Please keep the church and state separate. This is not optional. It's vital. It's why the United States is a place of freedom; and it's how we continue being "a land of the free and a home of the brave."

Respectfully,

Brittany Parker

Sandpoint, Idaho

From: Jeanette Robichaud <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Cc: Jeanette Robichaud <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Advocate for Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:19:44 -0400

Importance: Normal

I have read the document by Johnathan Zirkle and agree with him completely as follows:

This document advocates for the separation of church and state, emphasizing its historical importance and criticizing recent proposals to weaken this principle.

Defense of Separation of Church and State

- The author emphasizes that the wall of separation was built by people of faith to protect religion, not imposed by secularists.
- Breaching this wall risks government favoritism, church conflicts, and erosion of religious freedom.

Historical Development of Religious Liberty

- The idea of separating church and state originated with Roger Williams in 1644 and was adopted by colonies before the Revolution.
- By 1833, all states disestablished their churches, supporting liberty and the success of religious freedom.

Misrepresentation of American Religious History

- The Commission falsely claims the separation idea was a Jefferson invention, ignoring earlier advocates like Roger Williams.
- Key figures like Madison, Washington, and Adams explicitly supported the wall of separation, which was central to the Constitution's adoption.

The True Meaning of the Wall of Separation

- The wall separates church and state, allowing individuals to exercise faith freely in public life.
- It protects both religion and civil freedom from ecclesiastical and governmental overreach.

Critique of the Commission's Recommendations

- The proposal to eliminate the wall of separation and promote religious influence in government threatens freedoms.
- Supporting religious funding and education risks government control and doctrinal conflicts.

Opposition to Repealing the Johnson Amendment

- Repealing it would enable churches to engage in partisan politics, risking political influence and corruption.
- It could lead to government funding being used for political gain, undermining church independence.

Dangers of Secularism and Church-State Union

- Secularism is a totalizing ideology that excludes religion from public life, posing a threat to freedom.
- History shows that church-state unions lead to oppression and totalitarian regimes.

Military Religious Services

- The military must provide religious services to deployed personnel who lack access elsewhere.
- This necessity does not conflict with maintaining religious neutrality in broader society.

Sincerely
Jeanette Robichaud

From: Patricia Miller <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE-Patricia K. Miller

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:19:46 -0400

Importance: Normal

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 Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Please be advised that the following is prefaced by this statement respectfully but enthusiastically supporting the Pillars of Freedom documentation forwarded to you by Jonathan Zirkle. Thank you.

Again here it is emphasized that it is a fact of history, throughout its entire course, that unification of church and state inevitably results in religious persecution. Such a result is antithetical to the principles established in the very first words of the United States Constitution, wherein Justice, Domestic Tranquility, the Common Defense, the General Welfare and the Blessings of Liberty to Ourselves and to our Posterity are assured.

Under a system wherein church and state are united, Justice will be annihilated. Domestic Tranquility will be destroyed. A Common Defense will be a moot point, as will be the General Welfare. The Blessing of Liberty will succumb to the Tyranny created by the persecution such unification of church and state creates.

Separation of church and state is what America was founded upon: no king; no pope; republicanism and Protestantism. That is history. Religious Liberty IS the separation of church and state.

Thank you in advance for considering this comment. Reversal of your recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and your recommendation of its enforcement are also herein requested.

From: Deb Kraut wurst <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty commission document

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:20:01 -0400

Importance: Normal

My email is: [REDACTED] PII

PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE do not do not approve this document to make a bridge between church and State.

This document is a travesty of justice. Religion and freedom from persecution was what brought our for fathers to this country.

Freedom to choose religion and worship as we choose, has been at the backbone of our country. This document is meant to destroy that.

Please, do not approve this document. It will be devastating, and the effects will be long lasting. It will enable the possibility for persecution of non-assenting religions in the future.

We cannot unite under one banner of religion. We need freedom to choose. Religion can never be forced. Whether someone chooses to worship or not, is a personal choice.

The God we serve, NEVER forces anyone to choose Him.

Again, this could have devastating effects for the future, and for the people to choose whom they will serve.

Please keep our country free

Thank you.

Respectfully yours

Deb Krautwurst

From: sue95q <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:20:25 -0400

Importance: Normal

My prayer is for the continued liberty of the state and of the church which shall remain separate to insure the liberty of both for all...

James 1:25: But whoso looker has into the perfect law of liberty and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man is blessed in his deed.

James 2:12: So speak ye and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

2 Corinthians 3:17: Now-the Lord is that Spirit: for where the Spirit of the Lord is , their is liberty.

May the Spirit of the Lord guide you in this most pivotal recommendation and policy to follow ...

[Sent from the all new AOL app for iOS](#)

From: Mary Gercke <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Commission Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:20:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

To our respected members of the faith community,

I wish to voice my heartfelt thanks for your consideration of religious matters and how those matters relate to government.

It is the opinion of myself and the reflection of God's holy word as written in the Bible itself that the state power not be in collusion with religious power.

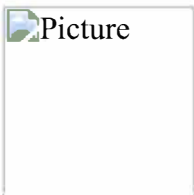
The things of God are spiritual and spiritually discerned. Scripture is it's own interpreter and the power of the state though instituted by God to keep evil in check, can never do the work of the church, which is to share a right understanding of our Creator. The use of force is contrary to the nature of God's true kingdom, which He alone will set up upon His return.

Our founding in this country with its lamb like principles of freedom of conscience have been tried even recently with the Covid situation. The Government chose to place what was claimed for the common good above an individual's right to chose what medical procedures to undergo based on their conscience. This in direct violation of the Nuremberg trials. The consequences of those actions cost lives, crippled the economy and undermined what little trust remained in government and medicine.

The use of the state to fund or promote spiritual initiatives is like mixing clay and iron. They cannot adhere to one another. God wins with the sacrificial love and the state controls through iron teeth. If you proceed we will eventually have religious persecution as one version of faith supercedes the conscience of individuals. Faith cannot be forced by law or coercion, nor be honest when funded by states.

I emlore you to abandon your current course or we will have tyranny once more

Mary Gercke, RN



Mary Gercke

From: Jeanette Robichaud <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Cc: Randy Robichaud <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Advocate for Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:21:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

I have read the document by Johnathan Zirkle and agree with him completely as follows:

This document advocates for the separation of church and state, emphasizing its historical importance and criticizing recent proposals to weaken this principle.

Defense of Separation of Church and State

- The author emphasizes that the wall of separation was built by people of faith to protect religion, not imposed by secularists.
- Breaching this wall risks government favoritism, church conflicts, and erosion of religious freedom.

Historical Development of Religious Liberty

- The idea of separating church and state originated with Roger Williams in 1644 and was adopted by colonies before the Revolution.
- By 1833, all states disestablished their churches, supporting liberty and the success of religious freedom.

Misrepresentation of American Religious History

- The Commission falsely claims the separation idea was a Jefferson invention, ignoring earlier advocates like Roger Williams.
- Key figures like Madison, Washington, and Adams explicitly supported the wall of separation, which was central to the Constitution's adoption.

The True Meaning of the Wall of Separation

- The wall separates church and state, allowing individuals to exercise faith freely in public life.
- It protects both religion and civil freedom from ecclesiastical and governmental overreach.

Critique of the Commission's Recommendations

- The proposal to eliminate the wall of separation and promote religious influence in government threatens freedoms.
- Supporting religious funding and education risks government control and doctrinal conflicts.

Opposition to Repealing the Johnson Amendment

- Repealing it would enable churches to engage in partisan politics, risking political influence and corruption.
- It could lead to government funding being used for political gain, undermining church independence.

Dangers of Secularism and Church-State Union

- Secularism is a totalizing ideology that excludes religion from public life, posing a threat to freedom.
- History shows that church-state unions lead to oppression and totalitarian regimes.

Military Religious Services

- The military must provide religious services to deployed personnel who lack access elsewhere.
- This necessity does not conflict with maintaining religious neutrality in broader society.

Sincerely
Randy Robichaud

From: JoElla Harlan <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:21:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern

The value of Religious Liberty and the wall of separation between Church and State in this country is a most basic and fundamental right of the American people. The right to choose how, when and who we worship--or the choice not to worship is the freedom that underlies every other. Removing this wall of separation from our Decalogue opens the door for Government or for Religion to assume a legislative right to enforce what is an inalienable free choice/right to worship and live according to personal conscience/right. God does not force our decisions--He leaves the door open for us to choose. Do not take that choice from us by allowing the separation of Church and State to be removed from our founding document--THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA and BILL OF RIGHTS.

From: michele davis <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:21:33 -0400

Importance: Normal

In the subject line write:

Public Comments Religious Liberty

“Please refer to [pillaroffreedom.org](https://www.pillaroffreedom.org) documents. I agree with them.”

From: Aleksandar Popovski <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT on SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE on
Aleksandar and Miriam Popovski

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:21:37 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

We want to express my appreciation for your commitment to defending religious liberty. History repeatedly reminds us that people of faith have too often been unjustly persecuted, silenced, or forbidden to express and practice their sincerely held beliefs. Every person should be free to worship according to the dictates of conscience without fear of discrimination or coercion.

At the same time, Scripture establishes an important boundary that neither governments nor individuals should cross: no one should be compelled to believe, worship, or practice a particular faith. Genuine faith cannot be produced by force. Jesus Himself declared, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24, NKJV), making it clear that following Him is a matter of personal choice, not compulsion. Likewise, the apostles affirmed the limits of civil authority when they declared, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29, NKJV), underscoring that conscience belongs ultimately to God.

As Jesus taught, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21, NKJV). While everyone should enjoy the freedom to live out their convictions, that freedom should always be exercised in a way that respects the equal rights and liberties of others.

Thank you for your continued work in upholding these biblical principles of freedom of conscience and religious liberty.

Sincerely,
Aleksandar and Miriam Popovski
La Feria, TX

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And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. John 8:32

From: Cherie Nordman <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:22:15 -0400

Importance: Normal

July 12, 2026

RE: Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Report

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as I am concerned with reevaluating the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment that would negate the long-standing principle that has honored the separation of church and state in the United States of America. I am strongly opposed to this recommendation as religious liberty has been the foundation of America, and this is what has made it unique and great among all nations.

I, myself, am a Protestant Christian who endeavors to live my life based upon Biblical principles as found in the original, English translation of the Bible being the King James Version. As time has passed since the original founding of this country, the statement "separation of church and state" has been interpreted as meaning the exclusion of God from government in support of anti-God sentiments. I believe this is an incorrect view, but I do not think it is corrected by the extreme opposite view of religious enforcement by the government.

It is clear that our roots are steeped in "one nation under God" ...; however, God, nor a particular religion, is defined. This was done intentionally as it left the details of a relationship between the individual and God. The first amendment of the constitution state clearly that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof".

It is my understanding that our government is fundamentally based on the ten commandments as stated in Exodus chapter 20. The first four commandments express the relationship an individual has with God and the last six focus on the fundamentals of how a society needs to function in relation to each other. The first four are a matter of conscience and represent the wall of separation as expressed in principle in the first amendment. The last six provide the basis for laws that govern civil activities.

This is the form of government in which Christ himself stated clearly in Matthew 22:21 - "...Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's". Jesus, while on this earth understood that no true change of heart could occur in an individual by force, coercion or legislation, but only through truth and love. He also stated plainly that his kingdom was a spiritual realm rather than a political entity established by force, see John 18:36.

Our founding fathers who signed the Declaration of Independence made statements clearly expressing that the separation of church and state was foundational to our form of government.

Regarding the very clause being addressed, Thomas Jefferson expresses this principle as “a wall of separation between church and state”.

James Madison, often referred to as the father of the constitution, states the following “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 violence”. He also argued that religion must remain beyond the jurisdiction of civil government because the duty owed to God precedes the authority of the state itself. He also later wrote, “Religion and Government will both exist in greater purity the less they are mixed together”.

Furthermore, Benjamin Franklin adds “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”.

One of our former presidents, Ulysses S. Grant, stated “Leave the matter of religion to the family circle, the church and the private school, supported entirely by private contribution. Keep the Church and State forever separate”.

Throughout the course of history whenever government and religion have been combined persecution has been the result. The Dark Ages of papal persecution are a clear example of this. If you did not agree with the church you were hunted, persecuted and killed. The protestant reformation is what eventually formed the basis of the United States of America. While our history has not always perfectly protected individual freedoms, it has been the foundation by which we have continued to move forward. Reversal of this will eventually lead, as history teaches us, to persecution in this country.

Religious persecution already occurred in America to members of my own faith in the late 19th century under the passage of the Blair Sunday Rest Bill. This bill attempted to use civil law to enforce what many religious leaders considered a religious duty. Fellow church members in Tennessee were sentenced to chain gangs for working on Sunday while keeping the Seventh day Sabbath according to their own religious conviction.

I understand and am greatly concerned over the morality of our country, as is this committee, but know that the solution is not the enforcement of religion. The solution is true and dedicated believers living out their lives based on their own conscience as witnesses to those around them. This is the power of the gospel and is what needs to be protected by government based on the individuals religious convictions. I am also very concerned that honest religious majorities, when empowered by civil authorities, can unintentionally deny the very liberty they seek to preserve.

In summary, a proper understanding of the establishment clause does not seek the abolishment of separation between church and state. The intent of the principal founders of the constitution does not support this. The constitution itself opposes this recommendation. Matters of conscience belong to God rather than the government. Jesus, who is our example, did not use force to forward His kingdom. History teaches that religious enforcement always leads to persecution.

May our government be faithful in supporting that God is acknowledged in a broad sense, but left to the individual to interpret in a personal relationship, and yet support morality as its laws pertain to relationships with each other.

Thank you for allowing me to express my thoughts regarding this matter.

Cherie J. Nordman

P.S. I have read the Pillars of Freedom and agree with the additional information included in this submittal.

From: robert wooten <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] re: separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:22:35 -0400

Importance: Normal

Date :7/13/26

From : Robert Wooten

To: The Religious Liberty Commission

Subject: **RELIGIOUS LIBERTY DRAFT REPORT**

Dear sirs,

I disagree with your religious liberty draft report indicating that we should build a bridge between religion and the US government as well as recommending that government fund church functions and religious education as well as make laws or executive orders to benefit religion will lead to a religion run state. This will lead to persecution of religions that disagree or are different from the religion backed by government.

During the Dark Ages, the Holy Roman Empire, as well as in early American Puritan Colonies people who differed with the religion run state governments were persecuted, banished, tortured and murdered in the name of religion.

If you continue in this vein of thought and recommendation you will be responsible for molding America into a society of persecution and the death of innocents that disagree with your beliefs. The direction you are heading will be a stepping stone to violation of the US constitution.

First Amendment

First Amendment Explained

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 oath is found in Article II of the Constitution. It contains 35 words and goes as follows:

"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

The establishment of a religion run government or the insertion of religious laws or measures into the laws and regulations of the United States will be the same as establishing an ecumenical religion, thus violating our

constitution.

Your proposals are the furthest thing from "Religious Liberty." Your proposals violate Religious Liberty.

Sincerely,

Robert Wooten

From: Jo Li Rollins <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:22:51 -0400

Importance: Normal

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

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

Who is qualified to speak for God?
Who is His interpreter?

The Father is God because He alone possesses supreme prerogative—the exclusive power, authority, and privilege to govern according to His righteous and eternal law. He is the Originator and Creator of mankind. Whether men acknowledge Him or deny Him, His sovereignty remains unchanged, for He is the Creator of all things. Man cannot claim this authority.

"The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all." — Psalm 103:19

Jesus Christ is God because He alone is the Savior of mankind. He is our Substitute, our Surety, and the only sacrifice for humanity's transgression, sin, and iniquity. No other "god" was incarnate, suffered, crucified, resurrected, ascended, and now intercedes before the Father on behalf of sinners. Man cannot do this.

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." — Acts 4:12

The Holy Spirit is God because He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. He always speaks truth, transforms sinful hearts, humbles the proud, and leads men and women back to their Creator through Jesus Christ. Man cannot do this.

"And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." — John 16:8

Here we see the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the Godhead—working together with one purpose: to restore the created to their Creator and to reconcile humanity into God's holy family. Man cannot accomplish this.

So I ask again:

Who can truly speak for God?

Which of you has Elohim—the Godhead—empowered to speak with divine authority concerning the eternal affairs of mankind? None.

This is why God gave us the Holy Scriptures.

The Bible is God's appointed revelation by which we learn who He is and how He governs His people. It reveals both His character and His will. It serves as the standard by which every doctrine, law, and moral claim should be tested.

For clarity, a Christian is one who follows Christ, the second Person of the Godhead. A person who merely bears the name "Christian" without following Christ does not represent Him.

So then, which earthly ruler can execute the office of the Son of God? Which official possesses perfect humility, mercy, grace, compassion, longsuffering, and the authority to forgive sin? Which ruler can search the heart or judge motives with perfect righteousness?

No man can.

This is precisely why God gave us His Word.

In Exodus 20, God reveals not only the moral principles of His heavenly kingdom but also the foundational principles upon which human society flourishes. The first four commandments define humanity's relationship with God. The last six define humanity's relationship with one another.

Yet nowhere in the Ten Commandments does God authorize one human being to govern another person's conscience.

Nowhere in the Decalogue does the Creator grant authority to compel worship, dictate belief, or force religious obedience. To coerce the conscience of another—whether believer or unbeliever—is contrary to the character and government of God. Such authority belongs to God alone.

When civil government joins itself to religious authority for the purpose of enforcing religious practice, it places itself in a position that Scripture reserves exclusively for God. Such a confederacy elevates human authority above divine prerogative and attacks the freedom of conscience with which God created mankind.

History demonstrates the tragic consequences of such unions. Throughout centuries, whenever church and state have merged their authority, persecution has followed. The medieval inquisitions, the religious persecutions of the Dark Ages, and countless other examples testify that combining civil power with ecclesiastical authority has repeatedly produced oppression rather than righteousness.

If the proposed union of church and state is claimed to be founded upon Christian principles, then it should withstand careful examination by the Scriptures.

Where, in the Scriptures, does God authorize any government, church, denomination, council, or religious leader to compel another person's worship according to the dictates of human authority rather than personal conviction before God?

The burden of proof belongs to those who would claim such authority.

Problems with Such a Confederacy

1. Assuming authority over another person's conscience demonstrates that those exercising such power are not following the God of the Bible. God never forces the human will.

God continually invites rather than compels.

"Choose you this day whom ye will serve." — Joshua 24:15

Even Christ stood at the door and knocked rather than forcing entrance into the heart (Revelation 3:20).

2. Forced conscience has repeatedly produced immense suffering throughout history.

The persecutions of the Dark Ages, inquisitions, imprisonment, torture, and executions carried out in the name of religion demonstrate the consequences of compelling belief.

Jesus Himself taught the opposite spirit:

"My kingdom is not of this world." — John 18:36

Christ never authorized His followers to spread truth through civil force.

3. If God's perfect law cannot compel genuine obedience, how can imperfect human laws accomplish what God Himself does not force?

Scripture warns against trusting merely human judgment.

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." — Proverbs 14:12

Only the Holy Spirit can transform the heart; legislation cannot produce conversion.

4. Whenever political and religious powers unite to control the people, history records devastation rather than liberty.

The builders of Babel sought unity apart from God's authority (Genesis 11), and the result was confusion and judgment. Likewise, Scripture warns against unlawful confederacies.

"Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy." — Isaiah 8:12-13

Ultimately, every person must answer before God.

"It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." — Hebrews 9:27

5. History shows that concentrated power rarely surrenders itself voluntarily.

When governments accumulate authority over conscience, speech, property, and worship, freedom steadily diminishes.

King Solomon observed:

"Where the word of a king is, there is power." — Ecclesiastes 8:4
"I will be like the most High." — Isaiah 14:13-14

Likewise, Daniel foretold a power that would oppose God's authority and seek to alter His law.

"He shall think to change times and laws." — Daniel 7:25

God, by contrast, seeks willing obedience born from love rather than compelled conformity.

6. Robbing individuals of the freedom to choose—even in matters of worship—reflects the principles of Satan's government rather than God's kingdom.

From the beginning, Satan sought to exalt his own authority above God's and compel allegiance.

"I will exalt my throne... I will be like the Most High." — Isaiah 14:13-14

Likewise, Daniel foretold a power that would oppose God's authority and seek to alter His law.

"He shall think to change times and laws." — Daniel 7:25

God, by contrast, seeks willing obedience born from love rather than compelled conformity.

Conclusion

Therefore, count the cost.

Before granting any church or civil government authority over another person's conscience—whether regarding worship, marriage, family, or any other matter—consider carefully the principles upon which such authority rests.

Freedom of conscience is not merely an American ideal; it reflects the character of God Himself, who invites but never coerces the human will.

Every individual, every church, and every government will ultimately stand before the judgment seat of God to answer for how they exercised the authority entrusted to them.

May we therefore preserve the distinction between the authority that belongs to God alone and the limited authority entrusted to mankind, remembering that "we ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

I therefore, urge you, as a Christian and an American, to refrain from crossing the sacred ground of religious freedom by infringing upon man's right to choose by blending the agenda of the church and the state. Additionally, everyone benefits when the Johnson Amendment is upheld. Let it be an example from us to the world of right doing.

***Respectfully submitted,
Joan Elizabeth
Texas***

From: oThom@ [REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- Separation of Church and State – Thomas Nelson

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:22:54 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

God has revealed to us that America's wall of separation of church and state is the very "***secret of its power and prosperity***" and the reason that the "the United States has risen to a place among the most powerful nations of the earth".¹ The separation of church and state formed the very foundation of religious freedom that set America apart from all other nations when it was established. It was a primary reason that millions came to this land seeking freedom from religious persecution and tyranny, represented by the iconic Statue of Liberty, a symbol of America's religious freedom.

The writers and signers of both the ***Declaration of Independence*** and the ***US Constitution*** well understood the need for separation of church and state. And the separation of church and state is clearly defined in the First Amendment of the US Constitution. Viewing the First Amendment from the church and state perspective, it could be clarified thusly:

Amendment I

Congress (state) shall make no law (state) respecting an establishment of religion (church), or prohibiting the free exercise thereof (church); or abridging the freedom of speech (church speaking), or of the press (church publishing); or the right of the people peaceably to assemble (church meetings/church services), and to petition the government (petition the state) for a redress of grievances (by the church).

God has also warned us that even if a small breach (via a "bridge" between church and state) is made in the wall of separation of church and state, such as repealing the Johnson Amendment, *the breach will result in complete "**national ruin**"², and end in its full demise.*

Revelation 13:11-18 – America in Prophecy

For a fuller understanding of these words of Bible prophecy, download a free .pdf or .mp3 audiobook version of *The Great Controversy* (between good and evil), 1911 edition, from this website:

egwwritings.org

Or install the free app, **EGW Writings 2**, on your smart phone which also has the audiobook and on-screen reading and mark-up capabilities.

Read the first chapter, and then chapters 25 onward, for a shortened version. Also note that the phrase “church and state” is used 11 times in the book. Read the context of each occurrence for a clearer understanding of the extreme importance of separation of church and state.

My prayer is that God may continue to bless America **as it continues to support a full separation of church and state.**

Sincerely,
Thomas Nelson

References

1. White, E. G. (1911). “God’s Law Immutable.” *The Great Controversy*, Review and Herald Publishing Association, 441
2. White, E. G. (1958). “Preparing for the Final Crisis.” *Selected Messages Book 2* Review and Herald Publishing Association, 372

From: Sheila Huber <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Mark Huber

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:23:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen of Sandpoint, Idaho, and as someone who believes, as our forefathers did, that this nation was set up under God, not under men, and that right governance in these critical times depends on remembering the difference between the two. That conviction is exactly why I am asking this Commission to leave religion untouched by law.

Consider first where rights come from. If a majority vote can grant religious liberty, a majority vote can also take it away, and something that can be voted away was never a right to begin with — only a permission. Our whole constitutional system rests on the opposite premise: rights are inherent, given by the Creator, and government exists only to protect them, which is why they were written down beyond the reach of election returns. As one of the old Religious Liberty Library tracts put it, 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 government was instituted to protect the minority, not to overrule it, because the majority can already look after itself at the ballot box. The people, however many of them there are, have no right to invade my relationship with God, or yours.

There is a deeper reason still. Our government rests on the Declaration's premise that just powers come from the consent of the governed — that is, from powers the people delegate. But no person can delegate his relationship to God. I can authorize someone to manage my property; I cannot authorize anyone to believe for me or answer for my soul. Since that power was never given, it was never received. Under the Declaration, therefore, the government of the United States can never have anything to do with religion — not because a clause forbids it, but because the people never held that power to hand over in the first place.

This is why even a law that favors religion destroys free exercise, rather than protecting it. Any religious law must define the religion it favors, and any definition includes some believers and excludes others — while even those included now hold their faith by legislative permission rather than by right, subject to revision whenever the majority changes. As it was said to a Senate committee long ago, it is impossible to frame a law on the subject of religion that will not prohibit the free exercise of religion. No man can safely consent to legislation favoring his own faith, because in doing so he resigns his right to change his mind if conscience or Scripture should lead him elsewhere.

And this is not merely my opinion or a church's argument. Congress itself ruled on this one generation after the founding, when men who had lived through it still sat in the chamber. The 1829 and 1830 reports on Sunday legislation declared plainly that it is not the legitimate

province of the legislature to determine what religion is true or false, that government is civil and not religious, 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 may with equal claim define them all. Any commission proposing government-favored religious observance today must overturn not a modern court case, but that founding-era Congress's own considered judgment.

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

Respectfully,
Mark Huber
Sandpoint, Idaho

From: Larry Duffield <[REDACTED] PII>

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:23:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

Thank you for the opportunity to voice our opinion to this RLC board. As a citizen of the United States I fear a repeat of history if this commission were to bring about laws, recommendations or pressure to persuade our government, via certain religious organizations to, prescribe a certain style of worship or a certain day to worship on or prohibit work on a certain day of the week. If a religious organization is worth its 'salt' or moral worth, then it should have the freedom to promote itself without the government bringing force into play. If America is truly a free country then it MUST allow its citizens to exercise their God given right to worship or not worship on whatever day they choose or whatever god they choose without government intervention regardless of whether it is for the 'common good' of their neighborhood as long as they behave themselves according to decent civil laws and don't disturb others. History should speak loud and clear to the fact that when government and religion commingle, persecution and unrest is the result and neither becomes stronger or harmonious. Forced religious practices do not change the heart but only bring hatred, persecution and bloodshed. Do you want that for our great American country that God raised prophetically to show the world what freedom is like and for the spread of the Gospel through the FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE?

Respectfully,
Larry Duffield

From: Derrie Davis <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Derrie Davis

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:23:20 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen from New York City who believes, simply, that worship is not something to be forced. That conviction is not a modern invention. It rests on the oldest Christian teaching about the two jurisdictions God has established. Christ himself divided all human duty in two 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 our duties to one another; it was never given authority over our duties to God. The test that follows is simple and needs no religious test at all: the state may ask only whether an action is civil or uncivil, never whether it is religious or irreligious. Morality belongs to God; civility belongs to the State. Every proposal that puts government behind a religious text, display, or lesson crosses the line Christ himself drew, and it is not too secular an objection to raise but too Christian a line to ignore.

I also ask the Commission to remember that rights do not come from majorities. A right that a vote can grant, a vote can revoke, which means it was never a right but a permission. Our rights are Creator-endowed and precede government; that is why they were written into a Constitution meant to stand above election returns. Popular governments exist to protect the minority, not simply to enact the will of the many, because the majority can already look after itself at the ballot box. As one Senate witness put it, the people, no matter how many, have no right to invade another person's relationship with God. Wide public support for a religious measure is not a justification; it is precisely the danger the First Amendment was built to check.

Even legislation that favors religion destroys free exercise, because it concedes that religion is a proper subject for the lawmaker, and whoever controls the legislature next inherits that power. Any law touching religion must define whose religion counts, which means some believers are favored and others excluded, and even the favored no longer practice freely but by permission. No one can safely support a law establishing his own faith without giving up his liberty to be persuaded otherwise someday. Believers who welcome state sponsorship today are handing a tool to whoever governs tomorrow, on whatever terms that future majority chooses.

Finally, the founders' separation of church and state was not carelessness or hostility to religion; it was deliberate design, urged by churches themselves who had suffered 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 a full establishment to object; they resisted the principle in its smallest appearance rather than let it entangle itself in precedent. A commission that invokes the founders to justify state-sponsored religion bears the burden of answering 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,
Derrie Davis
Harlem NY

From: Grant Walker <[REDACTED] PII >

To: <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment-Separation of Church and State-Grant Walker

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:23:40 -0400

Importance: Normal

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

Grant Walker

[Sent from the all new AOL app for iOS](#)

From: T B <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- Separation of Church and State – [Tamar Boswell]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:24:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am Christian and having been made aware of the proposition to remove the wall of separation between church and state, and instead create a “bridge”, has left me deeply troubled. One just has to read the crucifixion of Jesus to see what happened when a “bridge is created between church and state-the “church” needed the “state” to enforce their “religious laws” to persecute Jesus with whom they (the church) had a problem. There have also been several instances of this “bridge” which has resulted in religious persecution for a large percentage of the populace over the course of history - Roger Williams who founded the colony of Rhode Island comes to mind.

I oppose the proposition to join church and state-please keep them separate. DO not build a bridge-this WILL lead to disaster.

Sincerely,

Tamar Boswell,

Fresno, CA

From: V <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:24:34 -0400

Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern,

I thank you for all you do regarding the American people. This country came about seeking freedom from government telling them how when and who to worship, I pray that we all live to continue to exercise that freedom. I personally can work now in my state due to that freedom.

Thank you

Varline gervais

From: Gianna Bonilla-Rivas <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- Separation of Church and State – [Gianna Bonilla]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:25:04 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to submit a public comment regarding the draft report on religious liberty.

After reviewing the report, I am concerned about recommendations that would weaken the longstanding principle of separating church and state. I believe religious freedom is strongest when the government remains neutral toward religion and does not favor (or financially support) particular religious organizations or activities. I am also concerned about proposals to expand government funding for religious organizations and to repeal the Johnson Amendment. Churches and other religious institutions are best served when they remain independent from political influence and government funding. Maintaining clear boundaries helps protect both religious liberty and public trust. The United States has long protected the rights of people of every faith, as well as those with no religious affiliation. Maintaining that government neutrality allows everyone to practice their beliefs freely without concern that one viewpoint will receive official preference over another. I respectfully ask the Commission to reconsider these recommendations and preserve the constitutional principles that have protected religious liberty for generations.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my comments.

Sincerely,

Gianna Bonilla-Rivas

Freeport, New York

From: Michael Pharo <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Michael Pharo

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:25:23 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was very concerned when I heard about the Commission wanting to bring Church and State together. With all due respect, I do not believe that this is really good for our country as a whole or for individuals. Bringing Church and State together would bring secular government influence into our churches which would try to require people to answer to man (i.e. politicians) instead of God. Also, it would bring division between churches that are vying for government handouts. Church and State should not be "welded" together. I am not for it. Throughout history, the mixture of the two has proved tumultuous. I sincerely urge you to not go through it and keep them separate as our founding fathers have intended them to be.

Sincerely,

Michael Pharo

Edgewood, New Mexico

From: Aaron Rhoades <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment-separation of church and state-Aaron Rhoades

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:25:44 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Committee, I am writing to you to go on public record before men and God saying that I do not support any efforts to remove the principle of the wall of separation of church and state that is clearly in the US constitution. If this is done it will open up the floodgates of injustice and persecution. It will instantly remove our religious freedom, the very thing you are claiming to champion. I wish I had time to write more but I don't have time to because of the short deadline.

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

From: VicnLor Gabriel <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Victor and Lorraine Gabriel

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:25:46 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

We are concerned to read that the Commission wants to omit the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." With respect, that is exactly opposite of we need — and as people of faith, we find this concept alarming.

A bridge doesn't support the church or the state; it allows the government money and political favors to come into the church, until church isn't about the right thing anymore. With the state it brings into policy things that will inevitably trample the rights and freedoms of the minority. History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, and it isn't good for anyone or for the future of our country. Please don't build that bridge. Keep the church and state separate. It protects our religious liberty!

Sincerely,
Victor and Lorraine Gabriel
Athol, Idaho

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

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:25:58 -0400

Importance: Normal

PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Randolph G. Warkentin

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.

I support the the following 5 statements:

1. Objections to funding religious non-profit activities.
2. Objections to funding religious education and religious clubs on public campuses.
3. Objections to repealing the Johnson Amendment, which restricts church's political activities.
4. A request that the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced.
5. Objections to the special treatment given Jewish people and the state of Israel, and whether you desire complete neutrality in the government's relationship with religion.

Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,

Randolph G. Warkentin
Tehachapi, CA

From: Crystal <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendations of Religious Liberty Commissions

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:25:58 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Panel Members,

I am writing as an American born Christian. Please DO NOT do anything that would give the Government a hand in tearing down the separation of church and state. Our Declaration of Independence gives us our God-given rights to religious liberty. Study the history of this country and be honest. The USA was started because people wanted nothing to do with the King's religion. Please allow believers and non-believers to make their own decisions about religion. This is not the Government's responsibility.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Crystal L. Williams

Sent from my iPhone

From: Dennis Brinegar <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:26:35 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the religious liberty commission,
Religious liberty is hugely responsible for making our nation great!!!
Whole heartedly agree with many of the commission's goals. I however believe that any attempt to weaken the
"wall of separation " between church and state would be a serious mistake. History repeatedly bears this out.
Roger Williams had it right.
Sincerely, Dennis Brinegar

From: Larry Key <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Oppose

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:26:50 -0400

Importance: Normal

I oppose Church and State should be separate. The constitution of America was meant for Church and State to be separate. I do not agree that it should be together. The laws of this country should be separate from religion in all aspects. It would be a great tragedy and injustice to join State and Church together. Do not do this.

From: Benjamin Olivier <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Benjamin Olivier

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:27:09 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Commission,

I am writing to formally submit my public comment regarding the draft report issued by the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty.

I agree with the observation that liberal secular atheism has frequently been preferenced above Christianity in the courts, acting fundamentally as its own favored belief system. While I find that preference highly problematic and entirely understand the push to see Christian values accepted and protected in government spaces, I firmly believe that dismantling the wall of separation between church and state is not the answer.

The separation of church and state is fundamentally American, and it must stay that way. The best way to counter court bias is to enforce strict government neutrality, not to invite the state into religious matters. True religious liberty protects the freedom of conscience for all citizens and ensures the government does not entangle public funding with partisan religion or attempt to arbitrate faith.

I urge the Commission to uphold the historic American framework of a strict separation between church and state as the ultimate guarantor of religious freedom for everyone.

Respectfully submitted,

Benjamin Olivier

From: Robert Stone <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Chapter 14 - Robert Eric Stone

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:27:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to say that I agree much of what was written. I agree with the sentiments set forth that we should create even stronger protections for religious liberty. However I am concerned with this concept of "building a bridge" between church and state as well as that concept that they strengthen each other. While it is true that a people who act in harmony with Divine principles are more happy and healthy the fact is that church does not need the arm of the state. The wall of separation of church and state was not a wall that prohibited the personal piety of those who hold public office, but rather was intended to protect the church from political intrusion and the state from religious bias. I would raise a concern that the idea of the wall between church and state is being misunderstood. We need those healthy boundaries to protect our religious freedoms. The problem with a "bridge" is that one can cross over to the other side. If ever the State or the church were to cross over and act out of its proper sphere we would then see a repetition of the abuses seen in the old world prior to the founding of this country. We must protect the church from the state and the state from the church. The does not oppress religious freedom on the contrary it protects it.

Sincerely,
Robert Eric Stone

Sent from my iPhone

From: Tristi Ramos <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Tristi Ramos

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:27:23 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Please know that I fully agree with the comments submitted by Pillar of Freedom and respectfully ask that you implement their recommendations.

While I understand and appreciate the desire to restore moral values in our society and our country, history shows that when church and state become intertwined, both individual liberty and religious freedom are placed at risk. Keeping church and state separate is not meant to diminish faith; rather, it helps preserve the freedom of both. It protects the government from establishing or favoring religion, and it protects religious communities from government interference, allowing both to remain free.

For these reasons, I do not believe it is wise to use government funds to support religious activities or to weaken longstanding safeguards that help maintain the independence of both religious institutions and government. I am also concerned about proposals to repeal the Johnson Amendment if doing so would further blur the line between partisan political activity and the charitable and religious missions of tax-exempt organizations.

History has shown that when these boundaries are blurred, individual freedoms can be diminished and persecution can follow. We have seen this pattern before, and I fear it could happen again.

The intention may be to encourage people to live moral lives, but good intentions can have unintended consequences. Like a pendulum, efforts to correct one problem can swing too far in the opposite direction, resulting in intolerance and the loss of the very freedoms we seek to protect.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Praying for you,

Tristi Ramos

Greeley, Colorado

Sent from my iPhone

From: Esther Hocheo [REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT: Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:27:29 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I was deeply concerned when I read that the Commission is considering replacing the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." As a person of faith, I believe this change would weaken, rather than strengthen, religious liberty.

To me, the separation between church and state has never been about pushing faith out of public life. It exists to protect the independence of religious communities. When government and churches become too closely connected, churches can gradually become dependent on government funding, influenced by political priorities, and pressured to answer to elected officials instead of remaining faithful to their spiritual mission.

History has shown that when church and state become intertwined, both institutions suffer. Our faith is strongest when it stands on its own, free from political influence and government control.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask the Commission not to replace the wall with a bridge. The separation between church and state has long protected the freedom of both, and I hope you will continue to uphold that important principle.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Esther R.

Laurel, Maryland.

From: Connie Jones <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:27:32 -0400

Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern to the Religious Liberties Council: I firmly believe in the Constitution that I grew up with. I am 70 years old and the true constitution separated State and Religion. We were built on religious freedoms in the United States of America. State and religion should never be united!!

From: Wildflowers <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT — Separation of Church and State — Lezlie Watson

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:28:00 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing as both a citizen of the United States and a Christian who values religious liberty. I ask that you reconsider the recommendations in your report that would further weaken the distinction between church and state, particularly those that would expand government funding for religious organizations and repeal the Johnson Amendment.

I believe the independence of the church is one of its greatest strengths. When churches become closely connected to government funding or partisan politics, they risk losing that independence. Political priorities can begin to shape religious priorities, and churches may find themselves answering more to political interests than to their own convictions and mission.

As a Christian from a denomination with a long history of defending religious liberty, and the separation of church and state. Our pioneers opposed laws that sought to compel religious observance because they believed genuine faith can never be produced by civil authority. That history has impressed upon me the importance of protecting freedom of conscience for people of every faith-and for those of no faith at all. It is one of the reasons I care about preserving these constitutional principles today.

The principle of freedom of speech is founded on the principle of freedom of thought. If we are compelled to say certain things, our freedom to think and speak according to our conscience is diminished. Religious liberty means more than the freedom to worship, it also includes the freedom to believe, speak, and live according to one's conscience without government influence or coercion.

Although the familiar phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear in the Constitution, the principles of religious liberty and freedom of conscience that it expresses are reflected in our constitutional framework. The principle of separating church and state exists not to diminish religion, but to protect religious liberty by preserving the independence of both church and government. Early advocates of religious liberty argued that both the church and the government remain strongest when each remains independent of the other. For more than two centuries, this principle has helped people of many different faiths worship according to their conscience and has allowed religious communities to flourish without government control or political favoritism.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask you to preserve the separation of church and state and to reject policies that would further blur the distinction between religion and government. By preventing either institution from controlling the other, both have remained stronger and freer. Protecting the independence of each is one of the best ways to preserve the freedom of both.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lezlie Watson

Redlands, California

From: crane morrison <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:28:22 -0400

Importance: Normal

Please follow the first amendment of the bill of rights by not setting up a government sponsored religion. This would allow people to worship as their conscience dictates.

From: Francisca Flores <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment-Separation of Church & State-Joy Villegas

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:28:27 -0400

Importance: Normal

The following message is sent on the behalf of person named in the subject:

Religious Freedom

It is Constitutional, to separate Church and State, as it says, in the first two lines of the First Amendment, of the Constitution of the United States.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;".

constitutional

In a legal and political context, "constitutional" refers to anything that aligns with or is authorized by the supreme laws and fundamental principles of a nation or organization, as outlined in its governing Constitution of the United States. It ensures that government actions, laws, and policies respect the guaranteed rights of individuals and don't overreach established boundaries.

Sincerely,

Joy A. Villegas

A citizen of the United States of America

From: Tetyana Malakhova <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] religious liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:29:00 -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,

Tetyana Malakhova

From: Kenroy Fraser <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment policy recommendations

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:29:40 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the religious liberty commission,

I would like to voice my concerns on your recommendations. I believe what makes this country a great country to live in is, one we don't have a king and we keep religious beliefs as something personal between mankind and his God. To take away the things that are in place that keeps church and state separate will infringe on individuals personal religious beliefs. God calls for personal and voluntary relationship not a legislated experience. Jesus stands at the door and he knocks and if you let him in he will stay with you. The merging of church and state I believe will lead to persecution as it has been demonstrated during the dark ages. I believe the Bible demonstrates the separation of church and state when Jesus says render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar and the things of God unto God: Mathew 22:21. This shows a clear separation of church and state and if Jesus is our example than we should follow him and church and state should be kept separate. Please consider the many different religions that would be impacted by a state sponsored legislated religion.

Thank you
Kenroy

From: Regina Faustino <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Request for religious liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:29:43 -0400

Importance: Normal

I wanna ask your board please fight against the union between state and church, and allow us to be free to profess our faith without suffering any interference from state power.

I appreciate that and look forward for good results.

Best Regards

Regina Faustino

Sent from my iPhone

From: H S <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Halen Stonewall

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:29:43 -0400

Importance: Normal

"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]
James Madison

"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."

Thomas Jefferson, to the Baptist Association of Danbury, Connecticut, 1 January, 1802

To me it seems the intention of separation of Church and State was not only intended, but clear. There should be no confusion or need for "clarification".

The Founding Fathers of the American Constitution knew that there should and needed to be separation of Church and State from the inception of the Constitution itself.

I am against any tearing down, wearing down, or deconstruction of the original intentions of the First Ammendment.

 Halen Stonewall

From: Kathie Ingram <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Voice against altering the First Amendment protecting Religious Liberty for all Americans

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:30:04 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission Committee Members:

I would like to **strongly oppose** the *Religious Liberty Commission's* intent to alter the First Amendment commitment to the separation of church and state. My reason for this opposition will be brief: I see that this change has the potential to bring about almost certain disaster for all who do not share the views of the majority.

Thank you for hearing the voices of those who wish our country to continue their heritage of *freedom for all*.

Sincerely,

Kathie Marlene Ingram

From: "Steve Blake CPA" <[REDACTED] PII>

To: "Relig Liberty Comm" <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Principles of Separation of Powers - Steven L Blake

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:30:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

Commission Members;

First, let me congratulate you on finishing this project given the task I'm sure it was. However, even in your own deliberations, the very principles relating to Separation of Powers were at play with your commission's response to one of its own member's views and how the commission dealt with those views. I'm speaking of member Prejean's viewpoints and how some members of the commission viewed her views as antisemitic. Our forefathers believed in separation of powers being a very keen aspect of good government. Of course, they specifically separated legislative, executive and judicial. But they also came from a more recent history of state controlled religion or religion dominated states. They saw how Henry VIII and the roman church's stance on marriage created a state dominated religion in England. Their response to that was simple, Congress shall make no laws respecting religion. There was to be no state religion as was common across the European continent and there was to be no religion controlled state. Obviously religious people were allowed to hold office AFTER those prohibited [for instance Roman Catholics could not hold office in many protestant states] were allowed to run. Whenever someone in state authority has the ability to separate, prohibit or otherwise exclude someone from participating in government because they hold certain religious beliefs [such as Roman Catholics in early protestant colonies] or when religious people separate state authority based on a bias for certain religious customs [as you may be accused of with Ms. Prejean's views], then we are in danger of more witch hunts as in Puritan colonies. There are many reasons for caution in any combination of church/ecclesiastical authority and state/political authority. If you want to argue ultimate authority then why not take the Roman Catholic position itself of Jesus giving Peter both the keys of political [what ever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven] authority and ecclesiastical authority so that the church cannot be held accountable to the state. Just watch the movie "Spotlight" if you want to see a recent historical documentary on these issues. I believe it is the state's role to set up the legal system so that there is equal access to every thing [service, assets, etc.] that government does without designations relating to religion. Public education has been debated in this country since the late 1800's and systematically set up to create a "citizen" worthy of the state according to WT Harris and his *Philosophy of Education*. Take those plastic minds and mold them into what the state needs to have rather than teach them to reason and be free thinking human beings worthy of having the inalienable rights of God bestowed upon them. I do not agree with leftist ideology regarding a complete absence of religion in public life but neither do I agree with the government opening the "can of worms" of supporting religious, "faith-based" organizations UNLESS they support all of them EQUALLY [Christian Jewish, Muslim et. al.]. I know that is an impossible task. Therefore, we should develop a means to prevent us from becoming a "Christian Nation" because Christ does not need a nation, a nation needs Christ. "Blessed is the nation who's God is the LORD". As the Report of the Commission on Unalienable Rights stated, among the traditions that formed the American Spirit, three stand out, Protestant Christianity, Civic Republican Ideal rooted in classical Rome and Classical Liberalism. It is all of the ideals of these traditions that came together in our Constitution to provide for the 10 basic human rights principles of the Bill of Rights. While there have been attacks on these three traditions in the past in our public education system to lean wholly toward one or the other and not balance all three, it is the balance of all three that provides clearly the freedoms we have loved for 250 years. I fear this latest report on Religious Liberty is just another attempt to push an out of balance condition on us leaning more heavily on Christianity and a specific view of Christianity that believes God's chosen people should be supported at all costs. While I may or may not subscribe to this viewpoint, I do not believe my government should be supporting this view point as a political agenda for religious purposes. I don't mind supporting a "friendly" ally in a region that has been a hot bed of political turmoil since the early 20th century, but it should be only that, an ally we support as being "friendly", not a religious belief supported by public money. That is just one of many potential political/religious entanglements that will be the undoing of our civil union that has served us well for 250 years. These principles are principles in God's kingdom, the principles of love and freedom. God wants us to love Him, and freedom is required for it to be love. Without freedom, if it is forced, it is compliance, not love. We're back to Harris' philosophy of education, compliance. Beware of the path you are treading ...

Steven L. Blake CPA CFE CICA CGMA

PII

PII

PII

Live simply. Love generously. Care deeply. Speak kindly. Leave the rest to God.

From: eileen kubik <[REDACTED] PII >

To: <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - "Preserve Separation of Church and State " - Eileen Kubik

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:30:44 -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,

Eileen Kubik

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

From: Sue Chumrau <[REDACTED] PII>

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty commission report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:30:51 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious liberty commission,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the points raised in the recent religious liberty report by the commission. In particular, I disagree with the statement regarding building a bridge between government and religion.

The intent of the Constitution is to ensure that religion and its practice are not dictated by laws or government, while also protecting deeply held religious beliefs and the freedom of conscience. History shows us the dangers of state-controlled religion, such as the centuries when the Papacy coerced beliefs, or modern governments that dictate religious content. This is the direction we are heading if the points in this report are legislated.

Whose religion would we be legislating? Jesus never forced anyone to believe or obey through coercion; His people gathered because of His love, and He stated that His kingdom is not of this world. What we truly need is the enforcement of our constitutional laws and judges who will uphold them.

Additionally, I urge you not to repeal the Johnson amendment. I look at my church and they are split between red and blue. How's that going to work. It causes division and the worship of God has no place in politics. Let each individual decide for themselves. Fix the corruption in the voting
May God direct your decisions.

Sincerely,

Susan Chumrau
United States citizen

From: Verna Sommers <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:30:55 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

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

Thank you,
Verna Sommers
Battle Ground, WA

From: Yukica Seymouroo [REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State-Yukica Vincent

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:30:56 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: PUBLIC_COMMENT_-_Separation_of_Church_and_State.docx

RE: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – [Yukica Vincent]

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was deeply alarmed to read that the Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." A bridge connects, links, unites, binds things together to allow easier access, support or control. A bridge doesn't strengthen the church; it opens the door for government funds and political favors to march right in. Could you imagine a world where churches compete for grants, fight each other for favor and support, or pander to politicians for success instead of depending on God? How about church schools losing support because they have different beliefs than the state? What about the government funding religious education and religious clubs on public campuses? Imagine church approved messages presented to a church body fully funded by the government? It is clear that the Johnson Amendment must be continually enforced.

Historically, the result of such unions has resulted in laws that trample the conscience and tear down the very foundation it declares to uphold. As a Christian, I find the idea ominous.

The wall wasn't built by secularists to keep religion down. It was built by believers to keep the church free.

Please, don't build that bridge. Keep the wall. It helps the church focus on its most vital connection, God. Uphold the wall and the church will never fall.

Sincerely,

Yukica Vincent

Deer Lodge, Tennessee

From: Rowena Fortich <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Separation of Church and State-Rowena D'Amico

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:31:55 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state. As an individual who came to this country knowing full well how strong the religious liberty has made me love this country, respect of its full heritage and values. I have always love the freedom to express my belief and so as everyone else in this country no matter what color or race we've all came from. I enjoy the diversity that we all share and respect, I have met, made long time friendships with individuals that has a different religious view from mine and yet, we respected each other's values, beliefs and get along very well.

As a woman of faith who loves God and enjoys the freedom to express my belief. PLEASE KEEP CHURCH AND STATE SEPARATE. History reveals what happened when church and state joined together, it was not good for either of the two. People of faith has built to protect it, the very reason religion in this country has stayed strong and intact.

Thank you for your consideration. God bless America!

Sincerely yours,
Rowena D'Amico

From: Christie Margart <[REDACTED] PII>

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Christie Margart

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:31:56 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I think that it is a mistake to remove the separation of Church and State for our country by using a bridge to bring the two together. One only needs to look at history and current events to see that anytime a specific religion is endorsed by a government persecution to those that hold opposite beliefs follows. As a Christian myself I want to uphold the religious beliefs of those that agree with my religious persuasion and those that don't. The moment we begin to let politics and religion mix then we will find corruption not only in politics but also in church.

Please keep the wall intact and consider what the future will mean for people of all religious persuasions if we remove the separation of church and state.

Thank you for your time.

Christie Margart

Baker City, Oregon

From: Steve Nelson <[REDACTED] PII>

To: <[REDACTED] PII>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] A Special Thanks and Urgent Request

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:32:50 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I want to express my sincere appreciation for your faithful work in protecting the God-given principles of religious liberty and freedom of conscience for all people. Your commitment to defending the rights of every individual, regardless of their faith or beliefs, is both vital and deeply valued.

I also wish to express appreciation to our nation's public officials, and President Trump, for upholding the constitutional protections of religious liberty and freedom of conscience.

Thank you for your continued dedication to preserving these fundamental freedoms.

I pray that your efforts will continue to uphold the rights of every person to worship according to their conscience—as genuine faith only flourishes when it is freely chosen.

Sincerely,

Pastor Steve Nelson

PastorSteve.org

From: Ralph Rhyne <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:34:36 -0400

Importance: Normal

We believe in separation of Church and State. We think it is imperative because:

- Church and State should stay separate
- Everyone should have the right to worship as one wish
- The Constitution grants all to worship as one chooses
- We've read Pillars of Response and agree with it
- The way one worships should not be mandated, coerced, or forced

Mr. and Mrs. Ralph and Delores Rhyne

From: Kimberly Holmes-James <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:34:41 -0400

Importance: Normal

Is this the draft Bev

I agree with the Pillar of Freedom Commission's Draft on the issue of the Separation of Church and State.

I believe that the state should have no power over the choice that God has given me: the power of choose, the right to choose for myself.

In the garden of Eden, our first parents was not compelled to choose God, but instead, they had freedom to choose, even though God knew what the results would be. That is love! Love is not coerced, but free.

Jesus opposed the union of church and state when he said, "give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and unto God what belongs to God.

In the past, the church join the state when the state has lost control of the people, and therefore reached out to the church for help. Is this our current position, have the state lost control of the people? We know from history that this union of church and state has led to the dark ages, where a great massacre claimed the lives of thousands of Christians in Europe and the inquisition in South America. This was the reason that God brought them, the Christians, to this great American country of freedom from papal persecution. Now we want to return to that old tyrant. I disagree, church and state should remain separate.

Remain separate Church and State,

Truly,
Kim

Be The Exception....for God's glory!

Kimberly Holmes-James

www.theholmessisters.com

Changing lives daily one song and palate at the time!

From: Larry Fuller <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public response to church & state commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:34:44 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Document_(1)_(1).docx

Bo Fuller

PII

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Larry Fuller

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm troubled to read this report. A bridge between Church and State is a bad idea. Any time the government gets involved with something, then they start to take over control of it. Government has no business funding religious education or any other religious activities.

Please stay far away from any bridge building and please maintain the wall that our Founding Fathers were so wise to create.

Sincerely,

Larry Fuller

Seligman, AZ

From: Bob Bevins <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Feedback on the recommendations of the RLC

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:35:01 -0400

Importance: Normal

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. 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.

I remain, Yours truly,

Robert and Doris Bevins

[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=pAUkMwIWYB8>;
<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, 1810.

[11] John Adams, Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law, 1765.
<https://www.masshist.org/publications/adams-papers/index.php/view/PJA01dg2>

From: Claudia Bonilla <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:35:23 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments regarding the draft report on religious liberty.

I believe one of the greatest strengths of the United States is the protection of every person's freedom to practice their faith, change their beliefs, or choose no religion at all. This freedom depends on a government that remains neutral and does not become closely connected with religious organizations. For this reason, I am concerned by recommendations that would increase government funding for religious activities and repeal the Johnson Amendment. Religious organizations should remain independent from political influence and government funding. When government and religion become more closely connected, both institutions risk losing public trust and their independence.

Our country's commitment to religious liberty has served people from many different backgrounds and beliefs. I hope the Commission will preserve these principles by maintaining a clear separation between church and state and reconsidering recommendations that would weaken those protections.

Thank you for considering my comments and for allowing the public to participate in this process.

Respectfully,

Claudia Bonilla

Freeport, New York

From: Guadalupe Tom <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Pillars of Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:35:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

The United States was founded from God fearing Christians who escaped religious persecutions and torture for their faith in other countries. As a Christian, I will be facing the same fate in the United States from the United States! I stand with the Pillars of Freedom to help Christians in this country to maintain freedom of religion that is unique to the country I love and served, as I am also a proud U.S Veteran. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. God bless America!

From: Maureen Hogan <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Minority Faith Inclusion, Methodology and Definitions -Muslims for Muslims International

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:35:44 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: global_anti-Muslim_pressure_pattern_JPMH_2026.pdf;
M4M_Review_Religious_Liberty_Commission_7-13-26JPMH.pdf;
irfa_anti_muslim_pressure_infographic_v2_(3).png

Inline-Images: image1783974928916

Hello,

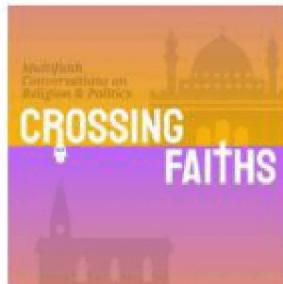
Attached is our report for public comment and report on Global Anti-Muslim Patterns to be submitted for evidence. Both of which are submitted by Muslims for Muslims International to the Religious Liberty Commission.

Thank you for your inclusion and consideration. Please let us know if any additional information is needed.

Respectfully,

Maureen Hogan

Director of Government Relations & Special Projects



www.muslims4muslims.org | www.crossingfaiths.com

Analysis on Global Anti-Muslim Pressure Patterns

The last two years show a **global anti-Muslim pressure pattern**: state power in India, China, Burma/Myanmar, and Israel/Palestine; far-right and nationalist street violence in Europe and the U.S.; and attacks on mosques as symbolic battlefield terrain. Under the **International Religious Freedom Act of 1998**, the clearest violations are where Muslims are denied worship, punished for religious practice, detained, beaten, killed, displaced, or where mosques and religious institutions are destroyed or coerced under state authority or with state tolerance.

IRFA defines religious freedom violations to include arbitrary restrictions on peaceful worship, preaching, prayer, religious speech, religious literature, and raising children in religious practice; it also includes detention, interrogation, forced labor, imprisonment, beating, torture, murder, and execution when tied to belief or practice. “Particularly severe violations” are “systematic, ongoing, egregious” violations, including cruel treatment, prolonged detention, disappearance, or other flagrant denial of life, liberty, or security. ([U.S. Code](#))

IRFA Rubric Applied

Category	IRFA Test	What It Captures
Access to worship	Are Muslims blocked from prayer, Ramadan, Eid, mosque entry, or religious assembly?	Al-Aqsa restrictions, mosque closures, surveillance of mosques
Violence against persons	Are Muslims beaten, killed, detained, disappeared, displaced, or threatened because they are Muslim or perceived Muslim?	Mob lynchings, mosque shootings, state detention, vigilante attacks
Attack on sacred space	Are mosques, cemeteries, shrines, waqf properties, or Islamic schools damaged, desecrated, demolished, or seized?	Gaza mosques, Indian demolitions, Paris pig-head desecrations

Category	IRFA Test	What It Captures
State role	Is the perpetrator the state, state-backed, state-tolerated, or non-state?	CPC-level cases require state commission or toleration
Pattern and intent	Is it isolated crime, political intimidation, religious hostility, ethnic cleansing, or systematic persecution?	Difference between hate crime and IRFA “particularly severe” violation

Core Findings by Theater

1. India: the clearest “state-tolerated plus mob” IRFA case

India is the strongest current case for an IRFA finding against anti-Muslim persecution by non-Muslim actors. USCIRF’s 2026 India chapter says religious freedom conditions deteriorated in 2025; the government introduced or enforced laws targeting religious minorities and their houses of worship, tolerated vigilante attacks, and Hindu nationalist mobs harassed, incited, and attacked Muslims and Christians. It also cites cow-protection violence, targeted attacks after the Kashmir tourist killings, and state efforts affecting waqf endowments and Muslim religious properties.

Under IRFA, this is not just “communal tension.” The operative issue is **state tolerance and political enablement**. When mobs attack Muslims under the banner of cow protection, when mosques or Muslim properties are demolished, and when political actors use anti-Muslim rhetoric, the IRFA question becomes whether the state is preventing violence or metabolizing it into policy. USCIRF has repeatedly recommended India for CPC treatment, which is the policy bucket for systematic, ongoing, egregious violations. ([ecoi.net](https://www.ecoi.net))

IRFA score: High concern / CPC-worthy if the evidence is accepted.

Type: State-tolerated vigilante violence, legal discrimination, attacks on worship infrastructure, political incitement.

2. China/Xinjiang: the most systematic state repression of Muslim religious life

China remains the cleanest “state perpetrator” case. USCIRF’s China materials describe ongoing violations against Uyghur Muslims; its 2026 reporting notes a Uyghur Muslim woman sentenced to 17 years for teaching Qur’anic verses to children and officials ordering Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang to provide video proof that they were not fasting during Ramadan. ([ecoi.net](https://www.ecoi.net))

This is classic IRFA territory: punishment for religious teaching, coercive interference with Ramadan observance, mass detention, ideological reprogramming, and the physical erasure of Islamic markers. Reuters reported in 2024 that Xinjiang's top Communist Party official called the "sinicisation" of Islam "inevitable," while rights groups have said large numbers of mosques in Xinjiang have been damaged or destroyed since 2017. ([Reuters](#))

IRFA score: Particularly severe.

Type: State repression, religious assimilation, coercive control of Islamic practice.

3. Burma/Myanmar: Rohingya Muslims remain in a mass-atrocity frame

Burma is an IRFA slam dunk because the state and armed actors have targeted Muslim Rohingya for years, and the last two years show continuing collapse. USCIRF's 2026 Burma chapter says the Tatmadaw used airstrikes and artillery against civilians, religious sites, and schools; destroyed hundreds of religious sites in 2025; and that Muslim-majority Rakhine State faced intensified violence, dire living conditions, forced labor, food crises, and armed actors locking or converting mosques into military bases and detention centers.

The Rohingya case is both ethnic and religious. That does not weaken the IRFA claim; it strengthens it. IRFA does not require persecution to be purely theological. If Muslim identity is part of the targeting matrix, and people are denied life, liberty, worship, movement, security, and citizenship because of that identity, it fits the statute's "particularly severe" logic. Reuters and HRW reporting in 2024–2026 also describe Rohingya civilians caught between the junta and the Arakan Army, including drone attacks and massacres attributed by witnesses or rights investigators to armed actors. ([Reuters](#))

IRFA score: Particularly severe.

Type: State and non-state mass violence, displacement, mosque seizure, religious-ethnic persecution.

4. Al-Aqsa / Jerusalem: worship restriction, sacred-site control, and political-religious escalation

Your Al-Aqsa example belongs in the "restriction of worship and sacred-site control" category. In 2025, Reuters reported that Israel limited West Bank Muslim worshippers' access to Al-Aqsa during Ramadan by age and security screening. In 2026, AP reported that Israel allowed only 10,000 West Bank Palestinians to enter for the first Friday of Ramadan, limited mostly to older men, older women, and children. ([Reuters](#))

The sharper 2026 event was the closure of Al-Aqsa at the end of Ramadan/Eid. The Guardian reported that, for the first time since 1967, Al-Aqsa was closed at the end of Ramadan, with worshippers forced to pray outside the Old City while Israeli authorities cited security concerns tied to the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran. The same report notes that Palestinians view the move as part of a wider strategy to tighten control over the compound, while the closure affected all Old City holy sites but followed repeated restrictions on Palestinian Muslim worshippers in prior months. ([The Guardian](#))

IRFA score: High concern.

Type: State restriction of worship, sacred-site access control, politically charged religious-site governance.

5. Gaza: destruction of mosques as religious-life destruction, with war-context complications

Gaza is analytically hard because Israel frames attacks as military operations against Hamas, while Palestinians and rights groups frame the scale of destruction as collective devastation. Under IRFA, motive matters, but so does foreseeable impact on worship and religious life. Reuters reported in March 2024 that Palestinians held Ramadan prayers outside the ruins of Rafah's al-Farouk mosque and that Gaza authorities said Israeli attacks had completely destroyed 223 mosques and partially destroyed 289 more by then. ([Reuters](#))

Le Monde, using UNOSAT satellite analysis, reported that 60% of Gaza's healthcare, school, university, and religious buildings had been damaged or destroyed since October 7, 2023. That is not merely property damage; it is the demolition of the civic and sacred architecture that makes communal life possible. ([Le Monde.fr](#))

IRFA score: High concern, but classification depends on evidence of religious targeting versus wartime proportionality/necessity claims.

Type: Wartime destruction of Muslim religious infrastructure, mass impairment of worship.

6. Europe and the United States: hate-crime surge, not usually IRFA/CPC unless state tolerance emerges

In the U.K., Tell MAMA reported a fivefold increase in threats to Muslims and a threefold increase in hate-crime incidents during the far-right mobilization after the Southport misinformation wave, with 10 mosques reportedly attacked or threatened. ([The Guardian](#))

In France, nine Muslim places of worship in and around Paris were targeted in September 2025 with bloody pig heads left outside mosques, some marked with “MACRON.” French authorities investigated the acts as incitement to hatred or violence on religious/racial grounds and also examined possible foreign interference. ([Le Monde.fr](#))

Germany also shows a sharp trend line: CLAIM’s 2024 report documented 3,080 anti-Muslim incidents, a 60% increase over 2023, with more than eight incidents per day on average.

In the U.S., the May 2026 San Diego Islamic Center attack is the most direct recent mosque attack. AP reported that two teenagers attacked the Islamic Center of San Diego, killed three men, cited Christchurch-style far-right inspiration, and left writings containing hate toward Muslims and Islam. TIME reported that CAIR received 8,683 civil rights complaints in 2025, its highest single-year number since its first report in 1996. ([AP News](#))

IRFA score: Serious hate-crime concern, but not automatically “particularly severe” under IRFA unless the state commits, enables, or systematically tolerates the pattern.

Type: Far-right violence, mosque desecration, threats, intimidation, political-rhetorical enabling environment.

Bottom Line Judgment

The worst IRFA cases are **China, Burma/Myanmar, and India** because the pattern is systemic and either state-run or state-tolerated. **Al-Aqsa and Gaza** are severe religious-freedom concerns because access to worship and sacred-site integrity are being constrained in a highly militarized political environment. **Europe and the U.S.** show a dangerous hate-crime escalation, especially around mosques, but they fall into a different category unless state protection collapses or official rhetoric becomes operational permission.

The practical conclusion: this is not random Islamophobia. It is a **global permission structure**. In some places the state is the hammer. In others, the mob is the hammer and the state looks away. In the West, online radicalization and political rhetoric turn mosques into targets. Under IRFA 1998, the test is simple: when Muslims cannot pray, gather, teach, fast, protect their mosques, or live without being threatened because they are Muslim, the threshold is no longer cultural friction. It is religious freedom failure.

PUBLIC COMMENT / STRATEGIC REVIEW

Strengthening “America’s First Freedom” for Every Faith and Belief

A Strategic BLUF Review of the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

Prepared from the perspective of Muslims for Muslims International and the International Religious Freedom Analyzer

PREPARED FOR	Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE	John T. Pinna Muslims for Muslims International International Religious Freedom Analyzer
DATE	July 13, 2026
DOCUMENT PURPOSE	Constructive assessment, public-comment support, and implementation resource memorandum

Purpose and posture

This memorandum is deliberately constructive. It recognizes the draft report as a serious defense of religious liberty while identifying the analytical, representational, and implementation architecture needed for the final report to protect all people—including minority faiths, converts, dissenters within majority traditions, and people who hold no religious belief. It is not legal advice.

“Creating a solution for the wrong problem will not solve anything.”

— John T. Pinna, “Classifying Religious Persecution to Implement Meaningful Change” [11]

BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

BLUF

Bottom line

The draft report is strongest as a legal and institutional defense of religious exercise against government burden. It is not yet a complete domestic freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) framework. The final report should preserve its concrete legal remedies while adding a universal rights definition, a transparent methodology, a representative minority-faith architecture, a two-track incident-attribution model, measurable implementation requirements, and a serious treatment of anti-Muslim hostility, other minority communities, nonbelief, digital harms, and mixed religious-ethnic-political motives.

The draft has real strengths: it translates testimony into concrete recommendations; covers education, health care, the military, faith-based institutions, houses of worship, and public-sector employment; recommends practical enforcement tools; and gives sustained attention to antisemitism. It also names mosques, synagogues, temples, and churches as vulnerable institutions and includes selected Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim examples. The Commission should retain those features.

The central weakness is structural. The report's testimonial and rhetorical center of gravity is predominantly Christian and Jewish, while its methodology is not sufficiently explicit to show how incidents were selected, verified, weighted, classified, or compared. It does not consistently separate state restrictions from societal hostility, direct religious motive from mixed motive, or immediate vulnerability from the evidentiary threshold required to label conduct "religious persecution." As a result, some communities are visible only through isolated anecdotes, and several are nearly absent.

The Commission already has an important foundation for collaboration: the draft cites Muslims for Muslims International's public comment in support of incident tracking and practical educational resources. That citation should be treated as an opening to deepen—not merely acknowledge—minority-faith participation. Muslims for Muslims International and the International Religious Freedom Analyzer can offer a culturally competent, evidence-based resource for the Commission's remaining work: mixed-motive attribution, Muslim and multifaith listening sessions, incident taxonomy, source verification, staff training, and a pilot domestic monitoring framework.

Executive judgments

Preserve	The report's practical recommendations on guidance, complaint pathways, training, enforcement, security, military accommodation, faith-based participation, and institutional accountability.
Universalize	Replace a largely majoritarian religious-liberty narrative with an explicit FoRB standard protecting belief, nonbelief, change of belief, intrafaith dissent, manifestation, association, and freedom from coercion.
Operationalize	Add a methodology appendix, incident taxonomy, evidence hierarchy, confidence levels, source disclosures, and a public implementation dashboard.
Represent	Create a standing Minority Faith and Nonbelief Advisory Council and document how the Commission heard from Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, Baha'i, Native/Indigenous, minority-Christian, convert, ex-member, humanist, and atheist communities.
Differentiate	Use separate tracks for vulnerability/protection and motive/accountability so assistance does not wait for perfect proof, while formal labels remain evidentially disciplined.
Connect	Treat antisemitism as both a distinct and urgent danger and an early-warning indicator within an interconnected ecosystem of threats to all religious and belief communities.

Measure	Assign owners, dates, indicators, reporting duties, and outcome metrics to every major recommendation.
Partner	Invite culturally competent minority-led organizations and technical practitioners into implementation design, not only into the public-comment record.

Recommended Commission decision

Adopt the draft report as the foundation for a stronger final product, but do not finalize it without a supplemental “Universal FoRB, Minority Communities, and Methodology” section. That supplement should explain the evidentiary method, broaden the affected communities, establish a domestic restrictions-and-hostilities framework, and set out a measurable implementation plan. This is the fastest route to preserving the report’s strengths while correcting the blind spots most likely to limit legitimacy, uptake, and durability.

DOCUMENT MAP

Scope, Method, and Standard of Review

This review assesses the draft report through five linked lenses: constitutional and statutory religious liberty; international FoRB standards; domestic minority-community experience; conflict and persecution attribution; and implementation design. It draws on the Commission’s draft, official USCIRF and Department of State frameworks, Article 18 Alliance commitments, Pew Research Center methods, and the author’s and Muslims for Muslims International’s prior work on classification, data, field practice, and multifaith engagement.[1–20]

The review does not attempt to relitigate every legal conclusion in the draft. Its purpose is to identify where the report is persuasive, where its evidence and framing are incomplete, and what additions would make it more useful to the White House, federal agencies, courts, state and local officials, faith communities, civil-society organizations, and people directly experiencing discrimination or violence.

Analytical standard

The governing standard is universal and individual-centered: freedom of religion or belief belongs to every person, not to favored institutions or communities. It protects theistic, non-theistic, and atheistic convictions; the right to adopt, change, leave, or decline a religion; freedom from coercion; and the individual and collective manifestation of belief, subject only to narrow, lawful, necessary, and proportionate limitations.[4, 21, 22]

A credible domestic assessment must also separate two dimensions that are too often collapsed. Government restrictions measure law, policy, official conduct, and state failure to protect. Social hostilities measure violence, intimidation, prejudice, vandalism, exclusion, and coercion by non-state actors. Pew’s dual-index approach and the Department of State’s separation of government respect from societal respect offer useful models for this distinction.[5, 9]

Finally, the review applies the International Religious Freedom Analyzer’s triadic attribution framework. Every reported event involves at least three perspectives: the perpetrator and any evidence of motive; the victim or community and its perception of the event; and the third-party reporter whose incentives, access, and verification practices shape the narrative. The model separates vulnerability, whether religious identity or practice increased exposure to harm, from confidence that the perpetrator’s motive was religious. Protection can be triggered by vulnerability even when motive remains contested; accountability labels require stronger proof.[12]

Document map

What the report gets right

What requires strengthening

Alignment with USCIRF, State Department, Article 18 Alliance, Pew, and credible research

Priority recommendations and implementation roadmap

Proposed insert language for the final report

How Muslims for Muslims International and John T. Pinna can serve as a technical and community resource

Scorecard, incident-coding template, and sources

Limitations and posture

The Commission's report is a draft assembled from hearings, written comments, and cited authorities. A public-comment review therefore cannot determine every internal selection decision, source-verification step, or drafting constraint. Where the report does not disclose a method, this memorandum identifies the absence as an institutional risk rather than assuming bad faith. The aim is to improve the final report and establish a repeatable structure for future Commission work.

PART I

What the Draft Report Gets Right

1. It treats religious liberty as an operational government responsibility

The draft does more than restate doctrine. It translates asserted harms into administrative and institutional responses: guidance, training, complaint portals, written explanations, interagency coordination, litigation posture, security support, military accommodation, and clearer public information. This is valuable because rights without accessible procedures are often rights only on paper.

The recommended "Know Your Rights" materials, hotlines, portals, and agency guidance can reduce the information gap between legal doctrine and lived experience. These tools are especially important for immigrants, small congregations, minority-language communities, low-income claimants, and people who do not have counsel. The Commission should retain these recommendations and add multilingual, disability-accessible, and culturally competent delivery requirements.

2. It recognizes that religious liberty problems appear across institutions

The report's breadth is a major strength. It examines education, parental rights, teachers, universities, faith-based organizations, the military, health care, public employment, houses of worship, and the public square. That institutional map reflects the reality that burdens on religion rarely occur in a single legal silo. A person's religious identity may shape schooling, employment, dress, diet, medical decisions, burial, family life, association, speech, and access to communal institutions.

The institutional breadth also creates a basis for cross-agency implementation. A final report can use this structure to assign responsibility to the Department of Justice, Department of Education, Department of Defense, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Homeland Security, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and other relevant bodies.

3. It converts testimony into concrete remedies

The Commission heard from more than one hundred witnesses across seven hearings and uses individual narratives to illustrate institutional pressure. Testimony is not a substitute for prevalence data, but it is indispensable for identifying mechanisms of harm that aggregate statistics may obscure. The report is persuasive when it connects a concrete experience to a specific administrative failure and then to a practical remedy.

This testimonial foundation should be preserved while being supplemented with a transparent explanation of case selection and verification. The right synthesis is qualitative depth plus quantitative and methodological discipline—not one in place of the other.

4. It gives sustained attention to antisemitism

The dedicated antisemitism chapter correctly recognizes that threats to Jewish people and institutions require focused attention. Antisemitism combines religious hostility, racialization, conspiracy narratives, political mobilization, institutional exclusion, and violence. It cannot be adequately addressed through generic hate-crime language alone.

The report's recommendations to improve enforcement, track incidents, develop practical resources, and address threats to institutions are strong. Importantly, the draft cites Muslims for Muslims International's public comment in support of tracking and educational/toolkit recommendations. That citation is evidence that minority-led, multifaith input can strengthen the Commission's work and should be integrated more fully into implementation.[1]

5. It acknowledges multiple traditions and vulnerable sacred spaces

The draft expressly recognizes that mosques, synagogues, temples, and churches can become targets. It includes examples involving Jewish, Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim individuals or institutions, including Sikh accommodation and school bullying, a Muslim health professional's conscience concern, and attacks or threats involving mosques and mandirs. These examples prevent the report from being wholly confined to one tradition.

The final report should build on these examples by moving from episodic inclusion to a systematic comparative analysis. Every community should be assessed using the same questions: What is the legal framework? Who is the actor? What conduct occurred? What evidence supports religious motive? What alternative drivers exist? How did government respond? What remedy was available? What outcome followed?

6. It links domestic religious liberty and international religious freedom

The report notes opportunities for the White House Faith Office and the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom to work together. This is strategically important. U.S. international credibility is strengthened when domestic policy visibly protects minority communities, and domestic institutions can learn from the mature reporting architecture developed by the Department of State and USCIRF.

The present linkage, however, is too brief. The final report should turn the connection into a standing mechanism for methods exchange, community consultation, early warning, and annual reporting.

7. It creates a platform for implementation rather than a one-time statement

The draft's recommendation structure can support ongoing work if the Commission attaches owners, deadlines, metrics, and public reporting. The report therefore has the potential to become more than a symbolic defense of religious liberty. With the additions proposed below, it could become a durable domestic assessment and response architecture.

Overall strength assessment

The draft's legal energy, institutional breadth, and practical remedies deserve preservation. Its main challenge is not a lack of concern; it is the absence of a fully universal, methodologically transparent, and representationally balanced framework capable of converting concern into comparable findings across communities.

PART II

What Needs to Be Strengthened

1. The report needs an explicit universal FoRB definition

The draft states that liberty matters to believers and nonbelievers, but its dominant language often centers “religious Americans,” a Creator-based account, churches, and the experience of major religious institutions. Those traditions are constitutionally and historically important, yet a final Commission report should state in its first pages that the protected right is held by every person.

A universal definition should expressly include: belief and nonbelief; adoption, change, and renunciation of belief; intrafaith dissent; individual and collective worship; religious dress and diet; teaching and transmission; association and institutional autonomy; conscientious practice; access to sacred spaces; and freedom from coercion. This would align the report with USCIRF’s articulation of the right to believe or not believe and with Article 18 of the UDHR and ICCPR.[4, 21, 22]

Why this matters for minorities: members of majority traditions often encounter the state through well-established institutions. Smaller communities, converts, dissenters, and nonbelievers are more likely to encounter barriers at the edges of legal categories—registration, zoning, prison chaplaincy, school calendars, dress codes, food, burial, licensing, employment scheduling, and misclassification of their practices.

2. The Commission’s representation architecture is too narrow

The named Commission and advisory structure includes prominent Christian and Jewish leaders and professionals, with limited visible Muslim participation and no comparably clear standing representation for Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, Baha’i, Native or Indigenous spiritual communities, minority-Christian communities, humanists, atheists, converts, former members, or people whose religion is intertwined with race, ethnicity, caste, migration, or tribal identity.

Representation is not a quota exercise and does not determine the truth of any legal claim. It is an evidentiary safeguard. Communities differ in how they describe harm, whom they trust, whether they report to police, what records exist, and whether discrimination appears as religion, race, national origin, language, immigration status, or security policy. A narrow advisory structure makes certain harms less likely to be heard or correctly classified.

The final report should disclose the demographic and substantive coverage of witnesses and written comments, identify gaps, and create a standing Minority Faith and Nonbelief Advisory Council. The council should include both institutional leaders and people with lived experience, including women, youth, converts, dissenters, and small congregations.

3. The report does not disclose a sufficiently rigorous methodology

The report identifies hearings, witnesses, public comments, and authorities, but it does not provide a clear methodology for selecting incidents, assessing credibility, resolving conflicting accounts, distinguishing allegation from finding, comparing communities, or determining when an anecdote represents a broader pattern.

A methodology appendix should answer at least ten questions: What sources were eligible? How were witnesses selected? How were submissions coded? What corroboration was required? How were duplicates handled? How were severity and recurrence assessed? How were legal conclusions separated from factual claims? What alternative explanations were considered? How were conflicts of interest or advocacy incentives disclosed? How were minority communities with low reporting capacity treated?

USCIRF’s annual reporting process, the Department of State’s recurring country-report structure, Pew’s published index methodology, and established conflict datasets demonstrate that transparency is possible without sacrificing narrative clarity.[3, 5, 9, 14, 15]

4. It needs to separate actor, vulnerability, motive, and legal responsibility

The draft moves among government restrictions, institutional policies, private discrimination, criminal attacks, political rhetoric, and societal hostility. These are all relevant, but they are not analytically interchangeable. A state may directly impose a burden; fail to protect a community; tolerate private violence; enforce a neutral rule in a discriminatory way; or respond effectively to a non-state attack. Each pattern requires a different remedy.

Motive is equally complex. Religious identity can increase vulnerability even when the perpetrator's primary motive is political, ethnic, racial, economic, personal, or criminal. Conversely, a perpetrator may invoke religion strategically even when other drivers dominate. Treating motive as binary can either overstate persecution or cause institutions to withhold protection until motive is proven.

The International Religious Freedom Analyzer's two-track model resolves this problem. Track A asks whether religious identity or practice increased exposure to harm and can trigger protection or assistance. Track B asks how confident the evidence makes us that the perpetrator's motive was religious and governs accountability language. Victim perception and third-party framing are recorded separately, not treated as automatic proof.[12]

5. Antisemitism should be distinct, urgent, and connected—not isolated

The dedicated antisemitism chapter is justified. The risk is that a stand-alone treatment can unintentionally imply that other communities are secondary or that threats travel in separate lanes. In practice, the same extremist networks, conspiracy ecosystems, online platforms, security failures, and political permission structures often target Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Christians, and other communities in overlapping ways.

The final report should retain the dedicated chapter and add an "Interconnected Safety of Religious and Belief Communities" section. Antisemitism can be framed as a canary in the coal mine: a distinct hatred that warrants focused action and also signals broader institutional vulnerability. Cross-community tracking would improve prevention without diluting the specificity of antisemitism.

6. Anti-Muslim hostility is not treated with comparable depth

The report includes Muslim examples and names mosques as potential targets, but it lacks a dedicated analysis of anti-Muslim discrimination, violence, surveillance, political rhetoric, workplace barriers, school bullying, prison and detention practices, zoning, security profiling, and attacks on Islamic institutions. This is a material blind spot for a national religious-liberty assessment.

Anti-Muslim incidents are frequently misclassified as race, ethnicity, immigration, national security, or generalized hate. Muslims also comprise diverse racial, ethnic, sectarian, linguistic, and ideological communities. Sunni, Shia, Ahmadiyya, Ismaili, Black Muslim, immigrant, convert, and other experiences are not interchangeable. An effective assessment must also consider dissent within Muslim communities and people who leave Islam, protecting both communal practice and individual conscience.

Article 18 Alliance statements on anti-Muslim hatred and USCIRF's universal standard provide credible points of alignment. The Commission should add a dedicated anti-Muslim section or annex developed with Muslim-led organizations, independent scholars, local congregations, civil-rights practitioners, and victims.[4, 8]

7. Other minority communities appear as examples rather than analytic subjects

Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, Baha'i, Native or Indigenous, minority-Christian, and other communities face distinct mechanisms of exclusion. Sikhs may experience misidentification, hair and turban barriers, military or workplace accommodation problems, and school bullying. Hindus may face attacks on mandirs, caste-linked discrimination, stereotyping, and calendar or dietary barriers. Buddhists and Baha'is may be invisible in data systems. Native and Indigenous traditions may face sacred-land, burial, prison, and institutional-recognition issues. Minority Christians can experience racialized or immigrant-specific hostility that is not captured by a generic "Christian" category.

The final report should not assume that a broad "religious" category captures these differences. A community annex can apply the same standard to each group without requiring a separate chapter of equal length.

8. The report underdevelops conversion, intrafaith dissent, and nonbelief

Freedom to maintain a faith is only part of freedom of conscience. The right also protects conversion, leaving a religion, changing denominations, rejecting an inherited identity, refusing coercive observance, and dissenting from religious authorities. These issues are especially important for youth, women, LGBTQ persons, interfaith families, immigrants, and people in tightly bounded communities.

A domestic report should distinguish state coercion from family or community pressure while acknowledging that severe non-state pressure can produce displacement, educational exclusion, economic retaliation, forced marriage, or threats. The Commission should also include humanists and atheists in its listening and reporting architecture, consistent with the universal right not to believe.

9. Gender, children, family, and economic vulnerability require disaggregation

Men and women can experience different forms of religiously related harm. Women and girls may encounter dress coercion, forced marriage, family-court consequences, reproductive or health-care conflicts, employment segregation, or community punishment. Men and boys may be profiled as security threats, targeted for recruitment, detained, or attacked in public. Children can be bullied, excluded from school activities, denied dietary or dress accommodation, separated from family religious practice, or pressured to conceal identity.

The report should require disaggregation by gender, age, religious community, race or ethnicity, immigration status, disability, geography, and socioeconomic position where privacy and sample size permit. Economic discrimination should be treated as an outcome in its own right: denial of jobs, licenses, contracts, housing, benefits, banking, or access to local markets can erode a community without producing a headline-grabbing violent event.

The author's prior framework and the wider research literature emphasize that persecution can disrupt families and the transmission of faith. The Commission should therefore track family separation, child-welfare consequences, and intergenerational effects where relevant.[10, 18]

10. The digital and AI environment is a major blind spot

Religious hostility now moves through recommendation systems, synthetic media, targeted advertising, content moderation, biometric surveillance, automated risk scoring, and online mobilization. These systems can misrepresent beliefs, amplify conspiracy narratives, suppress minority religious speech, expose worshippers, or convert political rhetoric into coordinated threats.

Article 18 Alliance's FoRB-sensitive AI work and the author's faith-informed AI ethics framework point to a clear standard: human dignity, transparency, accountability, protection of vulnerable groups, and meaningful human review.[7, 19] The final report should address both government use of AI and private-platform responsibilities, while avoiding the mistake of treating content moderation as a simple choice between censorship and unrestricted amplification.

At minimum, the Commission should recommend algorithmic impact assessments for systems affecting religious communities; auditability of government religious-accommodation decisions; safeguards against religious profiling; rapid response to synthetic incitement and doxxing; and consultation with diverse faith and nonbelief communities.

11. The domestic-international bridge is underdeveloped

The report's international recommendation is too cursory relative to the mature infrastructure already available. USCIRF applies statutory thresholds and issues independent recommendations. The Department of State organizes reports around legal framework, government practice, societal respect, and U.S. engagement. The Article 18 Alliance coordinates states around shared priorities. These systems offer methods, not merely foreign-policy talking points.

A domestic Commission should not import country designations or treat the United States as a foreign-policy case. It can, however, adapt the architecture: annual transparent reporting, universal standards, government-versus-society distinctions, incident categories, community consultation, and documented follow-up. A formal

methods exchange among the Commission, the Office of International Religious Freedom, USCIRF, and relevant civil-society experts would strengthen all four.

12. Recommendations need owners, dates, measures, and public accountability

The draft contains many recommendations but often leaves implementation responsibility and measures of success unspecified. A recommendation without an owner, timeline, indicator, and reporting duty is difficult to evaluate and easy to defer.

Each final recommendation should include: lead agency; supporting agencies; statutory or administrative authority; first milestone; completion target; output indicator; outcome indicator; disaggregation requirement; public reporting mechanism; and an appeal or correction process. The Commission should publish a one-year implementation dashboard and a two-year independent review.

13. Partisan or polemical rhetoric weakens durability

A report intended to guide multiple administrations, agencies, courts, and communities should distinguish documented facts from political characterization. Language that attributes failures to ideological camps or singles out partisan actors without a consistently applied evidentiary standard risks narrowing the report's audience and reducing compliance.

The Commission should retain forceful conclusions while using neutral actor descriptions, verifiable conduct, legal standards, and comparable evidence. Nonpartisan language is not timidity; it is a method for making recommendations harder to dismiss.

Core analytical gap

The draft is principally a defense brief. A final national resource must also be a measurement system. The Commission's next step is to add the transparent, repeatable architecture that allows the same standard to be applied across actors, communities, and political contexts.

ANALYTICAL SCORECARD

Draft Report Performance by Dimension

The following ratings are analytical judgments, not legal grades. They indicate where the current draft is mature and where targeted additions would yield the greatest improvement.

Legal and doctrinal engagement	Strong	Substantial discussion of constitutional and statutory issues; concrete remedies.
Institutional breadth	Strong	Covers schools, universities, military, health care, faith-based entities, worship, employment.
Actionability	Strong	Guidance, portals, training, enforcement, task forces, security, and accommodation.
Universal FoRB framing	Needs strengthening	Belief/nonbelief is acknowledged but not consistently operationalized.
Minority-faith representation	Needs strengthening	Selected examples exist; standing representation and comparative analysis are limited.
Methodological transparency	Weak	No clear coding rules, source hierarchy, confidence levels, or case-selection method.
Actor and motive attribution	Weak	Government, private, societal, mixed-motive, and vulnerability questions are not consistently separated.
Antisemitism analysis	Strong but siloed	Focused chapter and recommendations; needs connected-safety framework.
Anti-Muslim analysis	Weak	Muslim examples appear, but no sustained assessment of anti-Muslim mechanisms.
Other minority communities	Needs strengthening	Sikh and Hindu examples are present; Buddhist, Baha'i, Indigenous, nonbelief, and others are underdeveloped.
Gender, youth, and family	Needs strengthening	Some related narratives; no systematic disaggregation or family-impact analysis.
Economic discrimination	Weak	Not consistently treated as a distinct religious-liberty outcome.
Digital and AI risks	Weak	No robust treatment of algorithms, synthetic media, online mobilization, or religious profiling.
Domestic-international alignment	Needs strengthening	Link is acknowledged but not institutionalized.
Implementation metrics	Weak	Recommendations generally lack owners, timelines, and outcome measures.
Nonpartisan durability	Needs strengthening	Some rhetoric may reduce cross-administration legitimacy.

PART III

Alignment with Credible Frameworks and Sources

USCIRF: universal standards, thresholds, independence, and recommendations

USCIRF's value lies not only in its country conclusions but in its institutional design. It is independent and bipartisan, uses the International Religious Freedom Act and international standards, distinguishes categories of severity, conducts recurring research, issues policy recommendations, and permits individual or dissenting views. Its public articulation centers the right of every person to believe or not believe and to live according to conscience.[3, 4]

Domestic alignment should include: a universal definition; disclosed thresholds; annual or periodic reassessment; clear separation of facts, legal analysis, and policy recommendations; transparent disagreement where consensus is absent; and a victim- or incident-tracking capacity. The Commission need not reproduce USCIRF's country designations, but it should emulate its discipline.

Department of State Office of International Religious Freedom: a reusable report architecture

The Department of State's country reports offer a simple, durable structure: religious demography; legal framework; government practices; societal respect; and government engagement. A domestic adaptation could be organized as follows: national and local legal framework; federal, state, and local government practices; societal hostility and private institutional barriers; government response and enforcement; and implementation outcomes.[5]

This structure would prevent the Commission from collapsing state action, state inaction, and private conduct into one category. It would also make findings comparable across years and communities.

Article 18 Alliance: universal, coordinated, minority-sensitive, and technology-aware action

The Article 18 Alliance's terms emphasize coordinated action against persecution, violence, and discrimination. Its work on anti-Muslim hatred and FoRB-sensitive AI directly addresses two areas that the draft report underdevelops.[6–8]

Alignment should include: explicit attention to anti-Muslim hostility; engagement with international and domestic partners; a shared language of universal and indivisible rights; and technology policy that protects human agency, privacy, religious identity, and vulnerable communities.

Pew Research Center: government restrictions and social hostilities

Pew's Government Restrictions Index and Social Hostilities Index demonstrate the analytical value of separating state and non-state dimensions. The Commission can adapt this logic without copying the indices. A Domestic Government Restrictions domain could capture laws, policies, official conduct, discriminatory enforcement, and failures to protect. A Domestic Social Hostilities domain could capture violence, threats, harassment, vandalism, boycotts, exclusion, and displacement.[9]

Pew's U.S. Religious Landscape also underscores why representation matters: the United States includes a large religiously unaffiliated population and diverse non-Christian traditions. A national report should reflect the actual pluralism of the country rather than an idealized binary of religious institutions and a secular state.[10]

Muslims for Muslims International and John T. Pinna: attribution, cultural competence, and implementation

John T. Pinna's article on classifying religious persecution argues that religious harm is often intertwined with political, ethnic, and socioeconomic factors. The central warning—solving the wrong problem will not produce meaningful change—should be incorporated into the Commission's methodology.[11]

The Triadic FoRB Attribution Framework operationalizes that insight by scoring vulnerability, motive confidence, victim perception, and third-party lens risk. It creates deterministic labels and action flags, preserves assistance when motive is uncertain, and guards against overconfident advocacy framing.[12]

Muslims for Muslims International's broader work combines minority-led convening, multifaith dialogue, field experience, government engagement, media, humanitarian implementation, and data strategy. Its current partnership work with the International Institute for Religious Freedom and academic institutions is designed to bridge incident data, theory, and policy.[17, 18] The draft report's citation to M4M's public comment already recognizes the relevance of this contribution.

Scholarly and data alignment: RELAC, RCDC, and pluralism frameworks

RELAC distinguishes actor identity, religious claims, and the salience of religion within armed-conflict dyads. RCDC separately codes religious targets, religious actors, communal clashes, state clashes, and peace initiatives. These datasets demonstrate why "religious conflict" is not a single variable and why positive peacebuilding activity should be measured alongside harm.[14, 15]

The Global Pluralism Monitor adds a useful hardware/software distinction: formal commitments and institutions matter, but so do leadership, mindsets, group-based inequalities, and belonging. For the Commission, this means that legal victories should not be mistaken for complete social inclusion. A strong final report should measure both rule architecture and lived conditions.[16]

Alignment matrix

Universal definition	USCIRF / UDHR / ICCPR	Believe, not believe, change, leave, manifest, and resist coercion.	Add controlling definition in Executive Summary.
Government vs society	DOS / Pew	Separate state restriction, state tolerance, and social hostility.	Reorganize findings and dashboard domains.
Severity and thresholds	USCIRF / IRFA	Disclose criteria for patterns, severity, and official responsibility.	Methodology appendix and confidence levels.
Mixed motive	Pinna / IRF Analyzer / RELAC	Religion may be one factor among ethnicity, politics, economics, or crime.	Use vulnerability and motive tracks.
Observer incentives	IRF Analyzer	Record reporter type, corroboration, and lens risk.	Source disclosure and audit trail.
Minority participation	Article 18 / Pluralism Monitor	Communities should help define harms, remedies, and indicators.	Standing advisory council and listening sessions.
Anti-Muslim hatred	Article 18 Alliance	Treat anti-Muslim hostility as a FoRB concern, not only race or security.	Dedicated section or annex.
AI and digital risks	Article 18 / Pinna AI ethics	Transparency, human review, nonprofiling, and protection from mobilized violence.	Digital FoRB chapter and impact assessments.
Metrics and annual review	USCIRF / DOS / Pew	Repeatable reporting requires stable indicators and public follow-up.	Implementation dashboard and annual update.

PART IV

Priority Recommendations

The recommendations below are ordered to distinguish changes needed before final publication from implementation measures that can follow. “Immediate” means before finalization or in a formal supplement. “Near-term” means within six months of final publication. “Institutional” means a recurring structure.

1. Adopt a controlling universal FoRB definition [Immediate]

Insert a concise definition at the beginning of the Executive Summary and apply it throughout the report.

- Protect belief, nonbelief, conversion, renunciation, intrafaith dissent, manifestation, association, and freedom from coercion.
- State that protections apply equally to majority and minority traditions and to individuals within religious communities.
- Use “houses of worship and religious or belief institutions” alongside tradition-specific terms.

Why this matters: A universal definition prevents community visibility from depending on the report’s examples or theological rhetoric.

2. Publish a methodology and evidence appendix [Immediate]

Disclose how testimony, comments, legal authorities, and incident reports were selected, verified, coded, and weighed.

- Identify source types, corroboration requirements, duplication controls, and treatment of disputed facts.
- Distinguish allegation, credible report, corroborated incident, pattern finding, and legal conclusion.
- Disclose limitations, missing data, underreporting risks, and community-coverage gaps.
- Permit a short dissent or alternative analysis where Commissioners disagree.

Why this matters: Transparency protects the Commission from claims of selective evidence and allows future updates to use the same standard.

3. Create a Domestic Religious Liberty Monitoring Framework [Immediate / Near-term]

Adapt the Department of State and Pew structures into a recurring domestic framework.

- Domain A: Legal framework and official commitments.
- Domain B: Federal, state, and local government restrictions or discriminatory practices.
- Domain C: Societal hostilities and private institutional barriers.
- Domain D: Government protection, enforcement, remediation, and outcomes.
- Domain E: Digital, AI, and information-environment risks.

Why this matters: The Commission needs a measurement architecture, not only a set of case narratives.

4. Use two-track vulnerability and motive analysis [Immediate]

Incorporate the Analyzer’s distinction between protection triggers and accountability labels.

- Track A—Vulnerability: Did religious identity, practice, leadership, or sacred space increase exposure to harm?
- Track B—Motive confidence: How strong is the evidence that the perpetrator acted from a religious motive?
- Record victim perception and third-party framing separately.
- Trigger protection when vulnerability is credible; reserve formal persecution labels for stronger motive evidence.

Why this matters: This prevents both paralysis and overclaiming in mixed religious, ethnic, political, economic, and criminal cases.

5. Establish a Minority Faith and Nonbelief Advisory Council [Immediate / Institutional]

Create a standing, rotating body that advises on evidence, community access, terminology, and implementation.

- Include Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, Baha'i, Native/Indigenous, minority-Christian, Jewish, humanist, atheist, convert, and intrafaith-dissenter perspectives.
- Include women, youth, immigrants, disabled persons, small congregations, chaplains, and local practitioners.
- Publish conflict-of-interest and representation disclosures.
- Provide secure pathways for confidential testimony.

Why this matters: Representation is an evidentiary control and a trust-building mechanism.

6. Retain the antisemitism chapter and add an interconnected-safety section [Immediate]

Preserve focused attention to antisemitism while explaining how threats to Jewish communities often reveal broader failures affecting other faiths and beliefs.

- Map shared perpetrators, online narratives, funding pathways, security gaps, and institutional responses.
- Track cross-community attacks and solidarity responses.
- Use the chapter's incident-tracking and toolkit recommendations as a template for other communities.

Why this matters: Specificity and solidarity are complementary, not competing.

7. Add a dedicated anti-Muslim analysis [Immediate]

Include a chapter or substantial annex on anti-Muslim discrimination and violence.

- Cover houses of worship, schools, employment, prisons and detention, zoning, surveillance, political rhetoric, online mobilization, and hate crimes.
- Disaggregate Muslim communities where evidence permits and include both communal practice and individual conscience.
- Consult Muslim-led organizations, civil-rights lawyers, scholars, local congregations, converts, women, youth, and victims.
- Distinguish religious hostility from race, ethnicity, immigration, and security drivers while documenting overlap.

Why this matters: A national report that treats mosques as targets but omits a sustained anti-Muslim analysis remains incomplete.

8. Add comparative community annexes [Immediate / Near-term]

Use a common template for Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, Baha'i, Native/Indigenous, minority-Christian, and nonbelief experiences.

- Legal and institutional barriers.
- Government practices and failures to protect.
- Societal hostility and economic discrimination.
- Sacred-space and institutional threats.
- Reporting barriers and recommended remedies.

Why this matters: A common template creates parity without forcing artificial equivalence.

9. Require intersectional and outcome disaggregation [Near-term]

Collect data by religion or belief, gender, age, race or ethnicity, immigration status, disability, geography, and socioeconomic status where lawful and privacy-protective.

- Track school exclusion, job loss, housing or licensing barriers, family separation, displacement, and community exit.
- Use minimum-cell and privacy rules to prevent reidentification.
- Publish both incident counts and outcome measures.

Why this matters: Aggregate categories can conceal the people within a community who are most exposed.

10. Address digital platforms, AI, surveillance, and synthetic incitement [Immediate / Near-term]

Add a digital FoRB section and recommend safeguards for government and private systems.

- Algorithmic impact assessments for systems affecting religious accommodation, risk, benefits, or enforcement.
- Prohibitions and audits against religious profiling or proxy discrimination.
- Transparent processes for content moderation and appeal affecting religious speech.
- Rapid-response protocols for doxxing, deepfakes, synthetic incitement, and threats to worship.
- Meaningful human review and community consultation.

Why this matters: The information environment can create or accelerate physical vulnerability before conventional enforcement systems detect it.

11. Add a rights-balancing and limitations framework [Immediate]

Explain how the Commission evaluates conflicts involving public safety, equality, health, employment, education, and third-party rights.

- Ask whether a restriction is prescribed by law, pursues a legitimate aim, is necessary, and is proportionate.
- Require individualized analysis and consideration of less restrictive alternatives.
- Distinguish direct burdens, incidental effects, and pretextual enforcement.
- Document the interests of all affected persons.

Why this matters: A transparent balancing framework increases legitimacy and reduces the appearance of selective concern.

12. Neutralize partisan language and standardize actor descriptions [Immediate]

Revise political characterizations into verifiable descriptions of conduct and consistently applied legal analysis.

- Identify actor, action, authority, evidence, affected right, response, and outcome.
- Apply the same evidentiary standard regardless of political affiliation or ideology.
- Separate Commission findings from witness characterizations.

Why this matters: Neutral precision makes the report more durable across administrations and more persuasive to skeptical institutions.

13. Attach implementation owners, deadlines, and metrics [Immediate]

Convert every major recommendation into a monitored action item.

- Name lead and supporting agencies.
- Specify 90-day, six-month, and twelve-month milestones.
- Define output and outcome indicators.
- Publish implementation status and reasons for delay.

- Provide an independent two-year evaluation.

Why this matters: What gets assigned and measured is more likely to be implemented.

14. Create a domestic-international methods working group [Near-term / Institutional]

Form a technical exchange among the Commission, the White House Faith Office, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, the State Department IRF Office, USCIRF, and civil-society experts.

- Compare reporting methods and definitions.
- Share early-warning and community-consultation practices.
- Coordinate AI, online-incitement, and transnational-repression analysis.
- Avoid importing foreign-policy labels into domestic adjudication.

Why this matters: The United States should use its mature international reporting expertise to improve domestic consistency while respecting institutional boundaries.

15. Pilot the framework with an independent, minority-led technical partner [Near-term]

Select a representative sample of incidents and test the proposed taxonomy, source rules, and two-track attribution model.

- Include government action, private discrimination, hate crime, sacred-space threats, digital incitement, and mixed-motive cases.
- Use blinded dual coding and measure inter-coder agreement.
- Invite community review without allowing advocacy preference to determine the final classification.
- Publish lessons learned and revisions.

Why this matters: A pilot will expose ambiguous categories before the framework is institutionalized and demonstrate a serious commitment to minority expertise.

IMPLEMENTATION

90-Day, Six-Month, and Twelve-Month Roadmap

Before final publication	Insert universal definition; add methodology appendix; add anti-Muslim and interconnected-safety sections; revise partisan language; attach owners and metrics; document witness/community coverage.
First 90 days	Establish Minority Faith and Nonbelief Advisory Council; launch methods working group; publish accessible complaint and information pathways; define incident taxonomy; identify pilot sample.
By six months	Complete pilot coding; train staff and agency partners; launch public implementation dashboard; publish digital/AI safeguards; conduct regional minority-faith listening sessions.
By twelve months	Issue first domestic religious-liberty implementation update; publish disaggregated findings and limitations; assess agency compliance; revise indicators; report unresolved gaps.
By twenty-four months	Commission an independent evaluation of effectiveness, equity, data quality, and community trust; publish response and corrective action plan.

Illustrative implementation measures

Access	Number of languages and accessible formats; response time; abandonment rate; claimant satisfaction.
Representation	Communities consulted; demographic and role diversity; gap disclosure; repeat participation.
Evidence quality	Corroboration level; source diversity; inter-coder agreement; percentage of contested classifications.
Protection	Time from report to risk assessment; security support delivered; accommodation granted; retaliation reported.
Accountability	Investigations opened; written explanations provided; corrective actions; remedies completed.
Prevention	Threats disrupted; institutions receiving training; digital incidents escalated; recurring perpetrators identified.
Equity	Outcome differences across communities and demographic groups; unresolved disparities.
Transparency	Recommendations with public status; overdue actions; methodological revisions; correction notices.

PART V

Proposed Insert Language for the Final Report

The following language is designed for adaptation. It is intentionally concise enough to insert into the Executive Summary, methodology, and recommendations without restructuring the entire draft.

A. Universal freedom of religion or belief definition

Proposed text

Freedom of religion or belief is an individual and collective right held by every person. It protects the freedom to hold, adopt, change, leave, or decline a religion or belief; to manifest religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, teaching, association, dress, diet, and community life; to dissent within a tradition; and to remain free from coercion. These protections apply equally to members of majority and minority communities, to converts and former members, and to people who hold non-theistic or atheistic convictions.

B. Methodology and evidence

Proposed text

The Commission distinguishes testimony and allegation from corroborated incident findings, pattern findings, legal conclusions, and policy recommendations. In assessing reported events, the Commission considers the identity and conduct of the actor; the harm and vulnerability of the affected person or community; direct and contextual evidence of motive; alternative political, ethnic, racial, economic, criminal, or personal drivers; victim or community perception; source independence and verification; government responsibility or response; recurrence; severity; and available remedies. The Commission recognizes underreporting and differences in community access and states the limitations of its evidence.

C. Interconnected safety

Proposed text

Antisemitism requires specific, sustained attention. It is also an early-warning indicator for a wider ecosystem of religious and ideological hatred. Extremist networks, conspiracy narratives, online mobilization, attacks on sacred spaces, and failures of institutional protection may target Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Baha'i, Indigenous, and other religious or belief communities in overlapping ways. Protecting one community strengthens the security architecture available to all, while the distinct history and mechanisms of each form of hatred must remain visible.

D. Anti-Muslim hostility

Proposed text

Anti-Muslim hostility can appear as religious discrimination, racialization, national-origin bias, immigration hostility, security profiling, sectarian prejudice, political incitement, or attacks on individuals and Islamic institutions. The Commission will assess these overlapping drivers without requiring a single exclusive motive. It will consult diverse Muslim communities and protect both communal religious practice and the individual freedom to interpret, change, or leave a religion.

E. Protection and accountability tracks

Proposed text

The Commission separates immediate protection from final motive attribution. Protective action may be warranted when a person's religious identity, practice, leadership, or association increases vulnerability, even if the perpetrator's motive is mixed or not yet established. Formal findings of religiously motivated persecution or hostility require stronger evidence of motive, pattern, or discriminatory selection. This distinction ensures timely assistance while preserving evidentiary discipline.

F. Implementation accountability

Proposed text

For each major recommendation, the Commission identifies a lead entity, supporting partners, legal authority, milestone, target date, output measure, outcome measure, disaggregation requirement, and public reporting mechanism. The Commission will publish an implementation update within twelve months and support an independent evaluation within twenty-four months.

PART VI

A Practical Resource Pathway for the Commission

The report's citation to Muslims for Muslims International's public comment provides a constructive foundation. The next step is to move from citation to structured engagement. The Commission would benefit from a minority-led partner that can combine community trust, multifaith convening, field knowledge, policy translation, and disciplined data methods.

Muslims for Muslims International and John T. Pinna are positioned to contribute in a manner that complements—not replaces—the Commission's legal expertise, federal authority, or relationships with larger religious institutions. The value proposition is targeted: help the Commission see, classify, and respond to minority-community harms that are easy to miss or misattribute.

Relevant capabilities

Minority and multifaith convening	Muslim-led access combined with longstanding Christian, Jewish, and broader multifaith relationships; capacity to convene candid listening sessions across ideological lines.
Mixed-motive analysis	A documented approach to incidents in which religion intersects with ethnicity, politics, economics, gender, security, crime, or local power.
IRF Analyzer methodology	A repeatable framework for vulnerability, motive confidence, victim perception, third-party lens risk, classification, and action flags.
Government and policy translation	Experience engaging U.S. agencies, religious-freedom networks, development institutions, and national-security stakeholders.
Field-informed cultural competence	Professional experience in Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, and wider Muslim-majority contexts, combined with domestic Muslim-community engagement.
Data and implementation strategy	Experience translating reporting and field information into structured data, dashboards, recommendations, and institutional partnerships.
Public communication	Capacity to explain difficult religious-freedom issues to policy, academic, faith, and general audiences without reducing communities to advocacy slogans.
Scholarly bridge	Current partnership development with the International Institute for Religious Freedom and academic institutions to connect incident data with peer-reviewed inquiry.

Proposed technical-assistance package

1. Minority-faith gap assessment

Review the final draft's witness, comment, incident, and recommendation coverage; identify missing communities, geographies, actors, and harm types.

2. Listening-session series

Facilitate confidential and public sessions with Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, Baha'i, minority-Christian, Indigenous, convert, former-member, and nonbelief participants.

3. Incident-taxonomy pilot

Apply the Analyzer to a representative set of domestic incidents and compare classifications with legal, law-enforcement, and community assessments.

4. Cultural-competence training

Train Commission and agency staff on mixed motives, sectarian diversity, reporting barriers, terminology, and advocacy-lens risk.

5. Dashboard prototype

Design a minimum viable monitoring dashboard separating government restrictions, social hostilities, protection, and accountability outcomes.

6. Digital FoRB workshop

Convene experts on AI, surveillance, online mobilization, platform governance, and synthetic incitement affecting religious communities.

7. Annual external review

Provide an independent minority-community and methodology review of implementation progress, data quality, and unresolved blind spots.

Professional positioning

John T. Pinna's professional value to the Commission is the combination of policy access, operational experience, minority-faith credibility, field exposure, data strategy, and a willingness to interrogate advocacy narratives—including narratives favored by one's own community. That combination is uncommon and directly responsive to the report's present blind spots.[11, 12, 17, 18]

The recommended posture is collaborative rather than promotional: the Commission should use M4M and the Analyzer as one resource within a plural, transparent, and methodologically disciplined network. The aim is not preferential access. It is to ensure that minority communities are not visible only when their experiences fit a preexisting political or theological narrative.

Suggested Commission invitation

Invite Muslims for Muslims International to a structured technical session on mixed-motive attribution, anti-Muslim and multifaith incident reporting, and a pilot domestic FoRB monitoring framework. Pair the session with USCIRF, State Department IRF, Article 18 Alliance, academic, law-enforcement, and other minority-community participants so the resulting method is credible, comparative, and implementable.

CONCLUSION

From a Strong Defense Brief to a Durable National Framework

The draft report is a consequential statement that religious liberty remains a central American commitment. Its strongest features—legal engagement, institutional breadth, witness testimony, and practical recommendations—should be retained. The Commission has also taken an important step by recognizing Muslims for Muslims International’s contribution in the report itself.

The final report’s credibility will depend on whether it can protect people who do not resemble the report’s dominant institutions, language, or political constituencies. The decisive question is not whether the Commission cares about minorities. It is whether the report’s structure makes minority experiences systematically visible, comparable, verifiable, and actionable.

A universal FoRB definition, representative advisory structure, transparent methodology, dual government-and-society framework, two-track attribution model, anti-Muslim and comparative minority analyses, digital safeguards, and measurable implementation plan would transform the draft. These additions would not weaken the report’s defense of religious institutions. They would demonstrate that the Commission’s principles are strong enough to protect every person.

Muslims for Muslims International and the International Religious Freedom Analyzer can help the Commission make that transition. The organization’s role should be practical: identify blind spots, convene communities, test classification methods, improve cultural competence, and convert data into prevention and accountability. This is the kind of resource relationship that would allow the Commission to leave behind not only a report, but an enduring system for protecting America’s religious and belief pluralism.

The Commission’s opportunity is to make “America’s First Freedom” visibly universal: protected not only when a familiar institution is burdened, but also when a small, unpopular, misidentified, dissenting, or nonbelieving person stands alone.

APPENDIX A

Proposed Domestic FoRB Incident Coding Template

This minimum template can be used for intake, analysis, training, and dashboard design. It is adapted from the Triadic FoRB Attribution Framework and aligned with the report structures used by credible international and scholarly sources.[5, 9, 12, 14, 15]

Incident basics	ID; date/time; location; victim identity as self-described; victim role; suspected actor; harm type; target object; immediate safety need.
Actor type	Federal, state, or local government; law enforcement; school; employer; health institution; platform; organized group; individual; unknown; mixed.
Legal/institutional mechanism	Law; regulation; policy; discretionary decision; enforcement pattern; zoning; licensing; benefit denial; accommodation denial; failure to protect.
Harm types	Detention; physical violence; threat; vandalism; surveillance; job or benefit loss; school exclusion; dress/diet barrier; sacred-space interference; speech restriction; economic discrimination; displacement; digital exposure.
Vulnerability score (0–4)	How strongly did religious identity, practice, leadership, association, or sacred space increase exposure to harm?
Motive confidence (0–4)	How strong is direct, patterned, operational, and contextual evidence that the actor's motive was religious?
Victim perception (0–4)	What does the affected person or community believe the motive was, and why? Record as a signal, not a verdict.
Third-party lens risk (0–4)	What reporting incentives, access limits, political alignments, fundraising pressures, or verification weaknesses may distort the narrative?
Alternative drivers	Race; ethnicity; national origin; immigration; caste; gender; sexuality; politics; economics; land; crime; personal dispute; institutional convenience; mixed; unknown.
Verification	None; single source; partial; multiple independent; official record; on-site; primary documentation; contradiction noted.
Government response	Direct perpetrator; enabling; tolerating; failed to protect; investigating; prosecuting; remedy provided; prevention action.
Classification	Religion-related victimization; religious persecution/hostility; nonreligious harm; contested/hybrid.
Action flags	Protect/assist; investigate; escalate accountability; mediate; monitor; correct data; refer to agency.
Outcome	Safety restored; accommodation; compensation; reinstatement; prosecution; policy change; unresolved; retaliation; displacement.

Deterministic decision rules

- **Protect / assist:** Trigger when vulnerability is credible, even if motive remains uncertain.
- **Escalate accountability:** Trigger when motive confidence is strong and evidence supports discriminatory selection or coercion.
- **Investigate:** Trigger for hybrid cases, high source-lens risk, conflicting evidence, or serious harm with uncertain motive.
- **Monitor:** Use when evidence is insufficient for immediate escalation but risk or recurrence remains plausible.

- **Defensive verification:** Do not lower the vulnerability assessment because advocacy framing is weak; instead reduce motive confidence and increase investigation.

APPENDIX B

Sources and Notes

Bracketed references in this memorandum correspond to the sources below. Official sources are prioritized for institutional claims. Uploaded working papers and organizational documents are identified as such. Access dates are July 13, 2026 unless otherwise noted.

- [1] Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, Draft Report, June 2026, including Executive Summary, Antisemitism chapter, Houses of Worship discussion, recommendations, Appendix B, and citations to Muslims for Muslims International's public comment. [Official link](#)
- [2] Executive Order 14291, Establishment of the Religious Liberty Commission, as quoted and described in the draft report. [Official link](#)
- [3] U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2026 Annual Report. [Official link](#)
- [4] U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, International Standards and the right to believe or not believe. [Official link](#)
- [5] U.S. Department of State, Office of International Religious Freedom, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom and country-report structure. [Official link](#)
- [6] Article 18 Alliance, Terms of Reference and coordinated action framework. [Official link](#)
- [7] Article 18 Alliance, "Towards a FoRB-sensitive AI policy," April 10, 2025. [Official link](#)
- [8] Article 18 Alliance, statement on anti-Muslim hatred, November 13, 2024. [Official link](#)
- [9] Pew Research Center, methodology for the Government Restrictions Index and Social Hostilities Index; 2026 global restrictions update. [Official link](#)
- [10] Pew Research Center, 2025 U.S. Religious Landscape Study. [Official link](#)
- [11] John T. Pinna, "Classifying Religious Persecution to Implement Meaningful Change," organizational working article, December 18, 2023.
- [12] International Religious Freedom Analyzer, Triadic FoRB Attribution Framework Analyzer 2.0 Instruction Addendum, version 1.0, December 31, 2025.
- [13] "Quantifying Religious Freedom," concept note on reporting, data collection, analytics, and decision support, organizational working paper.
- [14] Isak Svensson and Desirée Nilsson, Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) Data codebook and related scholarship.
- [15] Johannes Vüllers, Birte Pfeiffer, and Matthias Basedau, Religion and Conflict in Developing Countries (RCDC) dataset and research note.
- [16] Global Centre for Pluralism, Global Pluralism Monitor Assessment Framework.
- [17] Muslims for Muslims International, participant-led letter regarding USCIRF commissioner appointments, May 15, 2026.
- [18] International Institute for Religious Freedom, Muslims for Muslims International, and Marist University, proposed International Symposium on Drivers of Violent Religious Freedom Violations, 2026.
- [19] Jt Pinna, "Biblical View on Artificial Intelligence: What Faith Traditions Teach About AI Ethics," June 10, 2026.
- [20] Religious Freedom in Near Eastern and Other Muslim Majority Countries matrix and supporting notes, organizational research materials.
- [21] International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, as amended.
- [22] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 18.

Source-use note

The Commission draft is the primary object of analysis. USCIRF, State Department, Article 18 Alliance, Pew, and international instruments are used for alignment and methodology. Organizational materials are used to state the author's and Muslims for Muslims International's analytical approach and relevant capabilities; they are not presented as independent validation of the Commission's findings.

Prepared as a constructive strategic review for public-comment and Commission-engagement purposes.
Muslims for Muslims International | International Religious Freedom Analyzer

Global Anti-Muslim Pressure Pattern

IRFA 1998 LENS

Worship restrictions • sacred-site attacks • state tolerance • hate-crime escalation

BLUF This is not random Islamophobia. It is a global permission structure: in some places the state is the hammer; in others, the mob is the hammer and the state looks away. The IRFA threshold is crossed when Muslims cannot pray, gather, teach, fast, protect mosques, or live safely because they are Muslim.

IRFA RUBRIC APPLIED

1 Access to worship Prayer, Ramadan, Eid, mosque entry, or religious assembly blocked.	2 Violence against persons Beating, killing, detention, disappearance, displacement, or...	3 Attack on sacred space Mosques, cemeteries, shrines, waqf property, or Islamic schools damaged, seized, or...	4 State role Perpetrator is state-run, state-backed, state-tolerated, or...	5 Pattern & intent Isolated crime, political intimidation, ethnic cleansing, or systematic...
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THEATER SNAPSHOT: SEVERITY + TYPE

China / Xinjiang	PARTICULARLY SEVERE
State repression; coercive control of Ramadan and Qur’anic teaching; religious assimilation.	
Burma / Myanmar	PARTICULARLY SEVERE
Mass violence, displacement, forced labor, mosque seizure, and religious-ethnic persecution.	
India	HIGH CONCERN / CPC-WORTHY
State-tolerated vigilante violence, legal discrimination, political incitement, attacks on Muslim properties.	
Al-Aqsa / Jerusalem	HIGH CONCERN
Worship restriction and sacred-site access control in a militarized political environment.	
Gaza	HIGH CONCERN + WAR CAVEAT
Mosque destruction and impairment of worship; classification turns on targeting versus wartime necessity claims.	
Europe + United States	SERIOUS HATE-CRIME SURGE
Far-right violence, mosque desecration, threats, and intimidation; IRFA escalates if state protection collapses.	

HARD DATA POINTS THAT CARRY THE ARGUMENT

GAZA MOSQUES 223 completely destroyed 289 more reported partially destroyed by March 2024.	GAZA CIVIC + SACRED INFRASTRUCTURE 60% damaged or destroyed Healthcare, school, university, and religious buildings.
UNITED KINGDOM 5x increase in threats to Muslims 3x increase in hate-crime incidents; 10 mosques attacked or threatened.	GERMANY 3,080 anti-Muslim incidents in 2024 60% increase over 2023; more than 8 incidents per day on average.
UNITED STATES 8,683 CAIR civil-rights complaints in 2025 Highest single-year number since CAIR’s first report in 1996.	CHINA / XINJIANG 17 yrs sentence for Qur’anic teaching Document also notes video-proof demands tied to Ramadan fasting.

BOTTOM LINE JUDGMENT

Worst IRFA cases: China, Burma/Myanmar, and India. Severe worship-and-sacred-site concerns: Al-Aqsa/Jerusalem and Gaza. Europe and the U.S. show a dangerous hate-crime escalation, but not automatically CPC-level unless state commission, enablement, or systematic tolerance emerges.

From: Leonard Hall <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Religious Liberty, Church/State Separation - Leonard Hall

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:36:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Commission:

First of all, thank you for your dedication to our great country. As a citizen of the United States of America, I share your interest in matters of freedom, particularly in matters of religious freedom. Additionally, as a Christian who loves God and stands firmly for His principles, I recognize that God never forces anyone to believe in Him.

God always strongly encourages what He knows is the right way, but He always allows each individual to either choose or reject it. In the garden of Eden, God presented a choice. Even knowing the results, God allowed our first parents to disobey if it was their choice. In Deuteronomy 30:19 God told the children of Israel there were two choices: one offered life and blessing, while the other resulted in death and cursing. Although He encouraged them to choose life, it was ultimately their choice. We see this same pattern throughout all of scripture. God gave us free will because He only accepts obedience that is founded on LOVE. Love cannot be legislated. It must only come from the heart.

Throughout history, whenever church and state has united, persecution is always the result. This is displeasing to God and cannot be considered His will. Whether or not the exact verbiage of "separation of church and state" is in our founding documents is of no consequence. If we say it is our desire to follow God, we will offer the choice, but never legislate it. History is riddled with the corruption that results in the church/state union, and literally millions of lives were lost under such a union. Again, this is never God's will. If the United States follows such a pattern, we will reap the same results.

Please understand I am not saying that religious people should stay out of politics, or that religion does not play an important role in society. I am merely saying that as important as religion is, it cannot be enforced on citizens.

Please consider carefully the direction that our great nation should support. I pray that you will see the wisdom in keeping a healthy kind of separation; where the government allows free choice of religion based on the dictates of individual conscience, and protecting those God-given rights, and never enacting any laws that force religious worship on the citizens. God cannot approve any other option but that which is consistent with His Word and example.

Thank you for your consideration. May God bless you as you follow Him.

Sincerely,

Leonard Hall
Spokane, WA

From: Yolanda <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] I agree with pillar if freedoms comments

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:36:29 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with pillar if freedoms comments

From: Lovenia Murphy <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:36:36 -0400

Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern,

I want to first state that I recognize that the new Religious Liberty Commission is committed to protecting religious liberty for our US citizens. Some of the proposals are a benefit and positively impact religious freedom such as protecting one's right to decline vaccinations based on religious beliefs. However, It has been brought to my attention that your new Religious Liberty Commission is suggesting that there be amendments made to the constitution to promote and allow the union of church and state. While some may see this as an answer to the decline of morality in our country and deem it necessary, I would suggest that this is also an unethical agenda. While the constitution does not specifically state the verbiage "the separation of church and state", the principles are clearly there. Additionally the individuals that originally founded and established this country did so primarily for the purpose of freedom. They fled the old world, and its persecuting power to the new world to find refuge. As a result, it was from the very inception of this country that this would be a place of religious freedom and liberty.

The attempt to repudiate these principles is counter productive and goes against EVERYTHING our country was founded on. As a country that alleges it's "under God" we need to refer to and ascertain what God Himself says about the separation of church and state. Matthew 22:21 states, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's. This means that there is to be a clear distinction between God and the state. Every citizen has the right to liberty of conscience as it pertains to the things of God vs the things of political matters. The governing of our nation is always to be maintained as altogether separate from religion. I truly hope and pray that you hear the words of God and reevaluate your position on this. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Blessings

Sent from my iPhone

From: "Barbara L. Clayton" <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY DRAFT REPORT - B. Clayton

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:37:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

To: Chairman Patrick, Co-Chairman Carson, and members of the Religious Liberty Commission

I am responding to the subject Report as a concerned citizen and a Christian. And what is a Christian? A follower of Christ. If you are a follower of Christ, you should do what He did and live/govern yourself as He said. It is my duty to speak out when matters of conscience, faith, principle, and civil/human rights are threatened to be trampled upon, and dare I say in this case ... stamped out, by those who try to play God, but who are not God.

1. It is correct that the principle of separation of church and state is not explicitly worded as such in the Constitution, but the foundation of that separation is. Where did that foundation originally come from? It came from Christ himself. He said in Matthew 22:21, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's (Ten Commandments, 2nd Table= civil authority) and to God the things that are God's" (Ten Commandments, 1st Table= religious liberty/an individual's personal relationship with God). No government or other human being has a right to control or insert itself into that relationship.

2. Obviously, America's Founding Fathers understood that the time might come, and indeed has, when mere human beings would exalt themselves to believe they are above God. *See comments* from James Madison in the *Federalist Papers* regarding securities in a free government and how the promotion of one religion over another is a "recipe for disaster." You may think you're going to "build a bridge" by removing the separation of church and state, but you're buckling yourself into a seat on a train that will most certainly take you "full speed ahead" to disaster. Adopting this draft Report will only lead to state-enforced religion, which will corrupt the church, damage the government, and will inevitably lead to persecution. History has proven the following calculation to always be true:

CHURCH+STATE = PERSECUTION

3. Do you need a reminder that the First Amendment 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?"**

4. You state that the Commission's intent is to safeguard the religious liberties of all Americans, but your recommendations depart from genuine religious liberty principles. By endorsing government funding of religious education and what the state defines as "spiritual fitness" you are threatening to resurrect theological despotism that our Constitution was created to avoid.

5. True religious freedom can only be safeguarded when the government stays on the civil side of the road (the 2nd Table of the Ten Commandments) and steers clear completely of interfering in matters that involve the 1st Table of the Ten Commandments, which is solely between us personally and our Creator. The civil government has no legitimate authority or jurisdiction regarding religion. God did not bestow any power on the civil government to have anything to do with "building a bridge" regarding our individual relationships with Him ... the Holy Spirit is the builder in that regard!

6. Repealing the Johnson Amendment and Politicization of the Pulpit. It SHOULD NOT be repealed. While having freedom of speech in addressing theological and moral issues from our pulpits is expected, the church is NOT the place for political campaigning and should be barred. The pulpit should be sacred and not turned into a partisan political tool!

7. Universal School Choice, Compromise of Public Funding. Demanding state funding of religious education can set a dangerous precedent for religious schools. Accepting state funding gives the government a dangerous interest in the mission of the school, which again is erasing the line between the two tables of the Ten Commandments. This should never be allowed! Religious schools should remain independent and totally disconnected from state funding.

8. Elevating “Spiritual Fitness” in State Entities. The Department of War has NO spiritual or theological authority to determine the “spiritual fitness” of anybody. Only God can do that. I repeat ... stop playing God.

Your recommendations’ claim to be defending religious liberty is not true. History reveals the opposite will result: religious tyranny.

To prosper, government must be confined to civil affairs ONLY. The Commission should withdraw these recommendations and go back to the historically sound and jurisdictional separation of church and state on which America was founded. Cancel your bridge-building project ... God disapproves ... His Word says so. God never granted mankind the authority to build a connector between Church Road and State Road. Doing so will only lead to the slippery slope of destruction for this country. In fact, God sent instructions (through Christ) for you to stay in your own lane!

Thank you,

B. Clayton

From: Kevin Hancock <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Cc: Erin Chlopak <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - CHAPTER 8 (JOHNSON AMENDMENT) -
CAMPAIGN LEGAL CENTER

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:37:11 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: 2026.07.13_-_CLC_comment_on_Chpt._8_of_RLC's_June_2026_draft_report.pdf

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

Please find attached Campaign Legal Center's comment on the Commission's June 2026 Draft Report, opposing the recommendations in Chapter 8 to narrow and repeal the Johnson Amendment.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,
Kevin P. Hancock

Kevin P. Hancock

Director, Campaign Finance Litigation

Campaign Legal Center

[REDACTED] PII

campaignlegalcenter.org



July 13, 2026

Via Electronic Mail to [REDACTED] PII

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

Re: Comment Opposing the Recommendations Regarding the Johnson Amendment in Chapter 8 of the Religious Liberty Commission's June 2026 Draft Report

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

Campaign Legal Center ("CLC") respectfully submits these comments in response to the Religious Liberty Commission's draft final report (the "Draft Report"). CLC writes specifically to oppose the recommendations in Chapter 8, which argue that the federal government should support the repeal of the Johnson Amendment, that the Department of the Treasury should issue guidance narrowing the Amendment's reach, and that the Department of Justice should support litigation challenging its constitutionality.¹

CLC is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting and strengthening the American democratic process, including through the defense of campaign finance laws that ensure voters can identify who is attempting to influence their votes.

CLC has direct experience with the precise question Chapter 8 asks the Commission to resolve. For example, together with Public Citizen and Common Cause, CLC filed an amicus brief in *National Religious Broadcasters v. Long* opposing a proposed consent decree that would have exempted two churches from the Johnson Amendment's

¹ See Draft Report, ch. 8, pp. 122-29, <https://www.justice.gov/religious-liberty-commission/media/1449896/dl?inline>.

prohibition on political-campaign intervention.² The district court ultimately dismissed that case for lack of jurisdiction, without reaching the constitutional and policy questions the litigation had presented.³ Chapter 8’s recommendations now ask the federal government to resolve those same questions, this time through wholesale repeal of the Johnson Amendment.

For the reasons set forth below, CLC urges the Commission to remove the recommendations to narrow and repeal the Johnson Amendment from its final report. First, such action would trigger a new flood of secret election spending by religious 501(c)(3) organizations, undermining the right of American voters to know who is spending to influence their votes.

Second, the constitutional premise underlying Chapter 8’s recommendations is incorrect: the Johnson Amendment is a lawful condition on a taxpayer subsidy, not a restriction on speech, and thus it does not violate the Free Speech Clause. The Supreme Court has repeatedly upheld similar provisions.

I. Narrowing or Repealing the Johnson Amendment Would Trigger a New Flood of Secret Election Spending by Religious 501(c)(3) Organizations

A. Voters Have a Right to Know Who Is Spending to Influence Their Votes

Disclosure of election-related spending serves compelling governmental interests and is foundational to the federal campaign finance system. As the Supreme Court has explained, “enlightened self-government” depends on voters knowing who is speaking about a candidate shortly before an election, so that they can make informed choices in the political marketplace.⁴ In addition, “disclosure can deter actual corruption and avoid the appearance of corruption by exposing large contributions and expenditures to the light of publicity.”⁵ Congress accordingly built a two-tiered disclosure regime into the Federal Election Campaign Act (“FECA”): organizations whose major purpose is federal campaign activity must register as political committees and file detailed, regular reports, while other groups must file event-driven reports when they engage in certain electoral spending.⁶

² Brief of Amici Curiae Campaign Legal Center, Public Citizen, and Common Cause Opposing the Parties’ Joint Motion for Entry of Consent Judgment, *Nat’l Religious Broadcasters v. Long*, No. 6:24-cv-311-JCB (E.D. Tex. Aug. 4, 2025).

³ *Nat’l Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, No. 6:24-cv-311, --- F. Supp. 3d ---, 2026 WL 884020 (E.D. Tex. Mar. 31, 2026).

⁴ *Citizens United v. FEC*, 558 U.S. 310, 339, 367, 369 (2010).

⁵ *Nat’l Republican Senatorial Comm. v. FEC*, No. 24-621, 609 U.S. ---, 2026 WL 1868932, at *10 (U.S. June 30, 2026) (internal quotation marks omitted); see also *Buckley v. Valeo*, 424 U.S. 1, 67 (1976) (per curiam).

⁶ 52 U.S.C. §§ 30101 *et seq.*, 30102, 30103, 30104(a)-(b); see also *SpeechNow.org v. FEC*, 599 F.3d 686, 698 (D.C. Cir. 2010) (en banc).

That regime, however, has significant gaps. Although FECA requires entities whose major purpose is federal campaign activity to register and report as political committees, the Federal Election Commission (“FEC”) has interpreted those rules to allow groups to dedicate up to half of their spending on elections without triggering FECA’s political committee disclosure requirements.⁷ Even then, the FEC has shown little interest or ability to enforce these already permissive rules thanks to structural partisan gridlock.⁸

Section 501(c)(4) “social welfare” organizations have exploited this FEC dysfunction, along with minimal IRS reporting requirements that do not require donor disclosure,⁹ to become a dominant vehicle for anonymous “dark money” spending—spending that reached record levels in the 2024 election cycle and that has undermined the public’s ability to trace who is funding political messaging.¹⁰

Chapter 8’s recommendations would not merely widen this existing gap; they would create an entirely new and even less accountable category of dark-money spender: religious 501(c)(3) organizations, which today are barred by the Johnson Amendment from any campaign intervention at all.

B. The Johnson Amendment Protects Voters and Taxpayers by Preventing Subsidization of Anonymous Campaign Activity by 501(c)(3)s

Section 501(c)(3) requires that an organization be “operated exclusively” for religious, charitable, or educational purposes, and prohibits it from participating or intervening in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to a candidate—including through the publishing or distributing of statements.¹¹ In exchange for complying with that condition, 501(c)(3) organizations receive federal income-tax exemption, and their donors may deduct their contributions. As the Supreme Court has explained, tax exemption and deductibility “have much the same effect as a cash grant,” functioning as a public subsidy administered through the tax code.¹²

Congress enacted the Johnson Amendment in 1954, on the initiative of then-Senator Lyndon Johnson, with little debate or controversy, out of a bipartisan concern that tax-exempt organizations were being used to influence elections while shielding donors from

⁷ See, e.g., *Citizens for Resp. & Ethics in Washington v. FEC*, 236 F. Supp. 3d 378, 394 (D.D.C. 2017).

⁸ See, e.g., Adav Noti & Erin Chlopak *et al.*, *Why the FEC Is Ineffective*, Campaign Legal Ctr. (Aug. 8, 2022), <https://campaignlegal.org/update/why-fec-ineffective>.

⁹ 26 U.S.C. §§ 6033, 6103(a), 6104(d)(3)(A); Treas. Reg. § 301.6104(b)-1(b)(1)-(2).

¹⁰ Anna Massoglia, *Dark Money Hit a Record High of \$1.9 Billion in 2024 Races*, Brennan Ctr. for Justice (May 7, 2025), <https://perma.cc/R6YC-KKEE>; Taylor Lincoln & Craig Holman, *Fading Disclosure: Increasing Number of Electioneering Groups Keep Donors’ Identities Secret*, Pub. Citizen 4-5 (2010), <https://perma.cc/7A55-H7JY>; Megan McAllen, *Delay, Deadlock, Dismiss: Pras Michel Indictment Exposes How FEC Dysfunction Opens Our Elections to Foreign Meddling*, Campaign Legal Ctr. (May 15, 2019), <https://perma.cc/Q7G7-RL3R>.

¹¹ 26 U.S.C. § 501(c)(3).

¹² *Regan v. Taxation with Representation of Wash.*, 461 U.S. 540, 544 (1983).

scrutiny.¹³ The provision applies broadly to every 501(c)(3) organization—religious, charitable, and educational alike—rather than singling out houses of worship.¹⁴ Consistent with that broad text, the IRS and the courts have long treated public communications endorsing or opposing candidates, including newspaper advertisements, candidate ratings, and broadcast appeals, as prohibited campaign intervention regardless of which 501(c)(3) organization makes them.¹⁵

Critically, 501(c)(3)s receive not only a taxpayer subsidy, but also the ability to raise money without disclosing any of their donors. Most 501(c)(3) organizations must file an annual information return with the IRS, but the names and addresses of their contributors are specifically excluded from public inspection.¹⁶ Churches are exempt from that filing requirement altogether, and so disclose nothing about their finances or their donors to the IRS or the public as a matter of routine practice.¹⁷ The Johnson Amendment was enacted, and has operated for more than 70 years, against this backdrop of donor secrecy: it ensures that the organizations receiving the most generous and least transparent tax treatment in the Internal Revenue Code are also walled off from campaign spending.

In contrast, Congress added Section 527 to the Internal Revenue Code in 1975 specifically to give nonprofits a lawful vehicle for campaign intervention that also protects the rights of voters. A section 527 organization is “operated primarily” for the exempt function of influencing the selection, nomination, election, or appointment of a candidate for public office.¹⁸ Unlike a 501(c)(3), however, a section 527 organization must publicly disclose its donors. Although 527s do not pay income tax on their receipts, donations to them are not tax-deductible for their donors.¹⁹

Congress, in other words, already built the tool that Chapter 8 of the Draft Report asks the federal government to help recreate: a tax-advantaged vehicle expressly permitted to campaign for or against candidates. Any religious or charitable organization that wishes to engage in campaign intervention today may establish a section 527 organization for that purpose, while continuing to operate its nonpartisan work through a 501(c)(3).²⁰

¹³ 100 Cong. Rec. 9128 (1954); Roger Colinvaux, *The Political Speech of Charities in the Face of Citizens United: A Defense of Prohibition*, 62 Case W. Res. L. Rev. 685, 692 (2012).

¹⁴ Ann M. Murphy, *Campaign Signs and the Collection Plate—Never the Twain Shall Meet?*, 1 Pittsburgh Tax Rev. 35, 48-49 (2003).

¹⁵ *Branch Ministries v. Rossotti*, 211 F.3d 137, 139, 141-44 (D.C. Cir. 2000); *Fulani v. League of Women Voters Educ. Fund*, 882 F.2d 621, 629 (2d Cir. 1989); *Ass’n of the Bar of the City of N.Y. v. Comm’r*, 858 F.2d 876, 880 (2d Cir. 1988); *Christian Echoes Nat’l Ministry, Inc. v. United States*, 470 F.2d 849, 856 (10th Cir. 1972).

¹⁶ 26 U.S.C. § 6104(d)(3)(A); Treas. Reg. § 301.6104(b)-1(b)(1)-(2).

¹⁷ 26 U.S.C. § 6033(a)(3)(A).

¹⁸ 26 U.S.C. § 527(e)(1)-(2).

¹⁹ 26 U.S.C. § 527(j).

²⁰ See *Regan*, 461 U.S. at 552-53 (Blackmun, J., concurring) (explaining that any First Amendment concerns with conditioning a tax subsidy on refraining from political activity are addressed by an

As the next section details, repealing the Johnson Amendment would thus not bring religious organizations into the transparent framework Congress built for nonprofit campaigning. Instead, it would let them campaign entirely in the dark and to the detriment of American voters, who would be paying for such organizations' tax subsidies.

C. Repeal Would Create a New and More Dangerous Class of “Super Dark Money” Groups

Because of the special advantages enjoyed by religious 501(c)(3) organizations, repeal or narrowing of the Johnson Amendment would only serve to exacerbate the already significant dark-money problem posed today by politically active 501(c)(4) “social welfare” groups.

First, unlike 501(c)(4)s, religious 501(c)(3)s could offer donors seeking to influence elections both secrecy *and* a charitable tax deduction. Empirical research shows that taxpayers respond to the charitable deduction by increasing their giving, and that this is particularly true for higher-income donors who itemize.²¹ Repeal would therefore create a perverse incentive for wealthy donors and political operatives to shift dark-money spending out of 501(c)(4)s and into newly politicized churches and religious nonprofits.²²

Second, religious 501(c)(3)s already face fewer disclosure and oversight obligations than any other tax-exempt entity. As mentioned above, churches are categorically exempt from the annual Form 990 informational return that most 501(c) organizations, including 501(c)(4)s, must file with the IRS.²³ Churches also presumptively qualify for 501(c)(3) status without ever applying to the IRS,²⁴ and are subject to special audit procedures that further insulate them from oversight.²⁵ If the Johnson Amendment were repealed, campaign spending by these organizations would be even more opaque than spending by existing 501(c)(4) dark-money groups: donors could not be identified, spending could not be tracked, and the public would have no way to determine who is responsible for significant spending intended to influence their votes.

Third, repealing the Johnson Amendment would enable an enormous amount of new dark-money spending in our elections. There are an estimated 340,000 religious 501(c)(3)

organization's ability to conduct that activity through an alternative organizational form); *see also* *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*, 573 U.S. 682, 712 (2014).

²¹ *See* Congressional Budget Office, Options for Changing the Tax Treatment of Charitable Giving 2 (May 2014).

²² *See* Noah Bookbinder, *Push to Repeal the Johnson Amendment Could Open Pandora's Box for Money in Politics*, CREW (Oct. 4, 2016), <https://perma.cc/DS56-Z7K8>; Brendan Fischer, *Destroying the Johnson Amendment: How Allowing Charities to Spend on Politics Would Flood the Swamp That President Trump Promised to Drain*, Campaign Legal Ctr. (May 3, 2017), <https://perma.cc/A986-RC59>.

²³ 26 U.S.C. § 6033(a)(3)(A).

²⁴ 26 U.S.C. § 508(c).

²⁵ 26 U.S.C. § 761d.

organizations in the United States, and some already report spending tens of millions of dollars annually on their broader operations.²⁶ If the Johnson Amendment were repealed, there would be little to stop religious nonprofits from devoting a substantial share of their budgets to campaign activity while remaining eligible for tax-deductible contributions.

While the Johnson Amendment's bright-line rule has historically constrained 501(c)(3) political activity, its removal would erase that barrier. Decades of history show that politically active donors and operatives quickly adapt to new spending options, and the same would happen here, routing money through religious organizations to take advantage of the tax deduction and the lack of disclosure. Liberal and conservative churches alike would be pressured to accept partisan contributions, and their leaders would be incentivized to act as campaign operatives rather than spiritual guides.²⁷ The same flood of dark money that has overwhelmed the 501(c)(4) space would surge into the newly politicized 501(c)(3) domain, only now, it would be taxpayer-subsidized and largely invisible.

Nor could the FEC or the states be expected to fill the gap. The FEC has shown little interest in or capacity for enforcing FECA's political-committee and disclosure requirements against politically active nonprofits; indeed, since *Citizens United*, the FEC has failed to voluntarily find any nonprofit organization to be a political committee, despite overwhelming evidence in many cases.²⁸ Many state disclosure regimes, in turn, were drafted against the background assumption that 501(c)(3)s do not spend on elections at all, and specifically exclude 501(c)(3) organizations from their reporting requirements—meaning that newly-active religious nonprofits could be exempt from state-level disclosure by pure happenstance.²⁹

In short, repealing the Johnson Amendment (or narrowing its scope through administrative interpretation) would dismantle a central safeguard of the federal campaign finance system and open the door to a new generation of political spending vehicles that are simultaneously tax-deductible, undisclosed, and largely unsupervised. The Draft Report should not recommend that outcome.

II. The Johnson Amendment Is Constitutional

Chapter 8 of the Draft Report frames IRS oversight of tax-exempt religious speech as government invasion of the pulpit, and recommends that the Department of Justice support litigation challenging the Johnson Amendment's constitutionality. That premise does not withstand scrutiny under settled First Amendment doctrine.

²⁶ See National Philanthropic Trust, *Charitable Giving Statistics*, <https://perma.cc/K7K6-ZSME>.

²⁷ See Brendan Fischer, *Destroying the Johnson Amendment: How Allowing Charities to Spend on Politics Would Flood the Swamp That President Trump Promised to Drain*, Campaign Legal Ctr. (May 3, 2017), <https://perma.cc/A986-RC59>.

²⁸ See Adav Noti & Erin Chlopak *et al.*, *Why the FEC Is Ineffective*, Campaign Legal Ctr. (Aug. 8, 2022), <https://campaignlegal.org/update/why-fec-ineffective>.

²⁹ See, e.g., R.I. Gen. Laws § 17-25.3-1(b); *id.* §§ 17-25-3(2), (19).

A. The Johnson Amendment Does Not Burden Speech—It Conditions a Subsidy

The Johnson Amendment does not suppress or penalize anyone’s speech. It sets a condition on eligibility for a government benefit—federal tax exemption and tax-deductible contributions—which the Supreme Court has recognized as “a form of subsidy that is administered through the tax system.”³⁰ Organizations remain entirely free to engage in political campaign activity; they simply must forgo that taxpayer-funded subsidy if they choose to do so.

This framework is well established. In *Cammarano v. United States*, the Supreme Court upheld the denial of a tax deduction for lobbying expenses, explaining that a taxpayer denied a deduction is not being penalized for constitutionally protected activity but is simply “required to pay for those activities entirely out of [its] own pocket.”³¹ In *Regan v. Taxation With Representation*, the Court applied the same logic to section 501(c)(3)’s restriction on substantial lobbying, holding that Congress “has not infringed any First Amendment rights . . . [but] has simply chosen not to” subsidize that activity.³² And in *Branch Ministries v. Rossotti*, the D.C. Circuit applied *Regan* directly to a church, upholding the IRS’s revocation of a church’s tax-exempt status for publishing full-page newspaper advertisements opposing a presidential candidate, and holding that “Congress has not violated an organization’s First Amendment rights by declining to subsidize its First Amendment activities.”³³

The Constitution does not require government to “assist others in funding the expression of particular ideas, including political ones,”³⁴ and organizations that wish to campaign for candidates retain real options: they may organize or reorganize as for-profit entities, which the Supreme Court has recognized offer “the freedom to participate in lobbying for legislation or campaigning for political candidates,”³⁵ or they may maintain a 501(c)(3) for their nonpartisan work while operating a separate 527 for campaign-adjacent activity.³⁶ Because 501(c)(3) status is a voluntary and statutorily-based tax benefit and not a constitutional entitlement, an organization that accepts the benefit cannot plausibly claim that Congress has restricted its speech by defining the benefit’s scope.³⁷

³⁰ *Regan*, 461 U.S. at 544.

³¹ *Cammarano v. United States*, 358 U.S. 498, 513 (1959).

³² *Regan*, 461 U.S. at 546.

³³ *Branch Ministries v. Rossotti*, 214 F.3d 137, 141-44 (D.C. Cir. 2000).

³⁴ *Ysursa v. Pocatello Educ. Ass’n*, 555 U.S. 353, 358 (2009); see also *Harris v. McRae*, 448 U.S. 297, 318 (1980) (explaining that the Constitution “does not confer an entitlement to such funds as may be necessary to realize all the advantages of” a constitutional right).

³⁵ *Burwell*, 573 U.S. at 712.

³⁶ See *Regan*, 461 U.S. at 552-53 (Blackmun, J., concurring).

³⁷ See *United States v. American Library Ass’n*, 539 U.S. 194, 212 (2003) (plurality op.); *Regan*, 461 U.S. at 545-46.

B. The Johnson Amendment Is Viewpoint-Neutral

The Johnson Amendment applies uniformly to every 501(c)(3) organization and prohibits intervention on behalf of or in opposition to every candidate, “regardless of candidate, party, or viewpoint.”³⁸ That neutrality distinguishes it from the sort of viewpoint-based restrictions that trigger heightened First Amendment scrutiny. Because the Johnson Amendment is a subsidy condition rather than a restriction on speech, speaker-based distinctions of the kind found in the tax code are permissible in a way that outright bans on speech, enforced through criminal penalties, are not.³⁹ *Citizens United* is not to the contrary: that case invalidated a ban on independent election spending by corporations enforced by criminal penalty, and did not involve a government subsidy or the boundaries of tax exemption at all.⁴⁰

C. The Draft Report’s Anecdotes Do Not Establish a Constitutional Violation

Chapter 8 relies heavily on individual testimony to suggest that the Johnson Amendment, or its enforcement, is being used to suppress disfavored religious speech. That testimony does not support the recommendation. Several of the anecdotes Chapter 8 cites do not involve Johnson Amendment enforcement at all: the termination of a fire-department chaplain over a personal blog post, and litigation over a hospital’s obligations under state abortion and insurance mandates, concern employment and regulatory disputes wholly unrelated to a religious organization’s tax-exempt status.⁴¹ Conflating these episodes with the Johnson Amendment overstates the scope of the alleged problem the report’s recommendations claim to solve.

The one anecdote that does involve a genuine Johnson Amendment inquiry (the IRS’s review of a Dallas church’s 2020 patriotic service) was resolved in the church’s favor, with the IRS concluding that no violation had occurred.⁴² That the law’s own procedures ultimately vindicated the church is, if anything, evidence that the Johnson Amendment’s enforcement mechanism functions as intended, not evidence that the statute itself is unconstitutional.

Even crediting the Draft Report’s broader suggestion that some politically active organizations have escaped scrutiny while others have faced it, uneven enforcement of a viewpoint-neutral statute does not, without more, establish a First Amendment violation. Courts require a plaintiff alleging selective enforcement to show that similarly situated speakers were treated differently because of their viewpoint, which is a demanding

³⁸ *Branch Ministries*, 211 F.3d at 144.

³⁹ *Wisconsin Educ. Ass’n Council v. Walker*, 705 F.3d 640, 648 (7th Cir. 2013).

⁴⁰ *Wisconsin Educ. Ass’n Council*, 705 F.3d at 648.

⁴¹ Draft Report ch. 8 (Statement of Dr. Andrew Fox); *id.* (Statement of Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone).

⁴² Draft Report ch. 8 (Statement of Dr. Robert Jeffress).

standard that isolated or anecdotal comparisons cannot satisfy.⁴³ That standard counsels a call for more consistent enforcement, not repeal of the underlying law.

D. The Johnson Amendment Serves Compelling Governmental Interests

Even if the Johnson Amendment were treated as a speech restriction, which it is not, it would satisfy heightened scrutiny because it serves at least two compelling governmental interests. First, as explained above, the government has a compelling interest in ensuring that tax-deductible contributions do not become a vehicle for financing political campaigns, which would create an unacceptable risk of *quid pro quo* corruption and undermine voters' right to know who is speaking about a candidate before an election.⁴⁴

Second, the government has a strong interest in preserving the integrity and nonpartisan character of the charitable sector, which is justified on the basis that tax-exempt entities confer a public benefit rather than serve private or partisan ends.⁴⁵ Permitting 501(c)(3)s—religious or otherwise—to function as partisan campaign vehicles while retaining that status would blur the line between public service and private political advantage and erode public trust in charitable institutions generally.

* * *

Because the Johnson Amendment is constitutional, none of Chapter 8's recommendations premised on doubting that conclusion has any legal footing. There is no constitutional infirmity for Congress to cure by repealing the Johnson Amendment, for the Department of the Treasury to avoid through guidance narrowing its reach, or for the Department of Justice to vindicate through litigation. Each of those recommendations incorrectly treats the Johnson Amendment's constitutionality as if it were an open question.

Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, CLC respectfully urges the Commission to remove Chapter 8's recommendation that the federal government support repeal of the Johnson Amendment, along with the related recommendations to procure narrowing IRS guidance and Department of Justice litigation support, from its final report. The Johnson Amendment is a constitutional, viewpoint-neutral condition on a taxpayer subsidy that protects the transparency of American elections and the integrity of the charitable sector. Repealing it would not free religious speech from government interference; it would free the wealthiest and most politically active donors to route unlimited, undisclosed, tax-deductible spending through America's houses of worship, at the direct expense of voters' right to know who is trying to influence their votes.

⁴³ See *Frederick Douglass Found., Inc. v. District of Columbia*, 82 F.4th 1122, 1141, 1146 (D.C. Cir. 2023); *United States v. Young*, No. 23-CR-241, 2024 WL 3030656, at *2 (D.D.C. June 17, 2024).

⁴⁴ *Citizens United*, 558 U.S. at 339, 367, 369.

⁴⁵ *Bob Jones Univ. v. United States*, 461 U.S. 574, 586-87, 592 (1983); *Regan*, 461 U.S. at 550; *Branch Ministries*, 211 F.3d at 143-44.

CLC appreciates the opportunity to submit these comments and would welcome the opportunity to discuss them further with the Commission.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Kevin P. Hancock_

Kevin P. Hancock
Director, Campaign Finance Litigation

CAMPAIGN LEGAL CENTER

PII

Washington, DC 20005

From: Sheila Huber <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Sheila A Huber

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:37:19 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen who believes God created the world and rested on the seventh day, and that man cannot change what God has made sacred. I also believe God directed the minds of our forefathers in setting up this nation, and that we have been blessed by following their principles. It is precisely because I hold these beliefs that I ask the Commission to resist any move toward government-sponsored religion. If rights come from the Creator rather than from majority vote, then no legislature, school board, or commission can grant or revoke them by counting heads. A right subject to the will of a majority is not a right at all, only a permission, and permissions can be withdrawn. Popular government exists to protect the minority, since the majority can already protect itself at the ballot box. As Jones told a Senate committee long ago, the people, however numerous, have no right to invade any person's relationship to God. That principle protects my faith exactly as it protects my neighbor's different faith, or no faith.

This is not a new argument I am asking you to accept on faith. Congress itself, one generation after the founding, ruled on this question when Sabbatarian petitioners demanded Sunday legislation. The 1829 Senate report stated plainly that determining what religion is true or false is not in the legitimate province of the legislature, because our government is a civil and not a religious institution. The 1830 House report went further, warning that if Congress defines even one point of religious duty, it may with equal propriety define every part of divine revelation. That is not a modern court's invention; it is the founding generation's own Congress describing the limits of its power. Any commission proposing government-defined religious duties today must reckon with that precedent, not just with more recent case law.

There is also no neutral "religion" for government to adopt. Even the Ten Commandments, often called common ground, are numbered and translated differently by Protestants and Catholics. Waggoner asked the question no advocate of religious legislation has ever answered: which of the several hundred religions professedly based on the Bible shall be enforced as the true one? A mandated display or curriculum cannot escape this problem; it must pick somebody's version, and at that moment the state has established a creed, not preserved a heritage.

Finally, I hold that religion is simply not the government's to hold. Our government exists by delegation from the people, but no person can delegate his relationship to God to anyone else, so that power was never given to government in the first place. No government will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to answer for any soul, and so none can rightly assume responsibility for one. This is why I trust the Creator to govern conscience, and ask the state to govern only what the people

were ever able to give it.

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

Respectfully,
Sheila A Huber
Sandpoint, Idaho

From: Tracy Hall <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Opposition to Religious Liberty Draft Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:37:45 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission Chairs & Members:

As Americans and students of our nation's and Christianity's intertwined histories, we are alarmed by efforts to replace the wall between church and state with a bridge. History shows that when government wields religious influence, it risks undermining the First Amendment's guarantee of religious freedom. The result is not unity, but oppression.

In the not-so-distant past, alliances between political and religious leaders created an environment that was intolerant to varying beliefs and resulted in bloodshed. Many immigrants came to America to escape such oppression, finding refuge in a country that promised liberty of conscience. Would you please continue to protect our freedoms rather than inadvertently create segregation. To weaken the separation of church and state is to risk repeating the very injustices our ancestors fought to escape: discrimination and persecution. These are not characteristics of the land of the free.

Freedom of religion is very much a foundational principal of America's founding fathers as documented in our Constitution and Bill of Rights. Founders were committed to religious freedom. When there is a separation between church and state, freedom is preserved. To provide funding to certain religious institutions and not to others is a discriminatory act.

A clear and distinct separation between church and state has nothing to do with the French revolution or Atheistic views but with our beautiful country's foundational principles and with preventing dictatorship over people's religious beliefs, as was done in Europe and beyond. Bridging religious institutions with the state also encroaches upon the first amendment of our Bill of Rights. Governments should remain neutral in matters of faith.

Please withdraw your recommendations in this regard, and do not fix what is not broken. Please allow the people of our land to continue to have the free exercise of religion.

Respectfully,
Randall & Tracy Hall

From: TaliyahAviles <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:38:00 -0400

Importance: Normal

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT- Separation of Church and State [DORA AVILES]

Honorable Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing both as a citizen, and a Bible-believing Christian of Faith. I am asking the Commission to reconsider the recommendations in the 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 God Almighty.

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 is the reason religious liberty has stayed strong here in this great nation of the United States of America. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free from ungodly influences.

Let this Commision on Religious Liberty reflect on past History as a clear reminder of what happens when church and state join hands: Hence, such as the tyranny of the "Dark Ages!" Prophetically, it isn't good for either one. Please don't build that bridge. Bridges overtime collapses. KEEP the WALL, for it will continue to PROTECT the churches far more than constrain it.

Thank you for your tireless work and for respectfully considering all responses.

Sincerely Regards,

DORA AVILES
Murray, Kentucky

From: Michael Hollifield <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:38:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

This should not be. In History we have always seen where
its always ended up in persecution. Please look for yourselves and see. Prove all things.

From: Berliz Batista <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:38:42 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to express my concern about the recommendations that would weaken the separation of church and state, including proposals to expand government funding for religious activities and remove long-standing safeguards such as the Johnson Amendment.

The separation of church and state was not created to diminish religion. It was established to protect religious freedom by ensuring that faith communities remain independent from government influence. When churches become tied to government funding or partisan politics, they risk trading their independence for political interests. Instead of being accountable solely to their beliefs and congregations, they can become subject to the priorities of elected officials and government programs.

History has repeatedly shown that when government and religion become too closely connected, both institutions are harmed. The church is strongest when it is free to carry out its mission without political pressure, and government serves everyone best when it remains neutral on matters of faith.

I respectfully ask the Commission to preserve the principle of church-state separation. Protecting that boundary helps safeguard both religious liberty and the independence of our faith communities for generations to come.

And remember what the Bible teaches regarding this subject;

Matthew 22:21 (KJV)

"They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

John 18:36 (KJV)

"Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world."

Sincerely,

Berliz Batista

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

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:39:05 -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,
Mykola Malakhov

From: Kim Brascho <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION,

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:39:40 -0400

Importance: Normal

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From: Marcia Oliver <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Keep church and state separate

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:40:08 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern (which is everyone),

I am writing to you today as a constituent to express my strong opposition to any blurring of the lines between church and state.

The separation of church and state is a foundational principle of our nation, designed to protect religious freedom for all citizens and ensure that our government remains neutral on matters of faith. I urge you to uphold this constitutional principle and oppose any legislation or policies that promote the union of church and state.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our community.

Sincerely,

Marcia Oliver

From: Helen La Madrid <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:40:20 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone

From: KEVIN ROJAS <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Separation of church and State--Kevin Rojas

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:40:30 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I had the opportunity to review the 12 Key Recommendations to Strengthen Religious Liberty for All Americans. I believe that many of the points have merit and are warranted, considering the way Christians have been treated in the last several years. Nevertheless, I would not repeal the Johnson Amendment as noted in point number 9. I still believe this amendment to be wise, helping to keep funds from being funneled into nonprofit organizations with the intent to sway elections.

**Thank you.
Kevin Rojas
Bybee, TN**

From: Rhonda Backman <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Rhonda Backman

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:41:35 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a lowly citizen of a country I love and appreciate the values of as given to all through our Constitution and Bill of Rights. I am writing to ask you to reconsider the recommendations you have presented in your report that would weaken the separation between church and state. It is highly unlikely, given the fact that history repeats itself, that any government money given to fund religious activities of any church wouldn't come with strings attached. And who is to decide which church would get money, and what the money would be or could be used for? Especially would this be a concern by repealing the Johnson Amendment.

We can see from the past Colonial history of this country, and the nations of Europe they fled the persecution from, that when the state and the church meddle with each other's business, someone ends up with fines, imprisonment, torture and death. You don't think this would never happen here, but it happened in the early colonial days when even the Pilgrims and Puritans fled from the persecution of Europe, they wound up doing the same thing here under the protection of the colony. Human nature wants control and wants to subject everyone to their way of thinking. The beauty of our Constitution and Bill of Rights, even the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment help to prevent those tragedies. It is from God Christians get the idea of loving our neighbor's as ourselves, to help them in their needs, and provide for them when they are not able. So what kind of love it is when we can't sacrifice to support these religious activities to help our community, that we must rely on the state to fund those activities? Is that what God intended? Absolutely not!

Because of family members who were missionaries in Pakistan, my husband and I have become friends with a family there who would be beheaded for converting to Christianity, as they were raised Muslims. They have been denied visa's to come to many neutral countries just so they could be baptized. They have been denied that right in their own country. They must hid their light under a bushel, so to speak, or they would be persecuted. We should see clearly from these Arab countries what the results would eventually be when state and church are combined, or even allowed to creep into each other's business. Please reconsider your desire to repeal the Johnson Amendment and the expansion of funding of religious organizations engaging in religious activities. By doing so, you would be relying on false history. You must have many lobbying for funding to churches, but I request, along with many other Christians, that you fully enforce the Johnson Amendment. History is one thing that can't speak lies! Look at the results!

Thank you so much,

Rhonda Backman

Sandpoint, Idaho

From: Barbara Salinas <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Barbara Salinas

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:41:43 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

“I agree with Pillar of Freedom’s comments. Please implement them.”

Sincerely,

Barbara Salinas
Mission, Texas

From: Chris & Tiffany <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Resources

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:42:02 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Commission on Religious Liberty,

Due to time constraints, I will not have time to write my own thoughts. Please consider, instead, the comments of Pillar of Freedom. It is my desire that you implement their suggestions.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Jones

From: Leso <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State -Les Shaw

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:42:19 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am deeply concerned as a person of faith to read of the replacement of the wall of separation of church and state with a "bridge." The concept of the wall was instituted to protect the church, not to weaken the church, and the removal of the wall can only do the very opposite to remove the protection and the strength that it offers the church.

Please keep the wall. We want the wall not the bridge.

Sincerely,
Les Shaw
Fort White, Florida

From: John Champeno [REDACTED] PII

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:42:35 -0400

Importance: Normal

Since Congress is restricted by the first amendment, from making any law respecting the establishment of religion or the free exercise thereof, and Congress is to make all our laws in our representative government, all committees, have no authority to make or support laws that bind the people.

Also, every nation that does not separate Church and State tends to depreciate all who do not follow the nation's religion. Millions have lost their lives for not accepting their nation's religion. This will be repeated here should State and Church combined, as it was in Europe. This country was established to guarantee all citizens freedom of religion which will cease should Church and State unite. God's kingdom is not of this world, and cannot be. Please do not recommend the union of Church and State.

-John Champen

From: Joni Schumacher <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:42:37 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am emailing you to comment on the stated goal of the RLC. As a Christian, I firmly believe in the separation of church and state, which keeps religious organizations and political governance politically distant. In the U.S., it is primarily rooted in the First Amendment's Establishment Clause, which prohibits the government from establishing an official religion, endorsing one faith, or coercing religious practices.

All religions are protected under the First Amendment, as are individuals that do not affiliate themselves with any religion.

Thank you,
Joni Schumacher

From: "Hilton, LaDon@CDCR" <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:42:40 -0400

Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern:

I believe there should be a separation of church and state.

When church and state are joined together, it always leads to religious persecution.

Thank you!

LaDon "Jack" Hilton, RDN
Registered Dietitian/Nutritionist

[REDACTED] PII

[REDACTED] PII

From: Dorothy Cherenfant <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Comment for the "Preservation of the Separation of Church and State" - Dorothy Cherenfant

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:42:51 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report (RLDR). Liberty is a gift from God, not a construct of man, and man cannot claim dominion over it. Yet nations, leaders, monarchs, and others have curtailed its exercise in various ways to maintain order and the rule of law among neighbors. God sanctioned that authority to further order, discipline, and limits on dysfunction within our race. This framework helps explain our relationship with God and with one another. As a Protestant Christian, I view my vertical and horizontal relationships as central to my worldview, though my worldview should not define another's or set the standard for others. The vertical relationship between God and the race of man belongs to God and man only. The horizontal relationships concern the relationship between God, man, and society.

As a result, I will address two of the twelve recommendations set forth in the RLDR. The **"Instruct the Department of Justice to issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state"** recommendation and the **"Repeal the Johnson Amendment which purports to give the government authority to regulate religious leaders' sermons and spiritual guidance to their communities"** recommendation.

1. Instruct the Department of Justice to issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state:

What concerns me with this recommendation is that any executive interpretation risks becoming a vehicle for advancing one understanding of religion over another. The Establishment Clause exists precisely because government should remain outside questions of what is religious truth. Rather than narrowing the principle to the church-state wall, the Commission should affirm that the First Amendment protects both the free exercise of religion and the freedom of conscience. The Commission should do so by preventing government from assuming authority over religious matters.

As a believer in Jesus Christ, I have a deep understanding of this precept. When A.T. Jones argued before the United States Senate Committee in December 1888, we understood that civil government possessed legitimate authority only within its proper sphere. Jones maintained that the government existed to protect people in their civil relations, but had no authority over the conscience or over one's duty to God. His central principle was that **government had jurisdiction over the conduct of its citizens in relation to the social construct, but had no authority over worship or the conscience of its citizens, which belong exclusively to God.**

Jones elaborated, stating that when the government attempts to define or promote religion, it inevitably exceeds the limits of its authority. History demonstrates that governments have often sought to regulate religious practice, compel conformity, or favor particular expressions of faith. Such efforts have consistently diminished genuine religious liberty rather than strengthening it.

I believe it is paramount for the Commission to distinguish between the two spheres of existence. This may assist in understanding the genuine dichotomies between these two relationships.

The **vertical relationship** is between God and the individual who genuinely desires to follow Him in truth. It encompasses worship, belief, conscience, prayer, doctrine, and strict adherence to the Word of God. This relationship belongs exclusively to God and the individual believer. Neither government nor religious institutions should exercise coercive authority over this relationship.

The **horizontal relationship** concerns our responsibilities toward one another within civil society. Here the government has an essential and God-ordained role. It preserves public order, protects life and property, administers justice, and safeguards the equal rights of all citizens. Government rightly regulates conduct that affects others. Religious liberty or liberty of conscience is not a collective construct but an individual unalienable right that exists between man and his God.

2. Repeal the Johnson Amendment, which purports to give the government authority to regulate religious leaders' sermons and spiritual guidance to their communities

I understand that the Johnson Amendment is a tax law provision that provides tax-exempt status for certain organizations, including churches, if they refrain from endorsing or opposing political candidates. However, I believe the issue should not be framed simply as protecting the speech of clergy, because ministers have always possessed broad freedom to preach, teach, and address moral issues from the pulpit.

My concern is broader. Whenever a church becomes entangled with internal affairs or political activities, the independence of both church and state is placed at risk. The pulpit should be exclusively reserved for preaching the Word of God. To conjoin political and religious affairs is not what Jesus Christ intended. In Mark 12:14-17, Jesus perceived the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the Herodians. He made a clear distinction as to rendering to Caesar what belongs to him and unto God what belongs to Him. Jesus is our example in all His ways. If we are in God's house of worship, we are claiming to render to Him what belongs to Him, and that is to preach the Word of God from His pulpit. To preach a word in furtherance of Caesar from the pulpit looks to be in violation of this teaching. That is why any changes to existing law, including the repeal of the Johnson Amendment, should strengthen the independence of our religious communities rather than deepen their involvement in partisan political activity.

Thank you for taking the time to review this comment. I hope that we can all worship our Heavenly Father and His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, in Spirit and in Truth according to the dictates of our conscience in religious liberty.

In conclusion, I respectfully ask the Commission to preserve the fundamental principle that religious liberty belongs first to the individual conscience before God. Government best protects this liberty when it recognizes the limits of its own authority and refrains from entering the sacred sphere between God and the individual.

From: [REDACTED] PII

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Committee Report Response

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:43:01 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Committee,

I am not in agreement with uniting church and state. Government forced religion is unbiblical. Jesus spoke against government controlled worship. Jesus stated, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. Matthew 22:21

Therefore, God has in His word established the regulations governing His worship, and men are not at liberty to add to these or to detract from them.

Roger Williams, a framer of the U.S. Constitution also spoke against uniting church and state. He mentioned that a magistrate's duty is to control crime but not the conscience of the people. He protested against a Sunday Worship Law. Roger Williams's ideas on religious tolerance and civil government directly influenced the principles later enshrined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Government controlled worship is not of God and should not be politically imposed, and free from coercion. God is a God of love and not forced worship. However it is His will that we obey His commands. (Exodus 20:8-11)

Blessings,

Concerned Christian

--

"Keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" Rev. 14:12

From: Linda Golden <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church & State & Johnson Amendment - Linda Golden

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:43:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

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 members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a Bible believing US Citizen and wish to provide comment on the above report. First it is apparent that significant hours and care went into the preparation of the report. For that I thank you.

Relative to the concept of Separation of Church and State, I agree that specific term does not exist within the Constitution, at the same time, it is also apparent that the basic concepts are. This country was founded on the principle of a country without a King and a church without a Pope. Those basic tenants are what allowed the United States to become what it is, and they need to remain in place. History has shown the outcome of allowing the church to have influence in the government and vice versa, the outcome has always been suppression of Liberty of Conscience resulting in Religious persecution. It was precisely that unification of church & state our founding fathers came here to escape and upon that foundation this country was established.

It is imperative we protect Liberty of Conscience, Religious Freedom, Freedom of Thought, and Free Speech if we are truly a country that honors God. Without these, we become a country that speaks like a dragon.

What I did not find in the report is classifying secular humanism as a religion, as it is as much a religion as any other, except in secular humanism's god is defined as "self" vs an external deity. If that would be the case, many of the issues that the commission is addressing would be eliminated.

The other aspect that I specifically would like to mention is the Johnson Amendment. While some of the examples presented where extreme applications of the law, I don't see how any good can become of merging politics and religion.

As Jesus told us in Mark 12:17 "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's". Seems He support separation of church and state too.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Golden

From: Antoine Maycock <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Antoine Jason Maycock

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:43:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I support the separation of church and state. We have benefited from a healthy boundary between church and state for a long time. It is sometimes hard to determine which changes are more healthy than hurtful.

If I understand why the Commission is recommending allowing churches to become more involved in politics, then churches who exercise this new freedom should also be required to disclose to the public like any other political organization so that transparency to the public is maintained. Since I don't think that the Commission wants to add a reporting burden to churches as is currently required of other political organizations then I suggest that the Johnson Amendment be left alone.

Sincerely,

Antoine Jason Maycock

Tyler,AL

From: Kay Rosenquist <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission actions

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:43:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

My name is Kay Rosenquist and I am a Protestant Christian living in the state of Virginia. I have recently become aware of the religious liberty commission's desire to change the laws here in our country which for so many years has protected all of us who are believers in many different religions. If our country begins to promote One Faith over another it will eventually limit all faiths. Our country was founded as a sanctuary for religious freedom. Let's keep it that way.

The organization called pillaroffreedom.org states very clearly several concerns and I adhere to those beliefs. We should not combine church and state. If we do, all you have to do is look at history to find that eventually persecution will be the result. Also we need to keep the Johnson Amendment so that funding for church functions and faiths will not become a part of our government. We are to keep that wall of separation between the church and state as the Pillar of Faith organization has stated. Please help us keep our freedoms for every organization of faith.

Thank you,

Kay Rosenquist

[REDACTED] PII

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

From: fern berryman <[REDACTED] PII>

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Please note my objection

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:44:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

Regarding your Religious Liberty Commission report to the president, please note that I strongly believe in separation of church and state. I request that you reconsider your position. History demonstrates persecution when governments get involved with their citizen's religious beliefs and practices. We want Americans to be free to practice minority religious beliefs.

Sincerely,

Fern Berryman

Newberg, Oregon

Fern Berryman

From: gloria raizada <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation between church and state with a "bridge"

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:45:07 -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."

Separation of church and state protects freedom. Mixing religion and government lets the state impose one faith on everyone, leading to discrimination and tyranny.

Religion is personal. Government must stay neutral to protect everyone's right to believe without interference. History proves religious states oppress. It was exactly why the USA was founded originally! The first people came here exactly BECAUSE church and state in their own countries was NOT separate.

So PLEASE, keep church and state completely separate.

Sincerely,

Gloria Raizada

From: Cheryl Hartman <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Objections to the Religious Liberty Commission's effort to break down our blood-bought; historically established; separation of church and state; by various means.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:45:08 -0400

Importance: Normal

My dear fellow citizens of the United States of America:

I was born into this country of religious freedom; and have been ever grateful for all the blessings that I, and those all around me, have freely received every single day of our lives. These blessings have come to us at great cost through our founding fathers earnest desire to establish religious freedom with liberty of conscience for their children and future generations. This determination did not come without a cost. Many of these great men were willing at the cost of their lives to give you and I the "birthright" that many of them never fully enjoyed as you and I have. They had fled religious persecution in Europe and understood and experienced the tyranny of a society that did not hold to the principle of the separation of church and state.

My family and I have spent a considerable amount of time living in a country that does not uphold the principle of separation of church and state; and what tyranny we beheld if anyone held any views different than the state! There was no freedom of thought or action. This stifled any creative innovation and development of mind and talent. America on the other hand has thrived in development due largely to freedom of thought and action. Most people living in oppressive countries, secretly; if not openly confess their ardent desire to live in America; the land of "liberty and justice for all".

Please reconsider the arguments others with wonderful articulation; have proposed. I have read the posted comments against the Religious Liberty Commission's report; and agree heartily with each and everyone of them; especially the Pillar of Faith's objections.

May you see with "prophetic eye-sight" the end of where your proposals will lead; and with abhorrence flee from such proposals! May you also in this reversal of thought, receive more years of peace in America; from what religious freedom, and Liberty of Conscience bring!

With much prayer and concern for my beloved homeland and its citizens,

Cheryl L Hartman

From: Gale Greyson <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - SEPARATION OF CHURCH & STATE - GALE GREYSON

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:45:13 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing to express my expectations as a descendant of early persecuted Baptists in America and as an American citizen for the Separation of Church and State, in order to protect our government from undue influence and coercion from a church or religion, our freedoms and the inviolable natural right of independence of conscience for every American, and especially to protect religion and churches undue influence and coercion and persecution from government.

I oppose the repeal of the Johnson Amendment.

I oppose the expansion of funding religious organizations engaging in religious activities.

I object to funding religious non-profit activities.

I object to funding religious education and religious clubs on public campuses.

I object to repealing the Johnson Amendment because it restricts church's political activities.

I especially request that the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced.

Please reference:

President Thomas Jefferson's Letter to the Danbury Baptists (1802)

President Jefferson wrote in response to Baptists who feared Connecticut's established Congregationalist Church. His reply reassured them that the federal government would not impose religious conformity:

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man & his god... 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 eternal separation between Church & State."

— Thomas Jefferson, Jan. 1, 1802 Library of Congress.

This passage is the clearest founding-era statement of the principle.

- James Madison, in his Memorial and Remonstrance (1785), argued that religion is "wholly exempt from [civil] cognizance," meaning government has no rightful authority over religious belief.
- Reynolds v. United States (1878)— The Supreme Court declared Jefferson's letter "almost an authoritative declaration" of the First Amendment's meaning. Library of Congress.

- *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947) — The Court reaffirmed that the Establishment Clause was intended to erect “a wall of separation between church and State... kept high and impregnable.” JSTOR

These sources show that Jefferson’s “wall of eternal separation of church and state” is a constitutional interpretation embraced by later generations.

Originally applied to protect the fledgling Baptists in the earliest days of America, Separation of Church and State must endure for the following reasons:

1. Individual conscience is inviolable.

Government cannot compel belief without violating natural rights.

2. Civil authority governs actions, not opinions.

Jefferson’s distinction prevents the state from legislating religious doctrine.

3. Neutrality protects pluralism.

A secular state ensures that no religious group gains coercive power over others.

4. History shows that entanglement harms both institutions.

Established churches become political tools; governments become theological arbiters.

5. The First Amendment codifies this separation.

Jefferson’s “wall” metaphor captures the structural safeguard built into the Constitution.

Together, these points form a durable argument: Separation of Church and State is not anti-religious; it is the constitutional mechanism that protects religious liberty for all.

Respectfully yours,

Gale S. Greyson

From: Mike Schrader <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Michael C. Schrader

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:45:18 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a citizen of the United State of America, and I love our country. Thank you for all you are doing to preserve our religious liberties. But I do have some concerns about the issue of separation of church and state.

Please reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken this separation, especially government funding of religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment. As we have seen repeatedly in history, when the church influences and directs governments, corruption and persecution follow.

Our country was founded on freedom of religion and freedom to worship according to our own personal beliefs and not to be dictated by a majority faith. This would include freedom to worship or not to worship at all.

Please protect that "wall" as was intended by President Thomas Jefferson as the First Amendment of the Constitution in the Bill of Rights to keep our country free and blessed by God.

Sincerely,

Michael C. Schrader

From: Ron Baerg <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] RLC

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:45:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear [Recipient Name],

I agree with the comments provided by Pillars of Freedom. Please proceed with implementing them.

Thank you,
Ron Baerg

From: Erin Mersino <[REDACTED] PII >

To: "[REDACTED] PII" <[REDACTED] PII >, Joel Oster <[REDACTED] PII >, Nicole Velasco <[REDACTED] PII >, Robert Tyler <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment to the Religious Liberty Commission's Draft Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:45:56 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Advocates_for_Faith_and_Freedom_Comment_.pdf

Inline-Images: Outlook-jkx3khrn.png

Attached please find Advocates for Faith and Freedom's Comment to the Religious Liberty Commission's Draft Report.

Thank you,



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Advocates for Faith and Freedom is a non-profit organization devoted to protecting and defending religious freedoms in America. Based on our clients' experiences across the United States, we highly support and encourage the Religious Liberty Commission's efforts to protect and defend our First Liberty.

Our Constitution serves as a safe harbor for religious freedom.¹ "Many of the earliest immigrants to America came seeking freedom to practice their religion without restraint."² But upholding natural rights is a high ideal, and the desire of government officials to gain power weighs against citizens' rights to practice their religion. Our clients have experienced firsthand the loss of religious freedoms due to the overreach of government officials. As such, we must ever be watchful, for "[f]reedom is never more than one generation away from extinction."³

Religious freedom is at risk in public schools. While recent Supreme Court decisions have reasserted the rightful place of religious expression in public education, the policies of many public schools towards such expression, by both students and teachers, are still at odds with these decisions and the Constitution.⁴ Today, public schools are more battlegrounds than forums for the pursuit of truth. Traditional Judeo-Christian values and beliefs are constantly under attack from a hostile and destructive secular ideology. In some instances, public education has devolved to the extent that schoolteachers are expected to actively "disrupt" the

¹ See, e.g., Conrad Hackett ET AL., *Jewish population change*, PEW RSCH. CTR. (June 9, 2025), <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/06/09/jewish-population-change/> (describing how the United States is home to the largest population of Jews outside of Israel and is the only country besides Israel where more than one million Jews choose to live).

² *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644, 733 (2015) (Thomas, J., dissenting).

³ President Ronald Reagan, Remarks at the Annual Convention of Kiwanis International (July 6, 1987).

⁴ See *Kennedy v. Bremerton Sch. Dist.*, 597 U.S. 507 (2022) (holding the First Amendment protected a public school football coach's right to engage in private post-game prayer on the football field); See *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, 606 U.S. 522 (2025) (holding a school board's refusal to excuse children from the reading of books that conflicted with their parent's religious beliefs violated the parent's free exercise rights).

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values that students are taught by their parents.⁵ As a result, parents find themselves at war with public educators for the minds of their own children. A war where the victims, in many cases, are still learning how to read and write.⁶

Secular progressive agendas, like advocacy for transgenderism, abortion, and the vilification of the history of the Christian Western world, are all taught under the guise of enlightenment, compassion, and tolerance. Though diametrically opposed to orthodoxy, this radical secularism paints itself in a quasi-religious light, promising to rid the world of newfound prejudice and oppression at the cost of objective truth. But unlike religion, its proliferation by teachers in public schools is unfettered by the Establishment Clause.

To effectuate this campaign, public school boards, administrators, and state actors use the Establishment Clause to silence the religious expression of teachers and students, thereby removing any opposition to their radical secular ideologies. This practice abandons the classical educational approach of teaching students to use reason to arrive at the truth with gentle guidance from teachers, in exchange for one where teachers emotionally manipulate children, using them as political pawns.⁷ Under this educational theory, students are taught that “all men are mortal; Socrates was a man, but Socrates could have been a woman if he wanted to.”

This practice is irreconcilable with American law. “It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.”⁸ The Supreme Court made this clear over 50 years ago, but these words have been largely ignored by public schools that continue

⁵ *Mahmoud*, 606 U.S. at 529 (discussing storybooks used by public schools that were designed to “disrupt” what children were taught by their parents).

⁶ *Id.* at 533 (explaining that the “LGBTQ+-inclusive” books at issue in the case were meant to be used in “Kindergarten through fifth grade.”).

⁷ *Id.* at 554 (discussing how a school board encouraged teachers to tell children that they were being hurtful if the children suggested that men and women cannot change their sex).

⁸ *Tinker v. Des Moines Indep. Cmty. Sch. Dist.*, 393 U.S. 503, 506 (1969).



to infringe upon the religious freedoms of teachers, students, and their families, blatantly ignoring the Constitutional prohibitions on this discriminatory conduct.

Neither the Constitution nor the Supreme Court’s jurisprudence are subtle in their expansive outlines of the religious exercise rights that teachers and students enjoy in public schools: “[g]overnment schools, like all government institutions, may not place unconstitutional burdens on religious exercise.”⁹ “At its heart, the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment protects ‘the ability of those who hold religious beliefs of all kinds to live out their faiths in daily life through the performance of’ religious acts.”¹⁰

Religious freedom is not the exception in public schools; it is the rule. Nor does the existence of private schools, as an alternative means of education, lessen the state’s responsibility to respect the religious upbringing of students by their parents in public schools.¹¹

Both parents and students benefit from Supreme Court precedent detailing their rights to religious freedom in public schools. The Supreme Court “ha[s] long recognized the rights of parents to direct ‘the religious upbringing’ of their children.”¹² This right also “extends to the choices that parents wish to make for their children outside the home.”¹³ As a result, it would violate the First Amendment for a public school to require “students [to] make an affirmation contrary to their [own and their] parents’ religious beliefs.”¹⁴ Furthermore, a law that “‘substantially interfer[es] with the religious development’ of a child” infringes on “the parents’ free exercise rights.”¹⁵ This year, the Supreme Court once again strengthened the religious freedom rights of families in public schools through its decision in *Mirabelli v. Bonta*.¹⁶ The Court

⁹ *Mahmoud*, 606 U.S. at 545.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 546 (quoting *Kennedy v. Bremerton Sch. Dist.*, 597 U.S. 507, 524 (2022)).

¹¹ *Mahmoud*, 606 U.S. at 547 (explaining that the existence of private religious schools does not give the state the right to prohibit religion in public schools).

¹² *Id.* at 546 (citation omitted).

¹³ *Id.* at 547.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 548 (discussing *West Virginia Bd. of Ed. v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624 (1943)).

¹⁵ *Mahmoud*, 606 U.S. at 549-50.

¹⁶ *Mirabelli v. Bonta*, 607 U.S. 492 (2026).



held that California’s policy of preventing schools from informing parents about the secret transitioning of their children at school would likely violate the parents’ free exercise rights.¹⁷

Teachers, too, enjoy broad religious freedom in public schools and are generally allowed to engage in private religious expression to the same degree that they would be free to engage in personal activities.¹⁸ The Establishment Clause does not require the government to prohibit all acts or displays that members of the public might see and perceive as endorsing religion.¹⁹ Nor does the fact that others take offense at a teacher’s religious expression limit that teacher’s rights.²⁰ Thus, it is clear that:

[A] proper understanding of the [First] Amendment’s Establishment Clause [does not] require the government to single out private religious speech for special disfavor. The Constitution and the best of our traditions counsel mutual respect and tolerance, not censorship and suppression, for religious and nonreligious views alike.²¹

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 provides another means of protection for the religious exercise of public school teachers while at work.²² In *Groff v. DeJoy*, the Supreme Court clarified that the “undue hardship” standard an employer must satisfy in order to reject an employee’s request for religious accommodation under Title VII requires the employer to show that providing an accommodation would substantially burden the employer.²³ This reinforced the rights of public school teachers to live according to their faith while at work. The religious freedom of teachers is further entrenched by the fact that under Title VII “[a]n employer may

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Kennedy v. Bremerton Sch. Dist.*, 597 U.S. 507, 513–14 (2022).

¹⁹ *Id.* at 535.

²⁰ *Id.* at 538-39.

²¹ *Id.* at 514.

²² 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2(a).

²³ *Groff v. DeJoy*, 600 U.S. 447, 468, 470 (2023) (overruling the lower “de minimis” standard for “undue hardship”).



not make an applicant's religious practice, confirmed or otherwise, a factor in employment decisions.”²⁴

Despite all these protections, Advocates for Faith and Freedom has witnessed violations of both students' and teachers' religious freedom carried out by school districts and state actors throughout America. One of the most frequent infringements is the practice by public schools of punishing teachers who object to promoting transgender policies to children. For many, the practice of deceiving parents about a child who is being secretly “transitioned” without the parents' knowledge or calling a child by a pronoun identifying them as something other than their biological sex violates fundamental religious values concerning truth and morality. Allowing teachers to lie to students and “transition” them without their parents' knowledge also undermines trust in teachers among families and in society at large.

Jessica Tapia was one California public school teacher who stood against this dangerous policy.²⁵ She was fired by a Southern California school district for her refusal to follow gender identity policies that conflicted with her religious beliefs.²⁶ These policies included using students' preferred pronouns or hiding gender identity details from children's parents.²⁷ Similarly, Ray Shelton, an elementary school teacher in California, was placed on administrative leave and investigated for “misconduct” because he spoke out at a school board meeting in opposition to pro-transgender policies and the practice of transitioning children without their parents' knowledge.²⁸

When school districts act to uphold parental rights, they may be attacked by the state. This was the case in California, where the state challenged the Chino Valley

²⁴ *E.E.O.C. v. Abercrombie & Fitch Stores, Inc.*, 575 U.S. 768, 773 (2015).

²⁵ *Tapia v. Jurupa Unified School District*, Case No. 23-cv-00789 (C.D. Cal.).

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Shelton v. Glendale Unified School District Officials*, Case No. 23-cv-10427 (C.D. Cal.).



Unified School District's policy mandating that schools inform parents if a student sought to transition at school.²⁹

The religious freedom of students is also besieged in public schools. Transgender sports policies violate the religious exercise rights of students by compelling them to share locker rooms and play sports with members of the opposite sex in contravention of core religious beliefs about morality, dignity, and the biological differences between men and women.³⁰ Furthermore, in Michigan, a high school student's announcement in opposition to a pro-abortion ballot initiative was denied by the school, while it allowed pro-abortion announcements in favor of the initiative.³¹ The state of California even went so far as to prevent children from attending public or private schools in the state if their parents objected to giving them a vaccine on the vaccination schedule for religious reasons.³² The state policy allows for medical exemptions but offers no exemptions for religious beliefs.³³

As is evident from these examples, public schools and states continue to defy the Constitution at the expense of teachers, students, families, and taxpayers, thereby undermining religious freedom. While Supreme Court precedent clearly outlines broad protections for religious freedom of parents and teachers, these protections provide little assurance in daily life when they are ignored by public schools. This places the burden on individuals to enforce the Constitution at the local level when it is violated by state actors. Teachers and students face significant barriers challenging school boards and public-school administrations. The large financial and legal resources at the disposal of states and school districts,³⁴ compared to the personal savings of families and teachers to challenge such discrimination,

²⁹ *The People of The State of California, Ex Rel, Rob Bonta, Attorney General of The State of California v. Chino Valley Unified School District*, Case No. CIVSB2317301 (Cal. Super. Ct. San Bernardino Cnty.).

³⁰ *McPherson v. Jurupa Unified School District*, Case No. 25-cv-02362 (C.D. Cal.).

³¹ *Nielsen v. Ann Arbor Public Schools*, Case No. 22-12632 (E.D. Mich.).

³² *Royce v. Bonta*, Case No. 23-cv-02012 (S.D. Cal.).

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *See Mahmoud v. Taylor*, 606 U.S. 522, 532 (2025) (discussing the Montgomery County School District's near \$3 billion budget).



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illustrates the serious impact of religious discrimination in public schools; it is David against Goliath.

The state action in these cases dissuades teachers and students from objecting to school policies for fear of losing their jobs or being suspended. As a result, public schools chill their speech and perpetuate the false narrative that the Establishment Clause prohibits religious expression in schools. These policies must stop. Fearmongering about Establishment Clause violations is no longer a viable strategy for states and public-school officials looking to infringe upon religious liberty. It is time for religious freedoms to be applied uniformly in all public-school districts in America, keeping in line with the Constitution.

Without the courage of students, parents, and teachers to challenge schools' restrictions on their religious exercise, we would not have the Supreme Court precedent that exists today. Individuals who challenge the restrictions on religious liberty imposed by public schools not only work to preserve their own rights, but in doing so, they entrench the rights of all Americans. It takes bravery to fight for one's rights, but bravery is an American tradition.

In one sense, the restrictions on religious freedom have produced a limited benefit. They have united members of diverse faiths in opposition to the dangerous secular ideologies pushed by some public schools. They draw people together to advocate for the freedom to practice their religion. Our forefathers came to America pursuing religious freedoms. Based on the experiences of our clients, this is a fight that continues to today. Therefore, we applaud the Religious Liberty Commission's efforts to protect this fundamental right.

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From: Doris Shelton <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:46:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Committee Members,

Please don't tear down the wall of separation between church and state. By so doing, you will invite again persecution of the likes described in Revelation 13:15-17...being cut off from buying or selling, and at last, being killed for not worshipping as the government will eventually dictate - as directed by the false church the government chooses to prefer.

...And have you considered who's side this will indicate that you are on? If you are creating the situation that causes others to not be able to buy or sell or to face a death decree over the issue of religious worship, it means that you will have received the mark of Revelation 13:17... and Revelation 14:9 gives the results of receiving that mark. IT MEANS YOU ARE NOT ON GOD'S SIDE

Please, each of you, personally, individually, prayerfully, reconsider.

Sincerely,

Earl and Doris Shelton

From: Michael-Kristine Herr <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Request to amend religious freedom draft

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:46:09 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

We urge you to reconsider the recommendations in your religious liberty commission draft. Even though the first amendment does not specifically state "separation of church and state", it expressly states the government allows for all Americans to have the freedom to worship (or not worship) based on personal conviction. This is why our country was originally formed. Separation protects faith, which is precisely why religion has remained strong in our country.

Please maintain the separation of church and state - that's how we keep both free.

Thank you,
Michael and Kristine Herr

From: Sara Lyford <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:46:45 -0400

Importance: Normal

Our country does not need a commission to offer advice on religious liberties. Our constitution says it all. Freedom of Religion is guaranteed so a commission to give advice for religious liberties is stupid and a waste of government funding. Please disband this ridiculous attempt to stifle our religious liberties.
Sara Lyford

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

From: annette fehoko <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:46:47 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am extremely concerned to learn that this Commission is seeking to replace or do away with the important separation between church and state. As a person of Christian faith, these actions are not in the best interests of our nation and its citizens of all faiths. I consider these actions and ideas to be disturbing, ominous, and something that should not be acceptable to you.

Churches should be kept free of connections or bridges that tie or encourage governmental funding and political favors to flood into them. This could and most likely would have a corrupting influence on this nation's Churches. Churches should not answer to politicians, instead they should only answer to almighty God. There is a long history of oppression, persecution, and disaster when church and state join together.

Finally, please take a look at **Pillar of Freedom's comments**. Please thoughtfully consider implementing them in the best interests of the United States of America and its citizens, as well as its influence in the world.

Sincerely,
Annette Fehoko
Thousand Oaks, CA

From: Tony Fabian <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Tony Fabian

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:46:59 -0400

Importance: Normal

July 13, 2026

Via Electronic Mail to [REDACTED] PII

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
Us Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave, 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 appreciate the opportunity to submit comments regarding the draft report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission. I recognize the seriousness of the Commission's work and commend its stated desire to strengthen religious liberty in the United States. Religious liberty is not merely one constitutional right among many. It has rightly been called America's "first freedom," because the freedom of conscience underlies every other civil liberty. A government that possesses authority over human conscience ultimately possesses authority over every aspect of human life.

It is because I cherish religious liberty so deeply that I respectfully disagree with several of the Commission's principal conclusions and recommendations. My concern is not that religion enjoys too much freedom in America, nor that religious voices have no place in public life. Rather, I am concerned that the Commission's recommendations unintentionally weaken one of the greatest constitutional safeguards ever devised for protecting both religion and government: the institutional separation of church and state.

I write these comments not as one hostile to religion, but as a Christian who believes that authentic faith is among the greatest blessings God has given to humanity. I believe religion has profoundly benefited American society through education, charitable works, compassion, moral instruction, and service to countless communities. Throughout our nation's history, churches and religious organizations have often been the conscience of the Republic, calling both citizens and governments to justice, mercy, and righteousness.

Precisely because I value religion so highly, I believe it must remain independent of governmental control, governmental financing, and governmental favoritism. History repeatedly teaches that whenever civil authority in ecclesiastical authority become institutionally intertwined, both institutions are diminished. Government assumes responsibility it was never designed to exercise, while religion gradually exchanges its spiritual independence for political influence.

The Commission's report frequently presents the Division of religious and civic authority as an obstacle to religious liberty. Respectfully, I believe history demonstrates the opposite. Properly understood, the constitutional firewall between religious life and government authority has never been an enemy of religion. It has been one of religion's greatest earthly protections – a safeguard for religious liberty against state power.

Liberty of Conscience: the foundation of American freedom

The American understanding of religious liberty begins with a truth far older than the Constitution itself: Human rights do not originate with government.

The Declaration of Independence declares that “all people are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights” and that governments are “instituted among men” to secure those rights. This language establishes a principle that is foundational to the American constitutional order. Government does not create liberty of conscience. It recognizes a freedom that already belongs to every individual because it has been bestowed by the Creator.

Among these unalienable rights is the freedom to seek God according to the dictates of one’s own conscience – or to decline religious belief altogether without civil penalty. Whether one approaches this question from theology, philosophy, or constitutional history, liberty of conscience necessarily precedes civil government. The relationship between the individual conscience and God cannot properly be placed under political jurisdiction because government did not create that relationship and lacks authority to govern it.

This understanding shaped the constitutional structure adopted by the Founders.

Article VI of the Constitution declares that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” In a world where religious establishments frequently determined political eligibility, this provision represented a remarkable departure from centuries of European practice. Reflected the conviction that civil office should depend upon civic qualification rather than ecclesiastical approval.

The First Amendment completed that constitutional design by declaring that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

These two provisions are often discussed independently, but they are best understood together. The Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause are not competing constitutional values. They are complementary protections. One restrains government from exercising authority over religion. The other protects citizens in the free exercise of their religious convictions. Together they preserve liberty of conscience by denying government jurisdiction over matters of faith while protecting every person’s right to worship according to conscience.

Some have argued that the Establishment Clause merely prohibited Congress from creating a national church comparable to the Church of England. While it certainly accomplished that purpose, the historical record suggests that many of the principal architects of American religious liberty understood the principle more broadly. Their concern extended beyond preventing the creation of a single national denomination. They sought to prevent civil government from exercising authority in matters that properly belonged to conscience.

No individual articulated this more clearly than James Madison.

In his 1785 *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*, written in opposition to a proposal that would have supported Christian teachers through taxation, Madison argued that “religion... can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence.” His objection did not rest upon hostility toward Christianity. Rather, it rested upon a profound understanding of the limits of governmental authority.

For Madison, religion “Must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man.” Because the duty of each individual owes to the Creator precedes the claims of civil society, government possesses no legitimate authority to compel religious support, prescribe religious observance, or finance religious ministry.

Madison’s argument remains remarkably relevant today.

Whenever government assumes responsibility for advancing religion – even for laudable purposes – it necessarily assumes authority to determine which religious activities qualify for support, which organizations satisfy governmental requirements, and which religious institutions deserve public funding. Financial support inevitably brings governmental oversight, and governmental oversight gradually expands to governmental authority over religion itself.

As an example, why does separation of duties exist in accounting? It is to ensure that no single person controls all aspects of a financial transaction. It creates checks and balances; It prevents fraud, abuse, and misuse of assets. In my view history teaches that religion has flourished in America not despite the separation of church

and state, but largely because of it. Understanding why requires looking not only to constitutional history, but also to the Biblical principles that inspired many of the earliest advocates of liberty of conscience.

The Biblical foundation of liberty of conscience and the proper jurisdiction of civil government

While the American constitutional tradition provides compelling reasons for preserving the institutional separation of church and state, I believe those constitutional principles rest upon a deeper truth concerning the nature of God and the dignity of the human person. As a Christian, I do not view religious liberty merely as a pragmatic political arrangement. I believe it reflects God's own method of governing moral beings.

From the opening pages of Scripture, God presents humanity with the remarkable gift of moral freedom. Adam and Eve were not created as automations incapable of choice. They were created in the image of God, possessing the capability to love, to obey, to reject, and to choose. Throughout the biblical narrative, God consistently addresses humanity through invitation rather than coercion. His government is founded upon truth, love, and persuasion rather than compulsion.

This principle appears repeatedly throughout Scripture. Joshua challenged the people of Israel, "Choose this day whom ye will serve." Isaiah records God's invitation: "Come now, and let us reason together." Jesus repeatedly invited individuals to follow him, saying, "If anyone desires to come after me..." Jesus compelled no one. The Bible closes as it began – with an invitation rather than a command: "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." These passages reveal something profound about the character of God.

God seeks willing worship.

He desires obedience that springs from love rather than fear, conviction rather than coercion. Such obedience cannot be manufactured by civil authority because genuine faith is, by its very nature, voluntary. A profession compelled by political power may produce outward conformity, but it cannot produce the inward transformation that Scripture describes as true conversion.

This understanding has significant implications for civil government.

If God Himself does not compel love or worship through civil force, government cannot claim authority to accomplish by legislation what God Himself leaves to individual conscience. The New Testament reinforces this distinction through Christ teaching concerning the respective spheres of civil and divine authority. When questioned regarding tribute to Caesar, Jesus replied, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are gods." These words establish far more than a rule concerning taxation. They recognize two distinct jurisdictions.

Caesar possesses legitimate authority over civil society. Government bears responsibility for maintaining justice, preserving public order, protecting life and liberty, punishing crime, and securing the equal civil rights of every citizen. These responsibilities are indispensable to any free society. Yet Christ simultaneously affirmed that there are matters which belong exclusively to God.

- Conscience belongs to God.
- Worship belongs to God.
- Faith belongs to God.

No civil government, however well intentioned, possesses lawful authority over those sacred obligations. The distinction is essential because government and religion serve fundamentally different purposes. Government exists to restrain injustice. The gospel exists to reconcile humanity to God. Government may regulate external conduct necessary for civil peace. It cannot regenerate the human heart. Government may prohibit theft, violence, fraud, and oppression because such conduct directly injures the rights of others. It cannot legislate faith, prescribe worship, or compel devotion because these concern duties owed to God alone.

Both institutions are indispensable. Neither should attempt to assume the responsibilities of the other. From my perspective as a Christian, this distinction is not merely constitutionally prudent; It is spiritually essential.

The Church's authority rests upon the truth of the Gospel and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. It requires no governmental endorsement to accomplish its mission. Indeed, Christianity spread across the Roman Empire long before it enjoyed legal recognition. Its greatest victories were won not through imperial favor but through faithful witness, sacrificial service, and steadfast devotion. History therefore suggests an important lesson. The Church's strongest when it relies upon Christ rather than Caesar.

Government is strongest when it protects every Person's freedom to seek God according to conscience while resisting the temptation to become an arbiter of religious truth. These complementary principles have served at the American Republic remarkably well for nearly two and a half centuries. They deserve careful preservation – not because they diminish religion, but because they preserve the freedom that allows genuine religion to flourish.

Applying the principles: A Respectful Response to the Commission's Principal Recommendations

Having considered both the constitutional and biblical foundations of religious liberty, I now turn to several of the Commission's principal recommendations. My purpose is not to question the Commission's sincerity. I believe the Commissioners genuinely desire to strengthen religious liberty in America. Rather, my concern is that several proposed remedies would unintentionally weaken the institutional independence that has historically protected both religion and civil government.

Religious liberty is preserved not merely by noble intentions but by maintaining clear constitutional boundaries. Throughout American history, the greatest defenders of religious freedom have recognized that government best protects religion by safeguarding its liberty while refraining from directing, financing, or managing its spiritual mission.

Government Funding of Religious Organizations

Among the Commission's most significant recommendations is the encouragement of broader governmental financial support for faith-based organizations engaged in religious activity. No reasonable person doubts the immense contribution religious organizations make to American society. Churches operate food pantries, disaster relief ministries, shelters, hospitals, schools, counseling centers, pregnancy resource centers, addiction recovery programs, and countless charitable ministries that relieve suffering and strengthen communities. These works deserve admiration and legal protection.

The constitutional question, however, is not whether religious organizations benefit society. The question is whether civil government should become their financial patron. In my judgment, history counsels caution. The strength of America's religious institutions has long rested upon their independence. Churches have been free to determine their own doctrine, govern their own ministries, appoint their own leaders, and direct their own resources because they have generally relied upon the voluntary support of their members rather than the public treasury. That independence has allowed churches to speak prophetically to government regardless of which political party held power.

Government funding inevitably alters that relationship. Whenever public Funds are appropriated public accountability necessarily follows. Taxpayers rightly expect transparency. Legislatures establish eligibility requirements. Administrative agencies create regulations. Auditors verify compliance. Courts resolve disputes. Each of these developments may appear reasonable in isolation. Collectively, however, they gradually transform an independent mystery into an institution increasingly subject to governmental supervision. This process rarely occurs because government is hostile toward religion. It occurs because government cannot responsibly distribute public funds without establishing standards governing their use. Consequently, every financial partnership creates new opportunities for governmental influence over religious institutions.

The wisest safeguard against such developments is to preserve the financial independence of religious institutions whenever possible. Voluntary generosity has sustained American religion for generations. There is

little reason to believe that governmental patronage would strengthen what voluntary faithfulness has already accomplished so well.

Government Funding of Religious Education

The Commission likewise recommends expanding governmental support of religious education. Parents unquestionably possess the primary responsibility for directing the education of their children. This principle has deep constitutional and historical roots. Religious schools have made extraordinary contributions to American education, often providing rigorous academic instruction while nurturing moral character and religious conviction. Nothing in my comments should be understood as diminishing the importance of these institutions. Again, however, the constitutional question concerns governmental jurisdiction rather than educational excellence.

When government finances religious education, government inevitably acquires a legitimate interest in supervising the use of those funds. Standards must be established. Curricula may eventually be reviewed. Reporting requirements increase. Administrative oversight expands. The various independence that allows religious schools to remain faithful to their religious mission may gradually erode. This concern extends beyond any particular denomination.

Whether Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Orthodox, Seventh-day Adventists, or any other religious tradition, every faith community benefits from maintaining the freedom to educate according to conscience without becoming increasingly dependent upon governmental appropriations. Government best protects religious education by respecting its independence rather than financing its operation.

The Johnson Amendment and the Political Independence of the Church

The Commission also recommends repeal of the Johnson Amendment, arguing that existing law unnecessarily restricts religious speech. Reasonable citizens may disagree concerning the precise operation of federal tax law. Nevertheless, the broader constitutional principle deserves careful reflection. The Church has always exercised its greatest influence when it has remained sufficiently independent to address moral questions without becoming institutionally aligned with partisan political movements.

Throughout biblical history, God's prophets confronted rulers of every political persuasion. Nathan rebuked King David. Elijah challenged Ahab. Amos condemned injustice among the powerful. John the Baptist rebuked Herod. Their authority rested not upon political alliance but upon moral credibility. They were free to praise righteousness wherever it appeared and condemn injustice wherever it arose.

The Church fulfills a similar calling today. It should proclaim timeless moral truth. It should defend the sanctity of human life. It should care for the poor. It should promote justice, mercy, and righteousness. It should encourage responsible citizenship. It should pray for those in authority. Nothing in constitutional law should prevent churches from faithfully proclaiming Biblical truth concerning public morality. Yet there remains an important distinction between prophetic witness and partisan political participation.

When churches become identified primarily with political parties, candidates, or electoral campaigns, they risk diminishing their ability to minister to all people regardless of political affiliation. Congregations become divided by political identity. The gospel becomes associated with electoral success. The Church's universal mission narrows into partisan advocacy. The outcome serves neither religion nor government well. The Church's greatest strength has never been political influence. It has been spiritual authority grounded in moral integrity. Preserving a healthy institutional distance between churches and partisan political activity helps safeguard that authority.

Governmental Neutrality and Equal Liberty

Perhaps the most enduring contribution of the American constitutional system has been its commitment to equal liberty of conscience. The Constitution does not ask government to determine which religion is most true. Neither does it authorize government to distribute religious privileges according to theological preference.

Instead, it protects every citizen's equal right to seek truth according to conscience. This principle deserves renewed affirmation.

Religious liberty cannot remain secure if government extends institutional preference to one religious community while diminishing the equal standing of others. Every citizen should stand equal before the law. Every religious community should enjoy equal protection. Every individual should possess the same freedom to worship – or not worship- according to conscience. Government demonstrates its highest respect for religion not by selecting favored faiths, but by protecting the equal liberty of all.

This constitutional neutrality does not diminish religion. Rather, it acknowledges the government lacks both the competence and the authority to judge competing claims of religious truth. That responsibility belongs to conscience alone. The Founders understood this well. Their objective was not to produce a nation devoid of religion. It was to produce a nation in which religion flourished freely because government neither compelled it nor controlled it.

In my respectful judgment, preserving that constitutional balance remains one of the surest safeguards of genuine religious liberty for every American citizen, regardless of faith, denomination, or conviction.

Conclusion: Preserving America's First Freedom

The United States has long occupied a unique place among the nations of the world because it embraced a principle that was revolutionary when it was adopted and remains extraordinary today: civil government possesses no rightful authority over the human conscience. That principle did not arise from hostility toward religion. It rose from a profound appreciation for both religion and liberty. Many of the Founders had witnessed the tragic consequences of governments that claimed authority over matters of faith. They understood that whenever civil rulers assumed responsibility for directing religious life, Both institutions suffered. Religion lost its spiritual independence, and government became entangled in theological controversies beyond its competence to resolve.

The American constitutional order sought a better way. The Declaration of Independence recognized that our rights Come from our Creator rather than from government. The Constitution denied the federal government authority to impose religious tests for public office. The First Amendment prohibited laws respecting an establishment of religion while simultaneously protecting the free exercise of religion. Together, These provisions created a constitutional framework in which religion could flourish through voluntary conviction rather than governmental patronage.

That framework has served the United States remarkably well.

America has become one of the most religiously diverse nations in history not because government has favored one faith over another but because government has generally respected the equal liberty of all. Churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, and countless other religious communities had been free to proclaim their beliefs, established schools, support charitable ministries, and contribute to the common good without being instruments of the state. Likewise, citizens who profess no religious faith have enjoyed the same protection of conscience guaranteed to every American.

This constitutional neutrality has not weakened religion; It has strengthened it.

Religion has flourished because it has relied primarily upon conviction rather than coercion, persuasion rather than privilege, and voluntary support rather than governmental sponsorship.

As a Christian I believe this arrangement also reflects an important biblical truth. Throughout Scripture, God consistently seeks the willing devotion of His people. Christ invited men and women to follow Him, but He never compelled belief through civil authority. The Apostles proclaimed the gospel boldly despite possessing no political power. The early church transformed the Roman world not because it controlled the state, but because it faithfully preached Christ and demonstrated his love.

This pattern should not be forgotten. The Kingdom of God advances through the work of the Holy Spirit upon the human heart, not through governmental preference or legislative authority. Civil government performs a

noble and indispensable role. Scripture teaches that governing authorities exist to preserve order, administer justice, and protect those entrusted to their care. These are sacred responsibilities. Yet scripture also recognizes limits to civil authority.

Government may punish crime. It may defend the innocent. It may preserve public peace. It may protect the equal rights of every citizen. But it cannot produce faith. It cannot command worship. It cannot transform conscience. Those responsibilities belong to God alone. For this reason, I respectfully urge the Commission to reconsider recommendations that would expand governmental involvement in religious institutions or weaken the constitutional principles that have historically preserved their independence.

Specifically, I respectfully recommend that the Commission:

- Reaffirm that liberty of conscience is an unalienable right belonging equally to every person regardless of religious belief or nonbelief;
- Preserve the institutional independence of religious and civic authority as an essential constitutional safeguard protecting both religion and civil government;
- Reject proposals that encourage governmental funding of religious worship, religious ministry, or religious education in ways that create institutional dependence upon the state;
- Recognize the wisdom of maintaining an appropriate distinction between churches and partisan political activity so that religious institutions remain free to exercise their prophetic and moral witness without becoming identified primarily with political movements;
- Affirm that government best practices religion by defending the equal liberty of all faiths rather than extending institutional preference to particular religious traditions.

These recommendations are offered with respect for the Commission and appreciation for its sincere desire to strengthen religious liberty.

Our nation unquestionably faces significant cultural challenges. Many Americans are concerned about declining civic virtue, increasing polarization, and growing hostility toward people of faith. These concerns deserve serious attention. Yet I respectfully suggest that the solution is not a closer institutional partnership between church and state.

History consistently teaches otherwise. The Church's strongest when it depends upon God rather than government. Government is strongest when it administers justice and partially without assuming responsibility for advancing religious doctrine. Both flourish when each remains faithful to its own proper sphere.

James Madison warned that alliances between ecclesiastical and civil authority had too often produced "Pride and indolence in the clergy; ignorance and servility in the laity; and in both, superstition, bigotry, and persecution." His warning was born not of cynicism but of historical observation. Thomas Jefferson's metaphor of a "wall of separation between church and state" likewise sought not to diminish religion but to preserve its freedom. Roger Williams understood that the church required protection from the corrupting influence of political power just as surely as government required protection from sectarian domination. More than a century later, Alonzo T. Jones argued before the United States Senate that civil government possesses jurisdiction over civil rights but not over religious duties owed to God. Though separated by generations, these voices all pointed toward the same enduring principle: Liberty of conscience is best preserved when government recognizes the limits of its authority.

As one who believes that religious liberty is both a constitutional principle and a biblical principle, I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve that inheritance. The greatest contribution America has made to the cause of religious freedom has not been the establishment of a favored religion.

It has been the recognition that faith must remain free. Free to believe. Free to doubt. Free to worship. Free to refrain from worship. Free to persuade. Free from coercion. That freedom has protected Christians of every denomination. It has protected Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and countless others. It has protected

those who profess no religious faith at all. Most importantly, it preserved the sacred principle that every human being must answer to God according to the dictates of conscience rather than according to the commands of the state.

I believe that principle remains one of the greatest achievements of the American constitutional experiment. May preserve it with wisdom, humility, and courage. True religion does not ask Caesar for power.

It asks only for freedom.

Freedom to preach.

Freedom to persuade.

Freedom to serve.

Freedom to love.

Freedom to obey God according to conscience.

May that freedom remain secure for every American and for generations yet to come.

Sincerely and respectfully submitted,

Tony Fabian

From: Emma Kliewer <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:47:29 -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 Chairman Patrick, Vice Chairman Carson, and Members:

The pioneers of this nation, traversed land and sea to escape persecution from the Old World where the state acted in favor of one religion and persecuted individuals whose conviction differed from the established religion. Here in this land, our pioneers established "the government" which allowed religious liberty quite unlike any other.

The Religious Clause of the First Amendment to the US Constitution, which states that, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof", prohibits the government from establishing a national religion, endorsing any specific faith, or coercing citizens to participate in religious activities. Thomas Jefferson famously coined the phrase "wall of separation between church and state" to describe this religious clause (in his Danbury letter <https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danbury.htm>). This religious clause was designed to preserve religious freedom by ensuring the government remains neutral towards religion. Hence, the government cannot create a state-sponsored church or officially declare the United States a nation of a specific religion. Nor can the government favor one religion over another, nor can it favor religious belief over non-belief. It cannot force individuals to support or attend religious institutions. The right of an individual to hold any religious belief—or no belief at all—is absolute and cannot be restricted by the government.

For many years in this blessed nation, when the government maintained this wall of separation between church and state and remained neutral towards religious convictions, Americans have flourished and celebrated their freedom, fought wars side by side, lived peacefully together, traded with each other, celebrated holidays together, educated their children, planted farms and built this nation together whether they be Protestants, Amish, Catholics, Buddhist, Islam, Taoist, Atheist, Secularist and whatever other faith entities, belief systems or religious entities there may be in this nation of refuge.

When this nation favored the beliefs of Secularism and Atheism (which are belief systems tantamount to religion) allowing their predominance in educational systems, the neutrality towards religion was breached and encouraged this belief system that sought to dominate the others. Should this neutrality, this wall of separation between church and state be further breached, bridged or eroded, this nation will find religious systems competing for government favor and dominance over the others. Should the wall of separation be weakened and bridged, our nation will eventually follow in the footsteps of the Old World where there was no distinction between the rule of government and the dictates of the favored/established religion. Thus, as heirs and preservers of this blessed freedom, instead of building a bridge which will eventually erode wall of neutrality to religion, it behooves us all the more to uphold and strengthen this wall of separation of church and state which ensured religious liberty and respect of individual freedom of conscience which has blessed this country of refuge for 250 years. The God of heaven who has blessed this nation, woos the heart of man but does not coerce the will. Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's (Matt 22:21). That is true separation of church and state.

In this 250th anniversary of our nation, my appeal to this honorable Commission is to maintain the freedom Americans have enjoyed as a result of maintaining the complete wall of separation between church and state.

Respectfully,
Emma Faith Klierer

From: Jodi Johnson <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:47:40 -0400

Importance: Normal

I understand that there is legislation proposed by the Religious Liberty Commission that could impact my ability to worship as I am convicted on the Seventh day Sabbath which is Saturday, the seventh day of the week. This is the Biblical Sabbath instituted by God at creation.

The Religious Liberty Commission is asking that the wall of separation between church and state be removed. The organization is asking for the government to fund many projects that are religious in nature. The second amendment guarantees that our congress shall make no law regarding the exercise of religion but this commission breaking down this separation.

Most Americans are Sunday keepers and our government would go to the majority to promote Sunday worship. This goes against my convictions based on the Bible that the 7th day is the day of worship. This day is a memorial of the 6 days of creation that happened 6000 years ago according to the Biblical record. But, the whole world wonders after the beast as the Bible says. The way is narrow that leads to life and broad that leads to destruction.

Please maintain the separation of church and state so that I can continue to worship God as the Bible required in the Ten Commandments. Jesus says "Here are they that keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus" Revelation 14:12.

Sincerely,
Jodi L Johnson
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

From: T T <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:47:51 -0400

Importance: Normal

While I have not read the whole document, I agree with what I read of Pillars of Freedom's comments and ask that you consider them.

In my opinion this country was founded on freedom of religion, that is the reason our ancestors fled Europe

As you read through the Bible, God isn't about force, He is about your free will. If God was about force, Lucifer would still be in heaven.

There is so much more I could say but short on time as this email is due in a few minutes

LET FREEDOM RING——- LET FREEDOM RING

and all heaven said AMEN

I will be praying for you

Feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

Todd Trenholm

Sent from my iPhone

From: Harriet Snyder <[REDACTED] PII>

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendations to Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:47:59 -0400

Importance: Normal

Harriet Snyder

[REDACTED] PII

July 13, 2026

The United States Department of Justice
RE: Recommendations of the Religious Liberty Commission

Dear Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the Committee. I am writing as a citizen of the United States with several years of experience as an educator.

Regarding Recommendation #9, which suggests that each state may decide its own closing and working laws, I believe it is essential to remember that no state law should override the national Constitution. The concept of liberty is central to understanding the intent of our forefathers during the composition of the Declaration of Independence.

I urge the Committee to ensure that the separation of church and state is maintained.

Sincerely,

Harriet Snyder

From: Karen Williams <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:48:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Public_Commission.docx

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Karen Williams

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was disturbed to read that the Commission plans to tear down the wall of separation between church and state. If you remember, in past ages, persecution came about through combining the two as one entity. Please take a little more time to research to listen to dissenting voices from history and those of today about the problems combining church and state. A bridge has and will weaken both religious and political parties. As one in the faith, I urge you to retain the wall of separation protecting both church and state.

Sincerely,

Karen Williams

From: Franklin Chalale <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:48:27 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: TO__The_Religious_Liberty_Commission.pdf

Greetings and salutations,

Please find herewith our PUBLIC COMMENT: Separation of Church and State

July 13, 2026

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

PUBLIC COMMENT: Separation of Church and State – Franklin Chalale

2026 and beyond, what a time to be alive!

I believe that we are nearing the end of the earth's history. And according to Revelation 13, the United States of America is to play a major role in the wrapping up of the history of this world as we know it. Sadly though, America, is not well-spoken of in Scripture. She is depicted as a beast (or a nation) with lamb-like horns. Those two horns depict in essence **"a church without a pope, and a State without a king."** John saw, unfortunately though, America also as speaking like a dragon – that is to say, she will speak like Satan himself. Can we even imagine America speaking like Satan? The Bible shows that America will compel the consciences of men and women, not only of America, but men, women, youth and children of the entire world to disobey God. America will make laws that will force the consciences of men to worship some other being and not the Creator of heaven and earth. Revelation 14 gives a stern warning to anyone who will worship the beast, take his mark on their forehead or in their hand or receive the number of the beast. America will also disallow every human being on planet earth to not buy nor to sell unless one or all those three entities are given homage or are worshipped. The very text suggests that WORSHIP will play a special part in the last years of earth's history.

In Daniel 3, we read where King Nebuchadnezzar forced all persons to worship his golden image. Though Nebuchadnezzar was a statesman, he coerced a form of religion by forcing everyone to worship his golden image on pain of being thrown into a fiery furnace. Jesus Christ was seen in that fiery furnace defending faithful Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. In a deeper sense, Jesus' presence in the furnace was a rebuke to King Nebuchadnezzar, not to unite religion and politics.

In Daniel 6, we also read of another king – Darius, who also, though a statesman, signed into law a religious mandate forcing all persons everywhere in his realm to worship him. Any person who refused to worship King Darius, would be thrown into a den of lions. Daniel refused to worship anyone except the Creator of heaven and earth. God saved faithful Daniel from the hungry lions. That too was a rebuke to King Darius' governors not to mix religion and politics.

How was Jesus Christ killed? Didn't corrupt church leaders force the government to kill Him? Didn't a union of a corrupt church leadership and a weak government cause death of the innocent Lamb of God?

When the Pilgrim Fathers left Europe, hadn't there been persecution all over Europe? In Britain, if one were not a member of the Anglican Church, wasn't there torture, property confiscation, imprisonment or death? When Napoleon took Pope Pius VI prisoner in 1798, wouldn't this act end papal persecution in Europe which had continued for 1260 years – (from 538 A.D to 1798)? Hadn't the Dark Ages rendered Europe a place where the Romish Church had such great influence over the State that the State ended up

following the dictates of the Roman Catholic Church? If one were not a member of the State-church, didn't persecution follow them? Why had the Thirty-years' war been fought? Was it not to render religious freedom to the peoples of Europe from papal tyranny?

In this current crisis: the Union of Church and State or the Separation of Church and State we are led to this statement by a pope of Rome found in *The Great Controversy*, by Ellen Gould White:

"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 worship,' also 'all such as maintain that the church may not employ force.'

The Great Controversy, Between Christ and Satan, 1888 Edition, p. 564.4

Based on the above, we ask the question; who really is against Liberty of Conscience? Is it not the Pope of Rome? Who anathematizes all persons advocating Liberty of Conscience? Is it not the Pope of Rome? Who anathematizes freedom of worship and would rather force worship? Is it not the Pope of Rome? Who really hates American freedoms? Is it not the Pope of Rome?

We conclude that the spirit or principle of denial of freedom to choose as one is dictated to by their conscience is foreign to the tenets of the Constitution of these United States of America. We see in this union of Church and State a sending of America back to the Dark Ages where while she was then *the persecuted* now *she is preparing to be the persecutor*. Is this what modern America wants to do...to stand on the wrong side of history...to persecute the peoples of America and indeed to persecute the peoples of the entire world by building a bridge between Church and State – denying them freedoms to worship whichever deity they choose according to the dictates of their consciences?

We pray that God would grant this Religious Liberty Commission wisdom to tread softly on this matter of the union of church and state. This American Republic was founded on the principle of Separation of Church and State. The very departure from Europe was to flee the union of Church and State; to flee persecution. What would Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Franklin, William Penn, Roger Williams, Patrick Henry, and all the early founders of the American Republic say today to see that liberty to choose has been denied its peoples?

"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."

We sincerely hope this short note sheds some light on what we believe is a cornerstone principle of the American Republic that freedom of conscience and the pursuit of happiness has granted this American Republic progress and prosperity for these last 250 years. God forbid that there should be a departure from the part of righteousness. Any departure from this path of righteousness, will, without fail cause chaos and national ruin in these beautiful United States of America.

Yours faithfully
Franklin Chalale
Lesotho, Southern Africa

From: Adriene Johnson <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:48:46 -0400

Importance: Normal

I object to the funding of religious non-profit activities mainly because of the first amendment and Johnson's Amendment in 1954:

The **Johnson Amendment**, introduced by then-Senator Lyndon B. Johnson in 1954, is part of **Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code**. It bars tax-exempt organizations from participating in political campaigns on behalf of, or in opposition to, any candidate for public office. Violating this provision can result in the loss of tax-exempt status for the organization. The amendment applies to a wide range of nonprofits, including charitable foundations, universities, and houses of worship, which are the most common 501(c)(3) organizations in the U.S.

From: Lisa M <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Lisa McCabe

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:48:53 -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,

Lisa McCabe

Riverside, California

From: "Michael R. Quion" <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Cc: "Melanie C. Quion" <[REDACTED] PII >

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE AND CHURCH-STATE SEPARATION

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:48:54 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chairman Patrick and Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing to express my serious concern regarding the draft Religious Liberty Commission report's treatment of the separation of church and state.

I strongly support the report's efforts to protect individuals and religious organizations from discrimination, coercion, and the improper suppression of religious expression. People of faith should not be required to conceal their beliefs or withdraw from public life. Private religious expression is constitutionally protected, and government should accommodate sincere religious exercise where the law permits or requires it.

However, the report appears to move beyond correcting misapplications of the Establishment Clause and toward discrediting church-state separation itself as a guiding constitutional principle. It emphasizes that the phrase "wall of separation" does not appear verbatim in the Constitution, characterizes the traditional metaphor as having been overstated, and proposes that religious liberty instead be understood as a "bridge" through which church and state "strengthen and support one another." The report also recommends federal guidance based on an "originalist understanding" of the Establishment Clause. Although it states that it is not advocating theocracy or the complete elimination of all separation, the report's overall framing risks minimizing the essential institutional independence of religion and government.

The fact that the precise phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear in the constitutional text does not make the underlying principle illegitimate. The Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses work together: government must not establish, sponsor, control, coerce, or improperly favor religion, while it must also protect the right of individuals and religious communities to believe, worship, speak, and serve according to conscience. The Constitution Annotated recognizes that the Establishment Clause requires a measure of separation, while the Free Exercise Clause may require the accommodation and equal treatment of religious persons.

As a person of faith, I do not understand church-state separation to mean hostility toward religion or the exclusion of religious voices from the public square. Rather, I understand it as an indispensable protection for authentic faith. Religion flourishes most securely when it is neither directed by government nor dependent upon governmental approval, preference, funding, or political power.

Thomas Jefferson's "wall of separation" language was intended to reassure a religious minority that the government would not establish or control religion. Whatever the limitations of the metaphor, it has long expressed an important principle: civil government must not assume authority over matters of faith and conscience.

Replacing separation with a model in which church and state are expected to "strengthen and support one another" creates serious risks. It may encourage government officials to decide which religions, religious expressions, or religious institutions deserve public endorsement and assistance. It may also

expose churches to political capture, financial leverage, governmental regulation, and pressure to conform to the priorities of those temporarily holding public office.

Religious liberty must protect everyone—not only adherents of the majority religion or traditions that currently enjoy political influence, but minority faiths, dissenting believers, and those who profess no religious faith. Today's governmentally preferred religion may become tomorrow's regulated or disfavored religion.

I respectfully urge the Commission to revise the report so that it clearly affirms all of the following:

- a) Private religious expression in public life is protected and should not be suppressed merely because it is religious.
- b) Reasonable governmental accommodation of religious exercise is permissible and may sometimes be constitutionally required.
- c) Government must remain impartial among different religions and between religion and nonreligion.
- d) The separation of church and state remains a vital safeguard against religious establishment, governmental coercion, religious favoritism, and state control of the church.

The Commission need not choose between robust religious exercise and meaningful church-state separation. Properly understood, each protects the other. Religious individuals should be free to influence society through witness, service, persuasion, and participation, while government should neither direct nor privilege religion.

I therefore respectfully request that the Commission remove or revise language that portrays church-state separation as a falsehood or merely an obstacle to religious expression and instead recognize it as an enduring constitutional safeguard that allows faith and conscience to remain genuinely free.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Respectfully,

Michael Quion

From: Victoria Wickwire <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:49:44 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPad

Begin

Subject: RE: Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

As a Christian who fully believes and seeks to follow scripture fully, I deeply cherish my right to worship according to the dictates of my heart. One being "The Biblical Sabbath", the sacred seventh day of the week—Saturday—which God has called us all to keep holy. I also love the United States of America and the principles upon which it was founded. The United States has been uniquely blessed by God, becoming a refuge for those seeking freedom of choice and liberty to worship according to Scripture without interference and coercion by any government.

History repeatedly proves that whenever civil government involves itself in the religious practices of its people, persecution inevitably follows.

Our forefathers understood these dangers well. That is why the First Amendment, in the Free Exercise clause and the No Establishment clause states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" U.S Const. Amend. 1 cl 1.

Their purpose is crystal clear: these clauses in the First Amendment were to keep church and state separate so that the two be not mingled by either one controlling the other. Religious liberty absolutely cannot exist without the separation of church and state.

Liberty of conscience is the fundamental right of every individual to follow his or her own moral and religious beliefs without coercion, interference or punishment by the government or its society. The separation of church and state is vitally and critically important to preserve and protect every individual's freedom to think, to believe, and act according to one's own inner convictions, even if those beliefs differ from the majority or state authority. No one should ever be forced to act against, or be penalized for one's sincere beliefs.

I respectfully request the Commission to:

Reconsider and reject any interpretation of the US Constitution that diminishes, dismisses or denigrates the Constitutional concept of separation of church and state;

Maintain proper boundaries between the state & government authority and matters of conscience to preserve liberty of conscience;

Withdraw any recommendation that would fund religious activities. Maintain proper boundaries between the state & government authority & matters of conscience to preserve liberty of conscience.

Respectfully,
Vicki L. Wickwire

From: Linda Golden <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church & State & Johnson Amendment - Linda Golden

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:49:56 -0400

Importance: Normal

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 members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a Bible believing US Citizen and wish to provide comment on the above report. First it is apparent that significant hours and care went into the preparation of the report. For that I thank you.

Relative to the concept of Separation of Church and State, I agree that specific term does not exist within the Constitution, at the same time, it is also apparent that the basic concepts are. This country was founded on the principle of a country without a King and a church without a Pope. Those basic tenants are what allowed the United States to become what it is, and they need to remain in place. History has shown the outcome of allowing the church to have influence in the government and vice versa, the outcome has always been suppression of Liberty of Conscience resulting in Religious persecution. It was precisely that unification of church & state our founding fathers came here to escape and upon that foundation this country was established.

It is imperative we protect Liberty of Conscience, Religious Freedom, Freedom of Thought, and Free Speech if we are truly a country that honors God. Without these, we become a country that speaks like a dragon.

What I did not find in the report is classifying secular humanism as a religion, as it is as much a religion as any other, except in secular humanism's god is defined as "self" vs an external deity. If that would be the case, many of the issues that the commission is addressing would be eliminated.

The other aspect that I specifically would like to mention is the Johnson Amendment. While some of the examples presented were extreme applications of the law, I don't see how any good can become of merging politics and religion.

As Jesus told us in Mark 12:17 "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's". Seems He supports separation of church and state too.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Golden

From: Selah <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:50:02 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Sir and Madam, I respectfully request that you stop the progression of a Church/State. I believe all people should have the right to choose how and when they worship without the Government enforcing worship-related laws. Thank you.
With warm regards, SueAnn Small

Sent from my iPhone

From: Elizabeth Hickman <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:50:27 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I'm writing as a young person to urge you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that blur the lines between church and state, specifically using taxpayer dollars to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment. Our country was founded on principles, not a desire to control people's beliefs or religions. The founding fathers envisioned a nation where religious liberty thrives. As a 1829 U.S. Senate Committee Report noted, religious persecutions stem from governments defining their own "law of God" - something our Constitution wisely prevents.

From studying history, I've noticed that every time a government has aligned itself with a church or religion, persecution and religious oppression have resulted. As a person of faith who believes the Bible is true and the ultimate moral guideline for humanity, I still don't believe the government should force anyone to believe in the Bible or a specific religion. History tells us this led to the Dark Ages.

I'm thankful and honored to live in the United States, with its freedom and religious liberty, which has made this a great nation. Religious liberty is a cornerstone of America's greatness. The First Amendment supports this: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." Let's keep this foundation strong for future generations.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Hickman
Athol, ID

From: dmm2713@ [REDACTED] PII

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment on Draft report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:50:35 -0400

Importance: Normal

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Marc Mann

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. That wall wasn't built by atheists 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 interference, until churches are answering to politicians instead of to God. History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, (for example the dark ages) and it isn't good for either one.

Please keep church and state separate and keep the wall, don't build that bridge.

That's how we keep both of them free.

Thank you for considering my request,

Marc Mann
Auburn WA.

From: Kurt Bruhnke <[REDACTED]> PII

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Kurt Bruhnke

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:50:38 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a citizen and a Christian with regard to the recommendations in the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty's draft report.

Our country was founded with personal freedom in mind and religion is one of the most personal activities in which one can participate. The draft report suggests changes to the protections provided by the first amendment which currently goes a long way to keeping the government out of the religious affairs of citizens. These protections should not be softened no matter how good the intentions behind doing so. This separation between the government and religion protects the church (and any religion) from the meddling of public influence. The leader of the church is God himself who does not need help from any government. In fact, history shows that governments which meddle in any way with religious affairs end up doing much more harm than good and created unnecessary divides between their citizens. The best thing a freedom-loving government can do with regard to religion is to stay out of religion all together, aside from ensuring it's free practice.

The repeal of the Johnson Amendment is concerning in that doing so would also permit the intertwining of religious and political agendas. When this happens, divine authority is replaced with political loyalties. Let the church teach morality. Political candidates already have sufficient platforms for spreading their message. We have a great thing going in America. Let's not break it now.

Considering the gravity of the matter, I am disappointed that the comment period is so short. There was barely enough time for this topic to be discussed in churches before the comment period closed. I further request that the comment period be extended at least another month.

Respectfully,
Kurt Bruhnke

From: Jeremy Fiedler <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- Separation of Church and State – Jeremy Fiedler

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:50:46 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am asking you to reconsider the recommendation to remove the separation of church and state. History shows that when church and state work that closely together the church is corrupted by the politics and feels that it may impose it's beliefs thru use of the state. This would be a grave error allowing for those who have more political sway to impose beliefs by force on those who believe validly different then they

Jeremy Fiedler

From: Cecelia Hess <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:51:12 -0400

Importance: Normal

July 13, 2026

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

The separation of church and state is one of the greatest safeguards of religious freedom. When government and religion become intertwined, the rights of all people are placed at risk. History repeatedly shows that when governments favor or enforce one religion, discrimination, coercion, and oppression often follow.

Faith is a deeply personal matter. Government should remain neutral in matters of religion so that every individual has the freedom to worship or not worship according to the dictates of conscience, without government interference.

This principle was one of the reasons many of America's earliest settlers sought a new home. They fled nations where church and state were closely connected, hoping to establish a society where religious liberty would be protected for everyone.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to preserve the clear separation of church and state and continue to protect the religious freedom guaranteed to every American.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Robert Hess

[REDACTED] PII

From: Drue Wagner <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment--Establishment Clause--Drue Wagner

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:51:15 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a private citizen from Plummer, Idaho, because I have heard it argued that the phrase separation of church and state appears nowhere in the Constitution. That is technically true of the words themselves, but the principle behind them is there in the founders' own writings, and I ask the Commission to weigh those words carefully before it acts.

Start with a hard structural fact: any law touching religion, even one meant to help religion, ends up controlling it. To pass such a law, government must first define which religion or observance qualifies for its favor. That definition necessarily includes some believers and excludes others, and even the favored ones no longer practice their faith freely — they practice it on terms a legislature wrote and can rewrite. A witness before a Senate committee on Sunday legislation put this to the very people who stood to benefit from the law he opposed: no man can safely consent to legislation favoring his own faith, because in doing so he surrenders his right to change his mind if he later becomes convinced some other form of faith is nearer the truth. That is worth sitting with. Religious liberty includes the liberty to keep searching. A law that locks in today's favored belief locks out tomorrow's conscience — including the believer's own.

The deeper reason majority support cannot settle a religious question is that rights of conscience are not the kind of thing a vote can create or dissolve. If a majority could grant religious liberty, a majority could revoke it, and then it was never a right at all — only a permission. Popular government is not instituted to enforce the will of the majority against the minority; it is instituted to protect the minority, since the majority can already look after itself at the polls. Congress's own committee, reporting on Sunday laws in 1829, said the Constitution regards the conscience of a Jew as sacred as that of a Christian, and gives no more authority to touch the conscience of one solitary individual than that of an entire community. That is the standard I would ask this Commission to hold itself to.

Nor was this separation an accident or a modern imposition read back into the founders. It was deliberate, and it came largely from believers themselves — the Baptists, the Presbyterians, the Quakers — who had felt establishment pressing down on them and wanted government kept out of religion precisely because they respected religion. Madison, who drafted the Amendment, told the Virginia ratifying convention there was not a shadow of right in the general government to meddle with religion, and that its least interference would be a most flagrant usurpation. In the Memorial and Remonstrance he explained the method: the founders did not wait for a small encroachment to grow into a large one before objecting. They saw the consequence contained in the principle itself and refused the principle at the outset. A commission weighing new religious policy today owes the country that same vigilance, not a reinterpretation that treats Madison's plain statement as somehow compatible with government sponsorship of belief.

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

Respectfully,
Drue Wagner
Plummer, ID

From: Tamara Castleman <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION – TAMARA CASTLEMAN

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:51:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am writing with some concerns about some of the Religious Liberty Commission's proposed guidelines. Repealing the Johnson Amendment is treading dangerous water. I urge you to remember that per Thomas Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, the US has a "wall of separation between church and state." This commission seems to be trying to create a bridge between church and state by loosening restrictions that keep the wall always intended by the Founding Fathers firmly in place.

You also leave it up to the Dept. of Justice to clarify what is meant by the separation of church and state, which is unnecessary because our Founding Fathers were clear in their writings as to what it means, and frankly, it's never been difficult to understand. I have a harder time understanding what needs to be clarified than I do simply understanding the wall of separation between church and state so eloquently explained by our Founders.

Please continue to fully separate church and state, letting the wall between them created by the great minds and forward thinkers who founded this country stand firmly in tact.

From: Hector Figueroa <[REDACTED] PII>

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - (Hector Figueroa)

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:51:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

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

Sincerely,
Hector Figueroa
Port St. Lucie, FL

From: carol conduff <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Draft - Please Consider My Response

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:51:31 -0400

Importance: High

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Committee:

As a United States of America citizen and the Religious Liberties coordinator for my church, I am deeply concerned with the recent statements and the Religious Liberty Committee Draft report.

My concerns are:

1. Removing the wall of separation of church and state with a "bridge;"
2. Repealing the Johnson Amendment that would allow U.S. tax dollars or government funding for non-profit religious entities.

My studies of world history, most specifically countries that combine church and state, have never worked out fairly. Once the government starts to remove our freedoms of conscience, the ability to choose how we worship, it has led to coercion, limited rights, and persecution. Millions of people were slaughtered during the Dark Ages, medieval times when the Catholic Church and the government aligned to destroy anyone with dissenting views or opinions about how they chose to worship. Martyrs such as Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, Thomas Cranmer are just a few of the people who spoke out in opposition to the Church/State were killed. The Waldensians were completely wiped out because they believed in only the word of God, "Sola Scriptura," which made them targets of the Church and State. Anabaptists were persecuted by authorities due to the pressures placed on them both Protestant and Catholic forces. In the U.S. Rhode Island was founded by Roger Williams who was forced to leave his home in the dead of winter because of his religious views, including his belief that church and civil government should remain separate. Rhode Island became an early model of religious liberty, and those principles later influenced the American commitment to religious freedom and the separation of church and state. These are only a few examples of the negative outcomes of when Church and State are not separate.

I am sure many other concerned individuals have written in and expressed their deep concerns about the direction this change can take our country in the near future. It is well known that "history repeats itself," and we do not want to erode the wonderful freedoms our country has afforded us in these last 250 years. Early settlers such as Roger Williams and our founding fathers fled the old world and its church/state persecution dreaming of a country that protects our individual rights. As a citizen who is well versed on how this change may disrupt our freedoms and safety, it is my fervent hope that the "bridge" intended to replace our separation of church and state is abandoned.

It is my hope that the Department will also preserve the Johnson Amendment and the integrity of religious organizations and maintain the independence of the Church from the government. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best Regards,

From: Renee Wilson <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Betty Farley

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:51:31 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen who has spent years studying God's Word, and from that study I have come to believe that we were made free to choose. Joshua called on the people to choose that day whom they would serve, and then declared for his own house that they would serve the Lord. That was an invitation to choose, not a command handed down by a magistrate. If Joshua himself would not compel Israel's worship by decree, no American legislature has any business compelling mine, or anyone else's. Please do not let this Commission recommend anything that would take away our religious liberty or dictate the conscience by law, for only the Word of God can rightly lead a man in worship.

The deepest reason for this comes from Christ himself, not from any secular theory. When he said to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's, he drew a line between two jurisdictions: one civil, one divine, and he placed government on only one side of it. Civil government exists to judge whether an act harms a neighbor; it has no authority to judge whether an act is religious, irreligious, or heretical. Murder and theft are punished because they injure people, not because they offend heaven. That single test settles every hard case without any religious test at all. Any recommendation that puts government behind a particular text, display, or lesson pushes the state across the line Christ himself drew, into territory reserved for God alone.

I also believe rights come from the Creator, not from a nose count. If a majority vote can grant liberty of conscience, a majority vote can just as easily take it away, and then it was never a right to begin with, only a permission. Our whole constitutional order exists to protect the minority, since the majority hardly needs protecting at all. A congressional committee once said that the Constitution regards the conscience of the Jew as sacred as that of the Christian, and gives no more authority to touch the conscience of one solitary person than that of an entire community. Popular support may justify a highway bill. It cannot justify a religious one, because faith was never a matter for the ballot box.

Finally, force cannot make a Christian; it can only make a hypocrite. Compelling attendance, observance, or belief reaches the outward man, never the heart, and history bears this out. Fifteen centuries of established Christianity, by Madison's own account, produced pride and indolence among clergy, ignorance and servility among the laity, and, in both, superstition and persecution. A faith that needs the police power to sustain it has already confessed its own weakness. Even General Grant urged that religion be left to the family altar, the church, and private conscience, with state and church kept forever apart. That counsel protected the churches themselves as much as it protected dissenters.

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

Respectfully,
Betty Farley
DeWitt

Sent from my iPhone

From: Thomas Dombrowski <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] My Concerns About the Religious Freedom Commission Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:51:44 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Department of Justice and The President's Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing this as a committed Bible believing Christian in response to the recent report of the President's Religious Liberty Commission. My intent on this email is to share my concerns about the conclusions and desired applications expressed by the findings of the commission.

First, while the commission has concluded that the phrase "a wall of separation of church and state" is not found written in the United States Constitution, and is convinced that bridges need to be built between the church and the state, I strongly believe that the principle of the concept, of a wall of separation of church and state, is found within the first amendment to the United States Constitution, which states "Congress shall make no law establishing a religion, nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof." In this brief statement, the wisdom of the founding fathers created barriers so that Congress, the highest legislative body of the federal government, is prevented from establishing a state ordained religion or a set of beliefs for the citizens of the United States to follow. In addition, the amendment prevents Congress from hindering the individual's right to freely exercise their faith—thereby allowing the citizens of the United States to truly remain a free people to practice their faith according to their conscience rather than by the state as dictated by the church.

To supplement my argument further, I am deeply concerned the commission's conclusions overlooked the precious contributions to our nation's history made by Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island, one of the original 13 colonies, who as a Puritan pastor, fled the persecution of the state-controlled church in England to seek religious freedom in the colony of Massachusetts, only to find the arm of the state was used by the Puritan Christians of Massachusetts to persecute Williams, who held to the belief in liberty of conscience. When Williams was banished from Massachusetts on October 9, 1635, he fled to Providence Plantations, and established the colony of Rhode Island, based on the principle of liberty of conscience, developing the idea of the establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state. It was Thomas Jefferson who eventually introduced this concept into law in the state of Virginia in 1781, resulting in the first state having a statute of separation between the church and the state. Based on the commission's conclusions, it appears they have ignored this crucial history.

My second concern is the commission's recommendation to abolish the Johnson Amendment. I believe this poses great danger because it creates the means to transform the pulpits of the church into political tools resulting in the message of the church becoming controlled by the state and ultimately leading to a church that then has the power to control the state—threatening the freedom of conscience in this land.

I write these objections and concerns, first, as one grateful to have been born in this nation that holds such a rich heritage of offering freedom to those seeking to exercise their faith according to the dictates of their conscience. I was raised in the traditions ordained by the faith of my fathers, but I chose instead to embrace the Holy Bible and the Bible only as the lamp for my feet and the light for my path. While that decision led to misunderstandings by both family and friends alike, it was the freedoms offered by this great nation that allowed me to worship God as I understand Him, despite the objections of family and friends. It is for these reasons that I write, not just as a committed Bible believing Christian, but as a citizen who is stewarding that same freedom so that others may enjoy the blessings I have freely received. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Thomas Dombrowski

From: Alejandro Colon <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT: Separation of Church and State - Alejandro Colón

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:52:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a man of faith and believe in defending the rights of christians. Our Nation was founded upon the belief of freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, this is what makes America great and distinct from other nations. I do not think it will be best for our country to remove the wall of separation that exists between church and state, doing so will take away our unique identity. The state should not have the authority to dictate over a man's faith or conscience. God blessed America over every other nation because we protected religious liberty. Moving forward with this decision will remove the blessing of God and will lead our nation to spiritual darkness. Please reconsider this decision for the best of our nation.

Sincerely,

Alejandro Colón
Manchester, CT

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

From: Shawn H <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Shawn Hoffman

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:52:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing to you today as a citizen of the United States to respectfully request the reconsideration of your recommendations in the recent report that propose weakening the separation between church and state. Specifically, I am concerned about the proposals to direct government funding toward religious activities and the recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment.

Maintaining a clear distinction between government operations and religious institutions protects the integrity of both. When houses of worship become dependent on federal funding or answering to politicians instead of to God, they risk compromising their independent missions and facing unintended government oversight. True religious liberty is strongest when faith traditions remain insulated from political friction and state influence.

The separation of church and state is a foundational American principle—one historically championed by people of faith to safeguard their own spiritual integrity. By preserving these established boundaries, we ensure that both our democratic institutions and our diverse faith communities remain free, vibrant, and autonomous.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Shawn Hoffman

From: Ashley Riesenberger <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Ashley Riesenberger

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:52:25 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for providing the opportunity to comment on the Commission's draft report.

I am writing as a Christian who deeply values liberty of conscience, religious freedom, and the free exercise of faith. I appreciate the Commission's desire to protect Americans from religious discrimination and to defend the rights of people to live according to their sincerely held beliefs. Those are freedoms worth preserving.

At the same time, I am concerned by recommendations that appear to move our nation toward a closer relationship between church and state. I believe one of America's greatest strengths has been its commitment to protecting the freedom of conscience for every person, regardless of his or her religious beliefs.

One of the passages of Scripture that has shaped my understanding is Jesus' statement before Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Christ never sought political power to accomplish His mission. He transformed lives through truth, love, and the work of the Holy Spirit—not through legislation or governmental authority. Even while living under an unjust and oppressive government, Jesus did not attempt to reform civil institutions or establish God's kingdom through political influence. Instead, He called individuals to repentance and changed hearts.

That example has profoundly shaped my understanding of religious liberty. The mission of Christ's church is not to seek political power but to faithfully proclaim the gospel. Government should protect every person's freedom to worship—or not worship—according to conscience, while remaining neutral among religions. Likewise, the church best fulfills its mission when it relies on the transforming power of God's Spirit rather than the authority of the state.

For that reason, I have concerns about recommendations that would increase government funding of religious organizations or encourage greater political involvement by churches. While these proposals may be well-intentioned, history repeatedly demonstrates that when religious institutions and civil government become closely connected, both eventually suffer. Churches become vulnerable to political pressures, and governments are placed in the difficult position of deciding religious questions that belong to conscience.

Religious liberty is strongest when it protects the rights of everyone equally—whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, atheist, or of any other belief. The freedoms guaranteed by our Constitution are most secure when the government neither advances nor inhibits religion, but instead safeguards every individual's right to follow the convictions of conscience.

Thank you for considering my comments and for your work on this important issue.

Respectfully,

Ashley Riesenberger, RDN

Seattle, Washington

From: deborah massey <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMENT - Separation of Church and State - Deborah Massey

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:52:45 -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. This results in churches competing for funding and being forced to obey politicians instead of their own conscience and God. That is bad for the church and country. Separation is essential to protect faith and freedom and is the reason we have a strong religion now.

Two of my ancestors (John, and I believe James Nickell) escaped from unfair taxation, and religious persecution in Scotland/Ireland in 1745. Working as indentured servants for 7yrs to pay for passage to the Virginia Colony. In 1749, John (my family branch), bought 400 acres in what is now Monroe County W.V., for the sum of \$5.00. It was known as Nickell Plantation and is still occupied by my relatives.

If they had not escaped the tyranny that resulted from the joining of church and state, which we see in the history of Europe, there would be no Nickell Family in America now.

Please keep church and state separate, so both can be free.

Sincerely,

Deborah Massey
Woodlawn, Tn

From: Michael Herr <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Request to revise religious liberty draft.

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:52:50 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

We urge you to reconsider the recommendations in your religious liberty commission draft. Even though the first amendment does not specifically state “separation of church and state”, it expressly states the government allows for all Americans to have the freedom to worship (or not worship) based on personal conviction. This is why our country was originally formed. Separation protects faith, which is precisely why religion has remained strong in our country.

Please maintain the separation of church and state - that's how we keep both free.

Thank you,
Michael and Kristine Herr

From: Natalie K <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT— Separation of church and state — Natalie

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:52:51 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a Christian. As such, I am very disturbed to hear that the Commission is seeking to weaken the separation of church and state by shifting the “wall” to a “bridge.” A quick look through history will reveal that most of the worst large-scale violations of human rights were committed by governments that had assumed moral or religious authority (think the Inquisition, holy wars, and elements of the Japanese participation in World War Two, for example). The reason our country has prospered so far is precisely because of our strict separation of church and state. The only reason I am free to worship God according to my convictions is because the government does not have the right to dictate anything about religion. Government funding for church activities, as well as political power for churches (as restricted by the Johnson Amendment), would ultimately give the government way too much control over religious affairs and beliefs. Please keep the government in its place—as a strictly civil authority—and let our churches and all other citizens remain free.

Sincerely,

Natalie

Washington State

From: Oscar and Family <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Keep Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:53:21 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission;

I too, wish to express support for the letter below, written by Andy Roman and request your consideration, that our nation, under God, must remain free. Free from the dictates of anyone's church or religion that they might impose on others. History shows us, if our nation does not maintain separation of church and state, persecution will follow, as in past.

Let us remember the history of the Dark Ages and the horrible persecution of peoples, of who many were torched and burned at the stake, because they could not, in good faith, agree with the state church. There was no Freedom of Thought. The Bible was forbidden for the common peoples to read because the church chose to force upon all, there ideologies and practices and band it's reading.

Our forefathers fled Europe to come to this new land in order to escape suppression. A land where they could have Freedom of Choice, including religion.

Soon after arriving, the Puritans were intolerant of different faiths and hung many those who differed with their religion. Roger Williams fled from Massachusetts to save his own life and was able to established Religious Freedom in Rhode Island, a land showing us a better way to live.

Oh, that we should not forget the pain and suffering of those before us who fought to give us a place where we should have Freedom of Choice, free from the dictates of a church run state.

Please keep separation of Church and State for this our beloved county, the United States of America.

Thank you.

Rosemary Ferguson from Battle Ground, Washington

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: Kathy Gravello <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:53:25 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

I would like to state that as a concerned citizen, I respectfully request of the Commission, that we hold fast to the original constitutional principle of separation of church and state. I believe we should keep religion and government separate, and not encourage unity between the two. Though some may think the unity would strengthen our nation, I believe it would open doors to laws that would actually restrict our religious freedoms.

I vote to continue having separation of church and state.

Thank you for listening and respecting the opinions and concerns of those governed.

Kathy Gravello

From: Joshua Flores <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:53:42 -0400

Importance: Normal

The separation of church and state was not just a comment made in a letter sent by Thomas Jefferson. It was placed on the first two lines of the 1st Amendment to the Constitution for a reason. The founding Fathers put it there due to their roots of religious persecution when their forefathers escaped from England. They wanted to ensure that this could never happen again in this newly established United States.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;" If this Amendment were done away with, then the government could prohibit the practice of any religion it deems unworthy and even persecute on the basis of religion. A restriction of when to buy or sell on a specific day. This must not be allowed to occur.

This country was built on the foundation of religious freedom, don't allow those in power to take that away from us.

Sincerely,

Josh Flores

From: "Dr. Janelle Louis, ND, PMHNP-BC" <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Janelle Louis

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:54:01 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a citizen who cares about both halves of the First Amendment's religion clauses, because I believe they are really one commitment, not two rival ones. Consider what happens the moment government passes any law on the subject of religion, even one meant kindly. As the reformer Jones told a Senate committee long ago, it is impossible to frame a law on the subject of religion that will not prohibit the free exercise of religion, because any such law must define which religion counts, and that definition excludes someone. Even those it includes are no longer free; they practice their faith by permission of a legislature that can revise the terms tomorrow. Jones made a striking point to the very believers who might celebrate such a law: no man can ever safely consent to legislation in favor of the form of faith he himself professes, because in doing so he resigns his own right to change his mind if he becomes convinced some other faith is nearer the truth. That is the quiet radicalism worth remembering—religious liberty includes the liberty to keep searching, and a law that locks in today's belief as public policy legislates against a citizen's own future conscience.

This is not a new argument invented for our moment. Congress itself settled it in 1829 and 1830, when Sabbatarian petitioners asked lawmakers to halt Sunday mail and enforce religious observance. The Senate and House committees, in reports Congress adopted while men who had lived through the founding still served, declared plainly that it is not in the legitimate province of the legislature to determine what religion is true or false, since our government is a civil and not a religious institution. They went further, warning that if a law defines even one point of religious duty, it may with equal claim define every point, down to the forms of worship and the support of the clergy. And they noted, with real prescience, that declaring a holy day would not convert a single dissenter, only extort vain sacrifices, since human power cannot command the affections of the heart. A commission proposing government-defined religious duties today is not confronting some recent court precedent; it is asking us to overturn what Congress itself, one generation removed from the founders, already ruled outside its power.

Finally, I'd ask the Commission to weigh what state sponsorship does to religion itself. Coercion cannot produce faith; it can only produce conformity. Forcing outward observance, one writer of that era put it, will not make Christians of anyone, though it might make hypocrites of many. Madison's own survey of fifteen centuries of established Christianity found the fruits to be pride and indolence in the clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, and bigotry on every side. Even General Grant, addressing the country in 1875, counseled that religion be left to the family altar, the church, and private schools, with state and church kept forever separate. The churches most eager for government backing today are the ones with the most to lose when that backing changes hands.

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

Respectfully,
Janelle Louis

From: SeanR <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] RLC

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:54:06 -0400

Importance: Normal

I firmly believe in the separation of church and state, which keeps religious organizations and political governance politically distant. In the U.S., it is primarily rooted in the First Amendment's Establishment Clause, which prohibits the government from establishing an official religion, endorsing one faith, or coercing religious practices.

All religions are protected under the First Amendment, as are individuals that do not affiliate themselves with any religion.

From: Linda Golden <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: PUBLIC COMMENT- Separation of Church & State - Jean Engel

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:54:16 -0400

Importance: Normal

I do not agree with removing the wall of separation in favor of building bridges relative to the separation of church and state. These are our inalienable rights endowed by our Creator to protect one nation under God for conscience sake.

From: mahal9394 <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:54:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

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

Thank you very much.

Delia Smith

From: Keith Nelson <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Please do not unite church

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:54:30 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am a standard Protestant mainstream evangelical. I am not an extremist by any standard. I am proud to be an American and I love my freedoms, but I feel those will all be threatened. If you combine church and state the freedom we have to worship the way we want outside of the states Control is magnanimously important please consider carefully when making our passing laws. The separation of church and state is absolutely crucial. Thank you Keith Nelson Fort White, Florida.

From: Jacob Purvis <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:54:37 -0400

Importance: Normal

Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Our country was founded with church and state being separate. Once they become one, it will ruin our religious freedoms and our country as we know them. Look at church history and see how one church controls all and how it ended for those that opposed those beliefs. We as Americans believe in freedom, and our largest freedom as that of religion.

If our founding fathers wanted it religious freedom, then maybe it's better for our country that way. How else would we have become the greatest country on earth without our peoples freedoms?

Thank you for your time.

Very respectfully,

Jacob Purvis

--

Jacob Purvis

[REDACTED]
PII PII I

From: Linda McClellan <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Linda McClellan

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:54:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

From the beginning, God gave us the gift of freedom of choice and has repeatedly shared it in His Word, the Bible. Religious Liberty is also one of the foundational elements that makes the United States of America a place where all people have the freedom to follow their conscience and worship without persecution.

In reviewing that the Commission wants to remove the wall separating church and state and connect and/or merge them, I am very alarmed. It is important that religion and church stays separate from the government and government mandates. Any regulation/mandate that dictates how and when people worship is dangerous. Each person's ability to choose to serve God by his/her conscience and not by the dictates of the government is important.

Please keep church and state separate.

Sincerely,
Linda McClellan
New Market, Alabama

From: Gardinia Han <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Honor the principle and practice of "separation of Church and State"

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:54:57 -0400

Importance: Normal

I

Dear RLC :

It is a very important principle that our country keep the separation of Church and State. Our founding Fathers advocated and that this country is founded on the principles of freedom.

I read the Pillar of Freedom response and I agree with it.

Thank you for our country of USA, that we the people can speak and honor our God in religion, and honor our country, and be good citizens. God Bless America!

Sincerely,

Lydia Hsu

From: Kim Dowell <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:55:03 -0400

Importance: Normal

I believe in the separation of church and state. We only need to look in history to see the persecution that results when the State involves itself in the Church
Sent from my iPhone

From: Ilcias Vargas <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment on the Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:55:10 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Committee Members:

Thank you for your work to protect religious liberty in our nation. As a devout Christian, I am proud to be an American and am grateful for the civil and religious liberties guaranteed to us by our Constitution and other founding documents.

My simple request is that care be taken to avoid any reinterpretation of the principle of separation of church and state that would tend towards the expression or enforcement of religious belief by law, which would violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. While it is true that the principle of the separation of church and state has too often been weaponized by those wishing to silence religious perspectives in the public square, I do not wish to see my religious liberties violated by the opposing extreme: enforcing the express will of prominent religious voices through law.

Thank you again for your diligence in safeguarding religious liberties. I stand with these efforts, provided that they do not go so far as to violate the Establishment Clause.

"Break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity." —Daniel 4:26, NKJV.

Sincerely,
Pastor Ilcias Vargas, Jr.

From: Arriele Sidney <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:55:13 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I appreciate the Commission's commitment to protecting religious liberty. Faith is a matter of conscience, and every person must be free to worship according to his or her convictions without government pressure or interference.

Scripture teaches that civil government has a role in maintaining justice and order, while worship belongs to God alone. Jesus affirmed this distinction 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).

I respectfully urge the Commission to continue protecting the free exercise of religion while preserving the constitutional principles that prevent government from establishing or favoring religion. History shows that liberty of conscience is strongest when civil and religious authority remain distinct.

Thank you for your time, consideration and attention to this matter.

[Sent from Yahoo Mail on Android](#)

From: Allie Hall <[REDACTED] PII>

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:55:29 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for your diligence and hard work on the draft report presented.

My serious concerns regard your recommendations which erode the separation of church and state—especially your recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment. This will further politicize our nation's churches. We must ensure that the Johnson Amendment continue to be enforced.

Additionally, the expansion of funding religious organizations engaging in religious activities is not aligned with guarding the boundaries of government to prevent encroachment on our individual religious liberty.

As a Christian who is grateful for our country's separation of church and state, I support the Commission's belief that all must be able to speak freely about our religious beliefs and respect those beliefs of others that may be contrary to our beliefs. But this should not be at the expense of tearing down the critical wall of separation of church and state. This separation has prevented persecution and upheld our liberty for all, including those with differing beliefs from the government.

Sincerely,
Allie Hall
Spokane, WA

From: Bruce Wickwire <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:55:30 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom it May Concern:

As a Christian who fully believes and seeks to follow scripture fully, I deeply cherish my God given right to believe and follow the dictates of my conscience as outlined in Biblical truth. This would include worshiping on the Biblical Sabbath, the sacred seventh day of the week—Saturday—which God has called us to REMEMBER and keep holy. I also love the United States of America and the principles upon which it was founded. The United States has been uniquely blessed by God, becoming a refuge for those seeking freedom of choice and liberty to worship according to Scripture without interference and coercion by any civil government.

History repeatedly proves that whenever civil government involves itself in the religious practices of its people, persecution inevitably follows.

Our forefathers understood these dangers well. That is why the First Amendment, in the Free Exercise clause and the No Establishment clause states in part: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" U.S Const. Amend. 1 cl 1.

Their purpose is crystal clear: these clauses in the First Amendment were to keep church and state separate so that the two be not mingled by either one controlling the other. Religious liberty cannot exist without the separation of church and state!

Liberty of conscience is the fundamental right of every individual to follow his or her own moral and religious beliefs without coercion, interference, or punishment by the government or its society. The separation of church and state is vitally and critically important to preserve and protect every individual's freedom to think, to believe, and act according to one's own inner convictions, even if those beliefs differ from the majority or state authority. No one should ever be forced to act against, or be penalized for one's sincere beliefs.

I respectfully request the Commission to:

Reconsider and reject any interpretation of the US Constitution that diminishes, dismisses or denigrates the Constitutional concept of separation of church and state;

Maintain proper boundaries between the state & government authority and matters of conscience to preserve liberty of conscience;

Withdraw any recommendation that would fund religious activities.

Sincerely,

From: Candace Dematteis <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberties Commission draft report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:55:38 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Final_-_Response_to_DOJ_RLC_Report.pdf

Good afternoon.

Please accept the attached comments respectfully submitted in response to the draft report from the Religious Liberties Commission.

Best,

Candace

Candace DeMatteis
Vice President, Policy & Advocacy
Partnership to Fight Infectious Disease
www.fightinfectiousdisease.org

July 13, 2026

Dear Chairman Dan Patrick and Commission Members:

We write as clinicians, public health professionals, patient advocates, and other concerned stakeholders committed to protecting Americans from vaccine-preventable disease to urge you revise the references to vaccines and vaccine-related recommendations in the draft Religious Liberty Commission report.¹ As the U.S. deals with the largest measles outbreak in decades fueled by declines in vaccination rates, any policy proposals relating to vaccines require context of the public health considerations and benefits of vaccinations foundational to state decisions around vaccination requirements. For example, research shows that over the lifetimes of the 117 million children born in the U.S. 1994 – 2003, routine childhood vaccinations will prevent:

- 508 million cases of illness,
- 32 million hospitalizations, and
- 1,129,000 deaths.²

These health benefits from childhood vaccination translates to \$540 billion saved in direct medical costs and \$2.7 trillion in broader societal savings. The Commission report fails to incorporate any of this context, which undermines its conclusions, the reasoning used to reach them, and the recommendations that follow from both.

The right to practice any religion — or no religion at all — without government interference is one of America's most valued, protected freedoms. That right, however, has never been unlimited. For more than a hundred and twenty years, courts have recognized that states can place reasonable limits on religious exercise when it conflicts with their duty to protect public health and safety, including through vaccination requirements.³ This balance exists because states have a compelling interest in preventing outbreaks of serious, preventable diseases, and because vaccination has produced real, measurable gains across generations. These gains depend on sustained, widespread vaccination.

Given the weight of these interests, we strongly believe a thorough, evidence-based examination of the public health benefits of vaccination should be included in this report and must be considered before the Department of Justice (DOJ), Health and Human Services (HHS), or any other government department or personnel commits taxpayer resources to pursue civil rights investigations or strategic litigation, offer legislative support, issue formal guidance, or proffer official correspondence advocating for religious freedom relating to vaccination. The draft report, however, contains none of that context

¹ Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission (June 2026), <https://www.justice.gov/religious-liberty-commission/resources>.

² Fangjun Zhou et al. Health and Economic Benefits of Routine Childhood Immunizations in the Era of the Vaccines for Children Program—United States, 1994-2023. 73 MMWR 682 (2024), <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/mm7331a2.htm>

³ Jacobson v. Massachusetts, 197 U.S. 11 (1905); Zucht v. King, 260 U.S. 174 (1922).

and should be revisited and substantially revised to incorporate these fundamental facts before determining what, if any, recommendations for federal action relating to state vaccination requirements. These omissions lead the report to fundamentally flawed conclusions and unsupported, potentially dangerous, policy recommendations that must be rejected.

Report Fails to Include Public Health Context Behind Vaccine Mandates

Chapter 10 of the draft report, "Conscience and Coercion in Vaccine Policy," describes the burdens vaccine requirements can place on people of faith without describing why those vaccine requirements exist, without recognizing the long-standing jurisprudence that establishes state rights to determine these matters, and without detailing the public risks from illness outbreaks when vaccination rates fall. A policymaker relying solely on this chapter as written would have no way to know that vaccination is one of the most effective tools in public health, or that declining vaccination rates carry measurable, well-documented consequences to health and costs to the state, particularly relating to protecting children and other vulnerable populations from vaccine-preventable illnesses.

The evidence on this point is not new or contested.

- **Community protection for those who cannot be vaccinated:** High vaccination rates protect infants too young for certain vaccines and people who are immunocompromised.
- **Direct links between exemptions and risk of outbreaks:** Studies document that rising non-medical exemption rates are associated with lower vaccination coverage and an increased risk of outbreaks. South Carolina and Utah account for more than half of the nations confirmed measles cases in 2026. In outbreak areas, both states have low MMR vaccination rates in the areas with the largest number of measles cases.⁴ Overall, national data show county-level non-medical exemption rates increased four-fold between 2010 and 2024.⁵
- **Real costs to families and taxpayers:** A single measles case costs an average of nearly \$59,000 to manage. Lost wages and productivity from quarantines and missed school add thousands more in costs per case, borne by working families and already-stretched local health departments and school systems.⁶
- **Decades of progress now at risk:** Widespread vaccination helped eliminate measles from the U.S. for more than 25 years,⁷ cut cases of a leading cause of childhood bacterial meningitis by more than 90 percent,⁸ and reduced hepatitis B

⁴ International Vaccine Access Center, U.S. Measles Tracker, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/ivac/resources/us-measles-tracker>

⁵ Mary Van Beusekom, Rising US Nonmedical Childhood Vaccination Exemption Rates May Portend Disease Resurgence, CIDRAP, Univ. of Minn (2026), <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/childhood-vaccines/rising-us-nonmedical-childhood-vaccination-exemption-rates-may-portend-disease>

⁶ Partnership to Fight Infectious Disease, Measles in America, <https://www.fightinfectiousdisease.org/measles>; Victoria Willens, Estimating the Financial Costs of Measles Outbreaks, Johns Hopkins Int'l Vaccine Access Ctr (Cot. 28, 2025), <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/ivac/2025/estimating-the-financial-costs-of-measles-outbreaks>

⁷ Adria D. Mathis et al. Maintenance of Measles Elimination Status in the United States for 20 Years Despite Increasing Challenges, 75 Clin Infect Disease 416 (2022), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11288340/>

⁸ Mary PE Slack et al. Efficacy and Prolonged Safety of Haemophilus Influenza Type b Conjugate Vaccines, 19 Expert Rev Vaccines 903 (2020), <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32962476/>

infections by 99 percent since 1991,⁹ protecting thousands of people from liver cancer and other lifelong illness. That progress resulted from sustained, high vaccination rates.¹⁰

None of this diminishes the sincerity of the families whose stories appear in Chapter 10. It simply reflects the context in which states exercise their Constitutionally protected powers to determine vaccination requirements. Vaccine-preventable diseases are serious, contagious, and costly, and high vaccination rates benefit both individuals and the members of every community who cannot protect themselves without the cooperation of those around them.

Chilling Effect of Threatened Legal Actions

Chapter 10 of the draft report recommends the Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services open civil rights investigations and pursue litigation against schools, health systems, and government entities that decline to grant religious exemptions to vaccine requirements. The prospect of federal investigation or litigation can have a chilling effect on state and local officials trying to set vaccination policy based on the medical and epidemiological evidence in front of them.

Defending legal challenges would force states, school systems, and other entities to reallocate taxpayers' resources away from priority health, education, or other programs to respond. In consideration of public integrity and the appropriate use of public resources at the federal and state level, we urge the Commission to proceed with caution and incorporate the full context of vaccination and the rationale for mandates before advocating for civil rights investigations, litigation, other legal action, and statutory changes. Given the public health stakes involved, we urge the Commission to revisit its recommendations considering the full public health context surrounding vaccination mandates.

Policy Recommendations – Concerns with FDA “Prioritizing Approval”

The final recommendation regarding vaccines in Chapter 10 includes deeply troubling language regarding the FDA. Any policy recommendation that the FDA “prioritize *approval*” of any product is inappropriate. While many existing programs prioritize FDA drug *reviews and applications* addressing unmet medical needs, none “prioritize approvals” as such a standard could be interpreted as downgrading FDA’s robust requirements on safety and efficacy. We also object to the report’s recommendation that the FDA prioritize “ethically appropriate” vaccine alternatives. The medical ethics that guide drug development and

⁹ Aliza Rosen, Hepatitis B Vaccination Is an Essential Safety Net for Newborns, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (Sept. 24, 2025), <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2025/why-hepatitis-b-vaccination-begins-at-birth>

¹⁰ Melissa Rudy, American Vaccines that Transformed Public Health over 250 Years: ‘Outweighs Harm’, Fox News (July 1, 2026), <https://www.foxnews.com/health/american-vaccines-transformed-public-health-over-250-years-outweighs-harm>

FDA review of vaccine safety and effectiveness data from clinical trials and vaccine monitoring systems are grounded in ethical considerations that prioritize health and safety. We have serious concerns about the adoption of a subjective and overly vague “ethical appropriateness” consideration into the FDA review process. FDA review standards should remain focused on medical and clinical ethical standards that prioritize health and safety.

Our request

We respectfully ask the Commission to reconsider and revise both Chapter 10 and its underlying recommendations to reflect the full context in which vaccine policy decisions are made, including:

- the public health context in which public health authorities make decisions about vaccine mandates, including the well-documented benefits of widespread vaccination, the health consequences of disease outbreaks, and the human and economic costs associated with lower vaccination rates; and
- a description of what religious doctrine says about vaccination and specific vaccines.

Given the stakes for public health and the potential chilling effect of the report's recommended enforcement actions, we strongly believe this context is essential and any recommendations made without this foundation pose a serious risk to the public's health and public entities duty to protect it.

Respectfully,

AiArthritis

American College of Preventive Medicine

American Families for Vaccines

American Society for Meningitis Prevention

CancerCare

Caregiver Action Network

Kimberly Coffey Foundation

National Foundation for Infectious Diseases

National Hispanic Medical Association

Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease

Partnership to Fight Infectious Disease

Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society

Peggy Lillis Foundation

Vaccinate Your Family

From: Elizabeth Barnes <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:55:41 -0400

Importance: Normal

Greetings!

Thank you for taking a moment to read my concerns over the recent proposed legislation regarding the inclusion of religious organizations in various government funding, as well as the stated dismantling of the long-held separation of church power and government power.

I am a Bible-believing Christian. I wish nothing more than for every single citizen and visitor in our country to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

I believe that government funding and sponsorship of religious activities is an overreach of power. God has called upon us as Christians to support the work of His kingdom through our financial gifts. To depend upon government to support ministry takes away the responsibility that should be felt by the body of believers.

I believe that God came to bring freedom. He never forced anyone to believe in Him, to follow Him, to surrender their lives to Him. As His followers, we are called to go and do likewise. We are not called to appeal to the government to enforce specific religious guidelines. I am proud to live in a country that protects all people's religious beliefs, and gives freedom to practice those beliefs as long as they don't impinge on the freedoms of other citizens.

When government chooses to accept religion and enforce religious doctrines, we start down a very slippery slope. Our government was founded as an oasis for people to exercise freely their religion or their lack of religion. Many of the Bible-believing Christians that settled our country came here because of persecution by a state religion that would not allow them to follow their conscience.

I appeal to you to protect the religious freedom of all citizens by maintaining a separation between government and organized religion.

Thank you for taking the time to read my concerns. My prayers are with you as you make these momentous decisions.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Barnes

[REDACTED] PII

[REDACTED] PII

From: Andy Raq <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Andrew Raquepaw

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:55:42 -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 receive government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. The church will lose its focus on what really matters. 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.

I was saddened 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.

Separation isn't a secular idea; people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. The church can then be free to worship as it deems correct by conscience and principle from the word of God and not from a political party. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free. This goes for all church denominations and religions. Church and state need to be separate for freedom of religion to remain intact.

Sincere Blessings,

Andrew Raquepaw

U.S. Citizen of Michigan

From: Cori Stewart <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Support for Religious Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:55:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

Cori Stewart



7/13/26

Address: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty
Office of the Associate Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-001
Subject: Support for Religious Freedom

Dear members of the Commission,

I write to express my concern over the news about the separation of church and state being taken removed. It is of deep importance that the religious liberties for all be protected, ensuring freedom of belief and freedom from compulsion. I urge the Commission to uphold the people's constitutional protections, promote mutual respect among diverse faiths, and ensure fair treatment in all public spheres. In short, I disagree with the separation of church and state being removed.

Thank you for your commitment to this vital work.

Sincerely,

Cori M. Stewart

From: Lauren <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] The Commission on Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:56:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Commission on Religious Liberty,

Due to time constraints, I will not have time to write my own thoughts. Please consider, instead, the comments of

~Pillar of Freedom~

It is my desire that you implement their suggestions.

Sincerely, Jessica Nicholson

From: Lois Walker <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:56:30 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with comments.
Please implement them.

From: Geri Lyons <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Geri Lyons

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:56:35 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

It has been brought to my attention that the Commission has prepared a final report, a portion of which relates to "separation of church and state" in our great country, the United States of America. It is my firm belief that harm will come from the finalization of that report as it currently stands seeking a "bridge" as opposed to "separation of" church and state. It seems that if the Commission would simply look around them at the various countries in the world today they would have no trouble seeing what happens when a "civil" government becomes a "religious" enforcer through its civil powers by "bridging" church and state as opposed to keeping them separate and apart.

In addition, public funds should not be used to support any religion, religious school and/or religious clubs throughout these United States. When and if these things are brought to pass, the corruption of politics will enter in and some (for we are but men) churches will take their eyes off Jesus and start answering and bowing down to politicians instead of to God. Look around you right now and you will see the effect of the falling away of churches from the word of God and its baleful impact on society as a whole. Please don't allow yourselves to become complicit in this regard.

Please prayerfully reconsider your stance on the report as it now stands and make the necessary adjustments and/or changes to make a report that ensures the future liberty and freedom these United States have stood over the past 250 years.

Thank you for your time and effort put forth as a member of this Commission and praying that you will look at each response and consider each one prayerfully and carefully.

From: Jennifer Hickman <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- Separation of Church and State – Jennifer Hickman

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:56:38 -0400

Importance: Normal

As a citizen, a woman, and a mother, I'm asking you to rethink the parts of your report that would erode church-state separation — especially using public funds for religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

Mixing government money and partisan politics with churches brings political corruption into religious life. Instead of answering to their faith, churches risk answering to politicians. That weakens both the church and our democracy.

Separation of church and state isn't anti-religion. People of faith helped create it to protect faith itself. It's why religion has thrived here.

As a person of faith it has been a blessing to live here, to raise a family here , because of this freedom we have .

Keep church and state separate. This is the only way to have a strong nation for all.

Blessings,
Jennifer Hickman
Athol, Idaho

From: Donald Jensen <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Mr. & Mrs, Jensen
(US citizens living in Michigan)

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:56:42 -0400

Importance: Normal

Greetings,

My wife and I are seriously concerned about the proposed changes to the current legal standards supporting the separation of church and state. Our country has a long history of adherence to separating the government and legal system from any religious body, which has made the USA a bastion of religious freedom. Beginning with the founding of our country with religious tolerance for all, supported by our founding fathers, through decades of Supreme Court decisions and legal precedence, the U.S. have supported laws which offer religious freedom to all, rather than favoring just a few. Please do not change the foundational principal of church and state separation to be weakened through government funding of religious activities, education, or favoritism applied to any religious group. History has continually shown that such government meddling with religion weakens a society and the foundation of any democracy.

In summary, please do not change the Johnson Amendment nor fund religious activities.

Thank you,

From: Elizabeth Weiss <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:56:43 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to express my firm support for the separation of church and state, a principle I believe is fundamental to our Constitution and our nation's founding.

History shows that the Puritans sought refuge in America to escape religious persecution in Europe. Merging church and state would risk repeating those historical mistakes and undermining the very freedoms—speech, religion, and conscience—that make our country great. Progress depends on learning from the past to ensure these essential liberties are preserved for everyone.

I respectfully ask you to reconsider any proposal that would join church and state, and instead continue to uphold the religious freedoms our country currently enjoys.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Weiss

From: Bradley Burnham <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:57:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

Thank you for providing the opportunity for public comment on the Commission's draft report.

As a Christian who values religious liberty, I believe one of America's greatest strengths has been its commitment to protecting both religion and government by keeping them institutionally separate. This principle has never been about hostility toward faith. Rather, it has allowed churches to preach according to conscience without government influence, and it has protected citizens of every faith—or no faith—from government favoritism.

For that reason, I respectfully oppose recommendations that would expand direct government funding of religious activities or repeal the Johnson Amendment's restrictions on partisan political campaigning by churches. While these proposals may appear to strengthen religious liberty in the short term, history demonstrates that close partnerships between church and state eventually compromise both institutions.

When churches become financially dependent on government or closely aligned with political parties, they inevitably face pressure to conform to political priorities. Likewise, when government begins deciding which religious organizations receive funding or special treatment, it places civil authorities in the position of making religious judgments. Neither outcome serves the cause of genuine religious freedom.

America's constitutional tradition has protected an extraordinary diversity of religious belief precisely because the government has generally avoided establishing or favoring religion. That principle should be preserved, not weakened.

I respectfully ask the Commission to reconsider recommendations that diminish the historic separation of church and state and instead reaffirm policies that protect religious liberty equally for all Americans.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Respectfully,
Bradley V. Burnham

From: Sharon Hooper <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:57:35 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dr. Carson,

I am totally against combining church and state because I will loose my freedom.

Sharon from Oregon

From: Kyle Shelton <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Letter

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:57:50 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Copy_of_Religious_Liberty_Video_Script.pdf

Please consider this letter as my opposition to the proposed report.

My name is Kyle Shelton, former bi-vocational pastor, a religious liberties director of a local church, and also editor-in-chief of the American Sentinel II religious liberty newsletter.

In 1787, prominent Philadelphian Elizabeth Willing Powel asked Dr. Benjamin Franklin whether our new government was a monarchy or a republic. Ever the keen wit, Dr. Franklin replied, "A republic madame, if you can keep it."

This simple statement communicated volumes to people then, and also to people now. It highlighted the fact that, as President Ronald Reagan would put it in his inaugural speech exactly 180 years later, "freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction."

I strongly urge you, as members of the Religious Liberty Commission to consider this. You have made repeated statements that separation of church and state is not found in our Constitution. This conclusion is disproved by the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, which as you know states:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;"

As you also know and mention I. The draft report, Thomas Jefferson, spoke of this amendment as follows:

"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."

Despite this, not only is your commission seeking to reinterpret what Thomas Jefferson meant, but also trying to build bridges between church and state from the pieces of the wall you are tearing down. Quoting from your draft report:

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

We would do well to remember our Lord's words from John 18:36 that His kingdom is not of this world. We would also do well to remember world history and its record of what happens when the state builds bridges with the church.

With all due respect, it is neither your right nor purview to build such bridges. The state must leave the church alone, and the church must leave the state alone. And this is for good reason.

In 313 AD, Roman Emperor Constantine granted religious freedom to Christians in the Edict of Milan, and in 380 AD, Emperor Theodosius I made it the official religion of the realm.

For those who believe that dissolving church/state separation is a good thing, this historical example would have been the ideal scenario. However, if you know much about the history of Europe, of the Protestant Reformation, and of the Spanish Inquisition to name a few, the error of this thinking quickly becomes obvious. Thousands were burned at the stake, tortured in various cruel ways, massacred, and chased from country to country for daring to believe differently from the established religious empire.

Ironically, some of those fleeing this persecution sought and found refuge in what would become the United States of America. But all was not well here. Roger Williams, founder of Rhode Island, actually settled and founded that state after fleeing religious persecution in Massachusetts. This inspired him to make some very powerful statements about the importance of religious liberty, such as that, "Forced worship stinks in God's nostrils."

This sentiment is echoed in the Bible itself in Matthew 15:8, which says, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." God is not looking for forced worship, but rather obedience from the heart.

And such we ought to remember. The solution to a better society is not to bring the church into state affairs, but rather for the church to get involved in societal affairs. If the country is not moral, the church is not doing its job. The situation will not be improved by forcing one's own ideas of morality upon someone else. This has never worked.

Now, some may argue that a church state bond is ok given that the United States is a so-called “Christian nation.” Truly, the principles on which this nation was founded were of Christian origin. Christianity is enshrined in many of the facets and trimmings of our history and government. However, we go too far if we intend “Christian nation” to mean a nation for Christians and by Christians exclusively. This goes against every other principle enshrined in our founding documents, including not only the Establishment Clause but in those immortal words of the Declaration, “We find these truths to be self-evident that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

The Declaration in this opening preamble makes explicitly clear that these rights are basic human rights, given by our Creator. And they are true whether your Creator is the Christian God, the Hebrew Jahweh, the Muslim Allah, the Hindu Shiva, or whatever other deity your belief system asserts. It is an unalienable right to be able to live a life of liberty pursuing your happiness through whatever belief system you choose with your God-given free will.

The danger with building bridges, as you’ve term it, is that we could go a bridge too far. History has a tendency to repeat itself.

I implore the commission to carefully consider their actions and withdraw your recommendations about building bridges between church and state.

May God preserve religious liberty in this nation, and may God bless America.

Another contradiction hidden within this claim of being a “Christian nation,” is that, if we are a “Christian nation,” then we are historically a Protestant Christian nation. It wasn’t until 1960, 184 years after the birth of our nation, that a Catholic was elected president, President John F. Kennedy. This is not just a coincidence. In fact, President Kennedy himself stated during his campaign, “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...”

This statement was necessary due to, as the JFK Library website explains, the anti-Catholic prejudice that was still a mainstream part of American society in 1960. This prejudice

Estimates are that by 1776, less than 1% of people, in what would become the United States, were Catholic. We have to remember that this is largely because Americans were colonists from England, one of the first nations to break off from the Catholic Church and become officially Protestant in 1534. But this Protestant heritage has played a huge role historically in American society, and knowledge about the Protestant Reformation and its history in part helped fuel the nation’s hesitancy towards Catholics in public office, especially the presidency. Hence, by 1960, JFK was the first Catholic president.

Despite this past, estimates show that approximately 20% of Americans identify as Catholic. Our current government and certain organizations have made huge overtures to the Roman Catholic Church. The current administration has issued many statements recognizing Catholic holy days. Secretary of State Marco Rubio praised the roots of Catholicism in America during a speech leading up to the 250th anniversary of our founding. Pope Leo even received the Liberty Medal last week from the National Constitution Center for efforts in religious liberty.

Of the 15 members of the Religious Liberty Commission, including the 3 ex-officio members, 4 are catholic, including a bishop and a cardinal. Of the 11 advisors to the commission, 5, almost half are catholic, including an archbishop.

Now, I am not saying that prejudice is a good thing. I am not saying that American still should not elect Catholics to office or have them on religious liberty commissions. What we *are* talking about here is religious freedom. If we as a people are willing to overcome our historic biases towards Catholics, we ought to afford the same to other faiths. This protects religious freedom for all. Another strong argument for this is that, despite the U.S. only having about a 2% Jewish population, there are 5 rabbis on the Religious Liberty Commission, including one Commissioner. This is not a bad thing. What I am again trying to emphasize is there are no Hindu, Buddhist, or Muslim members. Ultimately, the main point I am trying to make is that we need to be extremely cautious of a body that calls itself a religious liberty commission, but is quite obviously built on bias, prejudice, and favoritism. Because, after all, if the recommendations of this commission are implemented, however fair and reasonable they may seem, they will be implemented with the same biases and prejudices which influenced their decision-making.

The obvious strategy being employed here is that, instead of trying to change the Constitution (because they know they would never get 2/3rd of states to support it), groups are trying to change the interpretation of the Constitution.

The Religious Liberty Commission has specifically tried to pick apart this phrasing from Jefferson, discrediting it and reinterpreting it in a way that suits their purposes.

I have a question for you. Just a week ago, this nation celebrated its 250th birthday. Of course, there is nobody left from that era. So isn't it important to listen to Jefferson's words and take them as they are instead of trying to interpret them through a modern lens? He quite obviously meant what he meant, and other of his contemporaries likely had the same interpretation of that Clause since they were all around at the same time to write it.

Let me tell you the truth. From the very beginning, the Religious Liberty Commission was established to create a narrative and to cast doubt on established history. After all, when you are the one interpreting the nation's story, choosing to tell it a certain way, leave out certain details, and redefine historical and established facts can cause significant effects downstream. If you are trying to make major changes to the way things have been, it would help your cause to rewrite

Narratives have always been important.

From: Mark Learned <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment- Separation of church and state- Mark Learned

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:58:20 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree with Pillar of Freedoms comments Please implement them.

Mark Learned

Sent from my iPhone

From: Henry Peña <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:58:31 -0400

Importance: Normal

Please do not build a bridge to connect Church and state. Connecting church and state always leads to persecution. Let's keep church and state both free.

Henry Peña
Sent from my iPhone

From: Magdalena Dan <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] There IS separation of church and state!

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:58:58 -0400

Importance: Normal

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,
Maria Magdalena Dan

From: "Duffield, Ronald E" <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:58:59 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen from Dixie, Washington, concerned that our country faces real dangers from both political extremes, and I believe the only sure guard against either is faithful adherence to the Constitution, especially its separation of church and state. That principle is not a relic to be reinterpreted away; it is the guarantee that lets this nation thrive regardless of who holds power.

Consider first what religion actually is. It is heart-work, and no statute can reach the heart. A law can compel a body into a pew; it cannot put worship in the man. Those who argued this most forcefully were not secularists but devout believers, who warned that forcing religious observance "only enforces hypocrisy and multiplies sin, because love for God is essential to every act of religious duty." The deeper harm falls on the favored faith itself: state sponsorship draws converts of convenience and breeds clerical complacency, trading the power of God for the power of the police. Madison's own review of fifteen centuries of established Christianity found the fruit to be "pride and indolence in the clergy; ignorance and servility in the laity; in both superstition, bigotry, and persecution." Even Grant counseled that the safest course was to leave religion to the family altar, the church, and the private school, and keep the state and church forever separate.

History shows why the first step matters so much. Constantine's earliest religious law, issued while he still held a pagan priestly office, set in motion a logic that ended in the Inquisition and the ruin of the empire that enforced it. The state, once drawn into deciding religious quarrels, becomes a partisan and loses the very power to keep the peace. As one careful historian of this process put it, "if the first step be taken, the last step is then as certainly taken; for the last step is in the first." No commission today proposes an Inquisition. No one ever proposes the last step first. The danger is in conceding the principle that government may define and enforce religious duty at all.

Our own government has already ruled on this question, and not recently. Congress's committees in 1829 and 1830, answering petitioners who wanted Sunday observance legislated, declared plainly that "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." That same report warned that once government defines one point of religious duty, it may with equal claim define every article of belief and worship. And it drew the distinction that still defines us: what other nations call religious toleration, we call religious rights. A right needs no official's permission.

Finally, the founders' separation was not oversight or hostility to faith; it was deliberate design, urged largely by churches that had themselves suffered under establishment. Madison told the Virginia ratifying convention there was "not a shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion." The founders did not wait for full establishment to object; they saw the consequences contained in the principle and denied the principle itself. Any commission that claims the founders' support for state-sponsored religion must first explain 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,
Ron Duffield
Dixie, WA

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From: Angela <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] July 13, 2026

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:07 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: July_13,_2026.pdf

July 13, 2026

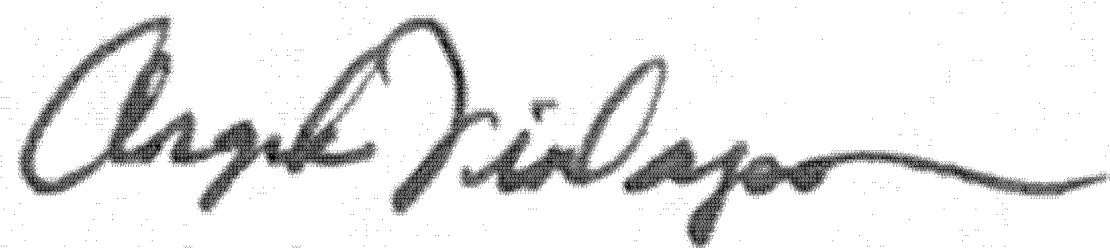
Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to urge you to safeguard the vital division between government institutions and religious faith. Mixing the two creates a dangerous environment where the state can impose a single religious viewpoint on a diverse population, naturally leading to unfair treatment and the loss of personal freedoms.

Belief is a private matter. The only way the government can truly protect everyone's right to their own convictions is by remaining completely neutral. We know from history that when governments become religious authorities, they alienate and oppress their citizens. Our nation's founders understood this deeply; many of the first people who established communities here did so specifically to escape the oppressive reach of combined church and state power in Europe.

Please take a firm stand to keep church and state entirely independent of one another.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Angela Finlayson', with a stylized, flowing script.

Angela Finlayson

Cocolalla, ID

From: James Smith <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:09 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am against the establishment of religion in the Government of the United States of America.

My forefathers did not flee across the Atlantic Ocean from oppression and religious tyranny just to have it reestablished in the home of the brave and the land of the free. The principles of the separation of church and state have been in operation for 250 years and we have built a nation that is the greatest nation on the face of the earth. **WHY change now??!**

The Papacy seeks to control the morality of the Government and now so do the Protestants, if you can call them that, because I can't figure out what if anything they are protesting.

Please do not enact the policies laid out in the report put out by your committee which will have the effect of bringing the United States of America back into the Middle Ages when approval of the government rule must first get church approval.

LET everything remain as is until JESUS COMES AGAIN. AMEN

THANK YOU

Wade Smith

From: "M. Alexa Blair" <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment – Separation of Church and State – M. Alexa Blair

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:10 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Response_to_The_Religious_Liberty_Commission_-_July_13.docx

July 13, 2026

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

God established liberty of conscience at creation and this principle runs throughout the Bible. It is evidenced at the time God told Adam and Eve to eat from every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. His warning was, if they ate from it they will die. God gave them a choice. Eve was deceived she listened to the lies of the serpent and ate from the tree God forbade them to eat. She induced her husband to eat the fruit. Even though he was not deceived he too ate the fruit. At this point they broke God's law and the love they had in their hearts for God was broken. Their selfless love to God turned from love of God supremely to love of self. However, God still had a selfless love for them. He let them know He would die for humanity to demonstrate His love and to keep His law intact. This vow was sealed with killing of a lamb. This is known as the everlasting covenant. God reiterated the covenantal relationship with Abraham and his ancestors approximately 1500 years later.

Abraham's ancestors fell into idol worship and failed to keep the covenantal relationship with God, which is to love God supremely. God allowed them to fall into slavery to cure them of idol worship. God delivered them from slavery and reiterated the covenantal relationship with them five hundred years after the promise He made with Abraham and two thousand years after He made the covenant with Adam and Eve. God wrote His covenant with His finger on two tables of stone and spoke to Israel from Mount Sinai to emphasize 1) the importance of His law and 2) Israel would not forget His law. There were two sides of the law, the first side emphasizes, God is to be honored supremely and the second side emphasizes honoring mankind. Israel promised God they would honor His commandment and they sacrificed a lamb to seal their commitment. This is known as the old covenant for it was sealed when a lamb died that day.

Two thousand years later after the sealing of the old covenant Jesus came to earth to confirm the covenant He made with Adam in Eden, Abraham in Canaan and Israel on Sinai. The principle of liberty of conscience was challenged during the time of Jesus' sojourn. Jesus was asked if God or the civil government was honored most? Jesus reiterated the same principles found in the Ten Commandments, which is the importance of honoring God and honoring the government. The first table of the law subscribes to honor God supremely and the second table states honor all others second. When the Lamb of God died it was to honor God's Ten Commandment and take away the sins of the world. His death was also known as the new covenant for this Lamb died approximately two thousand years later after the covenant at Sinai was sealed. It was also an indication He would write His law on the fleshy tables of the heart.

God has not delegated His authority to any earthly power since the time of Israel's theocracy. Therefore, the Bible doesn't teach any earthly government to force the

conscience or usurp the place reserved to Him alone. In addition, men must not claim to themselves authority over the human conscience that God has not entrusted to them. The Bible teaches a separation of church and state meaning religious liberty for all. God will again establish His theocracy at the second coming of Christ. God always gives choices. He doesn't force. Even if it means He is rejected. Only God can judge the thoughts and hearts of mankind. However, it doesn't mean He will not put down rebellion in His time. He wants all to come to repentance, the Bible states, "*And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation*" (Exodus 34: 6 and 7).

When the Christian experienced intolerance and persecution in the old world they were determine to establish a government on Biblical principles in the new world. This included foundational principles' of civil and religious liberty. The great truth of the Declaration of Independence notes, '*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.*' Under the Constitution the people have the right to self govern. This stipulates the elected officials should enact and administer civil laws not the conscience. Religious freedom was also established where every person were permitted to worship based on the dictates of his or her conscience. These two incontrovertible pillars of the United States of America are the secret of it power and prosperity. For these very reasons humanity from all over the world who was oppressed flocked to shore of the United States of America for freedom and liberty of conscience.

Even though the Constitution doesn't have the words 'separation of church and states' the principles are embedded within it. Removing any of its boundaries will erode freedom to choose.

I am writing, as a citizen to request you to reconsider the recommendation in your report would erode the principals of separation of church, especially using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment. Please keep church and state separate to keep both entities free.

Sincerely,
M. Alexa Blair
Dayton, TN

From: DSB <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State - Deloris Brooks

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:10 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the religious liberty commission:

I am 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 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 is the reason religion has stayed strong here. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,

Deloris Brooks

Butte, North Dakota

PS

Sent from [Proton Mail](#) for iOS.

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

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

I believe in the separation of Church and State

From: Jim McGee <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:25 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a citizen on the United States of America, a country known around the world for its religious tolerance. I oppose the Commission's proposal to destroy the separation between the church and government—the very principle that provided relief for millions of people who historically had been suffering under the religious oppression resulting from the combination of church and state in Europe and elsewhere.

The separation between church and state was a principle that was strongly held by the founders of this country. I believe that nothing that government does should weaken or abolish that principle, or establish a connection between the two entities. Instead, the state should always do what is necessary to ensure personal liberty for its citizens to believe and practice the religion they choose. The proposed "bridge" will open the door for executive orders and the establishment of laws that will impede and eventually extinguish this precious liberty.

I also believe that political presentations should be held in pubic venues, not in churches. Churches are intended to encourage the worship of God, not to promote or denigrate political candidates. Therefore, I urge the Commission NOT to repeal the Johnson Amendment, but to enforce it! That is a protection for churches to stay out of state affairs.

Furthermore, I agree with the response of the Pillar of Freedom to the draft report of the Religious Liberty Commission. Please implement the suggestions made there.

Please maintain the separation of church and state in this country. It maintains religious freedom for all of its citizens. When the USA was formed, this precious concept was held and initiated by people of faith to preserve the freedom to worship as they chose. I want that freedom to continue.

Thank you for considering these requests.

Sincerely,

William James McGee

Bonnors Ferry, Idaho

From: Shawn <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State (Executive Summary, Chapter 2, Appendices A and B) – Shawn Lathrom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:29 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: PUBLIC_COMMENT_-_Separation_of_Church_and_State_(Executive_Summary,_Chapter_2,_Appendices_A_and_B)_-_Shawn_Lathrom.pdf

July 13, 2026

Religious Liberty Commission

U.S. Department of Justice

Submitted via email: [REDACTED] PII

Re: Public Comment — Draft Report: Separation of Church and State (Executive Summary, Chapter 2, Appendices A and B)

To the Commissioners of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a private citizen and as a Christian who loves the Scriptures and loves this country. There is much in your draft report I respect. The testimony of witnesses of many faiths deserves the hearing you gave it: Sikh soldiers, Jewish students, Hindu congregations, Muslim scholars, Christian teachers. The chapter on anti-Semitism is needed and humane. Recommendations for security grants for houses of worship, for workplace and military accommodations, and for a written explanation owed to anyone a public official accuses of improper religious expression are the ordinary, honorable machinery of a pluralist republic, and I support them. So is the standard your own charter sets, quoted in the Department's June 26 summary: to "uphold Federal laws that protect all citizens' full participation in a pluralistic democracy." I ask nothing of this report that its charter does not already ask.

But the report's historical foundation, laid in the Executive Summary (pp. 21–22), built up in Chapter 2 (pp. 41–43), and handed to the public in Appendix A (pp. 190–191), will not bear the weight placed on it. Its account of the wall of separation is wrong by sixty-eight years on the law, wrong by a century and a half on the authorship, and silent on the Constitution's own words. The boldest recommendations in Appendix B rest on that account.

I support the report's pluralist protections without reservation. But its claim that the "wall of separation" was a mid-twentieth-century invention is refuted by the Supreme Court's own words from 1879, by Roger Williams's from 1644, and by Madison's and Jefferson's in between, none of which the report acknowledges. Its first recommendation presupposes the very separation its chairman has called a lie. This letter closes with six specific requests.

Start with the claim itself. The report announces, as its central historical finding: "The truth is that the phrase 'wall of separation between church and state' appears neither in the First Amendment nor anywhere else in the Constitution" (p. 42; the claim recurs at pp. 21 and 190). But the words "separation of powers" appear nowhere in the Constitution. Neither do "checks and balances," "federalism," "judicial review," "presumption of innocence," or "religious liberty," the phrase in this Commission's own name. No one concludes that those principles are absent. Such phrases are shorthand for what the text does.

And what does the text do? It grounds all authority in "We the People." It invokes no Deity in its operative text, an omission ratification-era critics attacked as godless, and one the framers declined to cure. Its commands touch religion exactly twice, both times to exclude government from it: the First Amendment's twin clauses, and

Article VI's guarantee that "no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States." It is remarkable that a 224-page report on the constitutional foundations of religious liberty never once quotes Article VI, the only religion clause in the original, unamended Constitution. A charter that forbids religious tests, forbids establishment, and guarantees free exercise has separated the institutions of church and state. That is not a twentieth-century invention. It is the architecture.

The report's timeline fares no better. Chapter 2 describes "a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson" that Justice Black "repurposed" in 1947 (p. 42), and the Executive Summary and FAQ tell readers the idea of a wall "only took off in the mid-twentieth century, when the Supreme Court began citing Thomas Jefferson's 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association" (pp. 21, 191). Three corrections are in order.

First, Jefferson did not coin the image. Roger Williams did, in 1644, a century and a half earlier, warning what happens "when they have opened a gap in the hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wilderness of the world." Williams was a preacher, banished by an established church for his conscience, who went on to found at Providence one of the first governments in the modern world built on full religious liberty. In its original meaning the wall protects the church. And Williams reasoned from the Ten Commandments themselves: the magistrate may enforce the second table, the duties people owe one another, but has no jurisdiction over the first, the duties owed to God. Roger Williams's name does not appear anywhere in the report.

Second, the Supreme Court did not begin citing the Danbury letter in the mid-twentieth century. It began in 1879, sixty-eight years before the report's chosen starting point. In *Reynolds v. United States*, 98 U.S. 145, a unanimous Court quoted the letter and held that, "coming as this does from an acknowledged leader of the advocates of the measure, it may be accepted almost as an authoritative declaration of the scope and effect of the amendment thus secured." *Reynolds* appears nowhere in the report, and a document published by the Department of Justice should not repeat a claim the Court's own reports refute.

That omission matters twice over. Chapter 2 insinuates that the wall entered constitutional law in 1947 through the pen of "a former Ku Klux Klan member" (p. 42). The origin story collapses once the record is restored: the metaphor's judicial debut came from the Waite Court of 1879, and its authorship from a persecuted dissenting preacher. The 1947 decision itself, *Everson v. Board of Education*, in fact ruled for the religious side of the dispute, upholding public funding of bus transportation to Catholic schools. Nor was *Reynolds* secularist handiwork; it affirmed a criminal conviction over a free-exercise objection. In its first appearance before the Court, the wall marked the line between belief and action. It has never meant exiling faith from public life, and this letter defends no such caricature.

Third, Jefferson was not alone, and the letter was no stray remark. James Madison, who drafted the First Amendment, asserted the same fact in the same words. "Strongly guarded as is the separation between Religion & Govt in the Constitution of the United States," he wrote in his Detached Memoranda. And to Edward Livingston in 1822: "Every new & successful example therefore of a perfect separation between ecclesiastical & Civil matters, is of importance," for "religion & Govt. will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together." The report calls the Danbury letter "one belabored metaphor," written "10 years after the First Amendment was ratified" (p. 191), while resting its own case on Washington's Farewell Address, which is likewise not in the Constitution, and on a "bridge" metaphor (pp. 43, 179) that is in no founding document at all. If post-ratification commentary counts, then the Father of the Constitution's testimony counts most, and it is on the other side.

What makes all this stranger is that the report knows this history. Chapter 2 is at its best when it remembers. It opens with Mary Dyer, hanged on Boston Common in 1660 for preaching her Quaker faith (p. 36). It candidly lists the "hallmarks of a religious establishment that the U.S. Constitution would later prohibit": tax-supported churches, banned rivals, "church membership as a condition for holding public office" (p. 36). It quotes young Madison condemning religious persecution as "conceived in Hell" (p. 39), words he wrote in 1774 about the Baptist preachers jailed in his own Virginia. I commend the Commission for telling that story. But the report stops the story one chapter early, just before the remedy.

The remedy the founders chose has a name, and they gave it. Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance* (1785), which your report cites only in a footnote, for a definition (p. 28), never for its central argument, was written to defeat Virginia's general assessment for "teachers of the Christian religion": mild, nonpreferential, evenhanded state support for Christian teaching in general. Precisely the kind of friendly patronage the report's "bridge" model gestures toward. Madison's question should hang over every page of the final draft: "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?" And its companion, aimed squarely at the public purse: 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." And his verdict on the experiment the report would soften: "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." His fifteen centuries reach back to Constantine: the experiment he condemned began where church first joined state, and he meant America never to repeat it.

The Memorial won. Its fruit was Jefferson's Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1786), the direct ancestor of the First Amendment and another founding document the report never mentions. Its reasoning is theological, and it is the reason I write as a believer rather than despite being one: "Almighty God hath created the mind free," and "all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments" 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." The Lord of heaven declined the sword. "My kingdom is not of this world," He said; "render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Coerced or state-sponsored religion is corrupted religion. The state can fill pews, but only at the price of teaching men hypocrisy.

The rest of the founding generation agreed. Washington, to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, an exchange your report rightly celebrates (p. 40), echoed the congregation's own Moses Seixas in praising a government "which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance." Franklin wrote in 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 ratified, after the Senate's unanimous consent, the Treaty of Tripoli of 1797, whose eleventh article begins: "As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion..." Benjamin Franklin, the Virginia Statute, the Treaty of Tripoli: none appears in the report. That history is also why so many of the persecuted sailed here in the first place.

It also answers Chapter 2's strangest claim, that the intellectual foundations of the modern "wall" lie in Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre (pp. 41–42), or in "philosophers from Karl Marx to Jean-Paul Sartre" whose ideas took hold "since the 1960s" (p. 180). Williams wrote in 1644, Madison in 1785, Jefferson in 1802, each before Nietzsche was born, let alone Foucault or Sartre. The wall reached the Supreme Court in 1879, generations before the 1960s in which the report itself locates these ideas taking hold. The wall was not built by atheists against the church. It was built by believers, out of the blood-soaked memory the report itself recounts, for the church's protection. Attributing it to death-of-God philosophy does not merely miss the history; it bears false witness against the devout dissenters, Baptists, Quakers, Presbyterians, who bled for it.

I also want to be honest about a harder thing. I credit the report's restraint where it appears: "this does not involve or require advocating 'theocracy' or even the total elimination of any separation between church and state" (p. 42), and the FAQ's concession that government "may not officially prefer one religion over another, take over the functions of a church, or coerce religious observance" (p. 190). Those are the right lines. But the Commission should know the pedigree of the doctrine toward which its rhetoric drifts. The *Syllabus of Errors* (1864, Proposition 55) formally condemned the proposition that "the Church ought to be separated from the State, and the State from the Church." Leo XIII, in *Longinqua oceani* (1895), told Americans it would be "very erroneous" to conclude that "it would be universally lawful or expedient for State and Church to be, as in America, dissevered and divorced," because the church "would bring forth more abundant fruits if, in addition to liberty, she enjoyed the favor of the laws and the patronage of the public authority." The favor of the laws and the patronage of the public authority: that is precisely what Appendix B offers. Presidential "calls to prayer and

fasting” (p. 204). Grant-making “solicitude for faith-based grant applicants” (p. 203). A Department of War “Spiritual Fitness Guide detailing how religion and religious accommodations are essential to supporting the whole warfighter” (p. 204). Department of Justice litigation upholding religious displays in classrooms (p. 216).

For a century Americans of every confession answered Rome’s nineteenth-century position with the founders’, so persuasively that in 1965 even Rome moved toward the American principle: *Dignitatis Humanae* declared all men “immune from coercion” in religion. It is an astonishing reversal to watch a United States federal commission drift the other way. And when the Commission’s chairman tells a public meeting, as the Associated Press reported (Peter Smith, May 2026), “We need to say there is no separation of church and state. That’s a lie,” and proposes a federal hotline to broadcast that message (“No one at the commission meeting disagreed,” the AP noted), the report’s careful disclaimers ring hollow. The final report should repudiate that statement expressly.

Let me be equally plain about what this argument is not. It is no brief against my Catholic neighbors, or Jewish, or any other. At least six founding-era state constitutions confined public office to Protestants. Maryland excluded Jews until 1826. New Hampshire kept its Protestant test until 1877. And Maryland’s last belief-in-God test for public office stood until the Supreme Court struck it down in 1961, within living memory. It was the separationist principle, Article VI written large across the states, that struck off every one of those shackles. Disestablishment, not establishment, is why this Commission’s own membership, a cardinal, a rabbi, evangelical pastors, can sit as equals at one federal table. Every member of this Commission belongs to a tradition that was, somewhere in America, once on the wrong side of an establishment. Those who lower the wall are dismantling the only structure that has ever protected them.

Which brings me to the recommendations. Begin with the Commission’s first, first in the report (pp. 22, 200) and first again in the Department’s June 26 summary: “Instruct the Department of Justice to issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state.” I agree with that sentence more than the Commission may intend, because it concedes everything this comment argues. A guidance document can only clarify “the proper understanding” of something that exists and can be properly understood. A lie has no proper understanding to clarify. The Commission cannot publish a report whose second chapter treats the wall as a mid-century misreading, whose chairman publicly declares that “there is no separation of church and state,” and whose first recommendation directs the Department of Justice to expound separation’s proper understanding. One of those must yield. The report’s own pages point the way out: p. 43 quotes the Supreme Court’s affirmation that the Religion Clauses have “complementary purposes, not warring ones,” a sentence that presupposes an Establishment Clause still standing. And because Recommendations 2 through 4 would carry that guidance into every classroom, hospital, and federal workplace through posters, FAQs, and hotlines (p. 205), the history beneath it must be accurate. As shown above, it presently is not.

Judge the rest of Appendix B by the report’s own stated limits: no preference, no coercion, no state theology. Several recommendations fail that test. Department of Justice “strategic litigation upholding the constitutionality of Ten Commandments and other world religion posters in public schools” (p. 216) puts the state’s thumb on a theological scale before it starts, because Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish traditions number the Commandments differently, and the government must first decide whose version a captive audience of schoolchildren will read. White House “calls to prayer and fasting” (p. 204) are government-composed worship, a practice Madison knew from the inside. He issued such proclamations himself as President, at Congress’s urging during the War of 1812, and then condemned the practice in the very memorandum quoted above: executive “Religious proclamations... recommending thanksgivings & fasts,” he wrote, “imply a religious agency, making no part of the trust delegated to political rulers.” Whatever current doctrine tolerates, the report proposes, in 2026, exactly what the First Amendment’s author tried, reconsidered, and rejected in its name.

The remaining machinery fares no better. A federal task force “defending American 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” (p. 209) is a blank check written to whatever faith holds the local majority, a promise that will be claimed, in different counties, by communities the Commission’s members would not recognize as their own; its qualifier, as shown below, is no restraint at all. The proposed hotlines and portals (pp. 200, 217) run in one direction only: free-exercise violations. Nowhere in 224 pages does the report contemplate a citizen reporting an establishment violation. A hotline that hears only half the First

Amendment will teach the public only half of it. And urging the appointment of judges with “proven records of fearlessly protecting all constitutional rights—especially religious liberty” (p. 207) is a screen for outcomes rather than judgment, a litmus test by another name. Every faction that captures that machinery will use it.

One more silence matters. The report calls again and again for school choice in which “funding follows the child” (pp. 15, 17). It guarantees faith-based institutions “an equal opportunity to participate on an equal basis” in funding (p. 14). It asks the Department of Justice to litigate against the state constitutional provisions “that restrict the ability of parents to use school choice funds to send their children to religious schools” (p. 214). And it never once mentions that the Supreme Court split four to four in May of last year, one Justice recused, on whether a public charter school may be a religious school — the precise question its funding program runs into first. The question did not die with the tie. It is on its way back: a Jewish charter school case is now in federal court in Oklahoma, and the established Jewish community it claims to serve wants no part of it. All of this is on the public record, reported by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. Senior leaders of Tulsa’s Jewish community objected in a joint statement that “an external Jewish organization would pursue such an initiative in Oklahoma without first engaging in meaningful consultation with the established Oklahoma Jewish community.” A Tulsa rabbi said, “I was surprised to be learning about it through a reporter.” In April that same rabbi and six other Oklahomans moved to intervene in the school’s federal suit, asking to stand as defendants beside the state, against the school. And the president of Americans United, speaking, as she said, as a Jew, warned that such a case “would be using Jews to advance a Christian Nationalist agenda that is not ultimately in Jews’ best interest.” She has read her history. When a minority’s name is borrowed to open the public treasury to religious schooling, the minority does not keep what the precedent buys; the majority does. Virginia settled this exact question in 1785. The assessment Madison defeated was a tax for religious teaching, and his Memorial already answered it: three pence today, conformity “in all cases whatsoever” tomorrow. A final report honest about its school-funding program will say where the wall stands within it: a public school may not be an arm of any church, and no minority’s name should be borrowed to make it one.

The same test condemns the words chosen to frame the report. The Introduction quotes, and the June 26 summary headlines, the President’s declaration at the Commission’s creation: “We’re bringing back religion in our country, and we’re bringing it back quickly and strongly — because for America to be a great nation, we must always be one nation under God” (p. 25). Set that beside the finest sentence in the report: “the Constitution protects religious liberty not by exiling religion from public life, but by preventing government from controlling it” (p. 15). Both cannot govern. A government on a mission to bring religion back is a government controlling religion, deciding how much of it, and whose. Reviving faith is the church’s commission, and she needs no federal help to fulfill it. The state has no more business restoring religion than banishing it; both are the same usurpation pointed in opposite directions. The report’s own best principle refutes its own epigraph.

The deeper danger is the report’s method. Its legal theory leans on “historical practices and understandings” (p. 209), the very qualifier attached to the task-force charge above. But American history contains Dale’s Laws of 1610–11, which made a third absence from Sunday worship a capital offense, and two centuries of test oaths, alongside the First Amendment that repudiated them. Nor is this ancient history. On a single day in 1961 the Supreme Court upheld Sunday closing laws, and in *Braunfeld v. Brown* let Pennsylvania’s stand against an Orthodox Jewish merchant who already closed his shop on Saturday for the Sabbath. Justice Stewart said what the majority would not: the law “compels an Orthodox Jew to choose between his religious faith and his economic survival. That is a cruel choice.” Your report’s only contact with those cases is warm: it quotes Justice Frankfurter’s observation that religion “profoundly relates the life of man to the world in which he lives” (p. 29), words drawn from the very *McGowan* concurrence that defended those laws. The concurrence is quoted; the man it cost is not. Method and citation lean the same way: a legal test that blesses whatever history contains, footnoted to the case that contains Sunday laws. The FAQ likewise cites *Groff v. DeJoy* for workplace accommodation (p. 195), and rightly, but *Groff* shields a believer from his employer; *Braunfeld* shows what happens when the day belongs to the government. The report cites the first and cannot afford the second. That is what “historical practices and understandings” look like from underneath. History is the inventory of everything we have done, including everything the founders built the wall to end. “It is proper,” Madison wrote, “to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties.” Every establishment in history has been sincere. Power changes hands. And when church and state merge, the first victims are never atheists; they are believers outside the

majority. That is not speculation. It is the first page of your own second chapter, and it was Mr. Braunfeld's living. If the final report means what its own FAQ says about coercion, one sentence would prove it: no government in America may prescribe, privilege, or enforce a day of worship or rest on religious grounds. That vocabulary is not a museum piece; proposals to write a "uniform day of rest" into law have resurfaced in national policy debate within the past year. Williams weighed that word in 1644: "An inforced uniformity of Religion throughout a Nation or civill State, confounds the Civill and Religious," and "inforced uniformity (sooner or later) is the greatest occasion of civill Warre." Congress weighed it in 1888, when a national Sunday-rest bill "to secure to the people the enjoyment of the first day of the week, commonly known as the Lord's Day, as a day of rest" was introduced, heard, and left to die in committee, then reintroduced and left to die again. Every Congress asked to open this door has kept it shut; the final report should keep it shut.

So here, plainly, is what I ask of the final report.

First, correct the historical record at pp. 21–22, 41–43, and 190–191: acknowledge Roger Williams's authorship of the wall image, the *Reynolds* Court's 1879 reliance on the Danbury letter, Article VI's religious-test ban, the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, and the *Memorial and Remonstrance*'s actual argument.

Second, retire the claim that church-state separation is foreign to the Constitution, a claim Recommendation 1 itself contradicts, since guidance clarifying "the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state" presupposes that separation exists and can be rightly understood. State accurately that separation is the founders' own description of the First Amendment's design.

Third, repudiate on the record the chairman's public statement that separation is "a lie," together with any government messaging, whether hotlines, bumper stickers, or recordings, to that effect.

Fourth, withdraw or rewrite the recommendations at pp. 200, 204, 209, 216, and 217 that would have government compose, sponsor, mandate, litigate for, or celebrate religious exercise; make any violation-reporting channel accept Establishment Clause complaints on equal terms with free-exercise complaints; affirm expressly that no level of government may prescribe, privilege, or enforce a day of worship or rest on religious grounds; and state plainly that a public school may not be an arm of any church.

Fifth, keep and strengthen what is best in the report: the accommodations, the religious discrimination enforcement, the security grants, the due process. None of it needs a lower wall.

Sixth, treat the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause as the founders did: two halves of one liberty, never adversaries.

Religious liberty does not need the state's patronage; it needs the state's restraint. The wall of separation is not a myth told against faith. It is the truth that set faith free, and it is why religion has flourished in America beyond anything the established churches of the old world could show, exactly as Madison predicted. Our forebears rang that conviction into the world on a bell whose inscription is Scripture itself: "Proclaim Liberty throughout all the Land unto all the Inhabitants thereof." Build on that foundation and I will cheer this Commission. Erode it, and history already tells us how the story ends.

Respectfully submitted,

Shawn Lathrom

July 13, 2026

Religious Liberty Commission

U.S. Department of Justice

Submitted via email: PII

Re: Public Comment — Draft Report: Separation of Church and State (Executive Summary, Chapter 2, Appendices A and B)

To the Commissioners of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a private citizen and as a Christian who loves the Scriptures and loves this country. There is much in your draft report I respect. The testimony of witnesses of many faiths deserves the hearing you gave it: Sikh soldiers, Jewish students, Hindu congregations, Muslim scholars, Christian teachers. The chapter on anti-Semitism is needed and humane. Recommendations for security grants for houses of worship, for workplace and military accommodations, and for a written explanation owed to anyone a public official accuses of improper religious expression are the ordinary, honorable machinery of a pluralist republic, and I support them. So is the standard your own charter sets, quoted in the Department's June 26 summary: to "uphold Federal laws that protect all citizens' full participation in a pluralistic democracy." I ask nothing of this report that its charter does not already ask.

But the report's historical foundation, laid in the Executive Summary (pp. 21–22), built up in Chapter 2 (pp. 41–43), and handed to the public in Appendix A (pp. 190–191), will not bear the weight placed on it. Its account of the wall of separation is wrong by sixty-eight years on the law, wrong by a century and a half on the authorship, and silent on the Constitution's own words. The boldest recommendations in Appendix B rest on that account.

I support the report's pluralist protections without reservation. But its claim that the "wall of separation" was a mid-twentieth-century invention is refuted by the Supreme Court's own words from 1879, by Roger Williams's from 1644, and by Madison's and Jefferson's in between, none of which the report acknowledges. Its first recommendation presupposes the very separation its chairman has called a lie. This letter closes with six specific requests.

Start with the claim itself. The report announces, as its central historical finding: "The truth is that the phrase 'wall of separation between church and state' appears neither in the First Amendment nor anywhere else in the Constitution" (p. 42; the claim recurs at pp. 21 and 190). But the words "separation of powers" appear nowhere in the Constitution. Neither do "checks and balances," "federalism," "judicial review," "presumption of innocence," or "religious liberty," the phrase in this Commission's own name. No one concludes that those principles are absent. Such phrases are shorthand for what the text does.

And what does the text do? It grounds all authority in “We the People.” It invokes no Deity in its operative text, an omission ratification-era critics attacked as godless, and one the framers declined to cure. Its commands touch religion exactly twice, both times to exclude government from it: the First Amendment’s twin clauses, and Article VI’s guarantee that “no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.” It is remarkable that a 224-page report on the constitutional foundations of religious liberty never once quotes Article VI, the only religion clause in the original, unamended Constitution. A charter that forbids religious tests, forbids establishment, and guarantees free exercise has separated the institutions of church and state. That is not a twentieth-century invention. It is the architecture.

The report’s timeline fares no better. Chapter 2 describes “a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson” that Justice Black “repurposed” in 1947 (p. 42), and the Executive Summary and FAQ tell readers the idea of a wall “only took off in the mid-twentieth century, when the Supreme Court began citing Thomas Jefferson’s 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association” (pp. 21, 191). Three corrections are in order.

First, Jefferson did not coin the image. Roger Williams did, in 1644, a century and a half earlier, warning what happens “when they have opened a gap in the hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wilderness of the world.” Williams was a preacher, banished by an established church for his conscience, who went on to found at Providence one of the first governments in the modern world built on full religious liberty. In its original meaning the wall protects the church. And Williams reasoned from the Ten Commandments themselves: the magistrate may enforce the second table, the duties people owe one another, but has no jurisdiction over the first, the duties owed to God. Roger Williams’s name does not appear anywhere in the report.

Second, the Supreme Court did not begin citing the Danbury letter in the mid-twentieth century. It began in 1879, sixty-eight years before the report’s chosen starting point. In *Reynolds v. United States*, 98 U.S. 145, a unanimous Court quoted the letter and held that, “coming as this does from an acknowledged leader of the advocates of the measure, it may be accepted almost as an authoritative declaration of the scope and effect of the amendment thus secured.” *Reynolds* appears nowhere in the report, and a document published by the Department of Justice should not repeat a claim the Court’s own reports refute.

That omission matters twice over. Chapter 2 insinuates that the wall entered constitutional law in 1947 through the pen of “a former Ku Klux Klan member” (p. 42). The origin story collapses once the record is restored: the metaphor’s judicial debut came from the Waite Court of 1879, and its authorship from a persecuted dissenting preacher. The 1947 decision itself, *Everson v. Board of Education*, in fact ruled for the religious side of the dispute, upholding public funding of bus transportation to Catholic schools. Nor was *Reynolds* secularist handiwork; it affirmed a criminal conviction over a free-exercise objection. In its first appearance before the Court, the

wall marked the line between belief and action. It has never meant exiling faith from public life, and this letter defends no such caricature.

Third, Jefferson was not alone, and the letter was no stray remark. James Madison, who drafted the First Amendment, asserted the same fact in the same words. “Strongly guarded as is the separation between Religion & Govt in the Constitution of the United States,” he wrote in his Detached Memoranda. And to Edward Livingston in 1822: “Every new & successful example therefore of a perfect separation between ecclesiastical & Civil matters, is of importance,” for “religion & Govt. will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together.” The report calls the Danbury letter “one belabored metaphor,” written “10 years after the First Amendment was ratified” (p. 191), while resting its own case on Washington’s Farewell Address, which is likewise not in the Constitution, and on a “bridge” metaphor (pp. 43, 179) that is in no founding document at all. If post-ratification commentary counts, then the Father of the Constitution’s testimony counts most, and it is on the other side.

What makes all this stranger is that the report knows this history. Chapter 2 is at its best when it remembers. It opens with Mary Dyer, hanged on Boston Common in 1660 for preaching her Quaker faith (p. 36). It candidly lists the “hallmarks of a religious establishment that the U.S. Constitution would later prohibit”: tax-supported churches, banned rivals, “church membership as a condition for holding public office” (p. 36). It quotes young Madison condemning religious persecution as “conceived in Hell” (p. 39), words he wrote in 1774 about the Baptist preachers jailed in his own Virginia. I commend the Commission for telling that story. But the report stops the story one chapter early, just before the remedy.

The remedy the founders chose has a name, and they gave it. Madison’s *Memorial and Remonstrance* (1785), which your report cites only in a footnote, for a definition (p. 28), never for its central argument, was written to defeat Virginia’s general assessment for “teachers of the Christian religion”: mild, nonpreferential, evenhanded state support for Christian teaching in general. Precisely the kind of friendly patronage the report’s “bridge” model gestures toward. Madison’s question should hang over every page of the final draft: “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?” And its companion, aimed squarely at the public purse: 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.” And his verdict on the experiment the report would soften: “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.” His fifteen centuries reach back to Constantine: the experiment he condemned began where church first joined state, and he meant America never to repeat it.

The Memorial won. Its fruit was Jefferson's Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1786), the direct ancestor of the First Amendment and another founding document the report never mentions. Its reasoning is theological, and it is the reason I write as a believer rather than despite being one: "Almighty God hath created the mind free," and "all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments" 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." The Lord of heaven declined the sword. "My kingdom is not of this world," He said; "render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Coerced or state-sponsored religion is corrupted religion. The state can fill pews, but only at the price of teaching men hypocrisy.

The rest of the founding generation agreed. Washington, to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, an exchange your report rightly celebrates (p. 40), echoed the congregation's own Moses Seixas in praising a government "which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance." Franklin wrote in 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 ratified, after the Senate's unanimous consent, the Treaty of Tripoli of 1797, whose eleventh article begins: "As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion..." Benjamin Franklin, the Virginia Statute, the Treaty of Tripoli: none appears in the report. That history is also why so many of the persecuted sailed here in the first place.

It also answers Chapter 2's strangest claim, that the intellectual foundations of the modern "wall" lie in Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre (pp. 41–42), or in "philosophers from Karl Marx to Jean-Paul Sartre" whose ideas took hold "since the 1960s" (p. 180). Williams wrote in 1644, Madison in 1785, Jefferson in 1802, each before Nietzsche was born, let alone Foucault or Sartre. The wall reached the Supreme Court in 1879, generations before the 1960s in which the report itself locates these ideas taking hold. The wall was not built by atheists against the church. It was built by believers, out of the blood-soaked memory the report itself recounts, for the church's protection. Attributing it to death-of-God philosophy does not merely miss the history; it bears false witness against the devout dissenters, Baptists, Quakers, Presbyterians, who bled for it.

I also want to be honest about a harder thing. I credit the report's restraint where it appears: "this does not involve or require advocating 'theocracy' or even the total elimination of any separation between church and state" (p. 42), and the FAQ's concession that government "may not officially prefer one religion over another, take over the functions of a church, or coerce religious observance" (p. 190). Those are the right lines. But the Commission should know the pedigree of the doctrine toward which its rhetoric drifts. The *Syllabus of Errors* (1864, Proposition 55) formally condemned the proposition that "the Church ought to be separated from the State, and the State from the Church." Leo XIII, in *Longinqua oceani* (1895), told Americans it would be "very erroneous" to conclude that "it would be universally lawful or expedient for State and

Church to be, as in America, dissevered and divorced,” because the church “would bring forth more abundant fruits if, in addition to liberty, she enjoyed the favor of the laws and the patronage of the public authority.” The favor of the laws and the patronage of the public authority: that is precisely what Appendix B offers. Presidential “calls to prayer and fasting” (p. 204). Grant-making “solicitude for faith-based grant applicants” (p. 203). A Department of War “Spiritual Fitness Guide detailing how religion and religious accommodations are essential to supporting the whole warfighter” (p. 204). Department of Justice litigation upholding religious displays in classrooms (p. 216).

For a century Americans of every confession answered Rome’s nineteenth-century position with the founders’, so persuasively that in 1965 even Rome moved toward the American principle: *Dignitatis Humanae* declared all men “immune from coercion” in religion. It is an astonishing reversal to watch a United States federal commission drift the other way. And when the Commission’s chairman tells a public meeting, as the Associated Press reported (Peter Smith, May 2026), “We need to say there is no separation of church and state. That’s a lie,” and proposes a federal hotline to broadcast that message (“No one at the commission meeting disagreed,” the AP noted), the report’s careful disclaimers ring hollow. The final report should repudiate that statement expressly.

Let me be equally plain about what this argument is not. It is no brief against my Catholic neighbors, or Jewish, or any other. At least six founding-era state constitutions confined public office to Protestants. Maryland excluded Jews until 1826. New Hampshire kept its Protestant test until 1877. And Maryland’s last belief-in-God test for public office stood until the Supreme Court struck it down in 1961, within living memory. It was the separationist principle, Article VI written large across the states, that struck off every one of those shackles. Disestablishment, not establishment, is why this Commission’s own membership, a cardinal, a rabbi, evangelical pastors, can sit as equals at one federal table. Every member of this Commission belongs to a tradition that was, somewhere in America, once on the wrong side of an establishment. Those who lower the wall are dismantling the only structure that has ever protected them.

Which brings me to the recommendations. Begin with the Commission’s first, first in the report (pp. 22, 200) and first again in the Department’s June 26 summary: “Instruct the Department of Justice to issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state.” I agree with that sentence more than the Commission may intend, because it concedes everything this comment argues. A guidance document can only clarify “the proper understanding” of something that exists and can be properly understood. A lie has no proper understanding to clarify. The Commission cannot publish a report whose second chapter treats the wall as a mid-century misreading, whose chairman publicly declares that “there is no separation of church and state,” and whose first recommendation directs the Department of Justice to expound separation’s proper understanding. One of those must yield. The report’s own pages point the way out: p. 43 quotes the Supreme Court’s affirmation that the Religion Clauses have “complementary purposes, not warring ones,” a sentence that presupposes an Establishment

Clause still standing. And because Recommendations 2 through 4 would carry that guidance into every classroom, hospital, and federal workplace through posters, FAQs, and hotlines (p. 205), the history beneath it must be accurate. As shown above, it presently is not.

Judge the rest of Appendix B by the report's own stated limits: no preference, no coercion, no state theology. Several recommendations fail that test. Department of Justice "strategic litigation upholding the constitutionality of Ten Commandments and other world religion posters in public schools" (p. 216) puts the state's thumb on a theological scale before it starts, because Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish traditions number the Commandments differently, and the government must first decide whose version a captive audience of schoolchildren will read. White House "calls to prayer and fasting" (p. 204) are government-composed worship, a practice Madison knew from the inside. He issued such proclamations himself as President, at Congress's urging during the War of 1812, and then condemned the practice in the very memorandum quoted above: executive "Religious proclamations... recommending thanksgivings & fasts," he wrote, "imply a religious agency, making no part of the trust delegated to political rulers." Whatever current doctrine tolerates, the report proposes, in 2026, exactly what the First Amendment's author tried, reconsidered, and rejected in its name.

The remaining machinery fares no better. A federal task force "defending American 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" (p. 209) is a blank check written to whatever faith holds the local majority, a promise that will be claimed, in different counties, by communities the Commission's members would not recognize as their own; its qualifier, as shown below, is no restraint at all. The proposed hotlines and portals (pp. 200, 217) run in one direction only: free-exercise violations. Nowhere in 224 pages does the report contemplate a citizen reporting an establishment violation. A hotline that hears only half the First Amendment will teach the public only half of it. And urging the appointment of judges with "proven records of fearlessly protecting all constitutional rights—especially religious liberty" (p. 207) is a screen for outcomes rather than judgment, a litmus test by another name. Every faction that captures that machinery will use it.

One more silence matters. The report calls again and again for school choice in which "funding follows the child" (pp. 15, 17). It guarantees faith-based institutions "an equal opportunity to participate on an equal basis" in funding (p. 14). It asks the Department of Justice to litigate against the state constitutional provisions "that restrict the ability of parents to use school choice funds to send their children to religious schools" (p. 214). And it never once mentions that the Supreme Court split four to four in May of last year, one Justice recused, on whether a public charter school may be a religious school — the precise question its funding program runs into first. The question did not die with the tie. It is on its way back: a Jewish charter school case is now in federal court in Oklahoma, and the established Jewish community it claims to serve wants no part of it. All of this is on the public record, reported by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. Senior leaders of Tulsa's Jewish community objected in a joint statement that "an

external Jewish organization would pursue such an initiative in Oklahoma without first engaging in meaningful consultation with the established Oklahoma Jewish community.” A Tulsa rabbi said, “I was surprised to be learning about it through a reporter.” In April that same rabbi and six other Oklahomans moved to intervene in the school’s federal suit, asking to stand as defendants beside the state, against the school. And the president of Americans United, speaking, as she said, as a Jew, warned that such a case “would be using Jews to advance a Christian Nationalist agenda that is not ultimately in Jews’ best interest.” She has read her history. When a minority’s name is borrowed to open the public treasury to religious schooling, the minority does not keep what the precedent buys; the majority does. Virginia settled this exact question in 1785. The assessment Madison defeated was a tax for religious teaching, and his Memorial already answered it: three pence today, conformity “in all cases whatsoever” tomorrow. A final report honest about its school-funding program will say where the wall stands within it: a public school may not be an arm of any church, and no minority’s name should be borrowed to make it one.

The same test condemns the words chosen to frame the report. The Introduction quotes, and the June 26 summary headlines, the President’s declaration at the Commission’s creation: “We’re bringing back religion in our country, and we’re bringing it back quickly and strongly — because for America to be a great nation, we must always be one nation under God” (p. 25). Set that beside the finest sentence in the report: “the Constitution protects religious liberty not by exiling religion from public life, but by preventing government from controlling it” (p. 15). Both cannot govern. A government on a mission to bring religion back is a government controlling religion, deciding how much of it, and whose. Reviving faith is the church’s commission, and she needs no federal help to fulfill it. The state has no more business restoring religion than banishing it; both are the same usurpation pointed in opposite directions. The report’s own best principle refutes its own epigraph.

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Respectfully submitted,

Shawn Lathrom

From: Susan EverBlest <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:30 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

I am not a person of eloquent words; therefore, I have used a letter written by a fellow church member with his permission. I 100% agree with every word expressed here, with the addition of the following thought: Our nation is a great nation called by God to serve the world as a haven of precious freedoms. Freedom to follow one's own conscience is paramount, as that is the only way we can truly follow and love God freely. As Christians, we are called to give the gospel message to a dying world, so that we may (along with others we witness to and who accept the gospel) inherit a heavenly kingdom should we choose to believe on Jesus Christ as our Redeemer.

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 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 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 American.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan EverBlest

From: Maureen Thomas <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:31 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission, as a citizen of the United States of America, I am asking that you refrain from using government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment which can cause negative consequences to people of faith. Please keep church and faith separate.

Thank you,
Maureen Thomas
Waynesboro, TN

From: Robert Hvizdak <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:33 -0400

Importance: Normal

Liberty of conscience is given to us by our Creator God. The Law of man has no authority over it. Religious Liberty existing within the framework of the Law of man is subject to the reinterpretation of said Law by those with the greatest majority, most influence or best argument. Then for the common good Liberty becomes subservient to the Law instead of defining it. Thus Liberty of Conscience becomes against the Law and those of Faith different from the majority become enemies of the State. Persecution is the result. Entire populations were slaughtered in Europe for not agreeing with the majority faith. This document is a precursor to the same inevitable result.

RHvizdak

From: Norman Watson <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- Protect Freedom of Conscience. - SABBATH BLUE LAWS

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:33 -0400

Importance: Normal

PI

- 3. Politicization of Churches and Religious non-profits by repealing the Johnson Amendment.
- 4. Singling out one religion for special government protection
- 5. Indoctrination of Americans in the ideology of the Commission.

To whom it may concern:

The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Draft report mentions “Sabbath” , as observed for religion and family. I believe that the department of justice should protect the rights of every citizen to hold any day as a Sabbath according to the dictates of their conscience.

I also believe that the Johnson Amendment should not be repealed. For if we look in the dark ages of the Roman Empire where Religion influenced the state, many Protestants were persecuted.

As a result in singling out one religion above another leaves no room for “religious liberty”, which makes our country great in the first place.

The sad fact is that if The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Draft report as a whole be signed into law, it would lead to the persecution of many Americans and eventually cause the downfall of the country we love.

Please consider accepting these recommendations as you consider future in preserving liberty and freedom of conscience in our nation, for this is the true meaning of “common good “

Thank you

From: Alandra Rocco <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State/ Jenny Rocco

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:34 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of The Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to kindly ask that you sincerely reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state by attempting to form a bridge between the two. With all due respect but that sounds backwards. As a person of faith, I find that quite concerning and alarming.

The wall was never built by secularists or non-believers to push down or persecute those of faith, but by believers to maintain religious liberty - as stated in 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."

It is the likelihood that this "bridge" will open the door for government money and political favors to march right in, where religious or faith-based organizations will end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of God. History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, and it isn't good for either one. May we never forget what our ancestors fought, bled and died for in order for us to have the very freedoms we are so fortunate to have this very day in our country.

Separation isn't a secular idea - people of faith built it to protect faith, and it's the reason religious liberty has stayed strong here in the U.S. Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free along with citizens who are protected by religious liberty.

Sincerely,

Jenny Rocco
Chattanooga, TN

From: Arriele Sidney <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comments-Oppose Religious Liberty Draft Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:34 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I appreciate the Commission's commitment to protecting religious liberty. Faith is a matter of conscience, and every person must be free to worship according to his or her convictions without government pressure or interference.

Scripture teaches that civil government has a role in maintaining justice and order, while worship belongs to God alone. Jesus affirmed this distinction 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).

I respectfully urge the Commission to continue protecting the free exercise of religion while preserving the constitutional principles that prevent government from establishing or favoring religion. History shows that liberty of conscience is strongest when civil and religious authority remain distinct.

Thank you for your time, consideration and attention to this matter.

[Sent from Yahoo Mail on Android](#)

From: Alise Littles <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS- Establishment Clause - Alise Littles

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:37 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a private citizen who believes, without qualification, that the two religion clauses of the First Amendment rise or fall together. My conviction is also a matter of conscience. The separation of church and state is not a technicality of American law; it is a safeguard against national ruin. Biblically speaking, neither the state nor any church has ever been given authority to force the conscience of another human being in matters of religious belief. That authority belongs to God alone, and I ask the Commission to consider this petition prayerfully, with the seriousness the historical record deserves.

Consider first that this question is not new, and it was not left unresolved by the founding generation. In 1829 and 1830, when Sabbatarian petitioners asked Congress to legislate Sunday observance, committees chaired by Senator Richard M. Johnson answered while men who had lived through the founding still sat in Congress. Their reports, adopted by Congress itself, declared plainly that it is not in the legitimate province of the legislature to determine what religion is true or what false, and that government exists to protect all and determine for none. They warned that if a legislature defines even one point of religious duty, it has claimed the right to define every part of divine revelation, down to the ceremonies of worship and the support of the clergy. They even noted that coercion cannot produce faith, since human power may extort vain sacrifices, but only the Deity can command the affections of the heart. Any commission proposing government-defined religious duties today is not confronting a modern legal theory; it is asking the nation to overturn what Congress itself settled while Madison was still alive.

Consider next that a law favoring religion is just as dangerous as one restricting it, because both concede that religion is a proper subject of legislation. Once that concession is made, the only question left is who holds power, and power changes hands. As the reasoning goes, 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 if he later becomes convinced some other faith is nearer the truth. Religious liberty must include the liberty to be persuaded. Believers who welcome government sponsorship of their own faith are handing a loaded instrument to every future administration, including those that may not share their convictions.

Finally, and most fundamentally, government was never given jurisdiction over religion in the first place. Our whole system rests on the premise that just powers come from the consent of the governed, delegated by the people. But no person can delegate his relationship with God to another; a man cannot authorize anyone to believe, worship, or answer for his soul in his place. What was never delegated was never received. No government will ever stand before the judgment seat to answer for any individual's faith, and so no government can rightly assume responsibility in matters of religion. The First Amendment did not invent this limit; it simply recorded a truth that was already there.

History, and I believe the record kept in heaven, will remember what this Commission decides.

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

Respectfully,
Alise Littles

From: Paula D <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Paula Dronen

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:40 -0400

Importance: Normal

Separation of Church and State is real and is a pillar of our country.

Paula Dronen

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

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comments on separation of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:41 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Committee,

Please keep separation of church and state. We believe it was our constitution writers intention, clearly stated or not, as most of our forefathers came to this country to escape religious persecution.

As soon as you bring church and state together, the opportunity for someone to tell me either TO worship or HOW TO worship, my liberty of conscience could easily be revoked.

I believe this is an inalienable right.

Thanking you for giving us the opportunity to speak,

Ken & Karen Johnson

From: Patricia Beckwith <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:44 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the religious liberty commission,

I feel the fact that this country was created on Freedom and that the Father's of this great country base the Constitution on freedom and made sure to include freedom of religion as part of the first amendment of the constitution says a lot about the importance of freedom of religion and separation of estate and church. We should honor their wise decisions to protect the people of this Nation.

The founders of this country were escaping persecution and abuse by the governments in Europe and all these tragedies and unhuman treatments towards people were based on their religious beliefs.

Separation of church and estate is a priority for the safety of the people of this country and it's the basis on which this country was established.

Trying to change it is not a very wise decision, if it didn't work back then it will not work in the future. Please reconsider whatever changes you are planning on making to the separation of estate and country and freedom of religion.

Praying that the right decisions will be made about this matter. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

M.P.Beckwith

Florida

From: Katheryn Matthews <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PRESERVE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:45 -0400

Importance: Normal

To aid the Religious Liberty Commission in processing your comments, please format the subject line using the following:

- PUBLIC COMMENT – “Preserve Separation of Church and State” – [NAME].

Email Address: [REDACTED] PII; Submission deadline: Monday 7/13/26

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 and 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

From: Marty Varsubsky <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church & State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:46 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carsen & members of the Religious Liberty Commission.

We believe this country is great, if it stays free! We do not need to change what Thomas Jefferson and James Madison and our forefathers wrote years ago. We do not need to give religious exemptions to churches ,schools and hospitals which could save our economy financially. I am blessed knowing the Lord and appreciate how Christ does not force. I also respect the right of all Americans, to not force my religion on people. We need to follow God and not a man! Blessings Debbie and Marty Varsubsky

From: Denise <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to the Religious Liberty Committee's recommendations

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:49 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the members of the Religious Liberty Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Committee's recommendations.

I am a Christian who is deeply concerned about the blending of the church with the state. We need only to look back into the dark pages of history to see the results of such a union.

I do agree that no one should be penalized, persecuted or dismissed from their job or from a public office because of his or her beliefs. A religious person of any persuasion should be able to wear to their place of employment sacred adornments that does not distract them or others from doing the required work. They should also be able to have off the day that they regard as God's sacred day. We were all created with the freedom of choice, with freedom of conscience. God is a God who does not force people to love Him.

Would the government use taxpayers money to fund any and all minority religious schools and activities or just mainstream christian religions? If the government only supports mainstream christianity, then the government has surely established one religion above another. Our founding fathers did their best to shield this country from the horrors and blood shed that uniting church and state brings.

Benjamin Franklin framed it this way when he said; "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 its professors are obliged to call for help of the civil power, tis a sign, I apprehend of its being a bad one."

Jesus said it best in Matthew 22:21 "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's."

Respectfully Yours

From: Joshua Marcoe <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Joshua Marcoe

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:49 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

A state without a king, and a church without a pope. This was the outcome of the founding of this country.

The founders of this great nation largely came from Europe, where many were experiencing persecution when their religious beliefs didn't agree with those who were currently in power, whether in Catholic nations, or Protestant ones. Thus, freedom had much to do with allowing space for different Christian persuasions coexisting within a broader Christian framework. True Christianity needs no more government support than our Lord did from the Roman government.

What about people of other religions or none at all? They should have the same religious freedom that we Christians would want to receive if we were in Saudi Arabia or North Korea (but currently do not), namely, freedom to worship God according our conscience, and practice our religion (including evangelization) without hindrance. (Now obviously, when someone wants to practice their religion, and restricts, harms, kills, or injures others, no such liberty should be given for that type of religious practice... for it is just criminal activity hiding behind religious activity)

But the larger question is why should the various Churches or Christian communities seek governmental support? In a word, because their faith has grown dim, their zeal has been dampened, their devotion has become weak. We are now possibly the richest group of citizens in the history of the world, and yet we are seeking government support for our specific religious projects. The early Church received no such handouts from the Roman government, but instead received the support of the Third Person of the Godhead. And in one generation the message was taken to the Roman world. We as Christians should consider this, as well as Jesus statement that "My kingdom is not of this world!"

Legislation is no replacement for evangelization. That is what this country and every country of the world needs, true Christian evangelization from devoted followers of Christ.

Joshua Marcoe
Greenbelt, MD

From: AT JJ <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

The below letter has been modified according to my considerations and/or citation checking.

RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF 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. 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 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. James Madison was the principal author of the Establishment Clause and is the greater authority on the above subject. 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 American history in the issuance of public guidance on the subject.

We are concerned regarding the potential to neglect 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 negative results to the owner.

Unfortunately, the Committee may not account for 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 of a variety of perspectives of which we may intellectually agree or disagree, but who experienced civil/religious penalties and the wrath of the historical Roman Papacy, 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 encourage due caution that the Department of Justice consider with nuance and adequate information from history the repeated innocent modern calls from people or even the papal power today for the censorship of the internet and the suppression of free speech, contrary to the First Amendment. [4] However innocent, we encourage due caution as one may question whether 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 under the witness 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 encourage the roots of justification for 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. 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?" [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 Govts. 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. Until Holland ventured on the experiment of combining a liberal toleration with the establishment of a particular creed, it was taken for granted, that an exclusive & intolerant establishment was essential, and notwithstanding the light thrown on the subject by the experiment, the prevailing opinion in Europe, England not excepted, has been that Religion could not be preserved without the support of Govt. nor Govt. be supported witht.(sic) an established religion that there must be at least an alliance of some sort between them. It remained for North America to bring the great & interesting subject to a fair, and finally to a decisive test." [12]

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.

[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=pAUKMwIWYB8>; <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>

[12] Madison

https://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/amendl_religions68.html

From: JUDDA HOOLEY <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:53 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of Religious Liberty Commission,

I am submitting this comment to formally register my protest against any action, policy, or proposal that merges church and state. The separation of these institutions is essential to protecting constitutional freedoms, individual rights, and religious diversity.

I urge you to uphold this foundational principle and reject any measure that compromises it.

Respectfully,

Judda Hooley
McKinney, TX

From: Micah Barker <[REDACTED]> PII

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Micah Barker

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:58 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a young person, a US citizen 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 some of the proposed solutions to the problems facing the country.

Replacing the "Separation of Church and State" with a "Bridge":

While I understand that the intention may be to correct the morals of the state with the christian principles of the state, the idea of doing away with the separation of church and state is very dangerous and can quickly lead down the wrong road once the state begins listening to religious institutions and granting favors other than allowing freedom for the religious institutions to exist. By observing the history of the past few thousand years it is easy to see, as a general rule, that when church and state unite, persecution to the unrecognized faiths follows. Whether it be Constantine and the Roman Catholic Church, the British Monarch and the Church of England, Iran and the Muslims, or even the colony of Massachusetts Bay and the Puritans, there is a very identifiable pattern:

- Religious leaders become corrupt
- Persecution comes to minority groups or those seen as a threat to the religions in power.
- The state is used for the goals of the church.

The closer the church and the state come together, the more persecution and corruption are likely to follow.

I realize that you are not recommending a union of church and state like the above examples, but it is a step in the wrong direction to claim that separation of church and state should be replaced with a bridge, because you are undermining the idea and the main phrase used to communicate one of the great principles of the freedom of religion that we have, and it can lead to closer bonds between church and state later.

I do not agree with the recommendations to make a bridge between the church and the state.

Public Funds Available for Religious Institutions:

This is a very dangerous idea because it puts the government in charge of distributing funds instead of the citizens themselves. What happens when there is a doctrine being taught by a religion that the government does not agree with or will not teach something that the government requires to be taught? Your idea is based on supposing that the government will always be in favor of the correct ideologies, but isn't that how the public schools started teaching evolution and many other things? What if a school doesn't want to teach a certain subject, but the state says it is essential and the school will not qualify unless it teaches it?

Also, it should not be taxpayer money supporting religious institutions, because taxpayers may be required to support things that they do not want to.

If the government wants to support proper education, then it should give funds directly to the citizens and they can use it for the education of their choice with no strings attached, whether it be a religious school, public school, or home school.

Inaccurate History:

The account of history given in the report seems to have some major flaws that change the view of religious freedom in the early years of our history as a nation. While there were views that the church and state should be united more or less, the idea that the principle of separation of church and state not being in the constitution and

that founding fathers were against it and it was just Jefferson and his letter and the court decisions of the 1940s that were for it is not grounded. The government made the first amendment and took other official positions that made it clear that the church must be protected from and separate from the state and the state must be protected from control of the church and these were voted and passed so that means the majority of the founding fathers had to have agreed to those actions.

The best way for the morals of the country to be revived is for the citizens to personally turn to God through their own decision and the churches should reform and get back to the pure word of God and transform the people of America by the power of God, not the power or funding of civil government.

Respectfully,
Micah Barker
from Tennessee

From: Brian Beavers <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Pastor Protesting Provisions 1 and 9

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:00:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Unconstitutional_Blue_Laws.pdf

Esteemed Leaders of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I write this email in opposition, points one and nine of would lay the foundation to threaten religious liberty in the future.

Trying to remove the understanding of the wall of separation is not a matter of just dealing with Thomas Jefferson. It's a matter of dealing with Roger Williams, but ultimately it's a matter of dealing with the author of the division of church and state, which is Jesus Christ himself in Matthew chapter 22:21. He lays the foundation for the wall of separation in which Rogers and Jefferson will mention in the future. I'm attaching quotations from the founding fathers that show original intent concerning the separation of church and state and building a wall of separation between the two such as people government being the worst form of government because it combines Church state.

Removing the Johnson Amendment would turn churches into Quasi political entities And would destroy the sanctity of the church and tear down a portion of the wall in which Jesus built between church and state.

Please Please remove points one and nine from your document

Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. - Religious Liberty Press, est. 2011

Liberty of Conscience, A WALL AND Unconstitutional BLUE LAWS

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 22:21

I. Jesus' & the Wall of Separation

A. **Reference:** "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 22:21**

1. Parallel Verses

a. **Cross Reference:** "And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.

Mark 12:17

b. **Cross Reference:** "And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's. (26) And they could not take hold of his words before the people: and they marvelled at his answer, and held their peace. **Luke 20:25,26.**

B. **Reference:** "Jesus answered, 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: but now is my kingdom not from hence. **John 18:36**

II. The Disciples' & the Wall of Separation

- A. **Reference:** "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. (2) Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. (3) For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: (4) For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. (5) Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. (6) For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. (7) Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." **Romans 13:1-7**
- B. **Reference:** "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; (14) Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. (15) For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: (16) As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. (17) Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king." **1Peter 2:13-17**

III. Radical Reformers & the Wall of Separation

- A. "Therefore, the church must separate from the state in order to regain her purity as the bride or Christ." **Michael Sattler**, Schleithem Confession of 1527.
- B. "I would say further, if the magistracy rightly understood Christ and His kingdom, they would in my opinion rather choose death than to meddle with their worldly power and sword in spiritual matters which are reserved not to the judgment of man but to the judgment of the great and Almighty God alone"." **Menno Simmons**, The Cross of Christ. (1554).

IV. Founding Fathers' & the Wall of Separation

A. Roger Williams Wall of Separation

"[W]hen they [the Church] have opened a gap in the hedge or wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world, God hath ever broke down the wall itself ... and made His garden a wilderness as at this day. And that therefore if He will ever please to restore His garden and paradise again, it must of necessity be walled in peculiarly unto Himself from the world, and that all that be saved out of the world are to be transplanted

out of the wilderness of the world and added to His church or garden.” – **Roger Williams**, Baptist and founder of the Rhode Island colony, in “Mr. Cotton’s Letter, Lately Printed, Examined and Answered,” 1644.

B. Rhode Island Charter, 1663

” ... all and every person and persons may, from time to time, and at all times hereafter, freely and fully have and enjoy his and their own judgments and consciences, in matters of religious concernments ...” – **Rhode Island Charter**, 1663. Rhode Island’s government was the first government to enshrine equal freedom of religion and conscience for all.

C. Isaac Backus

”Religious matters are to be separated from the jurisdiction of the state, not because they are beneath the interests of the state but, quite to the contrary, because they are too high and holy and thus are beyond the competence of the state.”

”God has appointed two kinds of government in the world, which are distinct in their nature, and ought never to be confounded together; one of which is called civil, the other ecclesiastical government.”– **Isaac Backus**, New England Baptist minister, in “An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty,” 1773.

D. James Madison

”Union of religious sentiments begets a surprising confidence, and ecclesiastical establishments tend to great ignorance and corruption; all of which facilitate the execution of mischievous projects.”

”Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise.... 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 laity; in both, superstition, bigotry, and persecution.” **James Madison** to William Bradford on April 1, 1774.

E. George Mason

”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; and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience; and that it is the mutual duty of all to practise Christian forbearance, love, and charity toward each other.” – Virginia Bill of Rights, enacted June 12, 1776. **George Mason** was the primary architect of the bill, thus laying the foundation for the U.S. Constitution’s Bill of Rights.

F. Patrick Henry

“These words will go forth to the world when our bones are dust. To the slave in bondage they will speak hope; to the mechanic in his workshop, freedom . . .

“That parchment will speak to kings in language sad and terrible as the trumpet of the archangel. You have trampled on the rights of mankind long enough. At last, the voice of human woe has pierced the ear of God, and called His judgments down. . . . – **Patrick Henry**, speech in the Continental Congress, Independence Hall, Philadelphia, July 4, 1776.

G. Thomas Jefferson

“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. – The Declaration of Independence, enacted July 4, 1776.

Thomas Jefferson was a principle contributor to the declaration along with John Jay and another.

H. The Presbytery of Hanover, Virginia

“This we are the more strongly encouraged to expect by the Declaration of Rights so universally applauded for the dignity, firmness, and precision with which it delineates and asserts the privileges of society and the prerogatives of human nature, and which we embrace as the magna charta of our commonwealth, that can never be violated without endangering the grand superstructure it was designed to maintain. Therefore we rely upon the declaration, as well as the justice of our honorable legislature, to secure us the free exercise of religion according to the dictates of our consciences. And we should fall shower of our duty to ourselves, and the many and numerous congregations under our care, were we upon this occasion to neglect laying before you a statement of the religious grievances under which we have hitherto labored, that they may no longer be continued in our present form of government. – Memorial of the Presbytery of Hanover to the General Assembly of Virginia, October 24, 1776. Signed by **John Todd**, Moderator and **Caleb Wallace**, Presbytery Clerk.

I. James Madison

“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.” Ketcham, **James Madison**, 75–76 (1776)

J. Thomas Jefferson

“We the General Assembly of Virginia do enact that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burdened 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.” – **Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom**, enacted 1786. **Thomas Jefferson** was the primary composer of the bill. For many years prior Baptists and other religious dissenters had pressed for the abolishment of Virginia’s theocratic government.

K. James Madison

“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.” **James Madison** (1787). “The Writings of James Madison: 1783-1787”, p.184

L. Charles Pinkney

“[N]o religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.” **Charles Pinkney** of South Carolina, Constitutional Convention in 1787

M. John Adams

“The United States of America have exhibited, perhaps, the first example of governments erected on the simple principles of nature. ... [In] the formation of the American [state] governments . . . it will never be pretended that any persons employed in that service had interviews with the gods, or were in any degree under the influence of heaven. ... These governments were contrived merely by the use of reason and the senses.” – **John Adams**, in “Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America,” 1787-1788.

N. John Leland

“The notion of a Christian commonwealth should be exploded forever. ... Government should protect every man in thinking and speaking freely, and see that one does not abuse another. The liberty I contend for is more than toleration. The very idea of toleration is despicable; it supposes that some have a pre-eminence above the rest to grant indulgence, whereas all

should be equally free, Jews, Turks, Pagans and Christians.”– **John Leland**, Baptist minister, in “The Virginia Chronicle,” 1790.

“Is conformity of sentiments in matters of religion essential to the happiness of civil government? Not at all. Government has no more to do with the religious opinions of men than it has with the principles of mathematics. Let every man speak freely without fear – maintain the principles that he believes – worship according to his own faith, either one God, three Gods, no God, or twenty Gods; and let government protect him in so doing, i.e., see that he meets with no personal abuse or loss of property for his religious opinions. Instead of discouraging him with proscriptions, fines, confiscation or death, let him be encouraged, as a free man, to bring forth his arguments and maintain his points with all boldness; then if his doctrine is false it will be confuted, and if it is true (though ever so novel) let others credit it. When every man has this liberty what can he wish for more? A liberal man asks for nothing more of government.”– **John Leland** in “Right of Conscience Inalienable, and Therefore, Religious Opinions Not Cognizable By The Law,” 1791.

O. James Madison

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”– The religion clauses of the Constitution’s First Amendment, 1791.

P. John Adams

“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 Musselmen, - and as the said States never have entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mehomitan 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.” John Adams, "Treaty of Peace and Friendship, Signed at Tripoli". The Barbary Treaties 1786-1816, avalon.law.yale.edu. November 04, 1796.

Q. Thomas Jefferson

“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.” – President **Thomas Jefferson**, in an 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, Connecticut.

R. James Madison

“The Constitution of the U.S. forbids everything like an establishment of a national religion.”

James Madison, Document 64, James Madison, Detached Memoranda, ca. 1817, W. & M. Q., 3d ser., 3:554--60 1946

S. James Madison

“Is the appointment of Chaplains to the two Houses of Congress consistent with the Constitution, and with the pure principle of religious freedom? In strictness the answer on both points must be in the negative. The Constitution of the U. S. forbids everything like an establishment of a national religion. The law appointing Chaplains establishes a religious worship for the national representatives, to be performed by Ministers of religion, elected by a majority of them, and these are to be paid out of the national taxes. Does this not involve the principle of a national establishment ... ?”

“The civil Government, though bereft of every thing like an associated hierarchy, possesses the requisite stability, and performs its functions with complete success; whilst 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 from the State.” **James Madison** to Robert Walsh Jr., 2 March 1819;

T. James Madison

“And I have no doubt that every new example will succeed, as every past one has done, in showing that religion and Government will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together.”

“Every new and successful example of a perfect separation between ecclesiastical and civil matters is of importance.”

“We are teaching the world the great truth that Governments do better without Kings & Nobles than with them. The merit will be doubled by the other lesson that Religion Flourishes in greater purity, without than with the aid of Government.” **James Madison** to Edward Livingston, 10 July 1822; <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/04-02-02-0471>

U. James Madison

“Strongly guarded...is the separation between religion and government in the Constitution of the United States.”

“[T]he 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.” – **James Madison**, in an undated essay (probably early 1800s) and an 1819 letter.

“In the Papal System, Government and Religion are in a manner consolidated, & that is found to be the worst of Govts.” **James Madison**, Document 68, James Madison to Rev. Adams 1832, Writings 9:484--87

V. Thomas Jefferson

Speaking of the Papacy, he said it is “... the real Antichrist.” Thomas Jefferson, *The Faith of Our Fathers*, 12

W. 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.”

“It may not be easy, in every possible case, to trace the line of separation between the rights of religion and the Civil authority with such distinctness as to avoid collisions and doubts on unessential points. The tendency to usurpation on one side or the other, or to a corrupting coalition or alliance between them, will be best guarded agst. by an entire abstinence of the Gov't from interference in any way whatsoever, beyond the necessity of preserving public order, and protecting each sect agst. trespasses on its legal rights by others.” **James Madison** to Jasper Adams, September 1833,” Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/99-02-02-2830>.

X. James R. Willson

“Never in any form, since the United States became an independent nation, has it acknowledged the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, nor professed subjection to his law.”

‘The United States are in the dominion of the King of kings, and they ought to have honored Him ... [instead] “Atheists, Deists, Jews, Pagans, and profane men, of the most abandoned manners, are as eligible to office by the United States constitution, as men fearing God and hating covetousness.”

‘There is no recognition of the law of God in the instrument [U.S. Constitution] which gives the nation its national organization. ... how very careful the framers were to avoid every word that might be construed into a declaration of respect to the statutes of Jehovah. ... It is certainly true, since Messiah is the Prince of the kings of the earth, that the national constitution is sinful in refusing this allegiance” [“to either Messiah the King, or the Christian religion”].

‘Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.’ Amendments, Art. I. ... Whatever has any respect of religion, or tends to give it stability, is prohibited by this article. ... which formally proclaims that it will not do any thing to promote the glory of his [God’s] name. ... there never existed, previous to this constitution, any national deed like this, since the creation of the world. A nation having no God!” – New York Reformed Presbyterian minister **James R. Willson**, in “Prince Messiah’s Claims to Dominion Over All Governments and the Disregard of his Authority by the United States, in the Federal Constitution,” 1848.

V. Prophecy & the Wall of Separation

A. And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had **two horns like a lamb**, and he spake as a dragon. **Revelation 13:11**

1. The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. **John 1:29**
2. And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation. ... (10) The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give **strength** unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed. **1 Samuel 2:1,10**
3. Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. And the **ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings** that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. **Daniel 7:23,24**
4. And the rough goat *is* the king of Grecia: and the **great horn that is between his eyes is the first king**. **Daniel 8:21**
5. 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 22:21**
 - a. Republicanism
 - b. Protestantism

B. Unification of Church and State Prophesied - Compulsory Worship Globally

1. And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him? **Revelation 13:3,4**
2. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. **Revelation 13:8**
3. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.. **Revelation 13:12**
4. And he had power to give life unto 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**
5. And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, **Revelation 14:9**
6. And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. **Revelation 14:11**

C. Unification of Church and State Prophesied - Spiritual Jezebel (Revelation 2:20)

1. And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. **Revelation 17:1,2**
2. For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. **2Corinthians 11:2**
(woman = church)
3. Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. **Daniel 7:23** (beast = kingdom or state power)
4. Antichrist is the great church /state power sitting on the seven hills of Rome.



From: Carol Palmer <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:00:11 -0400

Importance: Normal

I am a woman of faith, a seventh day Sabbath keeper. I am very concerned about the proposal to bridge the gap between church and state. A long time ago, many of us came to this country to have religious freedom and escape religious persecution from the Catholic Church. Our forefathers, to protect our religious freedom, formed the Constitution that had its origin from separation of church and state. This protects our freedom. History has taught us that when you have a bridge between church and state, religion always ends up running the state and tyranny follows. We do not want to fall back into the Dark Ages, so may the record reflect that we keep separation of church and state for the sovereignty of our country.

Respectfully,
Carol
Brooksville, Florida



Virus-free. www.avast.com

From: Mark Jagistch <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:00:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern:

Please maintain the separation between church and state. Persecution follows the mixing of civil authority with religion, and religious majorities.

Thank you,
Mark Jagitsch

From: Jacquie Gurley <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Opposing the Merger of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:00:22 -0400

Importance: Normal

Please don't let this merger happen

"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. 3 John 2

From: Pam Hughes <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:00:47 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Separation of church and state protects freedom. When religion and government are mixed, it lets the state impose one faith on everyone, leading to discrimination and tyranny.

Religion is very personal. Government must stay neutral to protect everyone's right to believe without interference. History proves religious states oppress.

I have friends who lived under this type of oppression in their country. They came to the USA to practice freedom of religion.

It was exactly why the USA was founded originally! The first people came because church and state in their own countries was NOT separate.

Please keep church and state completely separate.

--

Blessings,

Pam Hughes

[REDACTED] PII

From: Dea Perrino [REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:00:48 -0400

Importance: Normal

I'm a natural-born citizen of this country and appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts and convictions on the matters that the religious Liberty Commission has been discussing.

July 4, 1776, marked the birth of a new nation, It certainly wasn't the first nation to arise and wouldn't be the last. A nation which would become the greatest on earth; the United States of America. What made this nation distinct, and so great? What is their powerful military, their great wealth, or the respect given them by other nations? When we look beyond the surface, we see the distinction lies not so much with the

As we look at the other nations we see that the distinction lies not at the surface, but at the foundational principals which this nation was founded upon.

The understanding of the roles of church and state is of the utmost importance for the citizens of our nation to understand. It is through the uniting of church and state that some of the greatest evils have been wrought. It was the uniting of church that caused Puritan's, Quakers, and others to flee to America in 1620 because of the persecution inflicted upon them by the United religious and governmental powers.

The pages of History are stained with blood from the persecution caused by the church using its power over the government to mandate moral laws that only God has the right to dictate obedience.

If the government overrides the god-given consciences of the citizens of this country, this nation will surely fall and crumble just as those in the past.

Sincerely Dea,

From: Betty <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII, [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation Of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:00:54 -0400

Importance: Normal

It has been my privilege to be born and raised in the most wonderful and beautiful country in the world- these United States of America. The reason this is so is due the fact of the religious liberty as afforded to we citizens in that masterpiece known as the U.S. Constitution. Although it doesn't say verbatim the SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE, that is why we can worship with freedo without the government coercion. I fear that to repeal that amendment we're putting in danger that great freedom .Please do reconsider. Most Sincerely, in Love and Peace with my America, Betty Benitez.

From: Nioca Osbourne <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to RLC Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:01:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Commission_on_Religious_Liberty_Report.Response.07.13.2026.docx

Hello, please find attached my response to the Religious Liberty Commission Report of June 26, 2026.

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

PUBLIC COMMENT ["The United States Constitution does not provide for separation of church and State.]

The First Amendment Establishment clause of the United States Constitution states:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion."

"The Free Exercise Clause" guarantees individuals the absolute right to hold any religious belief, or not to belief at all, if they so wish, and allows the people to act on these beliefs according to their own consciences without fear of government intervention and suppression.

Although there is no use of the words, "separation of church and state" in the United States constitution, the intent is there in embodied in the "Free exercise clause." This is in no means negating the responsibility of the government to enforce the law where religious practice infringes on the rights of others and the civil laws and order of the land.

From a Christian, Bible-believing point of view. I rest on God's word and a person basic right of "liberty of conscience"

- God created human beings and proclaimed to them immediately the freedom to choose. He gave our fore parents, Adam and Eve Choice, Genesis 2:16,17. This right was never taken away from the human race.
- God has always given to do good, (be faithful and obedient to His will) or to disobey (choose to rebel and sin).

- God in His word has given us the option, in His word, to choose to continue in sin or to stop sin- Proverbs 29:13; Isaiah 55:7; Romans 6:18-22. “Chose today whom you will serve.”
- Jesus Christ, The King of glory, the Son of God, came to this earth to be sacrificed for sinful mankind and He too was given choice whether to go to the cross or not. Matthew 26:39-44
- Religion and religious practices must never be legislated or forced. The best and most prosperous countries are those who allow religious liberty.
- History bears evidence that when nations enforce religious laws, it is always when church and state unite. Examples of such are scattered across history; the Biblical Jewish nation united with the Romans against Jesus Christ and His followers, resulting in persecution and death of the apostles and many Christians from the period 64 A.D. to 313 A.D; The Apostolic church united with the Roman Emperor Constantine to stop persecution and ended up doing what they intended to stop! Today, many religious states across the world persecute Christians and other minority religious groups solely for their religious beliefs.
- Can The United States of America join that group after many fruitful years of prosperity and defense of human and religious rights?
- There are many moral wrongs in this society today, but I believe that there are more Biblical and Christ-like methods of dealing with our moral wrongs.
- In the separation of church and state, Jesus Christ said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” He came to establish a heavenly kingdom not an earthly kingdom. He also said to His followers, “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.”- Matthew 22:21

PUBLIC COMMENT [Repeal the Johnson Amendment]

- The Johnson Amendment is a judicial wall to maintain the separation of church and state.

- No public funding should be used to support religious entities, schools, churches, religious sponsored clubs such as the Satanists clubs on school campuses. Jesus warned His people to depend on their heavenly Father to supply all their needs according to His riches in glory.

Sincerely,

Nioca Osbourne

Baltimore, MD

From: David Miller <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:01:15 -0400

Importance: Normal

On Mon, Jul 13, 2026 at 3:51 PM David Miller <[REDACTED] PII > wrote:

Dear Commission:

Appreciate so much all the efforts you folks have put in to trying to preserve the blessings America has been privileged to have for 2 1/2 centuries of civil and religious liberty. The many folks globally who desire to come to these shores must know there is something special here.

As a physician entering retirement I'm pleased the commission has addressed some of the difficulties of Conscience that patients and providers faced by being censored and losing board certification etc because of speaking the truth. Freedom of speech is so essential.

When my ancestors came to America, some had been imprisoned as Anabaptists for baptizing by immersion in Switzerland. The reformed church had declared even under penalty of death they should line up with the church powers in charge.

This is the biggest threat I see if we open a bridge so the most politically influential religions can shut down minority religions and views.

Seems the church does best if government influence stays out of it and the government does better if no religion tells it what to do or not to do. Sad stories in France and Europe where Protestants were destroyed in situations like the St Bartholomew massacre and other minority religions were well nigh exterminated when the civil authorities had been totally controlled by the ruling religious powers.

May God guide and lead you each as you seek to keep our civil and religious liberties open for all to be benefited by.

Sincerely,

David K Miller

Tulsa, Oklahoma

From: Paul Fairbanks <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:01:33 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Religious_Liberty_Commission_Letter.docx

To: Religious Liberty Commission

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – [Curtis S. Hinrichs]

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As an American citizen I am troubled deeply to hear that the commission wants to bridge the wall of separation between church and state. I am expressing my personal convictions on this matter in this letter.

As a dedicated Christian for the last fifty years, I have enjoyed religious freedom during that time. I have been able to freely share my faith during that time without infringing upon the rights of others and accepting their rights to religious freedoms as well. During that time I have personally listened to other people's religious views and enjoyed honest dialogue with people as we listened to each other and shared our personal religious faith in this great country that has existed for the last 250 years, in which our religious freedom has been granted abundantly by the separation of church and state.

This separation has allowed people of all religious faiths, and even those who do not espouse any faith at all, to co-exist in this great country, the United States of America. I am firmly convicted that every person has the right of freedom of choice that God has created all mankind with based on His amazing love. Coercion of our God-given freedom should not be legislated through the tearing down of this wall of separation that exists between church and state.

History has shown us that when church is united with the state, persecution of individuals' rights are the result. When the pilgrims were persecuted in Europe they fled to America to enjoy religious freedom. All people of faith, regardless of their religious beliefs, should have the right to live and believe according to the dictates of their conscience without governments or religious institutions seeking to interfere with a person's personal convictions and religious beliefs. The heart, will and convictions of an individual should not be dictated to or legislated by laws that go contrary to the freedom of conscience given to us by God as both our Creator and Redeemer.

This country has been made great by our first amendment of religious freedom and freedom of speech. And any attempt to try to regulate or diminish the status of this country that has known religious freedom through separation of church and state for the last 250 years is to undermine the very fabric that has made this nation great.

Religious freedom of all religious faiths, especially minority faiths that seek to live peaceably with others and not force their beliefs on others, but to respectably and simply share their beliefs as a testimony to others is a tenet of the first amendment, in which we have both religious freedom and freedom of speech.

Any attempt to dissolve this divide between separation of church and state only foments division and instills religious intolerance and persecution as has been done when church and state have been united, such as existed in Europe for many centuries. It also robs individuals the free expression of their God-given beliefs and convictions.

I personally have suffered prejudice because of my religious convictions, yet I maintain the rights of all individuals to be able to express their rights as long as they do not try to force anyone else to believe as

they do. I would not try to impose my convictions on others, but simply share them with others, since all people have the right to believe as they wish. And any legislation that attempts to control or limit anyone's personal rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is against the intention and purpose for which this great nation was founded by our forefathers on July 4th, 1776.

I have personally and financially supported religious liberty to all people regardless of their religious beliefs. When a person's beliefs regarding a specific doctrine, such as which day to worship on, whether it is Friday by the Muslims, Saturday by Jews, Adventists or Seventh-day Baptists, or Sunday by many churches, such as Catholics and most Protestant churches, is limited or denied, it throws in the face of religious freedoms of people whether they are in the majority or minority. Separation of church and state provides protections of 100% of Americans regardless of their religious faith and convictions.

To tear down this wall of separation between church and state is to build up walls of prejudice that leads to persecution of people because they do not stand with the majority of others. When we become intolerant of anyone's personal convictions we show that we are attempting to do what God Himself does not do, for He does not seek to violate a person's freedom of choice.

We should never be forced in any manner to compromise or limit our personal convictions and religious beliefs. To do so through tearing down the wall that guarantees the rights of all Americans, is to deny the rights established by our great forefathers. They were willing to risk all to give us these inalienable rights. We all have to answer to God and no person or country should seek to undermine that by trying to erode our rights to God and the personal convictions we have toward Him.

Therefore, I cannot condone or accept the results of the commission's report that would seek to erode or break down the separation of church and state in this great nation. Why attempt to "fix" something that has worked for the last 250 years? Would you want anyone to suppress or limit your religious freedoms in this great nation in the name of religious freedom?

In Christ's service,

Curtis S. Hinrichs

Rogersville, TN

From: Wayne Kablanow <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:01:49 -0400

Importance: Normal

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:

I want to register my objection to the erosion of the concept of the separation of church and state which your report presents. It is true that the exact wording of "separation of church and state" is not in the Constitution of the USA. However, the concept is deeply rooted in the Constitution and history of the development of our country.

I want to remind you that if we refuse to learn the lessons from history, we are bound to repeat their mistakes. For 1260 years Europe had a church that dominated the state, and the result was horrible persecution of those whose conscience objected to the state endorsed church. History shows that whenever the church and state unite persecution of the minority is inevitable. Our pilgrim fathers fled the religious persecution of Europe in the 1600s and 1700s to establish a government without a king and a church without a pope. Their quest was for a country that would provide freedom to worship God according to their conscience. However, they slipped back into the European pattern and set up their own church/state union and again persecution of the minority developed here in this country. It wasn't until Roger Williams established the separation of church and state in Rhode Island that the tide began to turn towards true religious freedom here. The separation of church and state has been the foundation upon which God has blessed this nation. If we turn away from that, we will incur God's displeasure and this country will be destroyed.

I object to funding religious non-profit activities.

I object to funding religious education and religious clubs on public campuses.

I object to repealing the Johnson Amendment, which restricts church's political activities.

I request that the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced.

I object to the special treatment given Jewish people and the state of Israel.

I appeal to you to reject this report!

Sincerely,

Wayne Kablanow

[REDACTED] PII

From: Gina M Alpirez <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:02:01 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom it May Concern:

Please do not abolish the separation of church and state.

If you want to know what happens when the church controls the state, just look at Europe during the Dark Ages. Civil and religious liberty is what has made this nation great. Get rid of that, and we will descend into tyranny. If that is what you want...

Sincerely,
Gina Alpirez

From: Paull Dixon <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty and The Sabbath

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:03:00 -0400

Importance: Normal

I keep the 7th day Sabbath, Saturday, from sundown Friday evening to Saturday evening. I am totally against the state, the government, mandating anyone to keep a particular day.

At the beginning of the creation week, God set an example for us by resting on that day. Genesis 2:3. God wrote the Ten Commandments with his own finger and said, Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Exodus 20:8-11. When Jesus was on this earth He worshipped on the Sabbath day. Luke 4:16

The gospel of John says, For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. 1 John 5:3

When Jesus comes again he will say, Blessed are they that do his commandments. That they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. Revelation 22:14

God doesn't force people to obey him. He invites them to follow his example.

No where in the Bible is there a change of the Bible Sabbath.

Paull Dixon

[REDACTED] PII

[REDACTED] PII

Sent from my iPhone

From: Katrina A <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Katrina Albert

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:03:04 -0400

Importance: Normal

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 submitted during the public comment period to formally object to the structural risks present in the Commission's draft recommendations.

The most compelling issue with this report is the proposal to weaken and dismantle the principle of the separation of church and state. Although the literal phrase does not appear in the First Amendment, the core principle is central to the Establishment Clause. This foundational concept has stood since 1791 without change. It has been highly successful for a period of 235 years, serving as the bedrock of enduring religious freedom. To dismantle it now threatens the exact liberty that defines the nation.

The authors and commissioners behind this report are undoubtedly sincere in their intentions to shield faith communities. Well-meaning individuals frequently design state mechanisms with the genuine goal of protecting believers. However, historical precedent warns that the builders of such infrastructure can easily become blinded to its ultimate trajectory. The long-term institutional consequences must be evaluated past the immediate intent of these proposals.

Please consider the following critical dangers before finalizing the report:

- **A Protection Built by Faith:** This wall was not a secular invention imposed upon religion to weaken it. Rather, it was constructed by people of faith to protect the religious freedom of all people. In 1644, Roger Williams—a devout, persecuted pastor banished into the winter by religious magistrates—conceived a "wall of separation" specifically to keep the heavy hand of civil government out of the church.
- **An Inevitable Power Struggle:** Replacing this protective wall with a conceptual "bridge" to merge church and state will spark an unnecessary power struggle. A bridge carries traffic in both directions. Utilizing state machinery inevitably allows state control, political agendas, and bureaucratic oversight to flow directly back into sacred spaces. True religious liberty requires that the state has no authority to

define, manage, or regulate faith. While there may be no conscious effort to do so at this current moment, that is precisely what this structural framework will lead to.

- **The Compromise of Impartial Justice:** The recommendation to select federal judges based on how they decide religious cases poses a severe threat to the legal system. Redefining foundational constitutional protections requires appointing judges based on ideological willingness to favor a specific religious agenda. This criteria fundamentally undermines the core principle of an impartial judiciary, transforming courts into partisan instruments.
- **The Financial Corruption of Spiritual Mission:** Once a system for the receipt of government funding is mandated, the core motivation of a religious entity becomes corrupted by everything from threats of survival to greed. This changes the organization from an outlet for the benefit of humanity into a vehicle for self-aggrandizement. The church begins to operate like a ruthless business rather than seeking to fulfill its mission of Christ's love towards the world.
- **The Threat of Inherited Machinery:** While the current creators of federal hotlines, online reporting portals, and litigation task forces intend for them to serve as a protective shield, political administrations inevitably change. Future rulers will inherit this exact administrative machinery. They will assume complete control over the surveillance databases, reporting channels, and enforcement powers built today. In the hands of a different administration, what was designed as a shield can easily be converted into a sword for tyranny.

True protection for religious liberty comes from strict institutional independence, not state patronage. Therefore, the Commission is strongly urged to reconsider these points. Please preserve the traditional, protective boundaries of the Establishment Clause to ensure the state remains entirely separate from the governance of the human conscience.

Thank you for the time, leadership, and thoughtful consideration of these critical concerns.

Respectfully submitted,

Katrina Albert

Lindale, TX

From: VINROY HYLTON <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL]

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:03:35 -0400

Importance: Normal

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

Sincerely,
Andrew Hylton
Port St. Lucie, FL

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

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:04:15 -0400

Importance: Normal

Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I opposed a "bridge" or any other way used to weaken or eliminate the Separation of Church and State found in our Constitution.

Let us take a walk down our history of Separation of Church and State. Lets hear it from some of the founders of this great nation who expressed that there is a Separation of Church and State in the Constitution. The government is to remain neutral in these matters. Consider the quotes below:

Benjamin Franklin:

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 its Professors are obliged to call for help of the civil power, 'tis a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one.

They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.

James Madison:

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. And I have no doubt that every new example will succeed, as every past one has done, in showing that religion and Government will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together.

Thomas Jefferson: (NOTE: I have taking the following from Jefferson's Letter to the Danbury Baptists. You can read the full version online)

The Final Letter, as Sent

To messrs. Nehemiah Dodge, Ephraim Robbins, & Stephen S. Nelson, a committee of the Danbury Baptist association in the state of Connecticut.

...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.

And study out for yourselves the bloody history during the Dark Ages in Europe where for 1260 years where church and state were united as one and persecution was rampant.

Let us keep government neutral and both church and government separated as our nation's founders intended having learned from the history of Europe and in some of the American Colonies such as Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Jesus our Lord had something to say about this when He said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Sincerely,

Bruce Frost

Napa, California

From: Cara Jagitsch <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment- Separation of Church and State- Cara

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:04:27 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am concerned that the Commission wants to "remove" the wall of separation between church and state and replace it with a "bridge." As a person of faith, this is very alarming to me. This wall wasn't built by atheists. It was built but by Christians to protect themselves and others from the government getting into their faith. When the government becomes entangled in the the faith and religion of its people, history shows that the results are not good. Money and political favors begin to corrupt things. Eventually freedom to follow one's conscience and worship God according to one's belief is lost. Please keep the wall. It protects freedom of religion much more than it restricts it. Faith is between a person and God , not between a person, God and the government.

Thank you. Sincerely,
Cara Jagitsch
Harrah, OK

From: Erik Kelly <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT, SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE, ERIK KELLY

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:04:58 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

First, I want to thank you for your conscientious efforts for religious liberty.

I am a Christian and I agree that Christians should have full freedom to worship according to the dictates of their own conscience. I also believe and agree that our constitution and the constitutional amendments guarantee that this privilege should and must be granted to men of all faiths, whether they be Christian, Catholic, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, etc.

Indeed, I believe this is what makes the United States of America unique, and is the God-given reason for its establishment and existence. This characteristic of our country reflects the gentle, loving character of our God who never forces His children, but seeks to draw them, to woo them, to win them. Please retain the principle of separation between church and state, that principle that neither forces religion nor restricts it.

"Thy gentleness hath made me great." Psalm 18:35

God bless you and cause His face to shine upon you dear friends.

Sincerely,

Erik Kelly

From: Oscar Daniels <[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 17:05:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Commission,

I wanted to address a couple of the opportunities that the Religious Liberty Commission is championing to strengthen religious liberty. Two of them I do not think are opportunities but snares.

Opportunity #1 aims to advance a new understanding of the Establishment Clause and the separation of church and state.

I believe this is a mistake. The separation of church and state must be maintained. It protects the church from attempting to wield political power, which is not the true source of its power. The Bible says, "Not by might, nor by power, but my Spirit saith the Lord." It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that our nation can be returned back to God—which would be a good thing. But God's work must be done using God's methods.

Opportunity #9 proposes repealing the Johnson Amendment.

Please do not repeal the Johnson Amendment. It ensures that non-profits are not drawn into partisan politics. If an organization wants to engage in partisan politics, they should not be able to do so while accepting the financial benefit of not having to pay taxes.

Thank you so much for your consideration of these thoughts,

Oscar Daniels

From: Tabitha Cantrell <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Constitutional Rights

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:05:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

I believe in the separation of church and state and an individual's right to practice their personal religious beliefs or the lack thereof.

Tabitha

From: Christina Keil <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:05:52 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I respectfully ask the Commission to preserve the clear constitutional boundary between religious institutions and government. That separation has helped protect both the independence of faith communities and the religious freedom of every American, regardless of their beliefs.

Our country was founded in part because migrants from England came here seeking relief from religious establishment and coercion. Many of the people who helped shape this nation understood firsthand what happens when government and religion become too closely tied: dissent is punished, conscience is pressured, and liberty is weakened. History repeats itself when we ignore those lessons.

Proposals to encourage government funding of religious organizations or allow houses of worship to become entangled in partisan politics move us in the wrong direction. Churches should be free to carry out their missions without political pressure or dependence on government support, and public resources should not be used to advance religious activities.

Our country's commitment to religious liberty has endured because government does not favor or finance religion. I urge the Commission to preserve that principle and reject recommendations that weaken the separation of church and state.

Thank you for your consideration.

Thank you,

Christina Keil

[REDACTED] PII

From: Anna Chiarenza <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:05:53 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for giving the American Citizens an opportunity to voice our concerns.

As an American Citizen who appreciates and values being born, living, and raising a family in a Country where many have given their lives to have and maintain freedoms, I only write on one point. And that is that having a President who has integrity and loves truth who is heralding the return of "One Nation Under God," my greatest desire is to make those in power recognize that when we say "God" who are we referring to. If it's the One True God who created Heaven and Earth then we should abide by what He stood for when He walked this earth through the presence of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Please read the following account from Mark 12:13-17

Taxes for Caesar

¹³ Later the leaders sent some Pharisees and supporters of Herod to trap Jesus into saying something for which he could be arrested. ¹⁴ "Teacher," they said, "we know how honest you are. You are impartial and don't play favorites. You teach the way of God truthfully. Now tell us—is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? ¹⁵ Should we pay them, or shouldn't we?"

Jesus saw through their hypocrisy and said, "Why are you trying to trap me? Show me a Roman coin, and I'll tell you." ¹⁶ When they handed it to him, he asked, "Whose picture and title are stamped on it?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

¹⁷ "Well, then," Jesus said, "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God."

His reply completely amazed them.

Where did Jesus Christ Himself stand on this issue?

Respectfully,

Anna Chiarenza

From: Fay Brown <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:06:16 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commttee,

Please cling tenaciously to true religious freedom. History has shown the detriment of the of loss of religious freedom and the unfavorable results.

Therefore, I urge the committee to secure true religious freedom by maintaining the Johnson Act which is the true secret for America's greatness. Please, please consider maintaining our true religious freedom.

Respectfully yours,
Fay Brown

From: "K & A" <[REDACTED] PII >

To: [REDACTED] PII

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:06:57 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: July_13,_2026.pdf

July 13, 2026

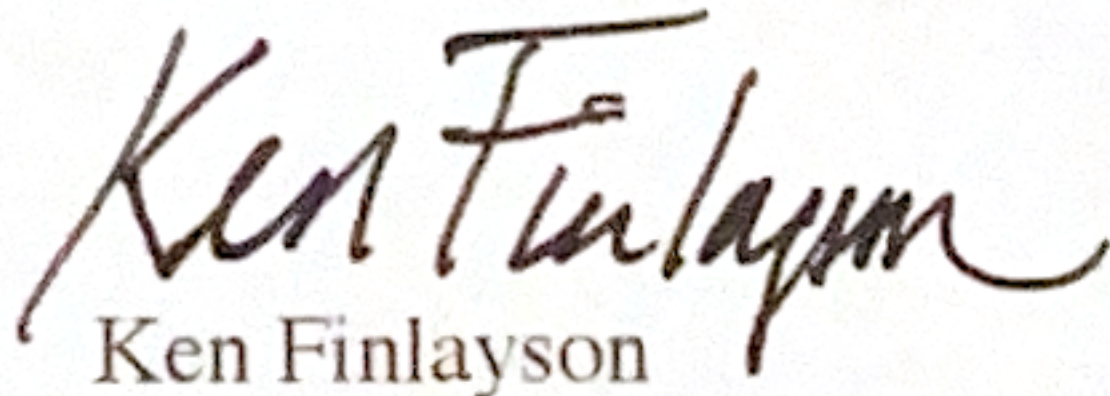
Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

True freedom of conscience relies entirely on the firm boundary between church and state. When government and religion become entangled, the state inevitably begins favoring specific beliefs, which inherently breeds discrimination and erodes individual liberty.

Faith is a deeply personal journey. To ensure that every citizen can live and worship—or not worship—according to their own conscience, the government must remain strictly neutral. History has shown us time and again that when a state adopts a religious mandate, oppression follows. In fact, preventing this very dynamic was a primary catalyst for the founding of the United States. The earliest settlers risked everything to come here precisely because they were fleeing the tyranny of state-enforced religion in their homelands.

For the sake of true liberty for all, I urge you to uphold the absolute separation of church and state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Ken Finlayson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ken" being more prominent and the last name "Finlayson" written in a continuous script.

Ken Finlayson

Cocolalla, ID

From: peggy kennimer <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Merging of church and state

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:06:58 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to give my reasons for protesting the uniting of church and state.

I will begin by stating that the word "Trinity" does not exist in the Bible but no one can dispute that the concept is there; one God in three persons. It's the same with the constitution and the relationship between church and state.

From Esther's time (Esther 3) when all were ordered by the state to worship a man, Haman, and what followed was a death decree for disobedience...to Daniel's time (Daniel 3) with state ordered idol worship or the fiery furnace... And yet later the king (state) ordering all to only worship, or pray, to him (Daniel 6) or be thrown to the lions, persecution and death decrees always followed.

During the dark ages when the Roman Papacy, with the aid of the state, declared people could only worship according to their dictates millions were put to death for not violating their consciences.

Persecution always follows the uniting of church and state, always.

In Revelation 13 we are told 5 times the eventual decree enforcing (vs 16) the mark of the beast is over worship. Those 5 times are in verses 4, 8, 12 and 15. The enforcement is accomplished through the state uniting with the church. The government wields the power to back up the church.

I appreciate the ability to explain my position. I pray for wisdom for all involved.

Sincerely,

Peggy Kennimer

From: Cori Stewart <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Support for Religious Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:07:10 -0400

Importance: Normal

Florence J. Smith

[REDACTED] PII

[REDACTED] PII

7/13/26

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty

Subject: Support for Religious freedom

Dear member of the commission

I write to emphasize the importance of protecting religious liberty for all, ensuring freedom of belief and freedom from compulsion.

I urge the commission to uphold constitutional protection, promote mutual respect among diverse faiths, and ensure fair treatment in all public spheres. Thank you for your commitment to this vital work.

Sincerely,

Florence J. Smith

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

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church & State - Plaza, Michelle

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:07:24 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Sir or Madam,

I respectfully request that you carefully consider the importance of maintaining the separation of church and state. History has shown that when government and religion become closely intertwined, religious minorities have often faced discrimination or persecution. Although the exact phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear in the Constitution, many understand the principle to be reflected in the First Amendment's protections for religious liberty. For over 250 years, the United States has protected the freedom to worship according to one's own beliefs. I am concerned by proposals or statements that suggest reducing the distinction between church and state. While these ideas may seem harmless to some, I fear they could weaken protections of religious freedom and place people with minority faiths or different days of worship at greater risk of discrimination. I respectfully ask that you preserve the constitutional principles that protect every American's right to practice their faith freely.

Yours in Christ.

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

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subjects, I agree

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:07:53 -0400

Importance: Normal

and want to be included in your program

Sent from my iPhone

From: Dennis Kamberg <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:08:32 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a citizen of this great country, I am saddened to see the proposals to replace or eliminate the separation of church and state. This historic principle enshrined in the first amendment by the founding fathers protects citizens from state coercion in matters of religion, faith and personal beliefs.

I have benefited from the freedom to worship God without force or government involvement in the church.

The inclination to worship God and practice personal beliefs for each individual should originate in the power of the Gospel and a free conscience, not state mandates. Worship, acting on personal beliefs and church functions are private matters historically protected by the Constitution.

This quote is one of many that have influenced our nations laws for over 200 years:

"I consider the government of the United States as interdicted by the Constitution from intermeddling with religious institutions, their doctrines, discipline, or exercises." From Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Miller, 1808

Please maintain the separation of church and state. People of faith built the Constitution to protect faith.

Respectfully,

Dennis Kamberg
Mesa, Arizona

From: Brenda Mejeur <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:08:51 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I do not agree with the recommendations and conclusion of this report. Church and state must remain separate, history has proven over and over that this does not work for either institution long term good.

I request that this is a flawed ill conceived report: and that it be withdrawn, reworked, or abandoned for the tradition of United States citizens' free choice and religious liberty.

Respectfully,

Brenda Mejeur

Cadillac, Michigan

From: "Ben & Michelle Bishop" <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Michelle Bishop

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:09:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen who believes God gave every person the freedom to choose how to worship, or not, and that our Constitution was framed to protect that same freedom of choice. If God himself allows humans to choose, I do not see how any government can rightly claim more authority over conscience than God exercises. That conviction shapes everything else I want to say.

My first concern is that any law touching religion, even one meant to help a faith I share, ultimately destroys the free exercise it claims to protect. A law favoring one belief must define what it favors, and that definition always includes some believers while excluding others. Even those included no longer practice their faith freely; they practice it by the government's permission, which can be revised whenever the political majority changes. A man who locks his current beliefs into law has also legislated against his own future conscience, foreclosing his freedom to change his mind if he later becomes convinced of something else. I would rather my faith remain unendorsed by the state than have it become dependent on the state's continued goodwill.

I also want to note that keeping government out of religion was not an oversight by the founders but a deliberate design, urged especially by churches that had suffered under establishment. Madison told the Virginia ratifying convention plainly 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 Memorial and Remonstrance explains that the founders did not wait for a full establishment to object; they resisted the principle at its very first appearance. Any commission that looks to the founding era for support of government-sponsored religion must reckon with Madison's own words, not a later reinterpretation of them.

Beyond history, there is a deeper reason majority opinion cannot settle religious questions: rights that depend on a vote are not rights at all, only permissions. Popular government exists to protect the minority, since the majority can already protect itself at the ballot box. As one of your predecessors, Senator Blair, was told, the people, however numerous, have no right to invade another person's relationship to God. Congress itself once affirmed that the conscience of a single dissenter deserves as much protection as that of an entire community. Popularity may justify a highway bill; it cannot justify a religious one.

Finally, I believe government never received authority over religion in the first place, because no person can delegate to anyone else his relationship with God. Our government's powers come from the consent of the governed, but no one can consent on behalf of another's soul. Since that power was never given, it was never received. Whoever assumes jurisdiction over another's belief claims an authority that God himself declines to exercise over any of us.

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

Respectfully,
Michelle Bishop
College Place, Washington

From: Maira Ivet Feliciano Rosado <[REDACTED] PII >

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

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

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:09:53 -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

Lucy Ávila [REDACTED] PII

Maira I. Feliciano Rosado [REDACTED] PII

From: James Ash <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Principles of Religious Freedom

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:09:59 -0400

Importance: Normal

To: The Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) Committee,

The principle of religious liberty was firmly established in America. In the Puritan-American winter of 1635-36, Roger Williams felt its keen severity and he did not perish. Making friends with the Indians, Massasoit, the Indian chief, took him to his cabin as he would a brother. Here, on soil unpolluted by oppression, he built an altar and called the name of the place Providence; for, he said "God has been merciful to me in my distress." Here he established a settlement, and founded a colony, the colony of Rhode Island, one of the leading and essential features of the government of which, he provided, should be perfect freedom in matters of religion.

Roger Williams is justly due the honor of establishing the first civil government in modern times providing fully and effectually for the free, full, and absolute liberty of conscience. This was the germ of religious liberty in America.

The recognition of the rightfulness of this principle grew, until, when the time came to establish the national government, it was quite generally conceded by the fathers and founders of the new nation as underlying the foundation principles of civil government.

Hence, the Constitution of the United States declares: "Congress shall make no law "respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

George Washington, our first president of the United States, said: "Every man who conducts himself as a good citizen, is accountable alone to God for his religious faith, and should be protected in worshiping God according to the dictates of his own conscience."

Succeeding presidents have spoken likewise;

Thomas Jefferson: "Almighty God hath created the mind free; 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 coercion on either, as was in His almighty power to do.

James Madison: "Religion is not in the purview of human government. Religion is essentially distinct from government and exempt from its cognizance. A connection between them is injurious to both."

U. S. Grant: "Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the church, and the private school, supported entirely by private contribution. Keep the state and the church forever separate."

Do these principles apply today? Do the principles which were so clearly set forth and so nobly maintained by Roger Williams nearly four centuries ago, apply to the efforts now being made to unite church and state in this country, and enforce religious observance, particularly Sunday observance, by law? And if such efforts succeed, and religion is again established here by law, will not religious oppression follow now as then?

Forgetting the noble and Christian principles of religious liberty so ably defended and wrought out at so great a cost by the worthy champions of soul liberty of the past, many today are teaching; as did the persecutors of old, that religious institutions enforced by law are essential to the stability of civil government, and that religion itself

will die out unless protected by law. Thus, the emperor Diocletian thought, and as a result that bitter persecution of ten years, 303-313 A. D., the bitterest of all persecutions under heathen emperors, followed.

The RLC will have a great influence for all men, women and children of this free nation. Please prayerfully consider these Christ-like (Christian) principles of America's founding.

Respectfully,

Jason Ash

From: Shannon Martling <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public coment

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:10:05 -0400

Importance: Normal

I do not believe that any "bridge" should be built between any religious body and any state entity.

The proposed amendments would start the nation on a path to unequal treatment of some religious bodies over others.

Any form of union of church and state will by necessity of what it is engender public prosecution of those religious bodies that are not supported by the government.

The founding fathers came from a climate of religious persecution and founded this nation as one of religious freedom.

A nessary byproduct of elevation of one faith must be to reduce those faiths that are not of the faiths licensed by the government.

The united states is the last bastion of religious freedom in the world it would be detrimental to force one orthodoxy over all others

Mr. Shannon Martling

From: maureen anderson <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:10:20 -0400

Importance: Normal

I agree

Maureen Anderson

Huntsville, Alabama

from my iPhone

From: seth grayckowski <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State-Seth Grayckowski

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:10:36 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

It has grieved me to hear that you are stating that there is not a separation of church and state. This is not true per the founding fathers who my children are related on their mother's side to John Adamse of the architects of the Massachusetts Constitution and The Constitution of the United States of America. John Adams put in the second paragraph the anyone should:

"for his religious profession or sentiments, provided he doth not disturb the public peace or obstruct others in their religious worship" Article 2 of the 1780 Massachusetts Constitution.

Due to this I feel that it is for all people to benefit from be it; Muslim, Buddahist or Christians. The reason for this to be in there is so that no one can tell people how to worship or who to worship. This also helps with keeping people safe from persecution be they any religion. I feel that as a SDA Christian that is it my right to support the separation of church and state not only for the religious freedoms that I fought for when I took my oath to serve this country but for the ability to not have one organization have a say in politics and tell others that who they worship is wrong.

I would like to endorse the separation of Church and State remain as it states in the Constitution under Amendment 1(1791)

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;

This to me includes executive orders of the President of the USA or any members of congress or the state officials. This is what gives us the freedom to make our choices and what has set the United States of America apart from the rest of the world. We should be proud our founding fathers were wise enough to see what was going on and to make these Amendments to make sure that the USA could endure for 250 years and longer.

Thank you for your time God Bless the USA

Regards,

Seth Grayckowski
Hartsel, Colorado

From: Joseph <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:11:51 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to submit some comments concerning the Religious Liberty Commission Report, namely the suggestion to repeal the Johnson Amendment. I strongly oppose the possible repeal of this amendment.

I believe Christian organizations should avoid partisan political strife and refrain from publicly endorsing political candidates. Voting is a personal and private choice, and church organizations, especially those who have acquired a tax-exempt status, should not be expressing political preferences or using their platforms to influence political decisions.

Furthermore, religious organizations should not financially contribute to political candidates, as this confuses the boundary between church and politics.

I've known of a multitude of churches preaching endorsements from their pulpits for a particular political party or candidate and yet have NEVER heard of any of them being called to task over it, and certainly not losing their tax-exempt status. But while I have never heard of the Johnson Amendment actually being enforced, I hope that someday it WILL be.

Thank you for considering my feedback on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Watts

From: Tony Gonzales <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to Report of Religious Liberty Commission

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:11:51 -0400

Importance: Normal

Public Comment - Response to the Religious Liberty Commission Report,

I agree with the objections to the recommendations of the RLC provided in the letter sent by the pillaroffreedom.org.

I would also like to add these observations:

In the letter from Thomas Jefferson on the subject of the separation of Church and State, sent to the Danbury Baptist Association on January 1, 1802, and published in a newspaper in Massachusetts, Jefferson states that:

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies between Man and his God...I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole which declared that American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...'"

It is of very significant note that Jefferson, in saying: "I agree with you..." is stating that the members of the Danbury Baptist Association had communicated to him their strong belief that there should be a wall between the Church and the state.

(Jefferson, Thomas. [Jefferson's Letter to the Danbury Baptists: The Final Letter, as Sent](#). The Library of Congress Information Bulletin: June 1998. Lib. of Cong., June 1998. Web. Aug 7, 2010)

As an ardent student of church history, I have noted that J.H. Merle D'Aubingé in book 1 of his "History of the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century" took great pains to note the slow growth of power of the Medieval Church as it accepted the power of the state which led to the persecution during the Dark Ages.

Indeed, church history shows that when a religion or church is aided by a government, or state power, it always leads to persecution. As is well documented in history, many British pilgrims came to the "New World" to escape State-sponsored persecution.

Indeed, our own history in this and recent centuries shows us that "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

History shows us that even when men with the best religious intentions in governing, can become oppressive when they or their descendants receive power from the State.

For these reasons I urgently request that the wall between Church and State that has been encoded in the laws of the United States for 250 years, not be overturned.

Respectfully, [REDACTED] PII

From: David Camacho <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Separation of Church and State - Frances Bregaudit

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:11:55 -0400

Importance: Normal

Hi. My husband & I believe that God, having created the whole universe, knows how to fix it (Genesis 1&2). No one will go to a TMobile shop to have his, her Apple phone repaired. Same principle is applied with God.

God is not asleep, and has gotten old, he is just a persevering, patient God that all may be saved.

I personally ask that your recommendations in the subject of the separation of Church and State be reviewed - to consider the ill effects that they may bring.

My husband and I use the Word of God, the Bible, as the basis of our daily living. The Bible is full of wisdom, advices and real life stories from over 6,000 years ago, life consequences of those (who lived in different eras) who obeyed and disobeyed God's Word. It teaches us whose footsteps we should follow.

God does not force, does not mandate - but he gives ample warnings. He created man as the masterpiece and (man) the only reason for all his creation. He gave man the FREE WILL to obey, or disobey his word. This separates man from the animal kingdom: God gave us the free will to choose: good or evil. Is it easy to choose good? No. It requires faith that does not see the results in the beginning but surely is rewarding, giving peace beyond understanding.

Again, kindly spend more time thinking about joining church and state together. If finite men manages the world through "rushed" bills and amendments, men can only go to the church for safety and security. Our life existence does not end in this earth. It ends in the hands of God.

Sincerely,
Frances Camacho

[REDACTED] PII

[REDACTED] PII

From: David Henderson <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:12:06 -0400

Importance: Normal

Pease do not make the foolish mistake of merging church and state. Not only is it an unconstitutional hindrance upon those whose religious beliefs may differ, but that church/state conglomerate will become a persecuting institution that will abuse its power to control and force the consciences of many, where faith is a personal matter.

David Henderson

From: DawnadS <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Commission Reply

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:14:55 -0400

Importance: Normal

July 13, 2026

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty U.S. Department of Justice

950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Room 5706. Washington, DC 20530

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

I believe it is very clear during the last 250 years, that our government has been blessed by God; He has blessed us with freedom for allowing persons to honor their own conscience. Just like he gave Lucifer, Adam, Eve, Cain and all of humanity free choice He expects the same from us and our government today. It is his way and he has honored it from the settling of Rhode Island to today's laws providing for separation of church and state, they have been part of our basic governmental structure.

I, an American, am writing this because I lived in a Muslim country for six years. I saw the net result of the government controlling religion and the misery it causes the people. Combining them stirs up discontent, grows suspicion, feeds contempt, and results in a controlling leadership and angry population. It has no redeeming value for Islam and will have none for Christianity. History already records a time when the catholic church ruled in the dark ages by combining church and state. People were to have no freedom of thought or behavior; they were subject to their leaders and had no say in their own lives. That is not the American way that has made this country great.

Please keep this in mind if you are remodeling laws. We live in a sin filled world; there is an unlimited number of power-hungry people who want control and status. Combining the state and religion feeds such a system, it is not God's way and may result in control of behavior but will never control conscience, which is a gift of God.

Thank you for listening, Dawna Sawatzky MPH, RN

From: [REDACTED] PII [REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Consider A Concerned Christian's Perspective to RL Report

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:15:28 -0400

Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commissioners,

It is a praiseworthy effort that you undertake to examine the importance of religious liberty and to recommend to the president those steps that are intended to ensure that America interprets and executes the First Amendment of its Constitution in propriety.

In doing so, it should be with much prayer and wisdom, which ought not to be without the consideration of those who may not agree entirely with your recommendations or characterizations. It is prudent to also consider the possibility that your work on this commission will outlive you and me, and that your intentions may not always be what is interpreted and executed after you have finalized your report and made these recommendations.

Advocating for a channel through which citizens may report religious liberty violations, especially following a widely publicized and improper interpretation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment could be cause for concern, in the least.

The widely broadcasted sound bites of the commission's president's and its vice president's perspective that the "separation of church and state is not in the Constitution" makes many of my faith concerned that the religious persecution that has always been expected when these kinds of sentiments are promulgated, is definitely on the horizon, especially for minority religious groups. Seventh-Day Adventists, for example, have proclaimed, taught and have had a particularly unique and encompassing understanding on the topic of religious liberty that is worth hearing and contemplating. I implore you to particularly consider this perspective prior to proceeding with recommendations such as numbers 1, 4 and 9 of your list of "12 Recommendations to Strengthen Religious Liberty for All Americans", starting on page 22 of your recent report.

Government support for religious organizations will also change the dynamics of how we exercise our right to embrace a religion and the freedom of expression involved in voicing our religious and other beliefs. The intention for good, and effort to promote a society where individuals are not marginalized because of their faith, needs to be carefully designed in order not to fabricate a climate where those who happen to fall in the minority category with their sincerely held beliefs are in fact marginalized in the process. I urge you to be reasonable and more mindful of the monster that is possible to be easily raised up out of this, your attempt to improve the American culture and way of life.

Sincerely,
A Concerned Christian

From: Becky Steve <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment- separation of church and state-Rebecca Steve

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:15:53 -0400

Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone

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

Sincerely, Rebecca Steve

From: Lori F <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Lori Fullard

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:18:48 -0400

Importance: High

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. We have seen this in history past, especially during the Dark Ages when many Christians were "forced" to choose either their "Faith (church) or face severe persecution by the state/country (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,

Lori Fullard
Celina, TN

From: A J <[REDACTED] PII >

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Protect Religious Liberty

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:18:49 -0400

Importance: Normal

Good afternoon,

I am writing to you to let you know how concerned I am that there is even a mention of tearing down the partition that was erected to separate church and state.

History has taught the observant student what happens when church and state are linked in unholy matrimony: persecution is the offspring.

We don't need that in America. America and Americans deserve better. God has blessed this country with religious liberty so people from all walks of life can choose to serve Him, or not. He loves us so much that He gave us freewill, to choose for ourselves and who are we to presume to take that away from our fellowmen and women? That presumption flies in the face of a Holy God and He is not mocked.

I ask you to carefully consider if this is truly the path you want to set America's feet upon. Our forefathers wanted a nation free from all religious constrictions so no one religion would have the supremacy. Our noblest men and women have willingly shed their blood to preserve those sacred rights, and we, who stand in their shadow, cannot and should not dishonor their memory by doing away with those freedoms.

Thank you,
Dee Jackson

Sent from my T-Mobile 5G Device
Get [Outlook for Android](#)

From: Lance Walker <[REDACTED] PII [REDACTED]>

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

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT re Chapter 12 and Appendix A – Lance Walker

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:19:14 -0400

Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern:

I am an employee of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and am responsible for federal government relations work. These recommended edits technical in nature and specific to the Church.

In Chapter 12, the second paragraph begins:

“During the year of the Commission’s operations, some of the violence against religious communities included violence and vandalism at a temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Saints in Michigan. . . .”

Please adjust the beginning of the sentence to read:

“During the year of the Commission’s operations, some of the violence against religious communities included violence and vandalism at a meetinghouse of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Michigan. . . .”

By way of explanation, our denomination has meetinghouses and temples, both are places of worship but distinct in their purposes. The attack mentioned in this paragraph took place at a meetinghouse. Also, the reference to the Church is incomplete, missing the second half of the hyphenated term “Latter-day.”

Thank you,

Lance Walker