



White House announces new rules protecting religious freedom and the First Amendment

In conjunction with Religious Freedom Day, January 16, the White House announced three actions to better protect organizations and people of faith.

Equal access to public benefit programs

First, nine federal departments issued proposed rules to ensure religious groups have equal access to public grants: Agriculture, Education, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Labor, Veterans Affairs and Agency for International Development, USAID.

These rules specifically address Obama-era rules that gave religious organizations second-tier status and imposed additional burdens on religious partners. The agencies have worked with the White House to remove discriminatory policies and to ensure faith-based and secular partners are treated the same. For example, regulations issued under President Obama required religious organizations to refer individuals offended by the religious character of an organization to secular organizations and post notices of this policy. The proposed rules remove this requirement.

All restrictions of grant funds will now apply equally to faith-based and secular partners, so that they can equally compete for funds. All organizations are still prohibited from discriminating based on religion, so regardless of how an organization operates, it has to agree that it won't turn away a beneficiary because he or she holds a different faith.

Updated policy on prayer in public school

Second, the Department of Education updated its policy on prayer and religious expression in schools. The Department of Education will be notifying every State that students should be allowed to exercise their rights of free speech and free exercise, and **school officials should not suppress student-led prayer.** As a condition of receiving funds, each school will have to certify to its State Education Department that it doesn't have a policy that prevents constitutional exercise of prayer.

Equal protection in grant competitions

Third, federal agencies must ensure all federal grant-making processes and state grant-making processes comply with the First Amendment.

Currently, 37 states have laws governing award sub-grantees, such as Blaine amendments, that can be used to discriminate against religious institutions. The Office of Management and Budget memo makes clear that sub-awards cannot discriminate against grantees based on faith. Essentially, to be eligible for federal funding, states may not enforce these laws. States don't have to repeal these laws, but they must adopt a policy of non-compliance.

At the press conference announcing these changes, President Donald Trump said, "It is a sacred principle of our Republic that **government must never stand between the people and God.** Yet, in public schools around the country, authorities are stopping students and teachers from praying, sharing their faith, or following their religious beliefs."

"That is why, today, my administration is issuing strong new guidance to protect religious liberty in our public schools. **The right of students and teachers to freely exercise their faith will always be protected, including the right to pray.**

"Nine federal agencies are also proposing new rules to roll back discriminatory regulations. ...And earlier this afternoon, my White House released a new memo to make sure federal funding is never used to violate the First Amendment."

Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos said, "In reality, our Constitution doesn't exist to protect us from religion; it exists to protect religion from government. **The First Amendment affirms our free exercise of religion, and we don't forfeit that first freedom to anyone or in any place, especially in public schools.**"

STOP Planned Parenthood: annual report shows abortions up; health services down

LiveAction reported on Planned Parenthood’s 2018-2019 annual report released in January. Planned Parenthood ended the lives of 345,672 preborn children last year. The group is the nation’s largest abortion provider, and is responsible for 40 percent of all abortions in the nation. Taxpayer funding of Planned Parenthood hit an all-time record—more than \$616 million. Since 2008, the organization has seen a 70 percent increase of taxpayer funding.

The “services” it provides outside of abortion are drastically declining. Patients are down 20 percent, contraception services are down 33 percent, cancer screenings are down 69 percent, pap tests are down 72 percent and breast exams are down 68 percent.

According to LiveAction.org, “Planned Parenthood is receiving more tax dollars for fewer services and fewer patients at fewer facilities while killing more preborn children than ever before.

“This report should make it clear: Planned Parenthood’s business is not about ‘health care’—it’s about making money off of the killing of innocent children.

“We must counter Planned Parenthood’s lies that they are in the business of providing actual health care for women. They are in the business of abortion—plain and simple.”

Find more information at LiveAction.org.

Supreme Court set to rule on Little Sisters

The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty reports that the Supreme Court will once again weigh in on the case of the Little Sisters of the Poor in their legal battle against the Health and Human Services (HHS) contraceptive mandate. The Supreme Court has twice protected them in the past, but several states including Pennsylvania and California, have continued to drag them back to court.

The Obamacare HHS mandate required the Little Sisters to provide contraceptive and abortifacient services in their health care plans or pay millions of dollars in fines. **Mother Loraine Marie Maguire of the Little Sisters of the Poor**, said, “We are grateful the Supreme Court has decided to weigh in, and hopeful that the Justices will reinforce their previous decision and allow us to focus on our lifelong work of serving the elderly poor once and for all.”