



COUNCIL FOR NATIONAL POLICY

March 1, 2017

President Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

You are doing something rare in American politics you are fulfilling campaign promises. We thank you especially for the steps you have already taken in your young administration to uphold our First Freedom, the freedom of religion.

We are writing to ask that you continue these efforts to defend religious freedom by issuing an executive order protecting the practical exercise of religious freedom.

For the last eight years, Americans of all backgrounds have suffered the loss of their religious freedoms because of destructive Obama-era policies. We commend you for beginning to reverse that devastating trend.

- You have rightly called attention to the need to restore the free speech rights that have been violated by the Johnson Amendment.
- You have rightly noted, at the National Prayer Breakfast, that “[o]ur Republic was formed on the basis that freedom is not a gift from government, but that freedom is a gift from God.”
- You observed in the same speech that international religious freedom violations are taking place: “We have seen . . . [a]cts of wanton slaughter against religious minorities We have seen peace-loving Muslims brutalized, victimized, murdered and oppressed by ISIS killers. We have seen threats of extermination against the Jewish people.”

While the media has largely passed over these comments, they have not escaped our notice. Thank you for being very clear about the importance of religious liberty. Naming the problem is the first step toward addressing it.

In this vein, we look forward to addressing domestic threats against religious freedom that still confront us:

- Federal grantees like World Vision, the Salvation Army, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, and Samaritans Purse face the prospect of the government forcing them to violate their faith or give up their role serving the disadvantaged and poor around the world.
- Adoption providers such as Bethany Christian Services and Catholic Charities have been forced out of Massachusetts, Illinois, and D.C. because they are committed to placing needy children with a married mom and dad.
- The Obama administration's solicitor general declared before the Supreme Court that religious schools that fail to embrace the Court's redefinition of marriage could see their tax exempt status fall into jeopardy.
- Schools like Gordon College and Brigham Young University Law School have had their accreditation come under scrutiny because of their beliefs about marriage, and the threat of federal action against religious schools remains.
- Service members like Navy Chaplain Wes Modder have been disciplined for counseling according to their Christian beliefs about natural marriage.
- The Little Sisters of the Poor as well as other religious groups and colleges have been forced under the HHS contraceptives mandate to choose between paying crushing federal fines or violating their deeply held beliefs.
- Family business owners around the country have been punished by state and local governments because of their religious views. Earlier this month, the Washington State Supreme Court affirmed the penalties imposed on florist grandmother Barronelle Stutzman for following her faith in the marketplace. She and others like her need to be assured that the federal government will not similarly punish them—whether through tax policy, denial of grants or contracts, or otherwise—because they act in accordance with their beliefs.
- Under a policy issued by the Obama administration's agriculture secretary, a USDA official threatened to remove all USDA inspectors if West Michigan Beef Company owner Donald Vander Boon didn't permanently refrain from placing in the company's breakroom religious literature supporting marriage between one man and one woman that the department deemed "offensive." The Vander Boons were forced to choose between their religious beliefs and having their plant closed and their employees left jobless.

The above individuals and groups, and many others like them, have either been punished by the government for their religious beliefs or are about to suffer under Obama era anti-religious regulations. They need protections that you can grant through an executive order to prevent federal discrimination against them for acting in accordance with their beliefs. We urge you to take action to ensure their freedom to believe and live out those beliefs is protected from government punishment.

We, in the conservative movement, stand ready to assist you in your efforts to protect and uphold the freedom of religion in America.

Sincerely,

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