



The United States Department of Justice Religious Liberty Commission
Minutes of the September 08, 2025 Hearing
Religious Liberty in Public Education: Student and Parent Perspectives

The second hearing explored religious liberty foundations, threats, and opportunities in public education, particularly from the perspective of students and parents.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) held a meeting on September 08, 2025, at the museum of the Bible in Washington, DC.

RLC Chairman, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, led the meeting in furtherance of and alignment with the RLC's charter and mission.¹ President Donald J. Trump attended a portion of the hearing and addressed the Commission and attendees.

All Commission Members attended except Rabbi Meir Soloveichik, who was unable to attend due to travel conflicts.

Ex-Officio Commission Members Attorney General Pamela J. Bondi, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Scott Turner, and Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council Vince Haley were also present.

This synopsis includes key highlights from the meeting.

OPENING AND WELCOMING REMARKS

Mrs. Mary Margaret Bush, the RLC Director and Designated Federal Official (DFO) opened the meeting, as required by the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

¹ Additional information regarding RLC can be found at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/05/establishment-of-the-religious-liberty-commission/>.

Chairman Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick began the meeting and introduced the Commission Members.

Chairman Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick welcomed the audience and provided an introduction and an overview of the origins of the Commission, as well as a summary of the first hearing.

He provided a summary of the day's agenda as well as a preview of future topics to be covered by the Commission.

Following the introductions, the three Commission Members (Rev. Franklin Graham, Eric Metaxas, and Cardinal Timothy Dolan) who were not present at the first hearing provided brief statements explaining their hopes and objectives for the Commission. All other Commission Members had provided similar opening remarks at the first hearing.

PRESENTATION TOPIC: Religious Liberty in Public Education – Student Perspectives

- **Miss Lydia Booth**, *Elementary School Student*
- **Mr. Justin Aguilar**, *High School Valedictorian*
- **Miss Valerie Cleveringa**, *Elementary School Student*
- **Mr. Jeremy Dys**, *Counsel, First Liberty Institute*

The Commission heard firsthand testimony from students who were discriminated against because of their faith as elementary and high school students.

School administrators forbid nine-year-old, Miss Lydia Booth from wearing a “Jesus Loves Me” COVID mask, even though her classmates were wearing masks that displayed other messages with other content.

High school valedictorian Mr. Justin Aguilar included a few lines thanking Jesus for His assistance through the challenges Mr. Aguilar faced in high school, including medical hardships. The school returned the draft of his speech with the name of Jesus crossed out. The administrators told Mr. Aguilar that “separation of church and state” prohibited any mention of God or Jesus in the graduation ceremony.

School administrators prohibited Miss Valerie Cleveringa and her brother from performing songs with Christian lyrics in the school talent show, even though other students were permitted to engage in expressive conduct. The school administrators told the children and their parents that “separation of church and state” required the censorship and disparate treatment.

Attorney Jeremy Dys provided legal background and history on the First Amendment and explained how it was violated in each of these instances. Mr. Dys offered recommendations to protect students in the future and deter mischaracterizations and violations of the First Amendment.

Cardinal Dolan then shared a story of colleagues at the papal conclave asking him about the work of the Religious Liberty Commission and the state of religious liberty in the United States. He

asked them why they were so interested, and they responded indicating that the United States serves as a beacon of global religious liberty.

Chairman Patrick introduced Attorney General Pam Bondi.

INTRODUCTION OF PRESIDENT DONALD J. TRUMP BY ATTORNEY GENERAL PAMELA J. BONDI

Attorney General Pamela Bondi introduced President Donald J. Trump, commending him for his leadership in restoring religious liberty and combatting religious discrimination.

REMARKS FROM PRESIDENT DONALD J. TRUMP

President Donald J. Trump addressed the Commission and the audience, emphasizing America's history of religious liberty and pledging to continue his Administration's unprecedented commitment to religious liberty.

President Donald J. Trump departed. Chairman Patrick announced a recess for lunch at approximately 11:23 am ET, with proceedings to resume at 12:30 pm ET.

PRESENTATION TOPIC: Religious Liberty in Public Education – Parent and Student Perspectives

Chairman Patrick introduced the first afternoon panel:

- **Miss Hannah Allen**, *Student targeted for religious exercise in junior high*
- **Mr. Shea Encinas**, *Elementary School Student*
- **Mrs. Jennifer Encinas**, *Mother of elementary school student targeted for religious beliefs*
- **Mrs. Svitlana Roman**, *Mother of student denied opt out from curriculum material violative of religious beliefs*
- **Miss Sameerah Munshi**, *Spokeswoman for Muslim families who were denied religious exemption to opt out of curriculum material framing human sexuality in a manner contrary to their religious beliefs*
- **Mrs. Jennifer Mead**, *Mother of student secretly transitioned by school district*
- **Mr. David Cortman**, *Counsel, Alliance Defending Freedom*

Miss Hannah Allen was penalized by her school for praying quietly with a group of friends in the school lunchroom after a classmate was injured in an automobile accident.

Mr. Shea Encinas was targeted by his school for his religious beliefs that God made people male and female. The school organized a "Pink Out the Hate Day" in response to his religious objection to being required to teach this sexualized material to a kindergartener.

Mrs. Svitlana Roman spoke to her family's experience of their school system forcing gender ideology on students in violation of their religious beliefs.

Miss Sameerah Munshi testified to the targeting experienced in Muslim communities, when parents sought to have their children exempted from curriculum materials framing issues of human sexuality in a way that is contrary to the Muslim faith.

Mrs. Jennifer Mead testified to her school system's secret transitioning of her daughter when her daughter was going through a vulnerable season.

Mr. David Cortman provided the legal foundation of each of the cases, explaining how the First Amendment and religious liberty laws should protect against such religious discrimination.

Question and answer among the Commissioners and witnesses ensued.

PRESENTATION TOPIC Religious Liberty in Public Education – Student Perspectives in Higher Education

Chairman Patrick introduced the second afternoon panel:

Panelists:

- **Ms. Alyza Lewin**, *Louis D. Brandeis Center, on behalf of parents whose elementary school children were targeted for their religious beliefs*
- **Ms. Maggie DeJong**, *Graduate, Southern Illinois University*
- **Ms. Norvilia Etienne Cain**, *Graduate, Queens College New York*
- **Mr. Chike Uzuegbunam**, *Graduate, Georgia Gwinett College*
- **Ms. Kimberlee Colby**, *Christian Legal Society*

Ms. Alyza Lewin testified on behalf of parents whose children were bullied for their Jewish faith, parents who were unable to come forward and provide firsthand testimony because of ongoing threats to their children's well-being.

College student Miss Maggie DeJong was subjected to the campus equivalent of a restraining order without due process by Southern Illinois University simply for expressing her Christian beliefs in a peaceful manner in the context of a dialogue on social issues.

College student Mrs. Norvilia Etienne Cain was prevented from starting a pro-life group on campus, in furtherance of her religious beliefs in the sanctity of human life, while other clubs, which held opposite positions on the same issues were approved and funded at Queens College.

Mr. Chike Uzuegbunam was prohibited from sharing the Gospel on campus, even with proper licensing and compliance with campus "speech zones."

Question and answer among the Commissioners and witnesses ensued.

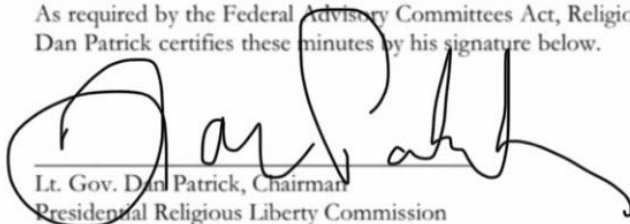
Chairman's Closing Remarks

Chairman Patrick closed the meeting by thanking everyone for their time, efforts, and devotion. He noted that the next meeting will be held September 29, 2025, with more details to follow soon.

Chairman Patrick adjourned the meeting – 3:03 p.m., ET

Certification of Minutes

As required by the Federal Advisory Committees Act, Religious Liberty Commission Chairman Dan Patrick certifies these minutes by his signature below.



Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, Chairman
Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

1/16/26

Date