

March XX, 2017

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The free exercise of religion - the fundamental human right guaranteed to Americans to practice any faith or to choose no faith at all - is enshrined as the first freedom in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. We were encouraged to learn of your consideration of an executive order that would require the agencies of the federal government to respect religious freedom throughout their activities and respectfully request that you issue such an order without delay.

From the earliest stages of our nation's founding to today, Congress and the Executive Branch have repeatedly acted to preserve and affirm the right of individuals to express freely and act on their religious beliefs. Laws respecting the freedom of religion have been enacted with bipartisan support. In 1993, following nearly unanimous backing in Congress, President Bill Clinton signed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act into law, at the time stating the "...shared desire here to protect perhaps the most precious of all American liberties, religious freedom."

An executive order requiring federal government agencies to protect the right to religious freedom is necessary, and directing agencies to adhere to existing federal laws protecting religious freedom is sound policy. The federal government has pushed organizations like the Little Sisters of the Poor to change their health care plan to offer services that violate the Little Sisters' deeply held religious beliefs. Highly-qualified faith-based organizations are being denied or they are declining to compete for federal contracts and grants because of their religious beliefs, the same beliefs that lead them to provide charitable work on behalf of the most vulnerable populations in our country and around the world. The threat of loss of accreditation or charitable tax status lingers in the wake of the United States Solicitor General's comments upon the Supreme Court's 2015 ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that the loss of charitable tax status was, "certainly going to be an issue." Religious groups on college campuses are being banned, threatened, or forced to change their bylaws.

We agree with and commend your strong statements in support of religious freedom, most recently at the National Prayer Breakfast on February 2, 2017, where you stated "...my administration will do everything in its power to defend and protect religious liberty in our land." Additionally, we appreciate the actions you have already taken to defend the rule of law and bring federal agencies into compliance with the law as written by Congress. The defense of religious freedom must not be left out of these efforts. The free exercise of religion rings hollow if individuals do not have the ability to live out their faith without fear of repercussion from the government.

Each year, we recognize the passage of the 1786 Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom. Thomas Jefferson wrote, “no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever...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 opinion in matters of religion.”

In both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, we reaffirm that the power of the state is intended to be wielded for the good of its citizens. We cannot be a country that financially punishes individuals for practicing their sincerely held religious beliefs or decides which practices are a valid part of a particular religious tradition and worthy of protection.

Religious freedom was a founding principle of this nation and is a value that we have exported to the rest of the world. We have a responsibility to protect and defend the free exercise of religion for people of all faith both here and around the world. We appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to working with you on this vital issue.

Sincerely,