

## **Comments from organizations opposing public-school chaplains**

**Rachel Laser, president and CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State:**

"The constitutional promise of church-state separation requires that students and parents – not public school officials, state legislatures or government-imposed religious leaders – get to make their own decisions about religion. Public schools should never force any particular religion on students. In order to protect the religious freedom of all students and families, legislators should ensure that certified school counselors – not chaplains – continue to support our students. In America, there shouldn't be any doubt that public schools welcome and are inclusive of all students. Public schools are not Sunday schools."

**Holly Hollman, general counsel and associate executive director of BJC (Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty):**

"Houses of worship and families are best equipped to provide religious education and spiritual guidance for children and youth. Efforts to put religious leaders in official roles in the public schools invade a realm of religious freedom that is properly protected by the separation of the institutions of church and state. Families and the religious decisions they make in raising children are properly shaped by congregations chosen by families and not the government."

**The Rev. Paul Brandeis Raushenbush, president and CEO of Interfaith Alliance:**

"As a minister, I know that chaplains can play an appropriate and important role in the lives of many families – but their place is not in our public schools. Putting chaplains in public schools erodes the separation of religion and government and opens our students up to potential religious coercion. That's why this broad and diverse coalition is standing together to challenge these dangerous bills wherever they are introduced across the country."

**Rabbi Jonah Pesner, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism:**

"In America, Jews and other religious minorities have been uniquely free, in law and in practice, to practice our faith and to organize our communal lives without government interference. These school chaplain bills, which are in direct violation of the principle of separation of church and state enshrined in our constitution, are a threat to our collective religious liberty. It is our obligation as religious leaders to strongly condemn

the chaplain bills and work together to ensure our children do not face any kind of religious proselytizing or persecution in our public schools.”

**Heather L. Weaver, senior staff attorney for the ACLU’s Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief:**

“The First Amendment protects the right of all students to attend public schools without the risk of school staff evangelizing them or imposing religion in any other way. Allowing chaplains on campus will undermine this fundamental constitutional principle and make our public schools unwelcoming environments for students who may hold different religious beliefs and values than their school’s official clergy.”

**Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation:**

“Schools should not be swapping mental health professionals for unlicensed outside adults. Students are entitled to qualified help for mental health support or suicide prevention.”

**Nick Fish, president of American Atheists:**

"Our nation’s students need evidence-based services from qualified mental health professionals – not religious instruction, recruitment, and coercion. Without sufficient safeguards in place for students' wellbeing and constitutional rights, this legislation could open the door to discrimination against students the chaplains deem objectionable, including those who are nonreligious."

**About Americans United**

*Americans United is a religious freedom advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C. Founded in 1947, AU educates Americans about the importance of church-state separation in safeguarding religious freedom. Learn more at [www.au.org](http://www.au.org).*

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**About ACLU**

*For more than 100 years, the ACLU has worked in courts, legislatures, and communities to protect the constitutional rights of all people, including First Amendment rights. With a nationwide network of offices and millions of members and supporters, the ACLU takes on the toughest civil liberties fights in pursuit of liberty and justice for all.*

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### **About American Atheists**

*American Atheists* is a national civil rights organization that, since 1963, has strived to achieve religious equality for all Americans by defending what Thomas Jefferson called the “wall of separation” between government and religion. We envision a pluralistic society where atheists and nonreligious people can participate fully without discrimination or stigma and where all people are guaranteed equality. We work to protect civil rights, advance political equality, achieve social inclusion, and empower atheists and other nonreligious people through advocacy, education, and community building.

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### **About BJC**

BJC (Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty) is an 88-year-old religiously based organization working to defend faith freedom for all and protect the institutional separation of church and state in the historic Baptist tradition. BJC is the home of the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign.

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### **About Freedom From Religion Foundation**

The Freedom From Religion Foundation ([www.ffrf.org](http://www.ffrf.org)) is a national nonprofit organization with 40,000 members across the country. It protects the constitutional separation between state and church and educates about nontheism.

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### **About Interfaith Alliance**

Interfaith Alliance is a network of people of diverse faiths and beliefs from across the country working together to build a resilient democracy and fulfill America's promise of religious freedom and civil rights not just for some, but for all. The organization mobilizes powerful coalitions to challenge Christian nationalism and religious extremism, while fostering a better understanding of the healthy boundaries between religion and government.

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### **About the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism**

For more than six decades, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (the RAC) has worked to educate, inspire, and mobilize the Reform Jewish community to advocate for social justice. We mobilize around federal, state, provincial, and local legislation on more than 70 pressing socioeconomic issues, including gun violence prevention, immigration, reproductive rights, and criminal justice reform.

*As a joint instrumentality of the [Union for Reform Judaism](#) and the [Central Conference of American Rabbis](#), we represent the values of the largest and most diverse Jewish Movement in North America to governments at all levels.*

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