

Religious Liberty Update Added to U.S. Attorney's Manual Protecting First Freedom

The Justice Department has taken a major, much-needed step in defense of religious liberty—our first freedom—and it's cause for celebration.

Earlier this year, the Justice Department announced an update to the United States Attorneys' Manual (USAM) with a new addition titled "Respect for Religious Liberty." This new section of regulations are intended to enforce the religious protections that were specified by the attorney general in a Memorandum for All Executive Departments and Agencies.

This can only be seen a positive move, making our constitutionally protected religious freedoms a top priority and not allowing the rights of individuals be trampled on simply because they don't wish to support or participate in something contrary to their religious convictions.

As Attorney General Jeff Sessions wrote in a previously released statement issuing guidance on federal protections for religious liberty:

"Our freedom as citizens has always been inextricably linked with our religious freedom as a people. It has protected both the freedom to worship and the freedom not to believe. Every American has a right to believe, worship and exercise their faith. The protections for this right, enshrined in our Constitution and laws, serve to declare and protect this important part of our heritage."

Attorney General Session's statement also echoed the words of

President Trump, saying, “We will not allow people of faith to be targeted, bullied or silenced anymore.”

A statement released by the Justice Department laid out three key functions this new section should accomplish:

Immediately inform the Office of the Associate Attorney General upon receiving service of a suit filed against the United States raising any significant question concerning religious liberty;

Coordinate decisions about merits arguments and significant litigation strategy questions in religious liberty cases with the Office of the Associate Attorney General; and

Obtain the approval of the Office of the Associate Attorney General concerning any affirmative civil suit that impinges on rights under the Free Exercise Clause, Establishment Clause, or Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

The updated USAM will also instruct relevant Justice Department components to consult the 20 religious liberty principles laid out in the attorney general’s October 6 memo when considering whether the notice or approval requirements are initiated.

We continue to vigorously defend religious freedom at the ACLJ. Recently we told you about the gentleman who contacted us after he was told by a local committee he and his team of volunteers could no longer publicly preach the gospel or pass out religious literature at a local festival. We’ve reported cases of Christian businessmen and women who are being targeted because of their faith. Even government agencies have discriminated against religious organizations in need of federal aid.

ACLJ Chief Counsel Jay Sekulow has been fighting religious liberty cases and defending evangelism for over 30 years, even

before there was an ACLJ. This addition the USAM to ensure religious freedoms will be protected by law is a major victory.

The need for protections for people of faith has never been greater. This addition to the USAM is the fulfillment of the president's words on the National Day of Prayer when he promised that his administration would be "giving our churches their voices back."

This is a good start and a welcome change. {eo}

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