

Activist Group Falsely Labels Christian Schools 'Anti-Gay'

Alliance Defending Freedom has distributed a letter to Georgia legislators and Christian schools across the state in response to an activist group's false allegation that Georgia's school choice scholarship program supports religious schools with "anti-gay" policies simply because the schools adhere to Christian ethics.

"No one should be ostracized because they don't share the same sexual agenda as an activist group that opposes school choice," said Senior Counsel David Cortman. "The Constitution protects the right of private, Christian schools to teach and follow biblical principles. Any efforts to prevent these schools from participating in the state's tax credit scholarship program would violate the First Amendment freedoms of these schools and the students who attend them."

"Two very recent Supreme Court decisions affirm such programs and the right of private religious schools to act consistently with their beliefs," Cortman added, referring to the cases *Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization v. Winn* (2011) and *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission* (2012).

The Southern Education Foundation, which opposes school choice legislation, falsely claimed in a recent issue brief that Georgia's tax credit scholarship program is diverting millions of dollars in "taxpayer funds" to private Christian schools that have "draconian anti-gay policies and practices." The group calls for these schools to be excluded from participating in the program as long as they maintain such policies.

Citing the Alliance Defending Freedom victory at the U.S.

Supreme Court in *Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization v. Winn*, the letter sent Monday to state legislators explains that SEF is merely attempting to punish private schools which “choose to adhere to biblical standards of morality.” The letter debunks the claim that taxpayer funds are being diverted to private schools. The scholarship funds come from the private donations of individuals and corporations across the state, not from government coffers.

“SEF’s entire issue brief is grounded in its inaccurate claim that ‘Georgia’s tax dollars help finance private schools...,’ the Alliance Defending Freedom letter explains. “The Supreme Court found no merit to such arguments [in *ACSTO v. Winn*], instead finding that ‘contributions [to scholarship organizations] result from the decisions of private taxpayers regarding their own funds...’ ‘[T]he tax credit system is implemented by private action and with no state intervention....’ The same is true of Georgia’s system.... The complete lack of State intervention establishes that, contrary to SEF’s claims, there are no ‘public funds’ involved in the private funding of SSOs by individuals and corporations.”

“This activist group should not be allowed to stand in the way of great school choice programs like those in Georgia, Arizona and many other states that are providing parents with real options to select the best education for their child,” said Legal Counsel Matt Sharp. “Ironically, SEF, in preaching tolerance, is clearly intolerant of anyone who disagrees with its agenda. Rather than the current program, which is open to anyone, SEF wants to limit it to its cronies.”