

News Brief: First US Religious Charter School a Victory for Educational Freedom

The state of Oklahoma has become a forerunner in the nation for religious freedom, and this week it took a huge step in that direction by granting plans for the first religious charter school in the United States.

The Oklahoma Statewide Virtual Charter School Board Monday voted 3-2 to approve the charter application for an online school, St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School. St. Isidore will be overseen by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Oklahoma City and the Diocese of Tulsa.

The school will begin holding classes in the fall of 2024, the Washington Post reported this week.

In a statement, Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt praised the board's courage to approve the authorization of the school, knowing that the decision would receive a great deal of backlash.

"This is a win for religious liberty and education freedom in our great state, and I am encouraged by these efforts to give parents more options when it comes to their child's education," Stitt says.

"Oklahomans support religious liberty for all and support an increasingly innovative educational system that expands choice. Today, with the nation watching, our state showed that we will not stand for religious discrimination."

Americans United for Separation of Church and State said there

group intends to file litigation against Oklahoma and actually called the decision a clear violation of religious freedom for Oklahoma taxpayers.

“Americans United will work with our Oklahoma and national partners to take all possible legal action to fight this decision and defend the separation of church and state that’s promised in both the Oklahoma and U.S. Constitutions,” CEO Rachel Laser said.

“State and federal law are clear: Charter schools are public schools that must be secular and open to all students. No public-school family should fear that their child will be required by charter schools to take theology classes or be expelled for failing to conform to religious doctrines.”

The Virtual Charter School Board had initially rejected St. Isidore’s application in April, citing multiple points of concern with the charter school request, among them questions of constitutionality. {eoa}

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