

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY PANEL REPORT IS OMINOUS

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Just prior to the festivities surrounding the 250 anniversary of the founding of America, President Trump's Religious Liberty Commission released a draft of its final report.

For more than 270 pages, this broad ranging report highlights the most appalling infringements of the rights of faithful Americans. More importantly, the report offers suggestions on how to ensure that these abuses never happen again.

Some of these reforms are more procedural in nature, and while they might not be the most eye-catching, they will help officials working behind the scenes to defend religious liberty. For instance, the report calls on the Department of Justice to issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state. Likewise, the report would make it less arbitrary for public officials to punish a person under their supervision who has allegedly engaged in improper religious expression.

Others are public facing. The report recommends a "Know Your Rights" campaign across multiple government agencies to ensure that people are aware of the protections they are afforded under the law. Similarly, these departments are urged to create religious liberty violation reporting hotlines/online portals and promote public awareness of existing reporting channels.

The report also focuses on some more long term objectives to better protect religious liberty rights. It calls for the appointment of federal judges with the courage to decide religious liberty cases. It also suggests the creation of a religious liberty task force to track and prioritize

litigation protecting religious liberty and to protect religious Americans from government-led litigation.

The report also wishes to honor the courage of religious liberty defenders by creating a Presidential Medal of Religious Liberty and First Freedom Hero Awards.

Taken as a whole these are extremely promising developments, and if fully implemented, these will significantly improve the safeguards for the rights of faithful Americans. However, it is worrying that we would need a commission to outline these common sense strategies. Even more troubling are the tales of abuse that people of faith have endured in this country in the not too distant past. Unfortunately, the radical secularists have become so hostile that this needs to be written out to check their relentless assaults on religious liberty.

Our work has made us keenly aware of the abuses faced by Catholics and other people of faith across America. So when it was announced that this commission was being put together, we immediately sprung into action to assist in whatever way we could because we knew this would help lay the foundation to establish more permanent protections.

To this end, in March of 2025, Bill Donohue traveled to Washington to meet with officials in the Department of Justice about what the Catholic League could offer that would be most helpful to them. We drafted a report outlining grave infringements on religious liberty that we promptly shared with these officials. After Trump named the members of his religious liberty commission, we shared this report with them to assist their work.

We are pleased to say that when looking at the whole report, you can see the Catholic League's finger prints in the documents. Our advocacy on these issues and the trove of documents we provided is apparent in the final product.

Further, we were stalwart defenders of the commission.

Routinely when the radical secularists would launch attacks in the media we sprung into action to thwart their invectives. Judging by the boldness of the report, the “air cover” we provided helped to give the commission the room it needed to produce this document.

Needless to say, we are proud of the work we did to assist the commission’s efforts, but it is important to remember that this is just a draft report. Even if it is finalized, these suggestions are only that. It will require persistent and dedicated effort to enact these reforms. Unless they are codified the next administration staffed by radical secularists will completely disregard this report and trample the rights of faithful Americans. However, you can rest assured that we will boldly continue our work to tenaciously defend religious liberty, and we will do what we can to ensure these meaningful reforms are enacted.