

## **Religious Liberty Actions Taken By Trump Administration**

### **2017**

- On May 4, 2017, President Trump signed an executive order that ensures religious organizations are protected from discrimination. (Catholic League, "Trump Set to Advance Religious Liberty," May 3, 2017)
- In October 2017, the Trump administration announced that the U.S. will provide direct assistance to persecuted Christians in the Middle East. (Breitbart "Mike Pence: U.S. Will Direct Humanitarian Programs in the Middle East; No More U.N Funding" October 26, 2017)

### **2018**

- On January 2, 2018, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) announced changes in federal disaster funding that would include private non-profit houses of worship. (FEMA.gov "FEMA Expands Public Assistance Eligibility to Include Houses of Worship" January 2, 2018)
- In January 2018, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced the formation of a Conscience and Religious Freedom Division within the HHS Office for Civil Rights (OCR). The purpose of the division is to "restore federal enforcement of our nation's laws that protect the fundamental and unalienable right of conscience and religious freedom." (HHS.gov, "HHS Announces New Conscience and Religious Freedom Division," January 18, 2018)
- In January 2018, the Justice Department designated a new section in the U.S. Attorney's Manual specifically devoted to the protection of religious liberty. The section, entitled "Associate Attorney General's Approval and Notice Requirements for Issues Implicating Religious Liberty" will require all U.S. Attorney Offices to set up a point of contact for any civil suit involving religious freedom or liberty. (Justice.gov, "Justice Department Announces Religious Liberty Update to U.S. Attorneys' Manual," January 31, 2018)
- In May 2018, President Trump signed an executive order to establish a White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative. The Initiative would "provide recommendations on the Administration's policy agenda affecting faith-based and community programs; provide recommendations on programs and

policies where faith-based and community organizations may partner and/or deliver more effective solutions to poverty; apprise the Administration of any failures of the executive branch to comply with religious liberty protections under law; and reduce the burdens on the exercise of free religion." (Whitehouse.gov, "President Donald J. Trump Stands Up For Religious Freedom In The United States," May 3, 2019)

- On July 30, 2018, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced the creation of the Religious Liberty Task Force within the Department of Justice. (Department of Justice, *Religious Freedom in Focus* vol. 76 September 2018)

## 2019

- In February 2019, the Department of Education under Secretary Betsy DeVos, introduced a proposed program that would allow for tax-exempt donations to reputable government programs to be used for local private school scholarships across the country. This program will allow local private schools, including religious schools, to receive state and locally funded scholarships and funds. (ed.gov "Trump Administration Unveils Plan For Historic Investment in America's Students through Education Freedom Scholarships" February 2, 2019)
- In April 2019, the Office of Personnel Management finalized rules and guidelines that will make it easier for religious federal employees to get time off for religious observances and holidays. (Chcoc.gov "Compensatory Time Off for Religious Observances Final Regulations" April 29, 2019)
- In May 2019, HHS announced a final rule that would protect individuals and health care entities in HHS programs that exercise their conscience from discrimination. (HHS.gov "HHS Announces Final Conscience Rule Protecting Health Care Entities and Individuals", May 2, 2019)
- In a commencement speech at Liberty University on May 11, 2019, Vice President Mike Pence encouraged graduates to stand up for religious freedom. (Catholic League, "Vice President Pence's Truthful Address," May 13, 2019)
- In May 2019, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) proposed the revision of a rule that would give religious exemptions to HUD grant recipients that choose to place transgender persons in housing based on their biological sex. (Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, "Revised Requirements Under Community Planning and Development Housing," May 22, 2019)

- In July 2019, the State Department hosted the second Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom. (State.gov "2019 Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom," July 18, 2019). As part of the Ministerial, President Trump met with 27 survivors of global religious persecution in a meeting in the Oval Office. (*Christian Post*, "Trump meets 27 survivors of persecution in Oval Office," July 18, 2019)
- On July 8, 2019, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the creation of a Commission on Unalienable Rights. The purpose of the commission is to emphasize the role of human rights and natural law both domestically and internationally. (Catholic League, "Commission On Unalienable Rights Needed," September 30, 2019)
- On August 15, 2019, the Labor Department issued a proposal that would expand the religious freedom protections of federal contractors. The Department opened a 30 day comment period for the proposal. (Catholic League, "Religious Rights For Fed Contractors Spike," August 15, 2019)
- In September 2019, in recognition of National Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Week, President Trump announced that his administration would be lifting restrictions on capital financing for Historically Black Colleges and Seminaries. (InsideHigherEd, "Trump Asserts New Win for Religious HBCUs," September 11, 2019)
- At the U.N. General Assembly in September 2019, President Trump hosted a call to religious freedom event at the U.N. headquarters. In his remarks, he announced the formation of a coalition of U.S. businesses for the protection of religious freedom and announced that his administration will allocate \$25 million in funds for the protection of religious freedom and religious sites around the world. (Catholic League, "Trump Scores At U.N. On Religious Liberty," September 23, 2019)
- In a speech to the Heritage Foundation on October 22, 2019, Secretary of State Pompeo reaffirmed the State Department's prioritization for promoting religious freedom and pro-life policies. (Catholic News Agency, "Pompeo highlights religious freedom, pro-life goals as among US priorities," October 22, 2019)
- In a speech given to Notre Dame Law School on October 11, 2019, Attorney General William Barr denounced militant secularist assaults on religious liberty. (Catholic League, "Bill Barr's Critics Look Foolish," October 15, 2019)
- On November 1, 2019, HHS announced a proposed rule change that would sustain federal funding for faith-based grantees that refuse to provide adoption services to same-sex couples based on their religious beliefs.

(*Catholic News Agency*, "HHS changes rules to protect religious adoption agencies," November 1, 2019)

- In November 2019, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) announced the creation of the Religious Prisoners of Conscience Project Database. The purpose of the database is "to heighten awareness of people imprisoned in countries cracking down on religious expression and encourage advocacy for them." (Christopher Vondracek, "U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom database lists religious prisoners across globe," *Washington Times*, November 6, 2019)
- In November 2019, President Trump announced recognition of the legal status of Israeli communities in the West Bank, overturning a 40 year policy. (Liberty Counsel, "Trump Recognizes Israeli Communities," November 20, 2019)
- In December 2019, President Trump signed an executive order that will allow for the cutting of federal funds to colleges and universities that do not curb anti-Semitic discrimination on campus. (*Wall Street Journal*, "Trump to Sign Executive Order Targeting Anti-Semitism on College Campuses," December 10, 2019)
- In December 2019, the United States Senate reauthorized funding for the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom as part of its 2019-2020 budget. (Catholic League, "U.S. Religious Freedom Panel Renewed," December 20, 2019)
- Between 2017 and 2019, the Department of Justice obtained 14 convictions in cases involving attacks or threats against places of worship. (Whitehouse.gov, "Proclamation on Religious Freedom Day, 2020," January 15, 2020)

## 2020

- On January 16, 2020, the Trump Administration announced a proposed rule that would promote religious freedom by withholding federal grants from college campuses that do not allow for the equal treatment of faith-based groups and organizations. In addition, the Department of Education also announced updated guidelines that would protect students and teachers that wish to pray in elementary and secondary schools. (Ed.gov "U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos Announces Proposed Rule Regarding Equal Treatment of Faith-Based Education Institutions, Provides Updated School Prayer Guidance," January 16, 2020)
- In February 2020, the USCIRF announced the filling of an advisory position within the National Security Council that deals with international religious

freedom. The post, which was created through a 1998 law, had been unfilled for over two decades. (Politico.com, "White House Taps Pence Aide for Religious Freedom Role," February 4, 2020)

- In March 2020, HHS's Office of Civil Rights reaffirmed provisions that would protect people from being denied medical supplies based on religious belief. (*Washington Times*, "HHS warns against 'ruthless utilitarianism' during COVID-19," March 30, 2020)
- In March 2020, the White House Office of Public Liaison held a conference call with top pastors around the nation and sought their advice and guidance in measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus. (mcclatchydc.com "White House turns to faith groups and churches for coronavirus help," March 17, 2020)
- In April 2020, the Small Business Administration (SBA) announced the inclusion of faith-based organizations in funding under the federal government coronavirus stimulus package. (sba.gov, "SBA Clarifies Eligibility of Faith-Based Organizations to Participate in Paycheck Protection and Economic Injury Disaster Loan Programs," April 4, 2020)
- In April 2020, the Department of Justice released a statement in support of a Mississippi church that was fined for holding a drive-in church service during the coronavirus pandemic. (Associated Press, "Justice Department takes church's side in 1st Amendment suit," April 14, 2020).