

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.
- In October 2017, the Trump administration announced that the U.S. will provide direct assistance to persecuted Christians in the Middle East.

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.
- 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."
- 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 The "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.
- 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."
- On July 30, 2018, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced the creation of a Religious Liberty Task Force within the Department of Justice.

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.
- 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.
- 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.
- In May 2019, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) proposed the revision of a rule that would give religious exemption to HUD grant recipients that choose to place transgender persons in housing based on their biological sex.
- In a commencement speech at Liberty University on May 11, 2019, Vice President Mike Pence encouraged graduates to stand up for religious freedom.
- In July 2019, the State Department hosted the second Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom. As part of the Ministerial, President Trump met with 27 survivors of global religious persecution in a meeting in the Oval Office.
- 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.
- 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.
- On August 28, the HHS Office for Civil Rights issued a notice of violation letter to the University of Vermont Medical Center for violating an employee's conscience based beliefs after it forced a nurse to assist in an abortion procedure.
- In September of 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.

- 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 dollars in funds for the protection of religious freedom and religious sites around the world.
- 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.
- In a speech given to Notre Dame law school on October 11, 2019, Attorney General William Barr denounced militant secularist assaults on religious liberty.
- 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.
- In November 2019, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom 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."
- In November 2019, President Trump announced the recognition of legal status of Israeli communities in the West Bank, overturning a 40 year policy.
- 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.
- 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.
- Between 2017 and 2019, the Department of Justice obtained 14 convictions in cases involving attacks or threats against places of worship.

2020

- On January 16, 2020, the Department of Education 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 also announced updated guidelines that would protect students and teachers that wish to pray in elementary and secondary schools.

- On National Religious Freedom Day 2020, President Trump issued new federal guidance that required state departments of education to put in place services and guidelines where people can put in complaints when they have been denied the ability to pray in school.
- In February 2020, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom 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.
- 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 Covid-19.
- In March 2020, HHS's Office of Civil Rights reaffirmed protections that would protect people from being denied medical supplies based on religious belief.
- In April 2020, the Small Business Administration (SBA) announced the inclusion of faith-based organizations in funding under the federal government's Coronavirus stimulus package.
- On April 24, 2020 Attorney General Barr issued a memo encouraging prosecutors to prosecute cases against states and governors whose Covid policies infringe on people's religious rights.
- 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.
- On May 15, Secretary of Labor Eugene Scalia issued directives and guidance that would require increased incorporation of religious liberty in daily Department of Labor operations. Among these directives include giving equal opportunities for faith based organizations to receive federal funding, further enforcement of legal prohibitions against religious discrimination, and respect of religious exemptions.
- In a statement in May 2020, President Trump declared that houses of worship are "essential" during the Covid-19 pandemic and urged state governments and governors to lift bans on in-person religious services.
- On May 27, the head of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division wrote a letter to Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak criticizing him for giving unfair treatment to religious institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- In May 2020, Secretary of Education DeVos guaranteed funding for private schools as part of the Coronavirus CARES Act. In June 2020, DeVos followed through on that promise by announcing a new rule that would require all local education agencies to equally and fairly appropriate CARES funds to local private schools.

- On June 2, President Trump signed an executive order that prioritizes religious liberty as a foreign policy initiative. The order states that all civil service employees will be required to undergo international religious freedom training and sets aside \$50 million for increased security at international houses of worship.
- In June 2020, President Trump signed an executive that will make it easier for faith-based organizations to partner with local and state agencies to effectively match children with adoptive parents.
- In July 2020, the HHS Office of Civil Rights intervened on behalf of a critically ill patient at a Maryland hospital who was denied a visit by a priest because of his medical condition. As a result of the intervention, the University of Maryland Medical system revised its policy to allow for clergy visits for patients in end of life situations.
- On July 22, 2020, the Department of Justice's Religious Liberty Task Force release new guidelines for awarding grants to religious schools in response to a recent Supreme Court ruling on private and religious schools. Under the new guidance, faith based organizations would be given more opportunities to apply for and be awarded federal grants.
- On August 7, as part of President Trump's 2017 executive order protecting free speech on college campuses, the Department of Education announced guidance that would protect the religious rights of organizations that participate in Department of Education programs.
- On September 9, 2020, the Trump White House finalized a rule that would cut funding from colleges and universities that fail to protect religious groups from discrimination based on speech.
- On September 10, 2020 the Department of Justice submitted a 35 page brief in support of a Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis that fired a teacher because he was married to his same-sex partner. In the brief, the Justice Department said that the teacher had "the responsibility of educating and forming students in the faith" and by allowing him to remain as a teacher would "interfere with the Archdiocese's public expression of Church doctrine regarding marriage."
- In a letter to San Francisco mayor London Breed on September 25, Assistant Attorney General Eric Dreiband criticized the mayor's Covid re-opening plan for failing to allow churches to re-open.
- As part of President Trump's "Platinum Plan" to help black Americans unveiled on September 25, it promised to increase federal funding to black places of worship by giving "black churches the ability to compete for federal resources for their community."

- In October 2020, the Health and Human Services' Office for Civil Rights intervened when two separate hospitals—one in Maryland and one in Virginia—had refused to allow patients to be visited by clergy due to the Covid pandemic. As a result of the Office's work, both hospitals revised its guidelines to include clergy visits for patients.
- The Abraham Accords Agreement—administered by the Trump Administration on September 15 as a peace deal between Israel and the United Arab Emirates—lists respect for religious freedom as an essential priority for creating peace between nations in the Middle East.
- On November 9, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) released an update to their Compliance Manual Section on Religious Discrimination that affirms guidelines protecting religious employers and employees from religious discrimination in the workplace.