

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 6, 2026

The Honorable Pam Bondi
United States Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Room 1145
Washington, DC 20530

The Honorable Harmeet K. Dhillon
United States Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Division - U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Bondi and Assistant Attorney General Dhillon,

We write to you today to commend the Trump Administration for its steadfast and principled commitment to defending religious liberty, a basic fundamental value in our Constitution. The unwavering efforts have reaffirmed the fundamental truth that the free exercise of religion is not a privilege granted by government, but a right endowed to every American. However, we write to express serious concerns regarding ongoing infringements upon these civil liberties occurring in several states.

As you are well aware, the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment guarantees that Americans may practice their faith without undue interference from the government. Vaccine mandate laws that fail to accommodate religious beliefs represent a clear, coercive intrusion on this freedom, compelling individuals and families to act in direct contradiction with their faith. On June 27, 2025, the Supreme Court reaffirmed the Free Exercise Clause by holding that public schools must provide opt-out mechanisms for parents who object to certain requirements on religious grounds in *Mahmoud v. Taylor*.¹ The Court further underscored this protection by vacating the Second Circuit's decision in *Miller v. McDonald* and remanding the case for reconsideration.

In *Miller v. McDonald*, members of the Amish community challenged New York State's vaccination requirement, which had been deemed "neutral" and "generally applicable," yet in practice burdened religious exercise.² Despite this clear judicial guidance, several states persist in defying constitutional norms and suppressing the religious liberties of American families.

Four states, New York, California, Maine, and Connecticut currently do not recognize religious exemptions for school-based vaccine mandates. California and Maine eliminated both personal and religious exemption options in 2015 and 2019, respectively. Connecticut followed in 2021, removing its religious exemption as a direct retaliation for parents exercising their rights during the COVID-19 pandemic.³

Of particular concern is the State of New York following its elimination of religious exemptions in 2019. The New York Department of Health has undertaken actions that have unjustly targeted pediatric physicians by publicly naming them in its "School Vaccination Fraud Awareness" campaign. The state has prohibited schools from accepting "paper-only" vaccination records from seventeen pediatric physicians; without filing charges or alleging any criminal conduct. These physicians have not falsified records. Instead, they have issued exemptions for vulnerable children, including those who are immunocompromised or suffer from preexisting

¹ *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, No. 24-297 (U.S. Supreme Court June 27, 2025), slip op., PDF, Children's Health Defense, <https://childrenshealthdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/Mahmoud-Supreme-Court-Decision.pdf>

² Suzanne Burdick, "'Checkmate': U.S. Supreme Court Delivers Huge Win for Religious Exemptions," The Defender, Children's Health Defense, December 8, 2025, <https://childrenshealthdefense.org/defender/supreme-court-win-religious-exemptions-new-york-vaccine-mandate-schools/>

³ Connecticut Ends Non-Medical Vaccine Exemptions for Schools, Daycares, Vaccinate Your Family, April 20, 2021, <https://vaccinateyourfamily.org/connecticut-ends-religious-vaccine-exemptions-for-schools-daycares/>

medical conditions.⁴ Nevertheless, they are being treated as though they engaged in criminal wrongdoing. As you may recall, you previously intervened to halt the prosecution of Dr. Kirk Moore, a Utah physician accused of falsifying COVID-19 vaccination records, recognizing the implications such actions have on civil liberties.

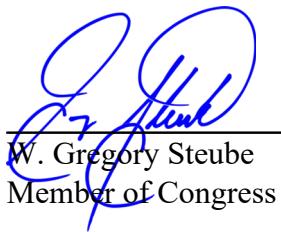
In another case, *Children's Health Defense v. McDonald*, plaintiffs challenge New York's categorical denial of religious exemptions while the State simultaneously permits multiple secular exemptions based on age, status, and administrative discretion over medical exemptions.

The two pending federal cases arising out of New York, *Children's Health Defense v. McDonald* and *Doe v. Oceanside Union Free School District*, present an appropriate opportunity for Department of Justice intervention. The agency's investigation in these cases would help ensure that religious families are not singled out for exclusion from education and that states do not evade constitutional limits by allowing school officials to substitute their judgment for that of parents and physicians.

The actions of these four states deny parents and guardians the choice over their children's healthcare decisions and infringe upon constitutionally protected rights. As a result, more states, such as Hawai'i⁵ and Massachusetts⁶, have been emboldened to further encroach upon Americans' rights by eliminating religious exemptions for vaccines. While we fully respect the principles of federalism and the state authority, such powers cannot come at the expense of the First Amendment that is guaranteed to every American. Our students deserve access to education without coercion or infringement on their religious beliefs.

As Members of Congress and steadfast advocates for religious liberty, we respectfully urge the Department of Justice to exercise its authority to investigate these states for potential violations of constitutionally protected rights. We appreciate your timely attention to this critical matter and thank you for your continued leadership in defense of our constitutionally-guaranteed freedoms.

Sincerely,



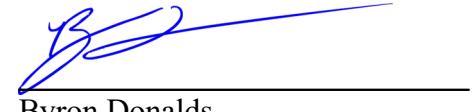
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Member of Congress



Byron Donalds
Member of Congress

⁴ School Vaccination Fraud Awareness, New York State Department of Health, September 11, 2024, <https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/immunization/schools/fraud.htm>

⁵ Megan Tagami, "Should Hawai'i Families Be Allowed To Opt Out Of School Vaccines?," Honolulu Civil Beat, February 14, 2025, <https://www.civilbeat.org/2025/02/hawai'i-lawmakers-want-to-make-it-harder-for-kids-to-skip-vaccines/>.

⁶ WBZ NewsRadio, "Bill Could Eliminate Religious Exemptions for School Vaccines," WBZ NewsRadio 1030, September 11, 2025, <https://wbznewsradio.iheart.com/content/bill-could-eliminate-religious-exemptions-for-school-vaccines/>



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