

## **A Proposal for the Full Committee's Consideration**

Religious student groups welcome all students to explore religious values and ideas, to participate in their activities, and to experience authentic community. Religious student groups create welcoming, safe environments for students away from home for the first time. They are crucial to helping first-generation college students find a nurturing place in an unfamiliar environment.

But for many decades, student organizations too frequently have been threatened with loss of recognition as an official student organization on some public college campuses because their speech, beliefs, practices, or leadership standards are religious. If excluded, a group loses free meeting space, as well as access to new student fairs and communication channels available to other student groups. If a group hopes to exist on campus, such access to meeting space and communication channels is essential.

Recently, a major public university told over 30 religious student groups -- representing Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Evangelical Christian, and other faiths -- that they would have to leave campus because they required their leaders to agree with their distinct religious beliefs. But this is wrong. Religious groups should have a place on campus alongside other student groups. Environmental groups, affinity groups, and political groups get to choose leaders who agree with their political or social beliefs. Similarly, religious groups' selection of leaders who agree with their religious beliefs should also be protected. Because they often lead a religious group's scripture study, prayer, and worship, it is especially important that student leaders share the group's religious beliefs.

We recommend to the Committee that the following proposed language be added as a definition in 34 CFR § 600.2:

Respect the religious mission of religious student organizations: As used in §600.4, a public institution of higher education shall not deny to a religious student organization at the institution any right, benefit, or privilege that is otherwise afforded to other student organizations at the institution (including full access to the facilities of the institution and official recognition of the organization by the institution) because of the religious beliefs, practices, speech, or leadership standards of the religious student organization.

Then the following language would be added to 34 CFR § 600.4:

(d) The Secretary does not recognize the accreditation or preaccreditation of a public nonprofit educational institution unless the institution agrees to respect the religious mission of religious student organizations at the institution.

This reasonable, straightforward solution would not require a public college to adopt any policy, and colleges would remain free to choose whatever policies work best for their campuses. This solution would simply prevent a college from using any policy to exclude student groups from campus because of their religious speech, beliefs, practices, or leadership standards. It would resolve a recurrent nationwide problem without placing any new administrative burdens on colleges. And it would ensure that religious students are able to continue to contribute to their campus communities.