

THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

MEDIA ADVISORY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION TO EXAMINE SCHOOL CHOICE, THE BLAINE AMENDMENTS AND ANTI-CATHOLICISM

What: Meeting of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, an independent, bipartisan agency charged with monitoring and protecting civil rights

WASHINGTON, DC – The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights will address school choice, the Blaine Amendments and anti-Catholicism during a public briefing at Commission headquarters on June 1, 2007. Specifically, this briefing will examine whether certain state constitutional barriers to school choice legislation – known as Blaine Amendments – discriminate against Catholics and whether, more generally, they discriminate against religion. Many state constitutions contain Blaine Amendments that prohibit the use of public school funds to support private religious schools. Some scholars argue that these constitutional amendments were originally enacted with the specific intent of limiting the availability of sectarian religious education and that, in this context, sectarianism may be euphemism for Catholicism. Others argue that the amendments were motivated by other concerns as well or that the passage of time since their enactment assuages any constitutional concerns. In this public briefing, the Commission will consider whether the Blaine Amendments are anti-Catholic and, if so, what the ramifications of this problem may be.

The speakers will be Holly Hollman, general counsel, Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty; Ellen Johnson, president, American Atheists; Richard Komer, senior litigation attorney, Institute for Justice; and Anthony Picarello, vice president and general counsel, Becket Fund.

A brief business meeting to address the State Advisory Committees for Michigan and Virginia will precede the briefing. A briefing agenda follows:

- I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY CHAIRMAN GERALD A. REYNOLDS
- II. BRIEFING: SCHOOL CHOICE, THE BLAINE AMENDMENTS AND ANTI-CATHOLICISM
- III. Questions by Commissioners and Staff Director

Public comments on the briefing *School Choice, the Blaine Amendments and anti-Catholicism* may be provided through July 2, 2007, by e-mail, accessible on the Commission's Web site (www.usccr.gov) or mailed to: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Office of the General Counsel, Room 620, 624 Ninth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20425.

When: Friday, June 1, 2007, 9:30 a.m.

Where: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 624 Ninth Street NW, Room 540 Washington, D.C.

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with monitoring federal civil rights enforcement. Members include Chairman Gerald A. Reynolds, Vice Chairman Abigail Thernstrom, and Commissioners Jennifer C. Braceras, Gail Heriot, Peter N. Kirsanow, Arlan D. Melendez, Ashley L. Taylor, Jr., and Michael Yaki. Kenneth L. Marcus is Staff Director. Commission meetings are open to the media and general public.