



U.S. Department of Justice

Civil Rights Division

JMG:SAS  
169-12-0  
AAGCM

*Educational Opportunities Section - PHB  
950 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20530*

NOV 07 2018

**VIA U.S. MAIL**

Daniel J. Piedra, J.D.  
Executive Director  
Freedom of Conscience Defense Fund  
P.O. Box 9520  
Rancho Santa Fe, CA 92067

Dear Mr. Piedra:

I write in response to your letter on behalf of the Freedom of Conscience Defense Fund, dated September 19, 2018, which outlines concerns about the Department's public documents on religiously motivated harassment in schools.

As you may know, the Civil Rights Division's Educational Opportunities Section enforces federal laws that protect students from discrimination, including harassment. The Section is responsible for enforcing, among other statutes, Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which authorizes the Attorney General to address certain equal protections violations based on race, color, national origin, sex, and religion in public schools and institutions of higher learning. Other sections within the Division also enforce laws that protect individuals from religious discrimination, such as religiously motivated hate crimes or biased zoning decisions.

I have carefully reviewed your letter and the materials and resources referenced therein. We agree that public schools must protect all students from harassment on the basis of religious belief, regardless of the specific faith held. The Division has authority to investigate allegations that a public school has failed to protect students from religious-based harassment, and may seek to bring the school district into compliance with federal law through voluntary means or an enforcement action.

The Division, and the Department more broadly, also strive to help public schools comply with federal civil rights laws so that all students can access their education free from religious discrimination and to help parents understand how to file complaints of civil rights violations. The informational materials we produce and maintain are intended to aid the public, school officials, and parents in understanding legal protections and Department procedures. We regularly revise and supplement these materials to respond to evolving circumstances and needs. I appreciate your taking the time to share your concerns and recommendations.

Your views will be given due consideration as we work to continually improve our public education efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S A S', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Shaheena A. Simons  
Chief