



March 24, 2025

Re: LD 927 An Act To Require Chaplains in School Administrative Units

To: Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

The Maine Chapter of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (MC-FFRF) writes to testify AGAINST LD 927, which requires public school districts and charter schools to hire, or accept as volunteers, religious chaplains for student service roles.

LD 927 states: "A school administrative unit shall employ or accept as a volunteer one or more chaplains to provide support, services, and programs as assigned by the school board...for students, staff and parents of students of the school administrative unit."

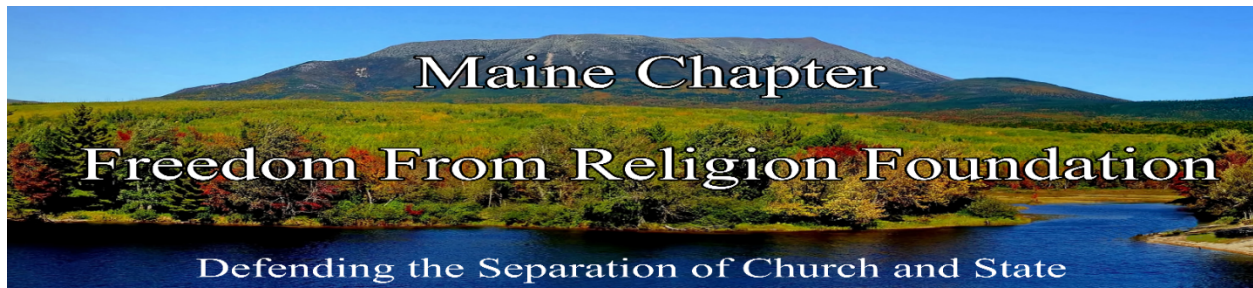
The bill defines "school chaplain" as, among other things, certified, licensed, or ordained by a faith organization recognized by the United States Department of Defense. The chaplain is not required to be certified under Chapter 501 or 502.

LD 927 specifically adds religious chaplains to the category of individuals who may provide student services in public schools. This bill clearly would promote religion in taxpayer-funded institutions, as they require all qualifying chaplains to be members of a "religious-endorsing organization" recognized by the Department of Defense. I assume this is a reference to the Armed Forces Chaplains Board (AFCB), a name which may have been inadvertently dropped when transcribing this bill from similar copycat bills introduced in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas and Utah.

The AFCB has a public listing of "DoD-Listed Religious-Endorsing Organizations/Agents" on its web site. There are a total of 161, of which 153 (95%) are Christian, five (3.1%) are Jewish, two (1.2%) are Muslim, and one (0.6%) is Buddhist. There are no other denominations listed, and certainly none that are secular. The list is overwhelmingly Christian and, practically speaking, nothing else. So, not only would the bill inject religion as stated above, but it would promote the beliefs of one type of faith, and since it is presented by the government it would show the government as favoring one faith over all others. This is a First Amendment violation.

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The mere presence of a chaplain would interfere with parents' right to raise their children in their own faith traditions, or in none at all. Public schools with a chaplain on staff would be exposing students to subtle, and probably not so subtle, religious indoctrination by someone in a position of authority.

School staff are required to be trained in the proper handling of student issues. Such specialized training ensures the care, privacy, and security of public school students. LD 927 does not require any such training for chaplains. Without that training, the only approach available to chaplains to handle student issues would be religious doctrine. There is no guarantee that they would follow public schools' educational mandates and avoid the promotion of religion. Exempting chaplains from the professional requirements used for other school staff shows that LD 927 is not about helping students, but subjecting children to unconstitutional, government-sponsored religious indoctrination.

Promoting Christianity in public schools through religious chaplains is an offense against anyone not a Christian. That's 48% of the Maine population (Pew Research). That percentage, plus much of the Christian population, expects public schools to provide secular education and not religious coercion camouflaged by "support, services, and programs".

For the reasons provided above, MC-FFRF urges the committee to vote "Ought Not To Pass" regarding LD 927. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Ray Vensel, President