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ATHEISTS**

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Florida Legislature: Leading the Nation in Dangerous Christian Nationalism

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Agenda

- Introduction
- 2022 Florida Legislation & National Trends
- Florida: A History of Bad Ideas
- What Can Secular People Do?

Why Are These Atheist Issues?

- Public education, health care & reproductive services, censorship
- Growing Christian nationalism affects all of us
- Atheist issues exist in the context of people's lives
- Nonreligious people say these are the issues they care about – and want secular groups to work on! www.secularsurvey.org

What Is Christian Nationalism?

- **Not** just very conservative interpretation of Christianity
- Political ideology that posits **Christian right to rule**
- **Revisionist history** that founders were devout Christians who never intended to create a secular republic
- They believe that separation of religion and government is **false and ahistorical**
- **Rejection of secular society**, restoration of an imagined Christian nation

2022 Florida Legislation & National Trends

Florida Bill – SB 1820/HB 747

Religious Refusals

- ▶ **45 states** have laws that allow health care institutions to deny abortion based on beliefs and **18 states** allow denials relating to contraception.
- ▶ **Florida already has both.**
- ▶ This bill would expand even further:
 - ▶ Any medical procedure (and referral) can be denied for religious, moral, or ethical reasons.
 - ▶ Extends to providers, institutions, and payers.
 - ▶ No requirement to inform patients, and many do not.
 - ▶ No exception for emergencies.

National Trend – Broad Religious Refusals

- Introduced in more than a dozen states in 2021 and 2022
- These bills passed last year in Arkansas and Ohio
- There is also a similar Mississippi law that passed in 2013
- We have not yet seen the full impact of these dangerous bills, but they will likely result in more denial of care and put patients at risk

Health Care Transparency

- ▶ Introduced bills to require disclosure of denial of care in 4 states, including **SB 1742/HB 373** in Florida
- ▶ Promote transparency and medical decision-making by requiring that providers using a federal or state denial of care law must inform the patient and the Department of Health
- ▶ Does not eliminate denials of care, but helps to raise awareness and allows individuals to receive information to make the best medical decisions for themselves

Florida Bills

Don't Say Gay Act (SB 1834/HB 1557)

- Erases LGBTQ students & families by banning classroom discussion. Would chill support for LGBTQ youth.
- Allows parents to sue and get damages for violation.

Stop WOKE Act (SB 148/HB 7)

- Censors diversity training for schools, agencies, and even private businesses.
- Chilling effect on honest discussion of history.

National Trend – Censorship and Surveillance Bills

- ▶ Range of attacks on secular public education, including bills that target so-called “critical race theory” as well as so-called “parental rights” bills
- ▶ Goal is censorship of disfavored topics, achieved through intimidation of educators, as well as undermining support for public education
- ▶ Where these bills have passed, we have seen book bans, firing of educators, mass complaints, requirements to teach historical tragedies in a neutral way
- ▶ Not just about the language, but the subtext

Florida Bill - SB 146/HB 5

15 Week Abortion Ban

- Similar to Mississippi law currently being challenged in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health*
- Not only bans after 15 weeks of pregnancy, but places additional certification and reporting requirements that make abortion more difficult to access

National Trend – Abortion Restrictions and Bans

- ▶ Increasing level of state anti-abortion legislation since elevation of Justices Kavanaugh and Barrett
- ▶ The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* will influence what these state bills looks like moving forward
- ▶ May also see bills similar to Texas SB 8, but those have not yet gained as much traction

Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization

- ▶ Case from Mississippi, where the state passed a 15-week abortion ban
- ▶ Leaked draft decision is not binding (abortion is currently still legal), but is very troubling
- ▶ If *Roe* is overturned, 13 states have trigger bans that immediately ban abortion. 9 states still have pre-*Roe* bans on the books.
- ▶ Other states would be free to pass whatever restrictions or bans they want

Florida: A History of Bad Ideas

Project Blitz



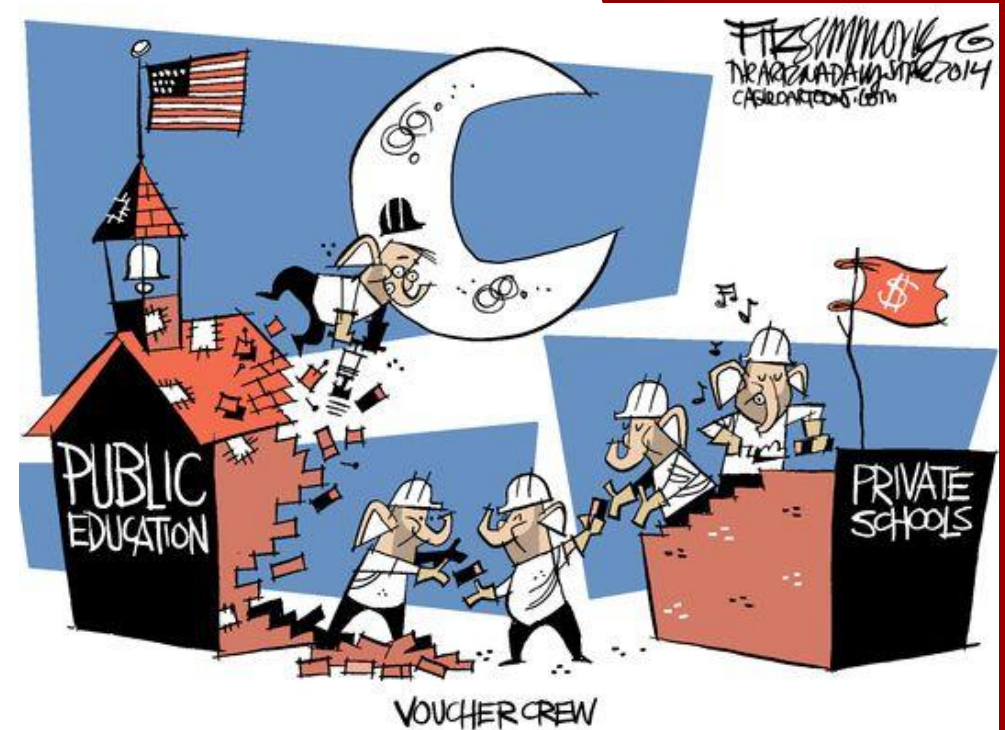
School Vouchers

How do they compare?

	Public	Charter	Vouchers
Must give statewide standardized tests in math, reading, science and social studies and make scores public	✓	✓	✗
Receives a school letter grade from state	✓	✓	✗
Must report graduation rates	✓	✓	✗
Must follow Florida's academic standards	✓	✓	✗
Permitted to teach religious curriculum	✗	✗	✓
Mandatory 20 minute recess in elementary school*	✓	✗	✗
Teachers required to have a bachelor's degree and Florida certification**	✓	✓	✗
Must make budgets public	✓	✓	✗
Must meet state building codes for schools	✓	✗	✗

*The Sentinel found some private schools have limited outdoor space or don't have playgrounds.

** The statute allows teachers without a college degree so long as they have "special skills," etc.



Current State of the law in Florida



Constitutional & Nondiscrimination Protections

Nearly every state constitution has provisions that echo the critical protections for religious equality created by the U.S. Constitution. Most states also have statutory nondiscrimination protections in various areas based on religious and nonreligious belief.

STATE ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE	▲
STATE FREE EXERCISE CLAUSE	▲
STRONG TAXPAYER STANDING	△
NONDISCRIMINATION LAWS	
Employment	▲
Housing	▲
Public Accommodations	▲
Education	▲
Religious Exemptions	▼
RELIGIOUS TESTS FOR OFFICE	▽

Health Care & Wellness

For decades, religious conservatives have sought to impose their dogmas on health care laws, focusing on reproductive health care and parental rights. The religious beliefs of others should never interfere with a person's ability to access essential health care.

MEDICAL AID-IN-DYING LAW	△
DENIAL OF CARE LAWS	
Private Institutions May Refuse Abortion Services	▼
Any Institution May Refuse Abortion Services	▼
Refusals Related to Contraception	▼
Refusals Related to Sterilization	▽
Professional Licensure	▽
CHILD NEGLIGENCE EXEMPTIONS FOR FAITH HEALING	
Civil Exemption	▼
Criminal Exemption	▼
NONMEDICAL EXEMPTION TO VACCINATION	▼

- ▶ State of the Secular States Florida Scorecard-
<https://states.atheists.org/scorecard/florida>

Freedom?

“Florida is a free state, and we intend to keep it that way.” – Gov. Ron DeSantis

- Free to not have an abortion
- Free to be denied health care for others’ beliefs
- Businesses free not to offer diversity training
- Classrooms free of LGBTQ people
- Free not to vote or hold protests
- Free to fund religious schools

Christian nationalist flavor of freedom: I’m free to do whatever I want, and everyone else is free is to do whatever I want.



What Can Secular People Do?

What You Can Do...



- ▶ Track the bills
 - ▶ <https://www.atheists.org/activism/state-legislation/>
- ▶ Connect with your legislators and visit their district offices
- ▶ Submit written testimony as an individual or as a group or testify in person if near Tallahassee
- ▶ Join and support organizations working to oppose bad legislation
- ▶ Don't stop talking (or writing) about these issues!

Action Alerts

- Send the 2021 State of the Secular States Report to your lawmakers by texting **“States”** to

855-465-5149

- You will receive a link to the Action Center and be registered for future alerts



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Questions?

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