



**AMERICAN
ATHEISTS**

Religious Equality Under Attack: 2025 State of the Secular States Report

Nick Fish

President

Sam McGuire

Director of Grassroots
Organizing & Advocacy

Melina Cohen

Director of Strategic
Communications & Policy
Engagement

Agenda

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ 2024 In Review & 2025 Legislative Forecast
- ▶ 2025 State of the Secular States Report
- ▶ Advocacy Tools & Resources
- ▶ Questions

Introduction

Why Work on State Legislation?

- ▷ Positive policy change is possible
- ▷ Can oppose negative policy change
- ▷ Let lawmakers know our community exists
- ▷ Build awareness and support for change
- ▷ Helps local groups to grow and build influence

American Atheists' focus on state and local policy change helps us to empower grassroots advocates to make real change.

Why Are These Atheist Issues?

- ▶ Public education, health care & reproductive services, LGBTQ equality, 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 are we tracking?

Laws that:

1. Impact religious equality, usually by providing special privileges based on religious belief
2. Affect the separation of religion and government
3. Cause (or could limit) harm that religion causes to third parties, especially children
4. Protect the civil rights of atheists and other nonreligious people and other religious minorities



2025 STATE OF THE SECULAR STATES

*A Review of State Legislation Affecting the
Separation of Religion and Government*



What Has Changed?

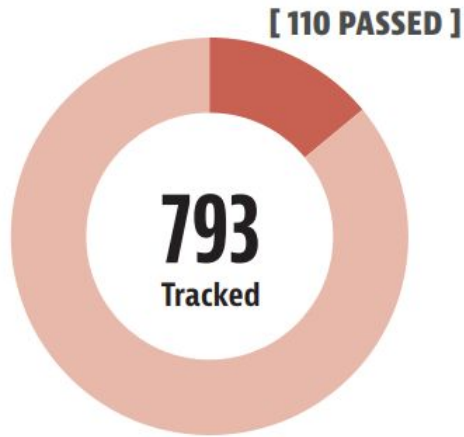
Things We Added

- ▶ RFRA-Equivalent Court Precedent
- ▶ School Chaplain Laws

Things That Changed

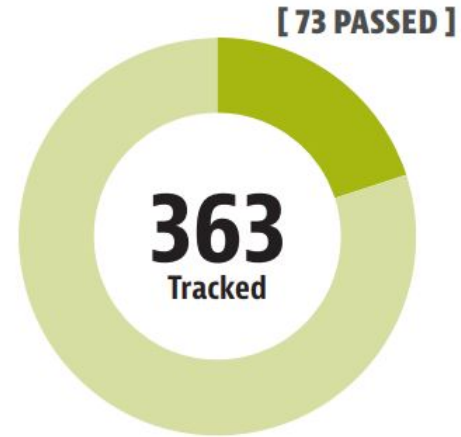
- ▶ Limited and Universal School Vouchers

2024 in Review



Negative Bills

We tracked and opposed 793 bills that would undermine religious equality during the 2024 legislative session. Of these, 110 bills passed and 683 failed.



Positive Bills

We tracked and supported 363 bills that would protect religious equality during the 2024 legislative session. Of these, 73 bills passed and 290 failed.

Notable Legislation in 2024

POSITIVE

Maine & Rhode Island

Passed shield laws to protect access to reproductive care and trans health care provided in the state

NEGATIVE

Louisiana

Passed a school chaplain law, a law to mandate display of the Ten Commandments in schools, and restricted access to mifepristone

NEGATIVE

Oklahoma

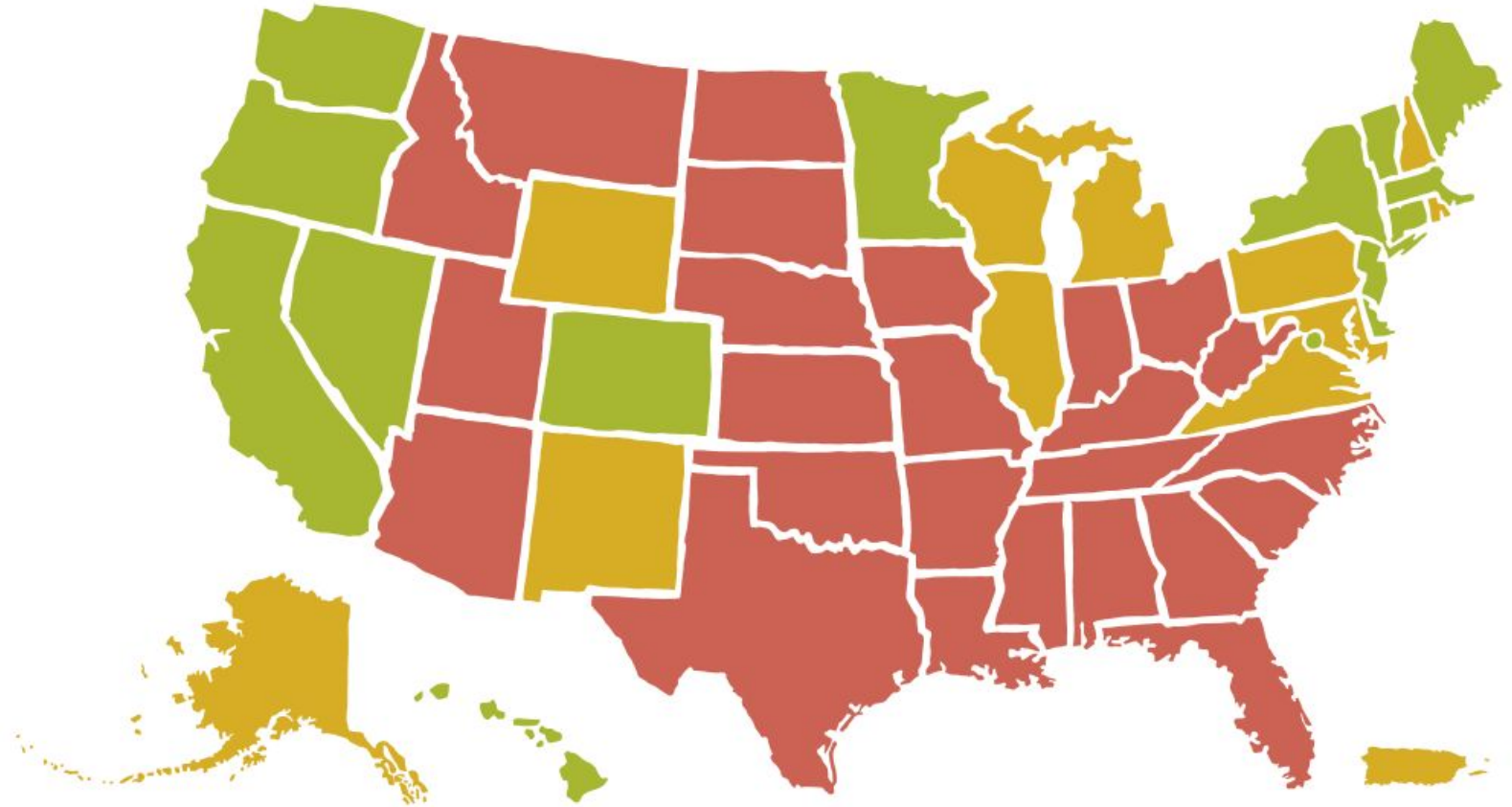
Passed a law requiring school districts to provide released time and academic credit for religious instruction

POSITIVE

New York & Washington

Passed law to protect employees from religious coercion in the workplace

National Summary Map



Minnesota

Strong Protections for Religious Equality



Constitutional & Nondiscrimination Protections

- ▲ State Establishment Clause
- ▲ State Free Exercise Clause
- ▲ Strong Taxpayer Standing

NONDISCRIMINATION LAWS

- ▲ Employment
- ▲ Housing
- ▲ Public Accommodations
- ▲ Education
- ▼ Religious Exemptions
- ▼ Religious Tests for Office

Special Privileges for Religion

LIMITATIONS ON CLERGY PRIVILEGE

- ▲ Mandatory Reporting
- ▲ Exception for Child Abuse

- ▲ Secular Celebrants

RELIGIOUS EXEMPTIONS TO ENFORCEMENT

- ▼ Foster Care & Adoption
- ▼ Public Health Protections
- ▼ Broad Liability Shield

TAX EXEMPTIONS FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP

- ▼ Limited Filing Requirements
- ▼ Parsonage Exemption
- ▼ Property Tax Exemption
- ▼ Sales Tax Exemption

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM RESTORATION ACT

- ▼ Statutory State RFRA
- ▼ Equivalent Court Precedent
- ▼ Anti-Blasphemy Law

Health Care & Wellness

- ▲ Medical Aid-In-Dying Law
- ▲ Protection from Conversion Therapy
- ▲ Health Care Transparency Law

SHIELD LAWS

- ▲ Reproductive Care Confidentiality Protections
- ▲ Trans Care Confidentiality Protections
- ▲ Reproductive Care Provider Protections
- ▲ Trans Care Provider Protections

ACCESS TO ABORTION

- ▲ Constitutional or Statutory Protections
- ▼ Statutory Abortion Ban
- ▼ Private Enforcement Provisions

DENIAL OF CARE LAWS

- ▼ Refusals Related to Abortion
- ▼ Refusals Related to Contraception
- ▼ Refusals Related to Sterilization
- ▼ Religion-Based Health Care Law
- ▼ Trans Youth Health Care Ban
- ▼ Child Negligence Exemptions for Faith Healing
- ▼ Nonmedical Exemption to Vaccination

Education & Youth

- ▲ Protection From Child Marriage

SEX EDUCATION

- ▲ Comprehensive Sex Education
- ▼ Abstinence Only Programs

HOMESCHOOLING LAWS

- ▲ Instructor Qualifications
- ▲ Testing & Evaluation
- ▲ Child Abuse Prevention
- ▼ Exemptions

SCHOOL VOUCHERS & TAX CREDITS

- ▼ Limited School Vouchers
- ▼ Universal School Vouchers

SCHOOL CENSORSHIP LAWS

- ▼ Divisive Topics Restricted
- ▼ LGBTQ Topics Restricted
- ▼ Religious Opt-Outs
- ▼ Undermines Students' Rights

- ▼ Trans Youth Athlete Ban
- ▼ Anti-Science / Anti-Evolution Law
- ▼ School Chaplain Law
- ▼ Bible Class Law
- ▼ Religious Displays in Schools
- ▼ School Prayer Law
- ▼ Compelled Pledge Law
- ▼ Released Time Law
- ▼ School Credit for Religious Education
- ▼ Campus License to Discriminate Law
- ▼ Religious Daycare Exemption

KEY

- ▲ State has this law or policy that enhances religious equality
- △ State does not have this law or policy that enhances religious equality
- ▼ State has this law or policy that harms religious equality
- ▽ State does not have this law or policy that harms religious equality

The 2025 State of the Secular States report is a project of American Atheists. To learn more about our critical state-level advocacy, research, and public policy work, please visit states.atheists.org

Oklahoma

Religious Exemptions That Undermine Equality



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2024 State Trends: RFRAs

- ▶ States expanded Religious Freedom Restoration Acts to provide broad exemptions for individuals and businesses to deny services based on religious beliefs.
- ▶ New RFRA laws were passed in states like Texas, targeting LGBTQ+ individuals and reproductive healthcare providers.
- ▶ Existing RFRAs were amended to shield religious organizations from anti-discrimination lawsuits and accountability measures.
- ▶ Advocacy groups raised concerns about the growing use of RFRAs to justify discrimination and erode civil rights protections.

2024 State Trends: Health Care

- ▶ Many states criminalized medication abortion drugs, such as mifepristone, and tightened existing abortion bans.
- ▶ Travel restrictions were implemented, with Tennessee penalizing interstate abortion access for minors.
- ▶ Funding for crisis pregnancy centers expanded, diverting resources from legitimate healthcare providers.
- ▶ Denial of care and health care transparency.

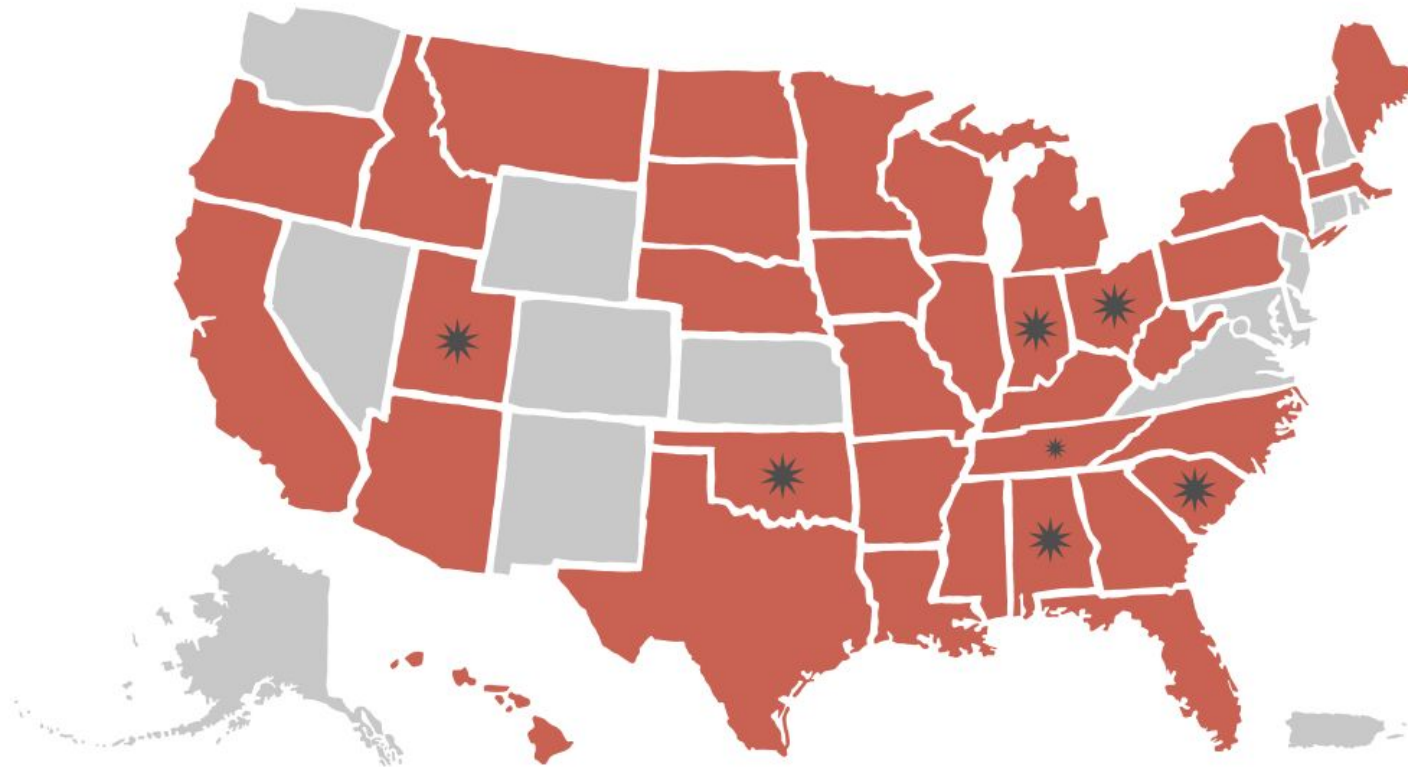
2024 State Trends: LGBTQ+ Issues

- ▶ Five states passed bathroom bills restricting transgender people's access to public restrooms.
- ▶ States like Arkansas and Montana imposed barriers to updating gender markers on official documents.
- ▶ Maine, Maryland, and Rhode Island enacted shield laws to protect trans health care providers and families from out-of-state interference.

2024 State Trends: Public Education

- ▶ Universal voucher programs were expanded in states like Alabama and Louisiana, draining resources from public schools.
- ▶ Religious curriculum and display mandates increased, as in Oklahoma and Louisiana.
- ▶ Book bans were enforced in states like Florida, leading to the removal of LGBTQ+ and race-related content.
- ▶ School chaplains, “parental rights” policies, and released time for religious instruction.

PUBLIC SCHOOL RELEASED TIME LAWS



Influences on State Legislative Trends in 2024

- ▶ The Christian Nationalist movement has intensified its focus on culture war policies targeting education, abortion, and LGBTQ+ issues.
- ▶ Legislative priorities were shaped by national discourse, including debates over abortion access and school privatization.
- ▶ Supreme Court decisions weakened Establishment Clause protections, encouraging religious encroachment into public schools.
- ▶ Ballot measures often countered legislative overreach, with voters protecting reproductive rights and rejecting school vouchers.

2025 Legislative Forecast

What's Coming in 2025

- ▶ State legislatures: changes to redistricting, adjustments to voting certifications, stricter voter ID requirements.
- ▶ Escalating religious encroachment, more 10C laws, school chaplain mandates, and released-time laws.
- ▶ Broad religious exemptions under RFRA laws will likely expand, shielding institutions from accountability.
- ▶ Attacks on reproductive and trans healthcare, with proactive “shield laws” emerging as key countermeasures.

What are we seeing so far?

Already tracking over 160 bills

- ▶ Expected attacks on education and healthcare
- ▶ 10+ School Chaplain or related bills
- ▶ 10+ Ten Commandment Bills
- ▶ 3 Covenant Marriage Bills

Advocacy Tools & Resources

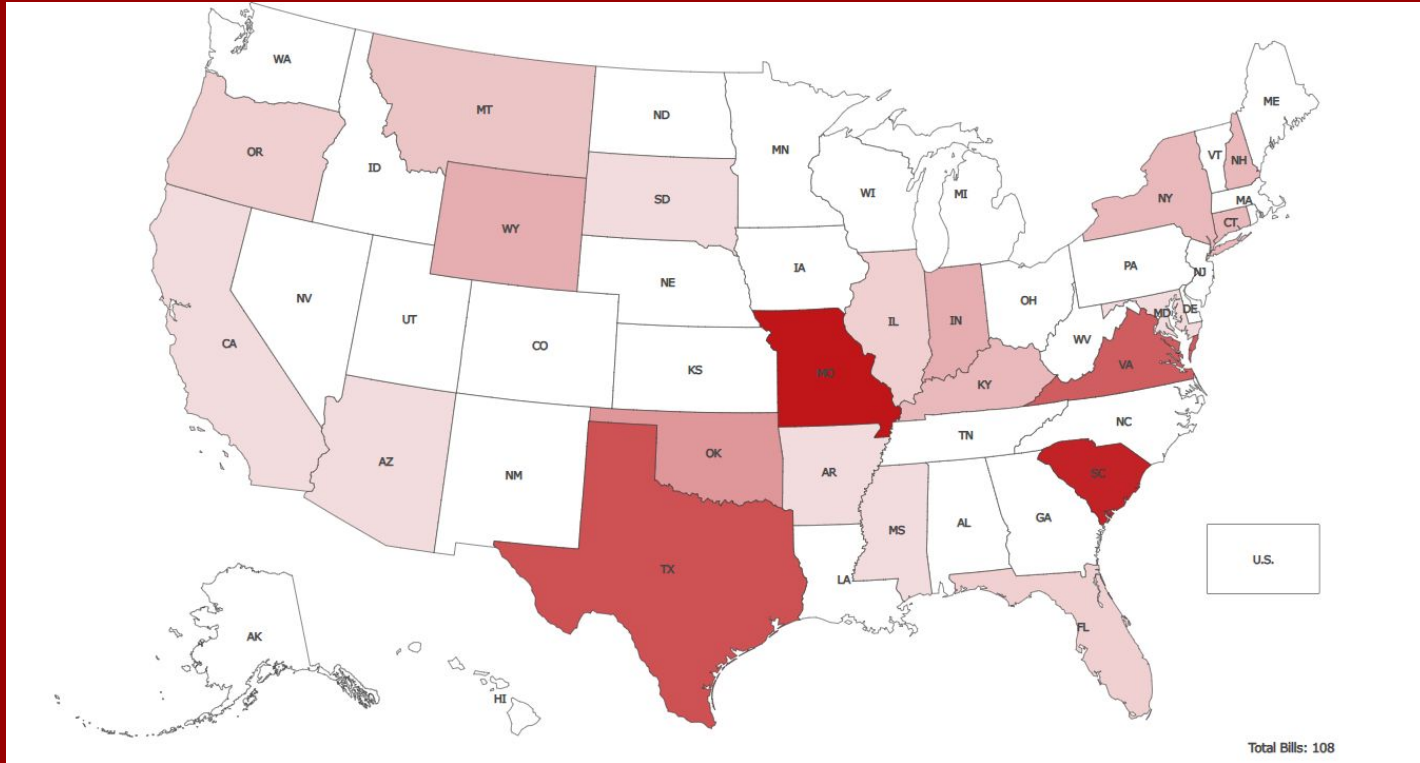
Why State Advocacy?

- ▶ Many of the most important public policy decisions are made at the state level
- ▶ You have more impact affecting policy change in your state
- ▶ Lawmakers should know you exist
- ▶ You can build awareness and support for long term change

Secular Advocacy Teams

- ▶ Established in several states to foster grassroots secular advocacy
- ▶ Currently, we have SATs in Colorado, Virginia, Texas, Florida, Oklahoma, and California
- ▶ We build connections between advocates and provide additional support, tools, and training
- ▶ If you would like to become involved with an SAT in your state, email smcguire@atheists.org

State Legislation Tracker



<https://www.atheists.org/activism/state-legislation>

Getting Started

- ▶ Make sure we have your correct address by submitting your information at www.atheists.org/sign-up/
- ▶ Look at your state scorecard and think about who you might want to share it with.
- ▶ Check out the legislation we're tracking in your state, submit any we missed!

Other Tools & Resources

- ▶ Data about nonreligious people at www.secularsurvey.org
- ▶ Connect with local affiliates or state directors in your area - www.atheists.org/activism
- ▶ Contact us at advocacy@atheists.org or field@atheists.org
- ▶ Come to our 2025 National Convention in Minneapolis! Register at convention.atheists.org



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How does your state compare?
Check out the 2025 State of the
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Questions?

Nick Fish

nfish@atheists.org

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smcguire@atheists.org

Melina Cohen

mcohen@atheists.org