

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

BJC Magazine

Making a difference
with BJC advocacy

AMANDA TYLER on the
impact of your voice

HOLLY HOLLMAN on
fighting for freedom

Q&A with Shurden
Lecturer **EBOO PATEL**

Make a difference: Connect with BJC's advocacy opportunities

This edition of *Report from the Capital* shows how people like you are working with us to make a difference. Whether it's engaging on social media, signing a letter to Congress, reaching out to lawmakers or taking action in your community, BJC is here to help you be an empowered and more effective advocate.

BJC ADVOCACY TRAININGS: Pages 6-9 take you inside our advocacy programs, and Lynn Brinkley shares her personal story of participation on page 12.

RESOURCES: On pages 13-14, you'll see a handout you can use to advocate for the repeal of blasphemy laws around the world.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION: Page 15 shares a variety of ways you can take action during Public Schools Week 2020.

A ROLE FOR EVERYONE: All of us can make a difference. Pages 10-11 have examples of the many ways your advocacy has an impact.

Let us know how we can equip you to raise your voice — we're in this together. Visit BJCOnline.org/make-a-difference to join us in our work and see how you can be an advocate for religious liberty.



BJC Board adds new member bodies, elects new officers

The BJC Board of Directors elected new officers and added two new member bodies during their annual meeting, which included visits to the offices of their members of Congress.

The board elected Jackie Baugh Moore of Texas as chair and C. Lynn Brinkley, representing the Religious Liberty Council, as vice chair. Emily Hull McGee, representing CBF of North Carolina, was elected secretary, and Brian Ford of Churchnet was elected treasurer. The officers' terms began at the conclusion of the meeting.

Two new Baptist bodies were approved for membership in BJC: Fellowship Southwest and Convención Bautista Hispana de Texas (the Hispanic Baptist

Convention of Texas). Both organizations share a commitment to religious liberty and provide opportunities for collaboration and advocacy.

While in D.C., BJC staff led board members through an advocacy training. The board then split up into groups and visited their lawmakers' offices on Capitol Hill to discuss religious liberty and BJC's work (see p. 6-9).

Composed of representatives of BJC's supporting bodies, the BJC Board meets annually to review the work of the organization, pass an operating budget and discuss ways to make a difference. During the 2019 meeting, they also heard from the winner of the essay contest and discussed current threats to religious liberty.

REFLECTIONS

Finding your role as a BJC advocate

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director

As we head into this holiday season, I am reflecting on BJC's work this year. In 2019, we embarked on a new way of fulfilling our mission to defend religious liberty: not only being your voice in Washington, but equipping you to be advocates for faith freedom for all.

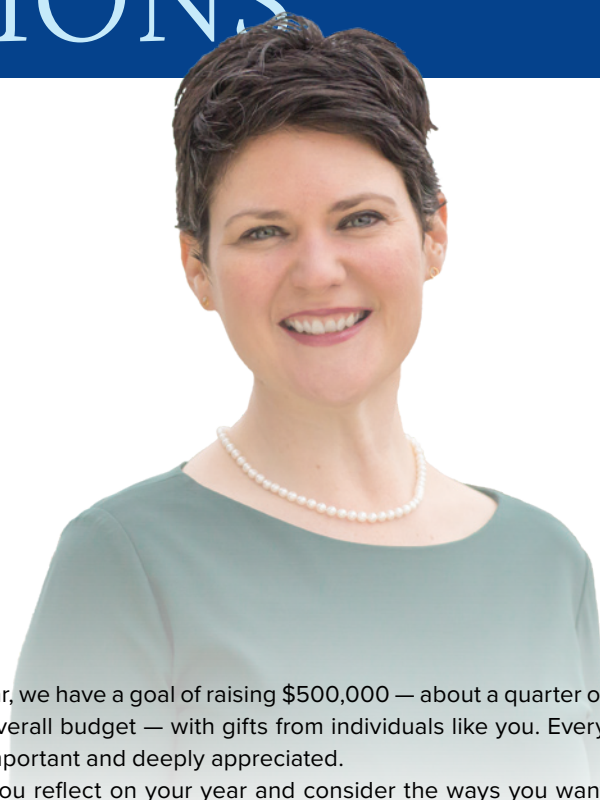
This additional aspect of our work has been a new strategic focus, and now we are putting our dreams and plans into action.

During the past couple of months, the BJC team conducted advocacy trainings in Washington and across the country for hundreds of individuals who are passionate about religious freedom and eager to share their support with their elected representatives, communities and social media networks.

I'm inspired by these advocates who take several hours out of their busy lives to attend a session, allowing them to learn together, share tips and use their newfound skills with a visit to their local congressional office. At a time when our Congress, and indeed our country, is deeply divided, I believe that BJC advocates have a powerful opportunity to provide a witness of how people of faith can engage constructively in the public square. If we are to keep religious liberty from being misused and politicized in our polarized society, we will need many more people to join us in this cause. This matters not just for the sake of principle, but for those whose religious freedom is under threat — in this country and around the world.

Being involved with the legislative process is just one way to make a difference. Some advocates are more comfortable engaging in digital advocacy by sharing information with their social media networks. Others prefer leading the conversation in personal settings, such as their houses of worship, workplaces, small groups or even around the holiday dinner table. Our next generation of advocates may feel called to apply to be a BJC Fellow or BJC Intern.

We advocate not just with our voices and our actions but with how we steward our resources. One way that all supporters of BJC's mission can engage in advocacy is with a donation to fund our advocacy trainings and other programs. While BJC was once entirely funded by denominational gifts, our budget increasingly relies on the generosity of individuals — Baptists and others — who care about preserving religious liberty for generations to come.



This year, we have a goal of raising \$500,000 — about a quarter of BJC's overall budget — with gifts from individuals like you. Every gift is important and deeply appreciated.

As you reflect on your year and consider the ways you want to be more involved in the work of defending faith freedom for all, I hope you will consider partnering and advocating with BJC. Your involvement makes a difference in the lives of our neighbors. I asked a few of our friends to share what our advocacy this year has meant to them.

"BJC stands up for me when it calls out attempts to ban Muslims as unconstitutional and un-American."

—*Bayan Al-Fathi, BJC monthly donor*

"I'm thankful for BJC's initiative to confront Christian nationalism through the truth of genuine Christian teaching and faithful constitutional study, both springing from our rich Baptist history."

—*Rev. Preston Clegg, pastor of BJC-supporting church*

"BJC is the best friend of the Jewish community as it advocates for religious freedom for all. This stance is important now more than ever, in the wake of unthinkable tragedies at synagogues and growing anti-Semitism."

—*Skip Newman, BJC donor*

"BJC shines a light on how Christian nationalism and racism have been intertwined for centuries and calls people to have courageous conversations about ways in which the church has been complicit."

—*Rev. Darrell Hamilton, BJC monthly donor & 2017 Intern*

"The threats to religious liberty for my neighbors are too numerous for me to stay silent now. I'm grateful to find others who share my concerns and a community where we can join our efforts to make a difference."

—*Dr. Kristen Nielsen Donnelly, BJC Fellow & monthly donor*

I am grateful for the advocacy of Bayan, Preston, Skip, Darrell, Kristen and many others who have invested themselves and their gifts in faith freedom for all — not just for their own freedom, but to stand with their neighbors. I hope you will join them in finding your role as a BJC advocate.

SCOTUS to hear case on taxpayer funding of religion



Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue explores provisions that prevent unconstitutional state funding

The U.S. Supreme Court is again deciding what weight to give a state constitutional provision designed to prevent government funding of and interference in religion. BJC filed a brief in *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue* to defend the law's distinctive treatment of religion.

Just two years after a decision that required the state of Missouri to include churches in a state grant program for playground resurfacing, the U.S. Supreme Court is now reviewing a state law designed to avoid funding of religious education.

Espinoza and the 2017 case of *Trinity Lutheran Church v. Comer* both involve the interpretation and application of state “no aid to religion” provisions. More than 39 states have state constitutions that categorically ban government funding of churches. Many of these provisions pre-date the U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment and protect against government funding of religion in more explicit terms than the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

In *Espinoza*, parents of students who attend private religious schools challenged a state tax credit program that did not include religious schools. The program provided a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for donations to an entity that pays tuition at private schools. The parents’ case went to the Montana Supreme Court, which struck the program, ruling that the state constitution forbids the creation of a tax credit program for donations that support private religious schools. Now, the U.S. Supreme Court will decide whether Montana’s decision to restrict such a program violates the Free Exercise Clause of the U.S. Constitution.

In *Trinity Lutheran Church*, the Court held that the state of Missouri violated the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment when it denied the participation of a church-owned preschool in a grant program, despite state constitutional provisions aimed to prevent state funding of churches.

BJC filed a brief defending such state constitutions as a valid and historical way of preventing government-funded religion. While the Court found that Missouri’s exclusion of a church-owned school was not allowed under the Free Exercise Clause, its decision was explicitly limited. In that case, the Court distinguished the case of a state’s denial of participation in a program based on religious “status” from a state’s avoidance of government funding for a religious “use.” The Court found denial based on status unconstitutional, but the Court did not address avoidance of funding for religious use. An important footnote in the *Trinity Lutheran Church* decision, written by Chief Justice John Roberts, specified that the case was only about playground resurfacing and not religious uses of state funding.

In *Espinoza*, the Court is being asked to require that the government provide benefits to religious institutions whenever it does for private secular ones. As in *Trinity Lutheran Church*, BJC’s role in this case is to defend the distinctive treatment of religion in law, and to counter the false and damaging narrative that misrepresents the prohibition on government-funded religion. Both avoiding government sponsorship of religion and preventing government inter-

ference with religious practice are important means of protecting religious liberty.

BJC’s brief argues it is ahistorical and inaccurate to claim that the “no funding” rule discriminates against religion. Instead, the “no funding” principle, which applies without regard to any particular religion, is deeply rooted in our religious liberty history and protects the integrity of religious institutions. With government money comes government rules.

Proponents of vouchers and other government efforts to fund religious schools often cite evidence of anti-Catholic hostility in the 19th century. They argue the “no funding” rule is the result of this animus. But, the “no funding” principle pre-dates that period and is not related to those concerns.

While the Supreme Court has held that the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause does not prohibit certain student aid programs that are neutral with regard to religion, it has never held that the Free Exercise Clause demands government funding of religion. To do so would, in effect, re-write state constitutions and upend the way religious liberty is protected in our legal tradition.

BJC’s brief was written with Dr. Steven Green, a professor of law at Willamette University and the nation’s leading expert on religious liberty and state constitutions.

The Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in the case January 22. For the latest information and to read BJC’s brief, visit BJCOnline.org/Espinoza.

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel

Fighting for religious freedom on all fronts

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel

With this edition of *Report from the Capital*, I am reminded of the variety of BJC's advocacy efforts through the years, and I'm thankful for the opportunity to make a difference together. I chose legal advocacy as a profession, but I learned how to fight for what is important to me long before adulthood. I trained by growing up with two older brothers and a younger sister, negotiating time on the trampoline, selection of television shows and snack distribution. More importantly, my parents, teachers and leaders in our Baptist church encouraged education and compassion. I felt valued when they answered my questions, and I felt accepted when I voiced my opinions. At home, religion and politics were typical topics of dinner conversations. We had a near constant rotation of visitors, including Mom's college students and foreign visitors my parents had met during their travels. Their different experiences helped us better understand our own.

I later realized this background led me to a career in law and, eventually, to BJC. Law school and my early experiences in law firms gave me the skills to advance a client's positions zealously and ethically in an adversarial setting. I also learned that in many situations it doesn't take a law degree to make an impact. It takes understanding an issue, passion to promote it and preparation for the specific arena. Effective advocacy requires a willingness to use one's voice and other skills to advance a cause from an informed and constructive perspective. Understanding diverse perspectives and divergent interests also helps.

As BJC general counsel, I represent the cause of religious liberty in the historic Baptist tradition. This work has proven to be important and consistently needed through many political and cultural changes. It is a privilege to work for what we believe is best for religious liberty for all. Sometimes that means advocating for a position because it is right, whether the law requires it or not. As is often the case, just because something is constitutional does not mean it is recommended as a matter of policy.

With so many challenges, we are often asked how we decide which issues to address. It's a balance between where our voice is most needed and where we can have a significant impact. We've learned through BJC's 80 years of experience to stick to our mission, build

on our history and past positions, adjust to changing circumstances, and use our resources wisely. Different venues require different kinds of effort, but in every aspect of our work, our supporters have been our partners, allowing BJC to grow in new and effective ways.

In our legal work, we participate in cases as a "friend of the court." We file *amicus* briefs when we can clarify or amplify a principle that is essential for maintaining religious liberty for all. Government should not intrude in matters of faith by co-opting religious symbols or by interfering in how churches make internal decisions, such as about the hiring or firing of ministers. Religious individuals — and those who do not identify as religious — have a right and responsibility to participate in all aspects of civic life, and they should be protected and treated fairly. No one should be denied the safety to worship as they see fit. While religious communities and government entities often work together for common goals, financial and other entanglements should be avoided. The institutions of religion and government should be meaningfully independent.

As advocates for faith freedom for all in a variety of difficult cases, BJC works to defend these principles. We may not always be on the winning side in any particular case, but getting a decision that includes certain distinctions and maintains important principles is crucial for the continuing legacy of religious liberty. Our briefs have sharpened oral arguments and become part of decision-making in the U.S. Supreme Court.

Likewise, our legislative efforts rely on articulating essential and unifying principles. Opportunities are expanded through contacts with government officials — both by us in D.C. and by you across the country. We maintain contact and provide accurate and useful information to congressional staff, working in coalitions with other organizations. You provide connections with your representatives to share concerns as a constituent and help them understand why you care about the issues affecting religious liberty.

BJC's opportunities have always come from offering a well-informed and trustworthy voice in partnership with supporting denominational entities, churches and individuals. By organizing and advocating in a variety of settings — from the Supreme Court, to Congress, to local communities — we will continue to have an impact in Washington and beyond.



BJC brings you tools to make a difference

Advocacy trainings empower you to connect with Congress and your local community

By Cherilyn Crowe
BJC Communications Director

Washington, D.C.

Your voice has power – in your community, on social media and in the halls of Congress. At the local, state and federal level, you have representatives whose ears perk up when a constituent is speaking, and BJC is here to help you use your voice to make a difference.

This fall, BJC launched a series of advocacy trainings, leading workshops in Colorado, Arkansas, Texas and Washington, D.C. Area churches hosted these events, which were open to anyone looking to be a more empowered advocate on church-state issues. The trainings also connected individuals who wanted to come together to make an impact supporting religious freedom for all.

“Not only is BJC dedicated to being advocates for faith freedom for all in Washington, we are committed to providing people with the tools and resources they need to take action in their communities,” said BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler. “These advocates are at the forefront of defending religious freedom for all people.”

The trainings provided both substantive education on current religious liberty issues as well as practical and effective strategies to build relationships with members of Congress and their staffs. They also include instruction on other forms of advocacy, such as using social media to raise your voice with lawmakers and within your own spheres of influence.

BJC’s experts on legislative advocacy walked participants through what to expect when visiting a legisla-





San Antonio, Texas



San Antonio, Texas

“Spending a day in advocacy training with leaders from BJC restored my faith in being identified as Baptist. I realized that I, too, could be a part of advocacy for religious freedom and separation of church and state.”

LaRinda Horan
Houston participant

tor’s office, how to approach the meeting and suggestions on valuable follow-up.

“Our major emphasis in these trainings is to demystify the process for people, many of whom are visiting with their elected representatives for the first time,” said Tyler, who worked in a congressional office for eight years before she came to BJC. “I understand both the power that each constituent’s voice carries for their member of Congress and also the intimidation that comes from not knowing the process or what to expect. Our nuts-and-bolts trainings are designed to provide individuals with the tools and the confidence they need to be effective advocates.”

BJC staff prepared handouts and talking points to educate local advocates on a variety of religious liberty issues, including the basic principles of religious liberty, bills being considered by Congress and the dangers of Christian nationalism. BJC equipped participants to speak confidently about the issues to others, allowing participants to practice their new skills by role-playing a visit and providing feedback to each other on the most effective messages to convey.

“One of the key things BJC did was walk us through what the conversation was going to be

like,” said Anyra Cano, a member of the BJC Board who participated in Washington, D.C., and Fort Worth, Texas. “We don’t have to be the experts, but we have to have a passion or a love for what we’re advocating for.”

“Spending a day in advocacy training with leaders from BJC restored my faith in being identified as a Baptist,” said LaRinda Horan, who attended the training in Houston. “I realized that I, too, could be a part of advocacy for religious freedom and separation of church and state.”

These skills are transferable, noted BJC Associate Director of Mobilization Christine Browder. “Once advocates know how to make visits and have the experience of completing one, they can help lead other groups of people in advocating with their local and state officials on a number of issues,” said Browder, who worked for several years organizing advocacy for the Texas Hunger Initiative at Baylor University.

A key part of an effective visit is having a clear action item for the elected representative to take. This fall, BJC sessions prepared participants to talk to their members of Congress about the dangers of blasphemy and apostasy laws. In countries around the world,

#BJCAdvocacy on Twitter

Sofi Hersher  @sof

Today, I (a Reform Jew) sat with @SenToomey's (Catholic) General Counsel to discuss Baptist & @BJContheHill history — and the importance of repealing blasphemy & apostasy laws worldwide. Only in America. #FaithFreedomForAll #BJCAdvocacy

Cynthia Holmes  @lawyercynthia

Enjoyed seeing Rep. @LacyClayMO1 again today on Capitol Hill and chatting with him about important legislation (H. Res. 512) which urges the repeal of blasphemy laws that threaten Americans in other parts of the world. #BJCAdvocacy



Convencion Bautista  @ConvencionTX

Thank you Don from @HurdOnTheHill's Office for meeting with Hispanic leaders as @ConvencionTX & @BJContheHill advocate for #FaithFreedomForAll!! #BJCAdvocacy



Todd Blake  @Rev_Todd

In DC for @BJContheHill board meetings and had the opportunity to meet with @RepBenCline. We talked about the importance of religious liberty for all and the need to repeal blasphemy laws around the world. Thank you Congressman Cline! #BJCAdvocacy #FaithFreedomForAll



Follow @BJContheHill on social media and see more stories by searching #BJCAdvocacy on Twitter and Instagram.



Little Rock, Arkansas

those laws criminalize religious dissent and are often used to silence religious minorities and punish political opponents, fostering religious intolerance, discrimination and violence. During visits, BJC advocates asked lawmakers to co-sponsor a bipartisan resolution that calls for the State Department and the administration to prioritize the repeal of such laws in foreign policy. Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Maryland, and Rep. Mark Meadows, R-North Carolina, introduced H. Res. 512 in the U.S. House of Representatives. Sen. James Lankford, R-Oklahoma, and Sen. Chris Coons, D-Connecticut, are expected to introduce a Senate companion bill soon. On pages 13-14, you can see the printed material provided to advocates and lawmakers about H. Res. 512.

“We don’t have to be the experts, but we have to have a passion or a love for what we’re advocating for.”

Anyra Cano
Fort Worth participant

After the briefing sessions, BJC led groups of advocates to visit the offices of their elected representatives. In Washington, D.C., members of the BJC Board fanned out to visit more than 50 offices on Capitol Hill. Advocates in Little Rock, Arkansas, and San Antonio, Houston and Fort Worth, Texas, visited the local offices of their federal representatives. BJC staff worked with offices to schedule visits in advance, and advocates were welcomed and connected with the appropriate member of a lawmaker’s staff in order to make the biggest impact during the meeting.



Fort Worth, Texas



Houston, Texas

“BJC Advocacy Training gave me insight into the inner workings of congressional offices,” said Pastor Garrett Vickrey of Woodland Baptist Church, who attended the San Antonio training. “It also taught me how we can build relationships with these community partners to advocate on behalf of issues that matter to congregational life.”

“BJC helped frame major issues surrounding religious liberty in a succinct manner,” said Kevin Heifner, who attended the training in Little Rock. “The session showed us how to engage others in a meaningful fashion to find common ground so we can work together to advance religious freedom for all.”

“Even if you cannot attend an advocacy training in person, you can make your voice heard,” said Browder. “Whether it’s engaging on social media, signing a letter to Congress, reaching out to lawmakers by phone, or taking action in your community, you can make a difference.”

After the success of the fall trainings, BJC plans to

continue the events in new cities across the country.

“Effective legislative advocacy is a marathon and not a sprint,” said Tyler. “BJC is helping individuals who are passionate about religious freedom for all take the first step in building a relationship with their elected representatives and their staffs, and we look forward to leading more trainings in 2020.”

Everyone is invited to join the BJC Advocacy Team, which provides additional information and opportunities for engagement. When you sign up to receive emails from BJC, simply check the box to join the team, and you’ll receive email alerts when action is needed to take a stand for faith freedom for all. Sign up or update your information at BJCOnline.org/subscribe.

If you would like more information about BJC Advocacy Trainings or if you are interested in hosting one in 2020, let us know. Email Christine Browder at cbrowder@BJCOnline.org.

Join the BJC Advocacy Team!

Receive action alerts about opportunities to make a difference. Sign up for BJC emails or update your preferences at BJCOnline.org/subscribe, and check the box to join the team.



Visit our YouTube channel to hear what it’s like to attend a BJC Advocacy Training in our new video, featuring participants in Washington, D.C., sharing about their experience.

Don’t miss our videos: Subscribe to BJC on YouTube!

A Role For Everyone

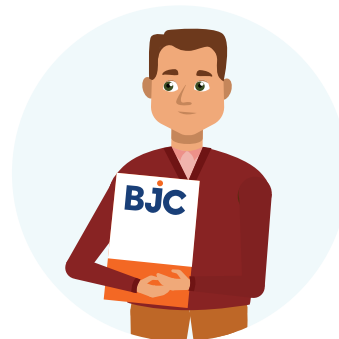
Thank you for helping BJC make great strides this year. Let's keep the momentum going. There are many ways to use your voice and give!



The Digital Advocate

You make a difference by adding your name to online platforms for action in support of religious freedom and calling out threats to faith freedom for all. You lead conversations by sharing your support with your social media networks and engaging in civil dialogue.

Your gift: On the first day of our Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign, more than 1,000 people, representing all 50 states and D.C., signed the statement. A donation of **\$300 (\$25 monthly gift)** helps spread the word on social media to gather more support.



The Legislative Advocate

You support religious freedom by building relationships with your elected representatives and conveying your priorities to them. BJC's advocacy trainings and tool kits can get you started and help increase your impact.

Your gift: BJC led advocacy trainings for more than 400 people this year, equipping them to be more effective advocates and lead conversations in their communities about protecting religious freedom. It costs **\$2000** to fund an advocacy training; a gift of **\$240 (\$20 monthly gift)** trains an individual for legislative advocacy.



The BJC Fellow

BJC Fellows participate in an intensive, one-year program that begins with an immersive seminar in Colonial Williamsburg. BJC Fellows deepen their historical, theological and legal understanding of religious freedom and develop the skills to advocate for the cause throughout their careers.

Your gift: We now have 50 BJC Fellows in 20 different states, serving their communities as local advocates for faith freedom for all. A gift of **\$50** supplies textbooks for a BJC Fellow, while **\$500** supports continuing education.



The BJC Intern

For nearly four decades, more than 200 students and recent graduates have spent an academic semester learning with BJC. Interns live on Capitol Hill while they get hands-on experience in legal and legislative advocacy, communications, mobilization and development.

Your gift: Our former interns are now in a variety of fields: ministry, law, politics, government service, business, education and more. A donation of **\$600 (\$50 monthly gift)** provides a stipend for living expenses in Washington, D.C., for an intern for a month.



The Donor

You make all of these advocacy programs possible — along with BJC's work in the courts, with Congress and more. Perhaps you are also a digital or legislative advocate, BJC Fellow or former intern. Whatever your gift, we depend on donations from passionate advocates like you to pursue our mission and bring our ambitious plans to life.

Your gift: Last year, 918 people like you gave more than \$400,000 to make these programs happen. Increasing donations from individuals to **\$500,000** is crucial to our continued impact.

Thank you.

You've joined impactful campaigns, such as Christians Against Christian Nationalism, and listened to and shared our 10-part podcast series of thoughtful conversations with experts and leaders on the topic. Your generous support has enabled us to continue to make a difference with our legal advocacy in the U.S. Supreme Court and to train and equip individuals to meet with their elected officials. Your previous involvement made possible a whole new website and look that is attracting newcomers like never before.

But there's so much more to do. We are living in turbulent times for religious liberty.

We all share a similar passion, and yet each of you has something unique to offer — whether it's advocating to your member of Congress, sharing messages on social media, working with the staff as a BJC intern, leading as a BJC Fellow, signing a statement, or making all these things happen by supporting our mission with your generous financial donations. With our long history as Baptist freedom fighters, we can equip you to take action in new and different ways. Maybe you are joining us today. Maybe you are already a member of our growing family of advocates.

Whatever your role — or roles — we need your advocacy now.



"BJC prepared me to confidently share my views, giving me the resources and training I needed to convey the importance of faith freedom for all with my members of Congress."

—Reba Cobb, Legislative Advocate



"It's important to go on the record when we see a threat to religious liberty, and BJC gives me and my networks the opportunity to take a stand. I am grateful for the ability to raise my voice alongside others."

—Jesse Rincones, Digital Advocate



"The BJC Fellows program encouraged me to step outside of my comfort zone and engage in advocacy work promoting religious liberty for all Americans — not just the African-American Baptists in my local congregation, but everyone."

—Corey J. Mitchell, 2017 BJC Fellow



"I had no idea that such an organization could exist — an organization that understands its own faith-based mission is best served by speaking out for the rights of others. I continue to give to BJC because I feel — truly — that BJC has invested far more in me than I have yet had the opportunity to give back."

—Elana Reman Safner, 2013 BJC Intern

Give Today

Will you join us with a gift toward our \$500,000 annual campaign? We are more than halfway there, but we need your gift to reach our goal.

Now is the time to use your voice and give. Every gift counts toward these projects and so many more.

Donate with the enclosed envelope or at BJCOnline.org/Donate

Starting my advocacy journey

By C. Lynn Brinkley
BJC Board Member

The initial thought of it was quite intimidating: Go to “the Hill,” walk into the offices of my members of Congress and advocate for justice. I had done such things on Facebook, in the beauty salon and from pulpits when I preached, but to actually go to Washington, D.C., and “act justly” like the book of Micah tells us to do was a different story. I didn’t know what to expect. Most of all, I didn’t think I was qualified to do this great work. Fortunately, BJC prepared us for a day of effective advocacy on Capitol Hill.

On the eve of our visit with our elected officials, former U.S. Congressman Chet Edwards gave us an evening tour of the U.S. Capitol. There was something sacred and solemn about being in the Capitol at night. We had the opportunity to sit in the members’ seats on the House floor. We stood in the Capitol Rotunda with its high ceilings and vast historical paintings. We also graced the Capitol’s National Statuary Hall, where I paused at the bronze statue of Rosa Parks. I stared at it for several minutes, reflecting on what Rosa Parks did for civil rights. I remembered that her simple gesture made a huge impact on the world. I thought, “If Rosa Parks could be an advocate for justice during the Civil Rights Era, surely I can do my part tomorrow.”

My fellow board members and I received advocacy training from the BJC staff. We reviewed key points, we shared our personal stories, we rehearsed our scripts with one another, and we headed to Capitol Hill. Our mission: To talk about the importance of faith freedom for all and express our concerns about blasphemy and apostasy laws in other countries and how these laws are a threat to everyone. Fortunately, we didn’t have to do this great work alone. BJC staff joined me for my visit in the House, and I teamed up with two other North Carolinians to visit the offices of our senators. We were fired up and ready to go!

We went to the offices of three people who represent our state: Sen. Richard Burr, Sen. Thom Tillis and Rep. George Holding. During our visits, we met with key members of their staffs who are crucial in making decisions.

We began by sharing our concerns about blasphemy and apostasy laws in other countries, which punish individuals who question their faith and criminalize converting from one religion to another. We asked that the congressmen join a bi-partisan effort to encourage the repeal of such laws: House Resolution 512 and the soon-to-be filed Senate companion, which officially calls for the global repeal of blasphemy, heresy and apostasy laws. Why do we care? (1) This is a humanitarian and moral issue. Individuals should not die or be imprisoned for questioning their faith. (2) We believe in separation of church and state and the right of all people (believers and non-believers) to practice their religion freely without government intrusion around the world. (3) We have missionaries serving



Top: Brinkley and a staff member from the office of Rep. George Holding, R-North Carolina. Bottom: Brinkley and BJC Director of Education Charles Watson Jr. on their way to an office visit.

in countries with such laws around the world, and we need to protect them. And, lastly, for me, this issue is personal.

My daughter will graduate from college in May 2020 from North Carolina A&T State University with a degree in mechanical engineering. She will also be commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force. My daughter may be deployed anywhere in the world and, wherever she goes, I want her to know that the government she is busy defending is also busy defending her! I want her government to set an example in defending everyone’s right to exercise their faith around the world by holding other countries accountable and opposing any effort by the United Nations to create a model for blasphemy laws that promotes religious intolerance, discrimination or violence.

While the initial thought of talking to my lawmakers was quite intimidating, I finished with a sense of accomplishment. I participated in my first advocacy experience on Capitol Hill! I felt we were welcomed. I felt we were heard. I felt we had the freedom to speak truthfully and share our resources. I felt the power of using my voice as an informed constituent. I also felt that I could do this again. Quite frankly, I want to do this again. While this is a mission accomplished, my BJC advocacy journey is just getting started!

Repeal Blasphemy Laws



Laws penalizing blasphemy stifle religious expression and undermine human rights. Most societies have had religious dissenters and other nonconformists, and history teaches us that state-enforced theological conformity simply doesn't work. While legal definitions vary, "blasphemy" refers to words or actions that disrespect religion. Blasphemy laws are often used to silence religious minorities or political opponents and to foster religious intolerance, discrimination, and violence within society.

Support religious freedom by calling for the global repeal of blasphemy and apostasy laws.

What are blasphemy and apostasy laws?

- A blasphemy law seeks to punish those who insult, offend, demean, or denigrate religion (including religious doctrines, leaders, symbols, and texts) with fines, imprisonment, or even the death penalty. An apostasy law criminalizes changing from one religion to another.
- Blasphemy laws harm all of us — religious and nonreligious alike. They are used to justify vigilante violence against both religious and nontheistic dissenters. They harm practitioners of the protected religion by preventing them from asking the hard questions to better connect their faith to their daily lives. Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and others have been imprisoned, tortured, and executed for blasphemy offenses.
- In its report titled "Respecting Rights? Measuring the World's Blasphemy Laws," the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom compiled blasphemy laws from all regions of the world, finding them in at least 1/3 of the world's countries.

Support the bipartisan **H.Res. 512** and the soon-to-be-filed Senate companion bipartisan resolution

H. Res. 512

- Calls on the President and the Secretary of State to: (1) make the repeal of blasphemy, heresy, or apostasy laws a priority in the bilateral relationships of the United States with all countries that have such laws and (2) designate countries that enforce such laws as "countries of particular concern for religious freedom" under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.
- Urges the governments of countries which enforce their blasphemy laws to: (1) amend or repeal such laws and (2) release unconditionally and ensure the safety of those who have been prosecuted, imprisoned, and persecuted on charges of blasphemy, heresy, or apostasy.
- Encourages the President and the Secretary of State: (1) to oppose any efforts by the United Nations to create a model for blasphemy laws and (2) to support efforts by the United Nations to combat religious intolerance, discrimination, or violence and avoid restricting religious expression.

Who supports the resolution?

A growing coalition of nearly three dozen religious and nontheistic advocacy organizations have signed an advocacy letter supporting **H.Res. 512**, including Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC), American Humanist Association, Hindu American Foundation, The United Methodist Church—General Board of Church and Society, and World Muslim Conference.

Impact of blasphemy laws around the world

"Blasphemy" refers to words or actions that disrespect religion. Blasphemy laws are often used to silence religious minorities or political opponents and to foster religious intolerance, discrimination, and violence within society.

In 2014, **Meriam Ibrahim**, a pregnant 27-year-old woman, was convicted and sentenced to death on apostasy charges in Sudan. Meriam was detained with her young son and gave birth to her daughter in her cell while shackled. After receiving international attention, Meriam was found innocent of all charges and finally freed.

In 2017, Russian blogger **Ruslan Sokolovsky** received a suspended sentence of three and a half years after posting a video of himself playing Pokémon Go inside a Russian cathedral.

In 2017, **Basuki Tjahaja Purnama** was seeking to become the first elected non-Muslim leader in Jakarta, Indonesia. He had a comfortable lead in the race until an edited video of one of his campaign speeches sparked outrage against him for appearing to criticize the Quran. Even though someone was eventually convicted for tampering with the video, his blasphemy conviction stood. Purnama was released from prison in January 2019 after serving his two-year sentence.

In 2016, **Albert Voss**, a retired physics teacher and professed atheist, was convicted of blasphemy in Germany for painting anti-Christian slogans on his car. He was fined €500.

In 2012, **Bishoy Kameel Kamel Garas**, a Coptic Christian in Egypt, was convicted of blasphemy for posts shared on a fake Facebook page impersonating him. Despite alerting the authorities of the fake account, posting a disclaimer on his own account, and obtaining a recorded confession from the creator of the fake account, he was convicted of blasphemy, and his family regularly received death threats. He served more than three years in prison before finally being acquitted of this crime he didn't commit.

In 2015, **Abdul Shakoore** received a three year sentence for blasphemy in Pakistan. He was put on trial for the offense of selling books related to Ahmadiyya, a group who considers themselves Muslim but are not legally permitted to describe themselves as Muslims. According to research statistics collected by the Center for Social Justice in Pakistan, 84% of the people charged under the Pakistani blasphemy laws between 1987-2016 have been Muslim or Ahmadiyya.

In 2014, **Kerolos Shouky Attallah** was convicted of blasphemy in Egypt for "liking" a Facebook page for Arabic-speaking Christian converts. He was sentenced to six years in prison, even though he "unliked" the page and never shared any of the page's posts nor posted any content himself.

In 2018, **Aasiya Noreen**, also known as Asia Bibi, was cleared of her blasphemy conviction in Pakistan and released from death row. Noreen is a Christian mother of five who was convicted in 2010 and sentenced to death by hanging. A mob nearly beat her to death in front of her 9-year-old daughter just before her arrest. Two of the Pakistani officials who came to her defense for the unjust conviction were assassinated for supporting her cause. She spent eight years on death row.

Laws are starting to be repealed — let's keep this list growing!

More than 10% of countries with blasphemy laws in 2015 have repealed them: Canada, Denmark, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Malta, New Zealand, and Norway.



Support
the bipartisan
H.Res. 512
and the soon-to-be-
filed Senate companion
bipartisan resolution

Support Public Schools Week: February 24-28, 2020



By Jennifer Hawks
BJC Associate General Counsel

You can make a difference by joining BJC and other organizations in celebrating Public Schools Week 2020. It serves as a reminder of the important role our nation's public schools play in our society and an opportunity to talk about how religious liberty is protected for all students.

Public schools educate 90 percent of American schoolchildren — children of all faiths and none. On the back of this page, you'll see a one-page document listing five concrete ways public schools ensure all students have the right to engage — or not — in religious practices.

Join BJC in supporting Public Schools Week at the local, state and federal levels. Here are five suggestions for engagement:

1) Take the Pledge for Public Schools

You can show your support for public education by signing a pledge. Visit PublicSchoolsWeek2020.com and take a moment to read and sign the Pledge for Public Schools, which honors the religious liberty of all:

Today, I pledge my support for public education. America's public schools educate nine out of 10 students in the United States — more than 50 million — regardless of ability, race, wealth, language, religion or country of origin, to prepare them for future endeavors. By pledging to support our nation's public schools, I also am pledging to strengthen the future of our country.

A list of signers will be shared with members of Congress and state legislators during Public Schools Week 2020, so sign now to be on that list!

2) Share why you are #PublicSchoolProud

Public Schools Week is an ideal time to share on social media why you support public schools. You can tell your story of attending or supporting public schools, post a photo from your school days or make a short video. Encourage your friends to share their own stories, too, to create a groundswell of support. When you post, use the hashtags #PublicSchoolProud and #BJCAdvocacy.

3) Host an event to honor public schools

Consider working with fellow church members or another community group to host an event celebrating your local public schools and educators, including teachers, principals and support staff. Past events have included book drives, speeches at civic meetings or pizza parties for teachers and students. Be creative, have fun and find ways to honor those who are daily investing in the lives of our nation's children.

4) Contact your members of Congress

Take a moment to call or email the offices of your U.S. representative and both U.S. senators, asking them to co-sponsor the Public Schools Week 2020 resolution and share in a floor speech or on social media why they are #PublicSchoolProud. Your voice as a constituent is powerful, and this is a great way to reach out to your lawmakers. The full text of the resolution can be found at PublicSchoolsWeek2020.com.

5) Engage with your local and state leaders

City, county and state legislative bodies often pass resolutions or proclamations to highlight issues important to the community. Ask your school board, city council, county government or state legislators to introduce and support a resolution similar to the one that will be introduced in Congress, which affirms the important role public schools play in our society.

For additional ideas, visit the website of Pastors for Children, a national network of clergy and faith leaders who serve, pray for and advocate for public schools as a key provision of God's common good, at pastorsforchildren.com/publicschoolsweek.

We want to hear from you!

If you participate in Public Schools Week — or if you want more information — let us know! Contact Christine Browder at cbrowder@BJCOnline.org to share your story or receive resources.

You can use the handout on the other side of this page to share how religious liberty is protected in public schools. Visit BJCOnline.org/resources to access it online.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A guide from BJC



STUDENTS CAN PRAY IN SCHOOL

Prayer is a constitutional right, but it cannot be forced on others. Prayer also cannot be performed in a manner that could be taken as a school endorsement of the prayer. Voluntary, student-initiated, student-led prayer is permitted if it is not disruptive, but school-sponsored prayer is not allowed.



STUDENTS CAN WEAR RELIGIOUS CLOTHING AND ACCESSORIES

Religious messages on clothing are permissible to the same extent that other messages are allowed. If a school has a dress code that does not permit any words on any clothing, then that also applies to religious words. Generally, if words or symbols are allowed, then religious words and symbols cannot be excluded.



RELIGIOUS GROUPS CAN MEET ON SCHOOL GROUNDS

Events that are student-initiated and meet when class is not in session (like prayer around a flagpole before school begins) are constitutional. Schools are also required to give religious groups the same access to school grounds as they do other groups that are not related to school curriculum. Students cannot force a captive audience to participate in a religious exercise, and school personnel cannot encourage, discourage or participate in religious groups or events.



TEACHERS CAN TEACH ABOUT RELIGION

Religion may be taught as an academic, objective subject. For example, teachers can teach about the role of religion in history, literature and culture. Religion should not be taught from a devotional or worship perspective. Teachers may not proselytize or teach biblical creationism as science.



STUDENTS MAY EXPRESS THEIR FAITH IN SCHOOL

Students are free to pray, read Scripture, make religious comments in class (when relevant to a subject being discussed) and even share their faith with others at school. Students cannot disrupt a classroom or harass others, but they have the right to talk about their beliefs.



A conversation with 2020 Shurden Lecturer Eboo Patel

On March 4-5, 2020, Eboo Patel will deliver the Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State. A key voice on issues of religious pluralism and democracy, Patel is the founder and president of Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), a nonprofit working to make interfaith cooperation a social norm in America.

Shurden Lectures with Eboo Patel

March 4-5, 2020
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas

Hosted by the
Baptist House of Studies
at Perkins School of Theology

All events are free and
open to the public.
Visit BJCOnline.org/ShurdenLectures
for the latest information.

Below are excerpts from a conversation with Eboo Patel and BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler, taken from episode 10 of the BJC Podcast series on the dangers of Christian nationalism. Visit BJCOnline.org/ShurdenLectures to hear the entire episode. This excerpt has been edited for length and clarity.

I found in conversations, there's some confusion about the idea that to be in favor of pluralism is somehow to water down your own faith or your own distinction.

That's not the way we [at Interfaith Youth Core] use the word "pluralism." For us, it's not a theological pluralism. It's not an "all paths up the mountain lead to the same place" kind of view, although that is one view and it is certainly not one that we are dismissive of. We just say that it is one theological view amongst many theological views. There is a Christian exclusivist view, there is a Muslim exclusivist view, et cetera.

When we talk about pluralism, it's really a civic pluralism. Whatever you might think about creation and salvation, when you share civic space with people who have different ideas of creation and salvation, you ought to figure out ways to cooperate. You ought to figure out ways where you can coach Little League together, where you can serve on the PTA together, where you can do heart surgeries in the same hospital together, where you can be good neighbors, and actually, there is a theological dimension to that. We call that the "theology of interfaith cooperation," which is to say, you don't have to believe that your neighbor is going to heaven to bring that person a cup of sugar when she or he might need it. All of our religious traditions have a theology of positive cooperation, including with the person who is not part of your religious tradition.

Is there a term you would use for our present time?

The shorthand that I have right now is "interfaith nation." I think of [our country] not as a melting pot, but I think of it as a potluck nation. And a potluck only works when people contribute. You don't have a potluck if people don't bring an offering, and a potluck is boring if everybody brings the same dish. So what we ought to look for in America is a table that welcomes the contributions of a diversity of people and nurtures a kind of coherence and gestalt.

The beauty of a potluck is not just all of these dishes on the table; it's the kind of wholeness and banquet that those dishes kind of make happen. And a potluck requires people to take care of the commons, to clean the space, to bring enough plates and cutlery, to make sure that people feel safe, to make sure that dishes are properly labeled for people who don't eat pork or so that people with peanut allergies or gluten issues are kept safe. So I love the idea of an "interfaith nation" that acts more like a potluck supper than a Judeo-Christian nation that is a melting pot.

Winners of the 2019 Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest

The 2019 topic asked students to write an essay about whether the Johnson Amendment — which protects nonprofits and houses of worship from the dangers that come with partisan endorsements — should remain as part of our tax law.



Grand prize winner:

Natalia Barber of Chesapeake, Virginia

Barber shared her personal story of leading the first-ever voter registration drive at her high school and explored the difference in being political and being partisan. “To keep the political process in the United States as effective as possible, it is vital that the Johnson Amendment be protected in American law. As religious leaders promote the idea that politics and partisanship are not the same, it is my hope that young people become inspired to get involved in the political process,” she wrote.



Second prize:

Sebastian Anastasi
Grove City, Pennsylvania



Third prize:

Sydney George
Portland, Oregon

2020 Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest

Open to all high school juniors and seniors!

TOPIC:

Write an essay in the form of a letter to your state representative about legislation mandating the posting of “In God We Trust” in public schools.

Visit BJCOnline.org/Contest for the full writing prompt, entry forms and additional details.

Grand Prize:

\$2,000 scholarship and trip to Washington, D.C.

Second Prize: \$1,000 Third Prize: \$500

Entry

deadline:

March 6, 2020

Young professionals: Apply to be a 2020 BJC Fellow



Applications are now open for the 2020 BJC Fellows Program, which equips young professionals to advocate for religious liberty throughout their careers.

Ten BJC Fellows will be selected to attend the BJC Fellows Seminar — an intensive educational program held at Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, on August 12-16, 2020. There, they will learn about religious liberty from BJC staff members and other church-state experts.

BJC Fellows will have projects to complete during the seminar as well as individual projects afterward. They will serve as liaisons between BJC and their communities, and they will be expected to use their skills for public engagement, such as leading educational sessions, writing op-eds and using social media to advance the cause of protecting faith freedom for all.

The program is open to individuals with diverse educational, cultural and professional experience. Any or no religious background is welcome — there is no religious requirement. Applicants must be between the ages of 25 and 40, and they must commit to be an advocate for religious liberty.

Visit BJCOnline.org/Fellows to learn more about the program and how to apply for the 2020 class. Applications must be submitted by February 21, 2020, to be considered.



BJC has video resources you can watch and share with others. On our YouTube channel, find videos about our work, the legacy of Baptist freedom fighters, Christians taking a stand against Christian nationalism and more.

Check out our videos and subscribe to our YouTube channel — find the link at the bottom of our website.



Tyler honored by University of Texas School of Law

The University of Texas School of Law named BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler the 2019 Outstanding Young Alumna, recognizing her remarkable professional accomplishments by the age of 40.

A 2004 graduate of the law school, Tyler received the award at the Law Alumni Association's annual gala in October. Previous recipients include George P. Bush, who serves as the Texas Land Commissioner, and Daniel Hodge, who served as chief of staff to Gov. Greg Abbott. Tyler is the first woman to receive this award from the law school.

Tyler was honored alongside other alumni: Ford Foundation President Darren Walker was named Outstanding Alumnus; Houston lawyer and civil leader Julius Gilckman received the award for lifetime achievement; Shawn Raymond, a partner in the Houston office of Susman Godfrey LLP, was recognized as the Distinguished Alumnus for Community Service; and Ari Herbert, a recent graduate, received the Mentor of the Year Award.

The ceremony included a new video showcasing Tyler's accomplishments and work in Washington. You can view it on our website at BJCOnline.org/Amanda-Tyler.



Pictured left to right are award recipients Shawn Raymond, Amanda Tyler, Julius Glickman, Ari Herbert and Darren Walker. Photo by Brian Birzer

Mark your calendar for 2020!

Reach out to your friends and neighbors to share these important dates and opportunities:

February 21: Deadline for BJC Fellows applications

March 1: Deadline for summer internship applications

March 4-5: Shurden Lectures at SMU in Dallas, Texas

March 6: Deadline for essay contest submissions

June 26: BJC Luncheon in Atlanta, Georgia

For more events, visit BJCOnline.org/calendar



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We are attorneys, Capitol Hill insiders, ministers, mobilizers and scholars. We file briefs in pivotal Supreme Court cases, advocate for and against legislation, testify in Congress and unite with others across faiths to ensure that every American has, and will always have, the right to follow his or her spiritual beliefs.

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REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

Amanda Tyler EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Cherilyn Crowe EDITOR

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Learn about our advocacy trainings in this magazine and visit our website for ways you can take action at BJConline.org/make-a-difference.