



January 26, 2022

**Testimony of P. George Tryfiates, Director for Government Affairs, ACSI
Virginia Senate Committee on General Laws and Technology
Senate Bill 177**

Check Against Delivery

Good morning, my name is George Tryfiates and I serve as Director for Government Affairs for the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). ACSI is the world's largest Protestant school association; we "exist to strengthen Christian schools and equip Christian educators worldwide as they prepare students academically and inspire them to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ." ACSI serves some 2500 member schools in the United States, including 87 schools and over 17,000 students in Virginia. We provide schools services such as professional development, teacher certification, accreditation, student events and curricula among many others.

The General Assembly passed legislation in 2020 about which we expressed very serious concerns at the time. We asked simply that "legislators ... provide clear and unambiguous religious protections so religious schools and ministries and the tens of thousands of families who choose them can continue to live out their faith."

Families choose Christian schools in part because Christians believe each one of us bears the image of God and is deserving of respect. In terms of human flourishing, we have a high view of sexuality and marriage as between one man and one woman for one lifetime with children as God may give them. Christian institutions, like all others, including elected officials, hire to mission and our employees seek to live by those standards. We invite all who agree with our vision of human flourishing to join our teams. The original language of the bill – now law – was and remains unclear. SB 177 is a reasonable, relatively modest, effort to resolve this difficulty.

SB 177 adds language that recognizes the freedom of religious institutions such as schools to live out their faith without fear of crushing government penalties. It makes clear that religious institutions can maintain their faith-based standards; that they have the freedom to employ those who share their faith; and, that religious institutions that provide housing, again, including schools, may do so consistent with their faith.

Please bear in mind that seventy-eight percent (78%) of parents who choose private schools choose religious schools. There is no doubt that our vision of human dignity plays a key role in those decisions. This legislation goes a long way to ensuring faith-based schools are able to maintain their faith and conduct standards according to their faith, consistent with our Commonwealth's Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom and the federal First Amendment. We urge you please to support SB 177 and we thank you for your consideration.

ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL

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