

The *Darren Patterson Christian Academy* Case

Case Name: *Darren Patterson Christian Academy v. Roy*

Case Status: On October 20, 2023 a federal district court granted the school's request for a preliminary injunction.

Significance: Whether the State of Colorado may disqualify a Christian preschool from a public benefit program because of its religious beliefs.



Background: Darren Patterson Christian Academy has been providing a Christian education to the residents of Chaffee County since 1982. As a Christian school, its beliefs guide everything it does, including its education of students, internal policies, interactions with the public, and employment decisions. The Colorado Department of Early Childhood recently introduced a brand-new universal preschool program that guarantees preschool funding for every 4-year-old in the state. But to participate in the program, the Department requires the school to abandon its religious beliefs and practices. Even though the school welcomes families and children of all faiths and backgrounds, the Department's rules would force it to hire employees who do not share the school's religious beliefs and to alter internal policies that are based on the school's beliefs about human sexuality, such as those related to bathroom usage, dress codes, pronouns, and student lodging for field trips. The school expressed these concerns to the Department and asked for a religious exemption, which was denied. Alliance Defending Freedom filed a lawsuit to prevent the government from forcing the Christian preschool to surrender its religious character, beliefs, and exercise to participate in Colorado's universal preschool program just like everyone else. In granting the school's request for a preliminary injunction, the court's ruling allows the school to participate in the program consistent with its religious beliefs while the lawsuit proceeds.

Key Points

- Religious schools have the right to hire employees who share their beliefs, and the government cannot penalize them for doing so.
- The government cannot force a Christian preschool to give up its religious character and beliefs to participate in a government program just like everyone else.
- Christian preschools and families should not be treated worse because of their religious convictions. The program is supposed to be universal and intended to benefit everyone.

Key Facts

- Darren Patterson Christian Academy structures outdoor overnight expeditions and field trips to give students the opportunity to put their faith into practice and gain real life experiences that grow their Christian character.
- Without a religious exemption, the new school program would require Darren Patterson Christian Academy to assign student roommates of the opposite sex for lodging accommodations during overnight field trips and expeditions. This requirement would not only thwart the development of Christian character but also endanger the students.
- To participate in the program the school would be forced to change its policies and forfeit its Christian beliefs.
- To help fulfill its purpose of guiding students in knowledge, character, and faith, the school must be free to hire employees that share its biblical beliefs.

The Bottom Line: Christian schools should not be forced to abandon their faith to participate in a public benefit educational program that is open and available to everyone.