

## **U.S. Attorney's Report to the District**

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### Combating Religious Discrimination

In May, I participated in a roundtable discussion at Stanford Law School addressing religious discrimination in education. The panel of speakers included the U.S. Attorneys of four federal districts (including me) and leaders from the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, the Office for Civil Rights of the Department of Education, and the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. The members of the audience—who did much of the talking—came from various parts of the community and included religious student association representatives and school administrators from colleges and universities, leaders of faith-based and interfaith groups, and attorneys representing religious interest groups. The group included a Muslim student association representative and a leader from the Anti-Defamation League; an executive director of Not in Our Town and a director of the Hindu American Foundation; a representative from the California Council of Churches and a constitutional law professor from UC Davis; and many others. Despite the diversity in backgrounds, the members of the panel and the audience shared a strong desire to support and defend our national commitment to religious pluralism, religious freedom and nondiscrimination.

Our roundtable discussion was one of five community roundtables held around the country that the Civil Rights Division hosted in partnership with the U.S. Attorneys and other federal agencies to examine how better to combat religious discrimination in education, employment, land use, and hate crimes. In our roundtable discussion at Stanford that focused on religious discrimination in education, we talked about preventing harassment and bullying in our K-12 schools, teaching diversity and tolerance and accommodating religious needs in K-12, and handling conflicts arising from religious expression and the exercise of free association rights in colleges and universities. People who have worked for years on such issues in the schools spoke of what they believed was effective and what wasn't, and many community members shared personal stories that illustrated the destructive nature of religious discrimination. A common thread running through the entire discussion was that combating such discrimination requires thoughtfulness and effort; ensuring that all students in an educational setting are able to enjoy their First Amendment religious rights free from discrimination is real work.

In July, the Department of Justice released a [report](#) summarizing what it and its federal agency partners heard and learned at the roundtables, including the challenges that were identified and the recommendations that were proposed. Some of those recommendations have already been

put into place: the Civil Rights Division updated its website to inform the public of its enforcement of hate crimes and religious land use laws; the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission announced it would change its data collection methods to better document complaints of religious discrimination; the Office for Civil Rights of the Department of Education updated its complaint form and launched a new web page collecting federal resources about religious discrimination; and the Department of Homeland Security updated its web site to highlight trainings and guidance for communities on how to protect their houses of worship. The report was released in conjunction with a final roundtable discussion hosted by the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships in Washington, D.C., which I attended along with several of my U.S. Attorney colleagues from around the country.

The release of the report may mark the end of the series of roundtable discussions but it in no way signals an end to the discussion of how to combat discrimination based on religion. My office, as well as those of the other U.S. Attorneys across the country and the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, are charged with enforcing federal laws involving civil rights, hate crimes, and land use issues, including where violations relate to discrimination based on religion. In fact, former U.S. Attorney Ben Wagner and I set up a working group of attorneys in my office focusing resources on cases involving civil rights, hate crimes and human trafficking to ensure that we are giving such cases the priority they deserve. We will always be interested in hearing what challenges people of various faiths face based on their religion and in considering whether egregious facts indicate that violations of federal laws need to be vindicated through a criminal prosecution or civil action.

If you would like to communicate with our office, contact the main number in Sacramento, or submit a suggestion by clicking on the button below. Thank you.

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Acting United States Attorney