

AMERICAN ATHEISTS, INC.

<http://www.atheists.org>

<http://www.americanatheist.org>

For more information, please contact:

Ellen Johnson, President (908) 276-7300

Dave Silverman, Communications Director (732) 648-9333

**ATHEIST GROUP CAUTIONS U.S. CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION
ON VOUCHER SCHEMES, DEFENDS BAN ON PUBLIC FUNDING
OF RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS**

In testimony Friday before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, the head of an Atheist public affairs organization warned that voucher programs to private, religious schools were a threat to public education and violated the separation of church and state.

Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists, told a hearing of the Commission that provisions in numerous state constitutions -- known as the "Blaine Amendments" -- along with the First Amendment to the federal constitution, guaranteed that no citizens would be forced to subsidize religious groups through their taxes.

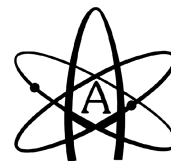
"Voucher programs are just another scheme to 'launder money' from the government and hand it over to churches, mosques, temples and other religious establishments," said Ms. Johnson. "This money should be going to our public schools for the education of our children, not religious indoctrination."

Dave Silverman, Communications Director for American Atheists, said that voucher supporters were mis-representing the issue of the Blaine Amendments, and trying to make it appear that anyone who opposed vouchers is "discriminating" against religion.

"Public schools, unlike religion-based schools, have to accept everyone. They cannot discriminate on the basis of faith. They're accountable to the taxpayers."

Silverman added, "If we have problems in our public schools, let's fix them. The answer is not trying to "out source" the job of educating our youngsters, and violate the separation of church and state in the process."

AMERICAN ATHEISTS is a nationwide movement that defends civil rights for Atheists; works for the total separation of church and state; and addresses issues of First Amendment public policy.



American Atheists, Inc. P. O. Box 5733 Parsippany, NJ 07054-6733
Tel.: (908) 276-7300 Fax: (908) 276-7402