



Faith . Freedom . **For All.**

Testimony of Amanda Tyler,
On behalf of BJC (Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty)

Before the
House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on the Constitution and Limited Government

Hearing: "Partisan and Profitable: The SPLC's Influence on Federal Civil Rights Policy"
December 16, 2025

I. Introduction

Good afternoon. I am Amanda Tyler, executive director of Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC). As a faithful Christian and patriotic American, I am honored to be here this afternoon to offer testimony about why the treatment of civil society organizations is directly relevant to religious liberty and First Amendment protections.

For 89 years, BJC has worked to advance faith freedom for all, bringing a uniquely Baptist witness to the principle that faith must be freely chosen and exercised, neither advanced nor inhibited by government. BJC is composed of more than a dozen Baptist organizations and supported by thousands of individuals and Baptist churches across the country.

BJC has a consistent record of supporting both of the First Amendment's religion clauses — No Establishment and Free Exercise. BJC chaired the diverse Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion that pushed for passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 and the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000. Our commitment to religious freedom stems from the historical experiences of early Baptists, who suffered the pain of persecution that resulted from religious fervor coupled with the coercive power of the state.

BJC works with a diverse group of organizations, both secular and religious, in various coalitions. Depending on the case or policy we are working on, we may find ourselves on the same or opposing sides with other groups that work on religious freedom issues or other concerns that are crucial to our pluralistic democracy. As an example of the diverse coalitions, in our most recent filing at the U.S. Supreme Court, in the *Landor vs. Louisiana Department of Corrections* case, BJC joined an *amicus* brief led by Christian Legal Society that included both the National Association of Evangelicals and the American Civil Liberties Union.

II. An independent civil society, including civil rights organizations, is crucial to America's constitutional democracy.

Nonprofits — religious and secular — are essential to American democracy, creating opportunities for civic engagement, caring for neighbors, and standing up to abuses of power. When government attacks these institutions, especially during moments of instability or when government services are strained, communities suffer.

American civil society represents the broad diversity of the American people. Dissent and disagreement between these groups is a hallmark of a free society. We cannot conflate policy disagreement with dangerous conduct. Government, and especially law enforcement, should respond to facts, not ideology.

Civil rights organizations — Southern Poverty Law Center included — are part of the essential infrastructure of American civil society. Civil rights organizations have historically helped communities in many ways, including documenting and combating discrimination and racially motivated violence; ensuring access to justice; providing education and services where government capacity is limited; supporting those targeted by bigotry or political retaliation; and strengthening democracy by defending constitutional rights. Today, as communities face rising extremism, political polarization, and gaps in federal support, these organizations remain crucial, often stepping in where government has stepped back.

III. Government interference with civil society should concern all Americans, regardless of ideology or religion.

This hearing fits squarely within a broader pattern of government retaliation against civil society. The Administration and its allies are increasingly directing government resources to single out organizations that defend civil rights, protect vulnerable communities, and support participation in our constitutional democracy. Such retaliation can chill advocacy, undermine constitutional norms, and threaten the independence of the nonprofit sector.

Government targeting of nonprofits should concern all Americans. A functioning democracy depends on the ability of organizations across the spectrum of viewpoints to debate without fear of retaliation.

These attacks come as nonprofits are stepping in to meet rising community needs — needs exacerbated by efforts to undermine civil rights and civil liberties, the affordability crisis, shutdown threats, slashing crucial governmental funding of services, and policy instability. When government undermines the very organizations filling the gaps left by these failures, it harms communities directly and weakens democratic institutions.

IV. **Attacks on civil society threaten religious liberty.**

What begins as political retaliation against civil society organizations quickly becomes a threat to conscience rights, religious pluralism, and the foundational First Amendment protections that safeguard all people and all faith communities.

Religious liberty depends on a government that remains neutral when it comes to religion, neither favoring nor denigrating any religious viewpoint held by individuals and groups. Government misuse of its authority — whether through investigations, rhetoric, or selective enforcement — creates a climate where religious people, houses of worship, and faith-based charities are put at risk.

Diversity of religious expression, belief, and identity in the United States is a strength that we as a people should re-commit ourselves to protecting. That includes diversity among different religions, as well as diversity within a given religion, such as Christianity. With that diversity, disagreement and dissent are inevitable and should be peacefully protected by First Amendment freedoms.

For faith to remain free, it must never be used as a tool of political power. There are no second-class faiths in this country. Religion must never be used as a proxy for threat or danger. When the state elevates certain ideologies and stigmatizes others, it erodes both free expression and free exercise.

V. **Conclusion**

A vibrant and free civil society is core to religious liberty in our country, as well as essential to achieving the promise of our constitutional democracy: that all belong, no matter how one worships, what one believes, or how one identifies, religiously or not.