

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

**We envision a republic where freedom,
opportunity, creativity, and innovation
flourish in our schools and workplaces.**

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Since our founding in 2021, the Defense of Freedom Institute for Policy Studies has stood on the front lines against federal overreach, teacher union power, and civil rights radicalism in education.

As the only conservative nonprofit led by former senior U.S. Department of Education officials, DFI uniquely unites public interest litigation, regulatory engagement, policy expertise, and communications power under one roof—with a singular focus on the federal role in education.

In our early years, DFI successfully fought to block the prior administration's unlawful student loan cancellations and radical interpretations of civil rights laws in education.

In 2025, when a new administration turned the page on a tattered Biden education agenda, DFI entered a new era—one defined not by reversing harmful regulations and policies, but by advancing long-needed reforms to shape the future of education. After years of litigation and advocacy, the opportunity before us was clear: expand education freedom, restore civil and constitutional rights for students, faculty, and parents, and strengthen accountability across K-12 and higher education.

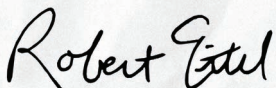
As our Annual Report highlights, we are pleased to report that DFI made great strides toward these goals in 2025. **For example, DFI:**

- **Filed major federal civil rights complaints against multiple states and school districts, leading to enforcement actions by the U.S. Department of Justice.**
- **Released a model Title IX law that protects women's sports and intimate spaces, due process and free speech on campus, and parental rights.**
- **Advanced reforms to a broken higher education accreditation system that strengthen accountability, transparency, and innovation and that purge discriminatory DEI and gender theory from colleges and universities.**
- **Helped shape and advance the landmark Federal Scholarship Tax Credit, which will expand education freedom to millions of families across the country.**
- **Earned national attention for our investigative reports exposing the damage to public education caused by the teacher unions.**

Last year's progress reflects more than momentum. It demonstrates a turning point. Reforms once debated are now being implemented, strengthened, and expanded.

Thank you for standing with us as we fight to expand freedom and opportunity and preserve civil and constitutional rights for all students, faculty, and parents.

Best wishes,



Robert S. Eitel
President & Co-Founder

By the Numbers

In 2025, DFI received **four invitations** to testify before legislative committees, conducted **62 speaking engagements** reaching more than **2,000 attendees**, and appeared in **59 television** and **23 radio interviews**. DFI placed **15 op-eds** in major outlets, including *Fox News*, *The Washington Examiner*, *The Daily Caller*, *The Federalist*, and *Education Week*, and generated **1,587 media mentions** and **404 citations** of DFI research.



12

DFI team members



124,028

Email subscribers



15

Op-eds



18

Title IX and FERPA complaints



1,587

Media mentions



9

Amicus briefs



2.28 million

Social media impressions



290,000

Social media engagements



45

Podcast episodes



40,517

Podcast downloads and views



Preserving Civil and Constitutional Rights

Defeating Gender Ideology and Defending Women's Sports and Privacy

In 2025, DFI continued to lead the fight to protect student privacy, women's sports, and parental rights under Title IX. DFI filed federal Title IX civil rights complaints against 17 state education agencies and school districts in [California](#), [Illinois](#), [Virginia](#), [New York](#), [Minnesota](#), [Kansas](#), and [Maryland](#) and one [university](#) in Washington, DC, challenging policies that allowed boys in girls' sports and forced students to share intimate facilities and overnight accommodations based on "gender identity" rather than biological sex. These complaints prompted federal investigations against 8 state education agencies and school districts and 1 university.

DFI also advanced long-term policy solutions by releasing the *Respect Equality in Sports, Privacy, and Education and Campus Transparency (RESPECT) Title IX Act*, a model law designed to restore Title IX to its original purpose and provide lasting protection for women's sports, due process, and parental rights.

“

Thank you very much for all that you do for me, [my daughter] and for all others that cannot fight for their civil rights by themselves.

Maryland Parent

”

Protecting First Amendment Rights

DFI defended the First Amendment rights of parents and families before the U.S. Supreme Court in [*Mahmoud v. Taylor*](#), a case challenging a school district's refusal to provide parents with the opportunity to opt their children out of classroom materials that conflicted with their religious beliefs. This brief reinforced the constitutional right of parents, not bureaucrats, to guide the religious upbringing and education of their children.

No. 24-297

IN THE
Supreme Court of the United States

TAMER MAHMOUD, ET AL.,
Petitioners,

v.

THOMAS W. TAYLOR, ET AL.,
Respondents.

On Writ of Certiorari to the United States
Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit

BRIEF FOR AMICI CURIAE
DEFENSE OF FREEDOM INSTITUTE FOR POLICY
STUDIES; JILLIAN BALOW; MICHAEL DIMATTEO;
PATRICK GARRISON; CLAUDINE "BEANIE" GEOGHEGAN;
NATHAN GWINN; MARK LENHARDT; TAMMY RAE
MCMAHON-GORAN; PAUL ROSSI; DICKY SHANOR; AND
MITCHELL M. ZAIS IN SUPPORT OF PETITIONERS

DONALD A. DAUGHERTY, JR.
Counsel of Record
MARTHA A. ASTOR
DEFENSE OF FREEDOM
INSTITUTE FOR POLICY STUDIES
1455 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Suite 400
Washington, DC 20004
(414) 559-6902
Don.Daugherty@dfipolicy.org
Counsel for Amici Curiae

March 10, 2025

No. 24-297

IN THE
Supreme Court of the United States

TAMER MAHMOUD, ET AL.,
Petitioners,

v.

THOMAS W. TAYLOR, ET AL.,
Respondents.

On Writ of Certiorari to the United States
Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit


BRIEF FOR AMICI CURIAE
DEFENSE OF FREEDOM INSTITUTE FOR POLICY
STUDIES; JILLIAN BALOW; MICHAEL DIMATTEO;
PATRICK GARRISON; CLAUDINE "BEANIE" GEOGHEGAN;
NATHAN GWINN; MARK LENHARDT; TAMMY RAE
MCMAHON-GORAN; PAUL ROSSI; DICKY SHANOR; AND
MITCHELL M. ZAIS IN SUPPORT OF PETITIONERS

DONALD A. DAUGHERTY, JR.
Counsel of Record
MARTHA A. ASTOR
DEFENSE OF FREEDOM
INSTITUTE FOR POLICY STUDIES
1455 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Suite 400
Washington, DC 20004
(414) 559-6902
Don.Daugherty@dfipolicy.org
Counsel for Amici Curiae

March 10, 2025



Bob Eitel attends his first NACIQI meeting on December 16, 2025.

 U.S. Department of Education

PRESS RELEASE

U.S. Department of Education Announces Five Appointments to the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity

NOVEMBER 25, 2025



About the NACIQI Appointees:

Robert Eitel is the president of the Defense of Freedom Institute. He previously served as Deputy General Counsel at the Department in the George W. Bush Administration and served as a Senior Counselor at the Department in the first Trump Administration. Eitel also held the role of the Department's regulatory reform officer and was involved in several efforts concerning Title IX and the Higher Education Act.

DFI also defended state-led innovation in higher education by filing an amicus brief in [*State of Florida vs. U.S. Secretary of Education*](#). Florida enacted reforms to ensure greater accountability in higher education and reduce reliance on a single accreditor. DFI's brief argued that the Biden administration responded to these innovations by issuing guidance that exceeded its statutory authority and interfered with Florida's ability to oversee its public colleges and universities.

At DFI's urging, the Secretary of Education later rescinded this illegal guidance, mooted that portion of Florida's lawsuit and aiding in the establishment of new accreditation agencies that can break the accreditation cartel.

DFI President and Co-Founder [*Bob Eitel was appointed*](#) by Secretary of Education Linda McMahon to serve on the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI), a key federal body responsible for evaluating accreditation agencies and safeguarding the integrity of federal student aid programs.

Student Loan Reform

DFI provided legal clarity on a federal proposal to transfer the federal student loan portfolio from the U.S. Department of Education to the Small Business Administration. Through a detailed [legal analysis](#), DFI outlined the statutory limits on executive authority and warned that such a transfer could not occur without congressional approval, reinforcing the importance of lawful authority and accountability in the administration of federal student aid programs. The administration has decided not to move forward with that plan.





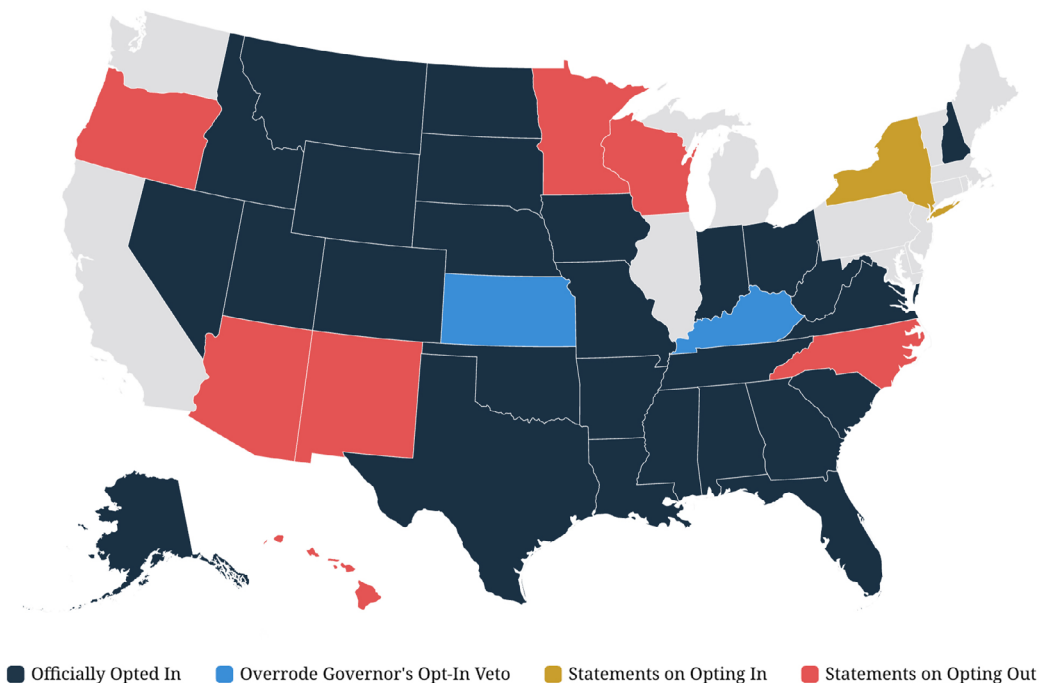
Advancing Freedom and Parental Rights

Federal Scholarship Tax Credit

In 2025, DFI helped deliver one of the most significant education freedom wins in decades: the Federal Scholarship Tax Credit included in the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act* signed into law on July 4, 2025. Based in part on the Education Freedom Scholarship legislation crafted by staff at DFI, our team played a critical role in a small coalition that drafted FSTC policy language, provided technical assistance, shaped communication strategy, and helped rally a national coalition of school choice supporters to support a strong implementation of the tax credit.



Visit dfipolicy.org/education-freedom-tax-credit





Defending Parents' Rights

DFI's Ginny Gentles, who directs our initiative on Education Freedom and Parental Rights, testified before both the [House](#) and [Senate](#) on the importance of expanding education choice and empowering families. Her testimony emphasized that education freedom and parental autonomy, not increased federal spending and bureaucratic red tape, are essential to improving outcomes for students nationwide. DFI's scholars are consistently called upon to provide expert testimony to Congress and regularly meet with administration staff.

DFI also defended the fundamental rights of parents to be informed about their children's education. In 2025, DFI filed four Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) complaints with the U.S. Department of Education's Student Privacy Policy Office, challenging school district policies that concealed students' social gender transitions from parents.



In the Courts

In *Hellman v. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*, DFI filed an amicus brief urging the First Circuit to reverse a state regulation that denied onsite special education services to students enrolled in private schools by parental choice. During oral arguments, the court specifically referenced DFI's brief.

“

It was the single best amicus brief I received in a case I litigated.”

Institute for Justice attorney

DFI also hosted five policy briefings for congressional staff, education leaders, and partner organizations on a wide range of topics including the FSTC, Title IX reform, and alternatives to unions for teachers.





Exposing the Harmful Influence of Teacher Unions

Our investigative work exposing how teacher unions prioritize political activism and ideological agendas over the needs of students, families, and educators continued to have an impact in 2025. Through rigorous research and reporting, DFI brought national attention to the growing influence of radical ideology within union leadership and classroom materials.



DFI's report *[Breaking Solidarity](#)* revealed how extremist activists have gained influence within teacher unions, promoting anti-Israel rhetoric and diminishing concerns about rising antisemitism affecting students and educators. The report documented how unions leverage the classroom to indoctrinate students with radical ideology and anti-American views. Following its release, the Senate HELP Committee sent a letter to the National Education Association requesting materials related to antisemitism in the union.



DFI also released *[The Fall of Woke?](#)*, the latest installment in our nationally recognized investigative series examining ideological activism within teacher unions. Building on earlier reports, this analysis showed how unions continue to promote discriminatory DEI bureaucracies and gender ideology in schools and workplaces, even as public opinion and federal enforcement have shifted on these issues.



Education Law and Policy Conference

Each year, DFI and its partners bring together top policymakers and legal experts to examine the most pressing issues in education law and public policy. In 2025, the Education Law and Policy Conference focused on the theme *Federal Executive Power and Education*.



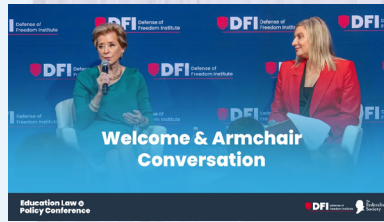
The conference featured a distinguished lineup, including an armchair conversation with U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon and then-*Washington Examiner* Politics Editor Marisa Schultz, as well as a keynote luncheon address delivered by the Honorable Paul Clement, former U.S. Solicitor General. Their insights helped frame critical discussions on the scope of federal authority and the future direction of education policy.



The conference also featured a strong roster of panelists and attendees from across the education, legal, and policy communities. Author David Zweig joined the event for a book signing of *An Abundance of Caution: American Schools, the Virus, and a Story of Bad Decisions*, further enriching the day's programming.

Panel and Debate Topics

THE
FEDERALIST
SOCIETY



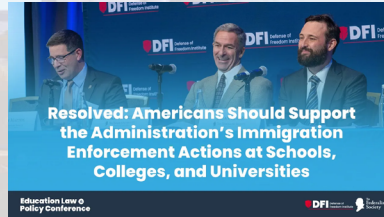
Welcome and Armchair Conversation – [Watch here.](#)



Reimagining Law School Accreditation: Possibility or Pitfall? [Watch here.](#)



Luncheon Address with Hon. Paul Clement – [Watch here.](#)



Resolved: Americans Should Support the Administration's Immigration Enforcement Actions at Schools, Colleges, and Universities – [Watch here.](#)



Federal Efforts to Combat Antisemitism: Restoring Campus Civil Rights or Infringing Academic Freedom? [Watch here.](#)

View the highlights





Freedom to Learn Podcast

DFI's *Freedom to Learn* podcast continued to grow as a trusted platform for conversations on education freedom, parental rights, and federal education policy. Hosted by Ginny Gentles, the podcast featured influential national leaders and policymakers who are shaping the future of education.

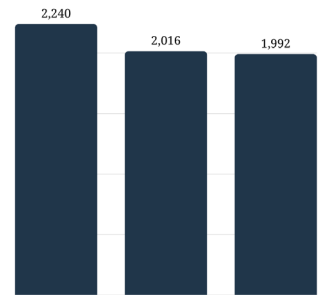
This year's guests included U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon, Senator Ted Cruz, Democrats for Education Reform leader Jorge Elorza, and other national and state education leaders. Episodes explored major policy developments, including expanding education freedom, returning power over education back to states, protecting parental rights, and defending Title IX.

Through in-depth discussions and timely analysis, *Freedom to Learn* continues to inform policymakers, engage advocates, and elevate the national conversation around education freedom.



40,517
YouTube views
and downloads

45
podcast
episodes in 2025

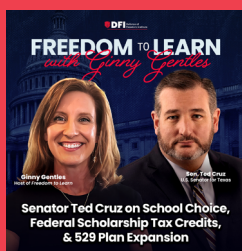


Top 3 Episodes on Buzzsprout:

1. **Erika Sanzi** on How Districts Defy Federal Law, Fail Families & Evade Consequences
2. **Neal McCluskey & James Shuls** on Fighting for the Freedom to Learn: Examining the Nation's Centuries-Old School Choice Movement
3. Re-Release: **Senator Ted Cruz** on School Choice, the Federal Scholarship Tax Credit (FSTC), & 529 Plan Expansion



LISTEN HERE



LISTEN HERE



LISTEN HERE



LISTEN HERE

Communicating Our Solutions

As a team we've published **15 op-eds** and hosted or participated in **15 conferences and webinars** on topics ranging from shutting down the U.S. Department of Education to ending the Title IX regulatory whiplash.

Bob Eitel's op-ed in the *Washington Examiner*.



“In the first Trump term, the department was faced with unraveling a Gordian knot of rancid policy choices and heavy-handed regulations embedded by the Obama administration. Not so with Trump 2.0,” he writes.



DFI's Angela Morabito joins PragerU.

Angela joins PragerU CEO Marissa Streit to make the case for abolishing the federal Department of Education.

“Without this federal agency in the way, we could send more dollars to the states. We could put more power in the hands of parents.” – Angela Morabito



Rulemaking Must Resolve Ambiguities in Federal School Choice Law—and Fast

Part one of a five-part series on the new federal scholarship tax credit



Jim Blew

Jim Blew's op-ed in *Education Next*.

“The new federal scholarship tax credit offers a historic opportunity to transform American education for the better,” he writes.



Ginny Gentles on News Nation

discussing President Trump's executive order to shut down the Department of Education.



Angela on Fox News

discussing DFI's Supreme Court victory in *Mahmoud v. Taylor*.



OPINION

Want wokeness out of schools? End woke teacher training

University programs prioritize social justice activism over educational fundamentals



OPINION By Angela Morabito · Fox News

Published December 1, 2025 5:00am EST

Angela's op-ed in *Fox News*.

“Wokeness in schools will end only if colleges stop training teachers to spread it,” she writes.

Angela joins Fox Business



to discuss teacher unions spending dues money to advance their radical agendas.



Meet the Team



Robert S. Eitel

President and
Co-Founder



Jim Blew

Co-Founder



Martha A. Astor

Counsel,
Litigation



Ginny Gentles

Director, Education
Freedom and
Parental Rights
and Host of
Freedom to Learn



Paul Zimmerman

Senior Counsel,
Policy and
Regulatory



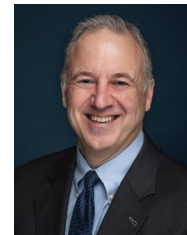
Angela Morabito

Director, Media
Outreach, and
Spokesperson



Holly Pitt Young

Chief
Development
Officer



Donald A. Daugherty, Jr.

Senior Counsel,
Litigation



Jay P. Greene

Senior Fellow



Clairece Marker

Manager,
Digital Media
and Podcast
Production



Trisha Ruckart

Director,
Operations and
Development



Claire Harrington

Intern,
Communications



Board of Directors



William "Bill" Hansen

Fmr. Deputy U.S.
Secretary of
Education

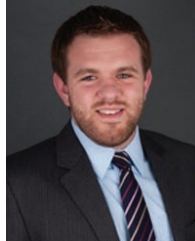
**Joined January 1,
2026**



Dr. Mitchell "Mick" Zais

Fmr. Deputy U.S.
Secretary of
Education

Joined May 1, 2026



Nathan Bailey

Policy Advisor to Betsy DeVos



James C. Blew

Co-Founder, Defense of Freedom
Institute



Robert S. Eitel

*Co-Founder and President,
Defense of Freedom Institute*



Hudson La Force III

Retired CEO and President, W.R.
Grace & Co., Inc.



Ebony Lee

Partner, Charter School Growth
Fund