

# The Guaranteeing Religious Accommodation in Childhood Education (GRACE) Act

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Vaccine mandates for children in K-12 schools began in 1855, with all 50 states requiring a variety of student vaccines by 1980. These mandates require children to receive state-chosen vaccines in order to enroll in classes and sometimes to participate in extracurricular activities.

While students may receive an exemption from one or more vaccines for medical, religious, or personal reasons,<sup>1</sup> religious exemptions are often seen as less viable than medical exemptions and are the most challenging for students to obtain.<sup>2</sup> Requirements to receive an exemption range from providing a note signed by a legal guardian to showing explicit documentation proving religious affiliation.<sup>1</sup> These hurdles for non-medical vaccine exemptions have caused some parents to withdraw their child from school and neglect to provide education entirely. Other students in California, Connecticut, Maine, and New York are not allowed any form of religious exemption and must be vaccinated at the expense of their beliefs in order to attend school.

Before three of these states removed their religious freedom exemptions in 2015, 2019, and 2021, California and New York reported that approximately 1-3% of their students held religious freedom exemptions,<sup>3</sup> while Maine had approximately double the national rate for non-medical exemptions.<sup>4</sup> Many of these American children are now blocked from attending the schools their tax dollars pay for, simply because of their sincerely held religious beliefs. The GRACE Act would rectify this injustice by ensuring that the federal government does not financially support school policies that try to supersede students' First Amendment right to the free exercise of religion.

The GRACE Act has the support of more than fifty organizations, including Moms for Liberty, Global Wellness Forum, and Children's Health Defense, with a House companion led by Representative Greg Steube (R-FL).

## Bill Specifics

- Prohibits federal education funds from any educational institutions and agencies that do not allow religious exemptions to vaccine requirements.
- Prevents institutions from requiring documentation or other information to be submitted by the student or family obtaining a religious exemption.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://online.simmons.edu/blog/vaccination-exemptions/>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6386772/>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://health.data.ny.gov/Health/Health-data/nvtm-yit2>. [https://health.data.ny.gov/Health/Immunization-Reports/x8kx-e69i/about\\_data](https://health.data.ny.gov/Health/Immunization-Reports/x8kx-e69i/about_data).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.maineaap.org/assets/docs/Handout-for-the-Legislature-5.4.1-002.pdf?utm>.