



March 11, 2018

The Honorable Walt Rogers  
Chairman, House Education Committee  
The Honorable Megan Jones  
Member, House Education Committee  
Iowa House of Representatives  
The Iowa Capitol Building  
1007 East Grand Avenue  
Des Moines, IA 50319

Via email: [walt.rogers@legis.iowa.gov](mailto:walt.rogers@legis.iowa.gov); [megan.jones@legis.iowa.gov](mailto:megan.jones@legis.iowa.gov)

**Re: Support for SF 2344 and Its Protection for Student Organizations' Leadership Selection**

Dear Chairman Rogers, Representative Jones, and Members of the Committee:

The Christian Legal Society supports passage of SF 2344 because Section 3.3 will provide much needed protection for religious students' ability to meet on college campuses. For over four decades, religious student groups have faced exclusion from campus because of their religious speech and their requirement that their leaders agree with the groups' religious messages. Christian Legal Society has monitored this problem since 1975 and has worked to ensure that college campuses remain open to students who wish to meet for religious speech.

Section 3.3 in SF 2344 would ensure that religious student organizations on Iowa public university campuses would no longer be threatened with exclusion from campus. In the past, University of Iowa administrators have sometimes threatened religious student groups with exclusion if they stated in their governing documents that they require their leaders to agree with the groups' basic religious beliefs.

But basic religious freedom requires that religious groups remain free to choose leaders who agree with their religious beliefs and teachings. Just as the College Democrats or College Republicans should be free to choose persons who share their Democratic or Republican political beliefs to be their leaders, so should religious groups have the right to choose leaders who share their religious beliefs. The leadership of any organization determines whether it will be able to carry out its mission. This is particularly true for religious groups whose leaders conduct their Bible studies and lead their prayers.

Indeed, it should be common ground-- even for those who advocate a strict separation of church and state -- that government officials should not dictate religious groups' choice of their student leaders.

Section 3.3 of SF 2344 is a commonsense measure that will conserve Iowa taxpayers' money by protecting its public universities from the costly lawsuits that result when university administrators try to exclude religious student groups from campus. SF 2344 allows public colleges to maintain whatever policies they wish so long as they allow student groups, including religious student groups, to choose their leaders according to their beliefs.

Section 3.3 of SF 2344 would add Iowa to the growing list of states -- Kansas, Ohio, Idaho, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Arizona, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Virginia -- that have enacted protections for religious groups' leadership selection. More information about how other states have addressed this concern is at <https://www.clsnet.org/document.doc?id=1110>.

We respectfully request that this letter be included in the record for the House Education Committee's hearing on SF 2344. Thank you for helping Iowa citizens by protecting religious students' right to meet on campus.

Yours truly,  
/s/ Kimberlee Wood Colby

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