

## The *Bethel Ministries* Case

**Case Name:** *Bethel Ministries, Inc. v. Salmon*

**Significance:** Whether the state can punish Christian schools for their beliefs about marriage and sexuality.

**Case Status:** Oral arguments in Maryland federal court on January 9, 2020.



**Background:** For over 35 years, Bethel Christian Academy in Savage, Md., has served preschool-through 8th grade students with an excellent Christian education in a diverse learning environment. In order to better serve low-income families in the community, Bethel began participating in Maryland’s school voucher program, called BOOST (Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today), prior to the 2016-17 school year. Even though Bethel fully complied with every aspect of the state’s program requirements, Maryland officials allowed their hostility toward Bethel’s religious beliefs about sexuality to override both the plain wording of their own program requirements, as well as the First Amendment’s guarantee that the government cannot discriminate against people simply because it disagrees with their religious views.

And, just weeks before the 2018 school year began, the state of Maryland informed low-income parents benefiting from a state voucher program that they would have to find a new school for their children. In its anti-religious hostility, the state not only left parents scrambling by waiting until the last minute to notify them of its decision to pull Bethel’s eligibility, but is now demanding that Bethel pay back the \$100,000 its low-income students received from the state during the two years Bethel participated in the voucher program.

### Key Facts

- The state refused to play by its own rules. Bethel fully complied with the program’s requirements, but Maryland let its hostility toward Bethel’s religious views, not the law, decide.
- With over 85 percent of the student body made up of racial and ethnic minorities--representing over 40 nations--Bethel offers a caring Christian education in a diverse environment. The state is telling low-income students that such an education can’t be an option for them.
- The \$100,000 may not seem like much compared with the state’s current [\\$7 million “BOOST” budget](#), but it’s a serious financial hardship for Bethel, and it limits their ability to serve low-income students.
- Bethel hasn’t and won’t turn down a student based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. They do ask grade-school students—children under Maryland’s age of consent—to refrain from engaging in any sexual conduct.
- The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled twice—first in *Obergefell* and again in *Masterpiece*—that the government must respect the belief that marriage is between one man and one woman.

**The Bottom Line:** The government can’t discriminate against religious schools simply because it dislikes their religious beliefs.