



Old Dominion Association of Church Schools

PRESIDENT
Rev. Doug Wright

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dan Zacharias
3131 VALOR COURT
BROADWAY, VA 22815
PHONE: 540/896-2785
CELL: 540/975-1536
E-MAIL: vaodacs@verizon.net
WEB: www.vaodacs.com

LEGISLATIVE
REPRESENTATIVE
Rev. Eddy Aliff

Public Comment

**State Board of Education
Commonwealth of Virginia**

**Speaker: Mr. Dan Zacharias, Executive Director
Old Dominion Association of Church Schools**

September 22, 2011

President Saslaw, Superintendent Wright, and Members of the Board:

Baptists in Virginia have a long history of advancing the cause of religious liberty. In the 1700's, our Virginia Baptist forefathers took strong stands on such matters as opposing taxes levied to support specific denominations and opposing the acceptance of licenses in order to be able to legally preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Since the late 1970's, that struggle has been carried on by the Virginia Assembly of Independent Baptists and by the Old Dominion Association of Church Schools. An important landmark of VAIB and ODACS involvement in the struggle was the 1988 decision of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit which determined that the Virginia statute exempting churches from obtaining a state license in order to operate a daycare was not unconstitutional.

I am addressing you today to express grave concern regarding what ODACS considers to be a potential threat to the freedom that our churches enjoy to operate a daycare with a religious exemption from licensure. We believe that the newest round of the United States Education Department's Race to the Top competitive grants, the Early Learning Challenge, includes incentives which, if pursued by Virginia, could potentially undermine the freedom that was upheld in that 1988 decision. Among the details of the program that give ODACS ministries concern are the following.

1. The first part of ELC's definition of the term *Early Learning and Development Program* appears to be carefully crafted with the goal of bringing all Pre-K facilities, including those currently operating with a religious exemption from licensure, under the influence of the federal government.



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