News

David Sharp

View Author Profile

Associated Press

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Portland, Maine — September 23, 2022
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Maine is ready to fund tuition for some religious school students for the first time since a Supreme Court ruling in June ordered the state to treat those schools the same as other private schools regarding tuition reimbursement.

Cheverus High School, a Jesuit college preparatory school in Portland, was the only religious school to apply for participation in the state's tuition reimbursement plan and its application was approved by the state, a state official said Sept. 22.

Carroll Conley, executive director of the Christian Civic League of Maine, said he's encouraged by the first tuition reimbursements for a religious school since the 1980s in Maine.

“We’re hopeful and encouraged that (others) might be able to find a path to participate" next year, he said.

There was no immediate comment from Cheverus, which is a Roman Catholic school but is not governed by the Diocese of Portland.

Advertisement

There were several lawsuits over the years since the state ended tuition reimbursements to religious school before the Supreme Court ruled that Maine can't exclude religious schools from a program that offers tuition for private education in towns where there are no public high schools.

The Supreme Court's 6-3 decision was the latest in a line of rulings by the court that have favored religion-based discrimination claims. It could fuel a renewed push for school choice programs in a number of states that have so far have not directed taxpayer money to private, religious education.

Despite the victory, religious schools are taking a cautious approach after Maine Attorney General Aaron Frey said all schools accepting public funds must abide by the Maine Human Rights Act.

The act bans discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or disability. That would include accepting gay and transgender teachers and students, which could conflict with some religious schools' beliefs.

In the Maine case that led to high court's ruling, parents sued in federal court to be able to use state aid to send their children to Christian schools in Bangor and Waterville. The two schools in question — Temple Academy in Waterville and Bangor Christian Schools — have policies that discriminate on a basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, Frey has said.