**Collier County Legislative Meeting**

**December 8, 2021**

Bill Korson

President,

Greater Naples Chapter

Americans United for Separation of Church and State

Americans United for Separation of Church and State opposes government funding of religious schools.  In fact, so does the Constitution of Florida. Article I, Section 3 states: “No revenue of the state or any political subdivision or agency thereof shall ever be taken from the public treasury directly or indirectly in aid of any church, sect, or religious denomination or in aid of any sectarian institution.”  Recent Florida legislation allows school vouchers to go to religious schools.  We disagree with those decisions and with any funding of vouchers for religious education.  But even those decisions do not allow religious discrimination by religious schools against voucher students.  For that reason, Americans United believes that not only should the prohibition of religious funding in the Florida Constitution continue to be enforced, but also that any school voucher legislation should include specific language prohibiting religious discrimination. We also believe that the use of school vouchers tends to undermine the protections against religious discrimination that public schools have, to the extent that the voucher schools are not required to comply with state standards for public schools. The Orlando *Sentinel* found voucher schools with unqualified staff, substandard facilities and discriminatory practices against LGBTQ students and parents.  We therefore support House Bill 429 and Senate Bill 532 requiring all private schools that receive state funds to comply with the standards required of public schools and the requirement to sign onto the state anti-discrimination policy.

The LeRoy Collins Institute of Florida State University reported in 2017 that Florida’s schools, after decades of positive integration results, have become resegregated during the past 15 years. “… student enrollment trends in Florida over the past decades show growing racial isolation for Hispanic and Black students . . . with signs of continuing segregation.”

We oppose school segregation and propose that the Florida legislature investigate these trends and reverse them.

Separation of religion and government ensures that religion is not used as an excuse to discriminate against any group including LGBTQ people, women, religious minorities and others. Equal treatment is a tenet of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. We support equality under the law for all.