



## ***U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Releases Report: Enforcing Religious Freedom in Prisons***

Washington D.C. – Today, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights releases its report, [\*“Enforcing Religious Freedom in Prisons.”\*](#) This yearlong investigation, led by USCCR Commissioner Peter Kirsanow, culminates in the release of this report which provides an update to the Commission’s [\*2008 statutory enforcement report\*](#). That report examined the legal foundation of prisoners’ religious exercise rights, and the rules and guidelines related to religion in federal and state prisons and local jails.

The purpose of this update is to evaluate how incarcerated individuals can exercise their religious freedoms, as well as assess how the religious composition of prisoners and court interpretations of the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA) claims may have changed since 2007.

“Religious freedom is a constitutional right that does not end at the prison gate. Yet, our report shows that incarcerated individuals, especially those from minority faiths, continue to face serious barriers in practicing their religion. These challenges often stem from bias, inadequate accommodations, and broken grievance systems. We hope this report encourages policy makers at all levels to strengthen protections for religious liberty in our nation’s prisons.” – Chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Rochelle Garza.

“The First Amendment’s religious liberty protections are a vital component of corrections. This report shows that there may be few things more essential to rehabilitation than the free exercise of one’s faith.” – Commissioner Peter Kirsanow.

As part of the examination, the Commission also held a public briefing on May 17, 2024 titled, [\*“The Federal Role in Enforcing Religious Freedoms in Prison,”\*](#) where they received written and oral testimony from academic and policy experts, religious leaders, direct service providers, impacted persons, and prisoners’ religious rights advocates.

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, established by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, is the only independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights and reporting annually on federal civil rights enforcement. Our 56 state Advisory Committees offer a broad perspective on civil rights concerns at state and local levels. The Commission: in our 7th decade, a continuing legacy of influence in civil rights. For information about the Commission, please visit [www.usccr.gov](http://www.usccr.gov).