

# **Study shows charitable choice based on false assumptions\_12604**

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## **Study shows charitable choice based on false assumptions**

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WASHINGTON (ABP)-A new study suggests one of the main arguments for government funding of religious social-service providers might be based on false assumptions.

Researchers at Indiana University-Purdue University of Indianapolis reported on a three-year study of the effectiveness of faith-based social-service providers recently.

The project, by researchers from the university's Center for Urban Policy, is the most comprehensive study of the issue since 1996, when Congress enabled government funding of social services through churches and other religious organizations.

President Bush has attempted to further expand the number of government programs that can provide funding to religious charities.

Although advocates of the so-called "charitable-choice" programs often

argue that religiously motivated charities are more effective at providing social services than their governmental or secular counterparts, the study's researchers concluded otherwise.

Among other results, the Charitable Choice Research Project found:

Religious organizations operating job-training programs placed 31 percent of their clients in full-time employment, while secular job-training organizations placed 53 percent of their clients.

- ◆ Those placed in jobs from secular job-training programs were more likely to have health benefits and to work more hours than were graduates of religious programs.

- ◆ “Relatively few” new religious groups in the states studied have begun accepting government money to perform social services.

Many opponents of charitable choice argue providing government grants to pervasively religious groups violates the Constitution's ban on government endorsement of religion.

Federal courts have made it clear that direct government funds cannot go to fund worship, devotional activity or other inherently religious acts.

However, the White House and other charitable-choice advocates have argued religious groups can use public funds for the secular aspects of their work while maintaining their religious character in other parts of their work.

The study's authors conclude that may be impossible to enforce.

“We found that states did not monitor constitutional violations and did little to educate (religious) contractors about constitutional compliance,” said Sheila Suess Kennedy, the project's lead researcher and a law professor at

the university.

“We also found that congregational leaders had little familiarity with applicable constitutional constraints.”

In one part of the survey, 67 percent of congregational leaders who took what researchers described as “a simple questionnaire” on constitutional issues were unaware that government money cannot pay for devotional activities, such as prayer and Bible study.

The project studied religious and secular social-service providers in Indiana, Massachusetts and North Carolina.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention ( SBC ) and around the world.