

## 47 States Include Philosophical, Personal Belief, & Religious Exemptions

### Different Names for the Same Non-Medical Exemption (NME) Function

When groups promoting eliminating exemptions declare, “Only 18 states offer philosophical or personal belief exemptions”, (pbe), it appears that they are trying to create an artificial distinction in NME that exists only in terminology. What is the origin of the “philosophical and personal belief exemptions” names, and their relationship to religious exemptions?

**47 states include non-medical exemptions, what these non-medical exemptions are labeled is typically a matter of when the laws were established, not intent.** In states with “only” a religious exemption the philosophical and personal belief are encompassed within the religious category. Conversely Minnesota and Louisiana do not explicitly recognize religion as a reason for claiming an exemption, but the non-medical exemption is understood to include religious beliefs. Exemptions are not an afterthought but foundational to keeping laws constitutional.

During the 1960’s courts were determining that an individual personal philosophical position could hold an equal place in an individual’s personal moral structure to that of an organized religion. That there could not be a hierarchy of “accepted” religions and that membership in an organized religion was not necessary to maintain certain “religious” rights. An atheist with a strong belief must be given the same equal protection under the law as a religious person with a strong belief.

States with vaccine attendance laws enacted after these seminal court rulings, frequently included the specific language, “philosophical or personal”, in recognition of this equal treatment under the law. States with laws adopted earlier are often labeled, “religious”. **In 1969 only 26 states had school vaccine laws. WA school vaccination rules date to only 1979, mortality rates for the vaccine targeted infections was already zero.**

States with the prior “religious” language understand and interpret those laws to include any philosophical or personal objection. **From a practical, functional standpoint a citizen uses whatever non-medical exemption is available to them in the state they reside.**

When sponsors of legislation to eliminate exemptions suggest “tightening religious exemptions”, they are suggesting the direct intervention of the government into evaluating the quality and value of a citizen’s level of sincerity of conscience.

This suggestion that determining the legitimacy of person’s faith is a government function should be abhorrent to anyone identifying as a U.S. Citizen. Imagine having some bureaucrat interrogating a citizen about the basis for their objection, potentially arguing about the interpretation of a scriptural passage or denying the legitimacy of their beliefs.

Or a citizen that objects to participating in a utilitarian scheme that knowingly injures and kills some children in the theoretical service of protecting other children is told this position does not rise to the government “standard” of an acceptable philosophical or personal objection.

**The current system was designed with the exemptions in place from its original crafting and has served the state extremely well for 40 years. There is 97% voluntary acceptance of the current recommendations, and exemption rates are down in 2017/18 from 2016/17.**

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