

Princeton Seminary and yeshiva shouldn't get state funds, suit says

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TRENTON, N.J. (RNS) The American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey and Americans United for Separation of Church and State filed a lawsuit Monday (June 24) to stop the state from giving more than \$11 million in construction funds to a Christian seminary and a Jewish yeshiva.

The money is slated to go to Beth Medrash Govoha, a Lakewood school that trains Orthodox Jewish rabbis, and Princeton Theological Seminary, which trains Christian ministers. The private schools are among 46 New Jersey colleges and universities due to split \$1.3 billion in taxpayer funds for campus construction and renovation projects.

The ACLU lawsuit petitions the court to block the state from awarding the grants to the two religious schools.

"We support freedom of religion; however the government has no business funding religious ministries," said Ed Barocas, legal director of the ACLU of New Jersey.

"Taxpayers should not foot the bill to train clergy or provide religious instruction, but the state is attempting to do exactly that."

Princeton Theological Seminary declined to comment. Beth Medrash Govoha officials released a statement stating they were aware of the ACLU lawsuit. The statement also listed the ways the rabbinical school contributes to the state's economy.

The state grant will be used to help expand the school, the statement said.

"BMG will use funding solely to expand library facilities and academic capacity," said Moshe Gleiberman, vice president for administration at Beth Medrash Govoha.

The all-male yeshiva is scheduled to receive \$10.6 million from the state; Princeton Theological Seminary (which is not linked with Princeton University) is scheduled to receive \$645,323 from the state for technology upgrades.

“The state of New Jersey has an important role to play in providing financial support for institutions of higher learning in our state, but public money should not be used to fund schools that are not open and welcoming to all students in New Jersey,” said Udi Ofer, executive director of the ACLU of New Jersey.

The state Legislature is considering the list of 176 projects approved by Gov. Chris Christie’s administration to receive the higher education bond money. Several lawmakers have expressed concern about the grants to the yeshiva and the seminary.

State officials have declined to release the applications the two religious schools filed for the bond money because the award process is not complete.