

Oregon releases policy for religious clothing at schools

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(RNS) Oregon state officials released a policy on Wednesday (Dec. 8) intended to give school districts guidance in applying Oregon's new law on religious clothing.

A statewide ban on teacher religious dress was originally enacted in 1923 to keep Catholic nuns from teaching in public schools during a time of anti-Catholic bigotry.

State lawmakers repealed the ban during February's special legislative session.

For the past month, a group of about 20 people from organizations including the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission, Oregon Education Association, American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon and the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon have been creating a model policy to help districts create their own policies.

The new law -- which goes into effect on July 1st, 2011, allows district employees to wear religious clothing except if it hinders the district's ability to "maintain neutrality" in the school environment.

The policy gives districts a number of factors to consider before restricting or prohibiting an employee from wearing religious clothing.

The factors include evaluating the size and visibility of the religious clothing, the number of employees wearing similar clothing, and whether the employee intends to use the clothing to proselytize students.