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CHRISTIAN LEGAL SOCIETY ASKS THE SUPREME COURT TO REJECT SECOND-CLASS CITIZENSHIP FOR RELIGIOUS AMERICANS

> ***"When the Government denies safety benefits to children because of their religious status, it treats religious persons as less than equal citizens. This discrimination is exactly what occurred when Missouri refused to let church preschools participate in a playground safety program," said Center for Law and Religious Freedom Director Kim Colby. "Preschoolers deserve a safe playground even if they attend a religious preschool."***

Today Christian Legal Society urges the United States Supreme Court to reject discriminatory treatment of religious preschoolers when it hears oral argument in ***Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia v. Comer***.

The State of Missouri excluded a preschool from participating in the Missouri Scrap Tire Program solely because it was affiliated with a church. The program provides grants for nonprofits to purchase materials made from recycled tires to re-surface playgrounds, which makes the playgrounds safer for the children who play on them. CLS argues in its amicus brief that Missouri's exclusion of churches from this child safety program violates the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Under Missouri's reasoning, churches in Flint, Michigan, could be excluded from government programs that protect children from lead in water. Churches and synagogues in New Jersey and New York could be excluded from government programs to repair buildings damaged by Hurricane Sandy. By excluding houses of worship from safety programs, the government penalizes religious congregations, who often selflessly serve those in need in their communities. Such exclusions would erode religious freedom by allowing government officials to discriminate against religious Americans, relegating them to second-class citizenship.

CLS's brief was authored by Professor Thomas Berg of the University of St. Thomas School of Law (Minnesota) and Lucas Kane, a student at St. Thomas' Religious Liberty Appellate Clinic. The brief was joined by: the Anglican Church in North America; the Queens Federation of Churches (Queens, New York); the Family Research Council; the National Religious Broadcasters; and the Christian Medical Association. These groups represent hundreds of religious congregations, broadcasters, physicians, attorneys, and other religious citizens.

About Christian Legal Society: Christian Legal Society (CLS) defends religious freedom through its Center for Law and Religious Freedom. Since 1981, CLS has represented religious organizations before the Supreme Court when they have been discriminatorily excluded from a governmental program.
About Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia v. Comer: The Supreme Court will hear oral argument April 19, 2017, with a decision expected in late June 2017.
CLS Brief: Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia v. Sara Parker Pauley