

## **Religious Exemption from Compulsory School Attendance**

Parents who have sincere religious convictions against sending their children to school may consider a claim of Religious Exemption (RE) to compulsory schooling under [§22.1-254 B 1](#) of the Code of Virginia.

**The Code of Virginia statute, §22.1-254 (B)(1) reads:**

*A school board shall excuse from attendance at school: any pupil who, together with his parents, by reason of bona fide religious training or belief is conscientiously opposed to attendance at school. For purposes of this subdivision, "bona fide religious training or belief" does not include essentially political, sociological or philosophical views or a merely personal moral code.*

### **Local School Boards and the Religious Exemption**

The local school board considers and acts on requests for religious exemption. This is not a power granted in law to the school superintendent or central office administration.

The school board may recognize or decline to recognize a claim of religious exemption from the compulsory school attendance requirements. School boards have the right and legal obligation to reasonably scrutinize religious exemption claims to ensure they meet the criteria in law.

### **How to Claim a Religious Exemption**

Send written request for religious exemption along with supporting information and materials to local school board.

Supporting documents should include:

- A letter that describes the parent's religious beliefs, particularly including those relating to the education of the children and the spiritual basis for opposing school attendance.
- Two letters from friends, relatives, or members of the faith, that confirm the parent's beliefs are sincere.
- A letter or affidavit from a religious expert or scholar or a religious leader, if the family has such an authority that confirm the beliefs as spiritual in nature and/or genuine.

Families who have received a Religious Exemption are exempt from the [Compulsory Attendance Code \(§22.1-254\)](#). Once approved, parents do not have to file an annual notice of intent, submit an annual description of their curriculum, or submit annual testing or evaluation results to their local school division when educating their children at home. However, the public school division may in subsequent years inquire if the religious exemption is still applicable.