

High court to hear faith-based case: Bush's attempts to expand government role at issue

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For the first time, the Supreme Court will hear a case directly related to President Bush's faith-based initiative, his attempt to expand the government's ability to fund social services through churches and other religious charities. However, the case does not deal directly with whether the faith-based program violates the First Amendment's ban on government establishment of religion, as some of its critics contend.

Rather, the Court decided December 1 that it will consider a narrower issue—whether a group of taxpayers, namely the Freedom from Religion Foundation, has “standing,” or the right to sue, over the use of general executive-branch funds to promote the faith-based plan.

Earlier, the Court declined to consider overturning a Maine state court's decision against the use of tuition vouchers at religious schools. The justices' refusal on November 27 to hear the appeal underscores their unwillingness—despite the Court's conservative make-up—to force states to fund religious schools in the name of religious freedom. *-Associated Baptist Press*