

Freedom of Thought:

Protecting Every American's Right to Worship



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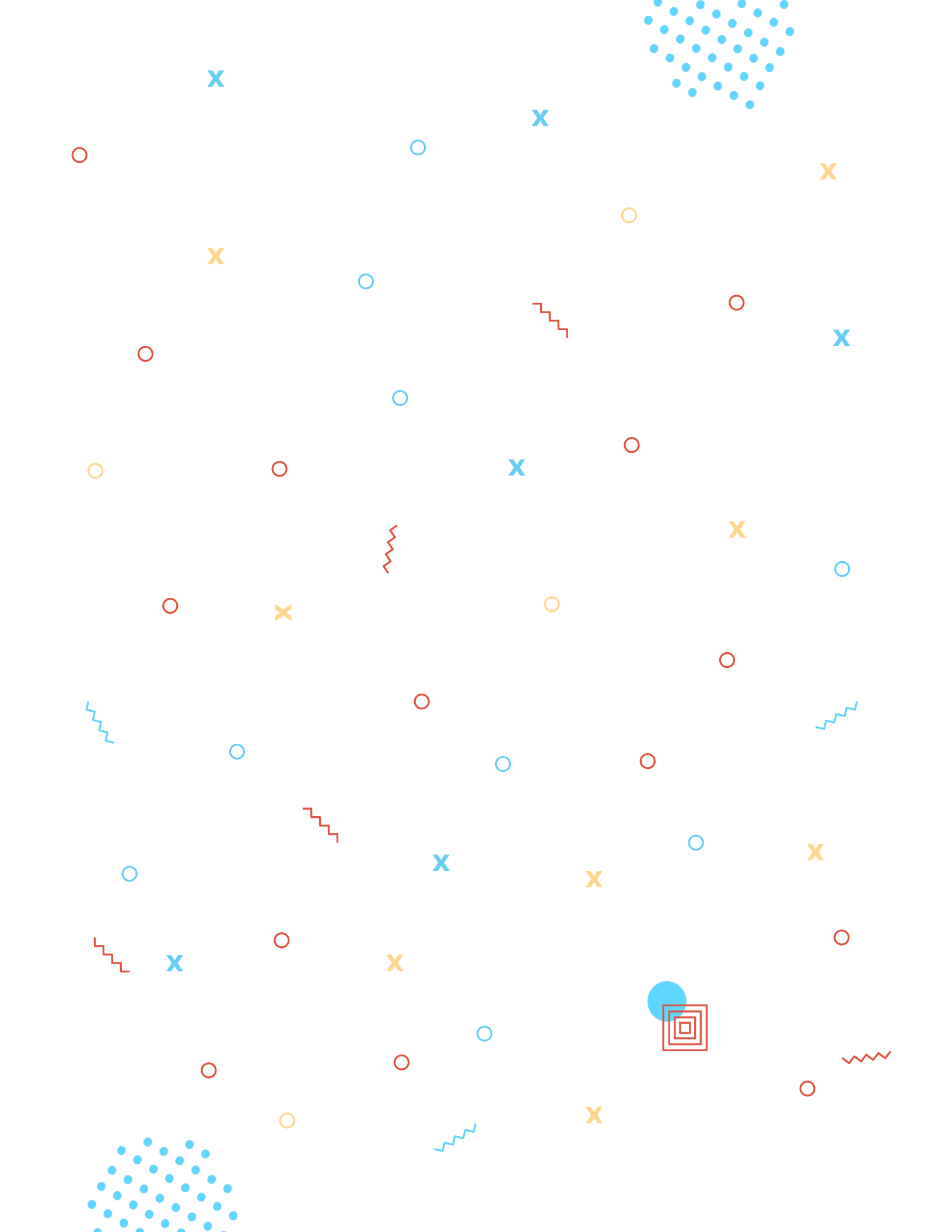
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Executive Summary

Respect is essential for a civil society – which is why it is important to **foster respect for a diverse range of lifestyles and beliefs**, including religious beliefs. Most Americans want to live their lives according to their conscience and want others to have the same freedom. In fact, a survey found **76% of Americans' support protecting religious freedom against the government.**

America's unofficial national motto is "E Pluribus Unum" which means "out of many, one." Though there are many Americans with different backgrounds and beliefs, we all come together to create one nation. **Diversity is one of America's greatest strengths** and, to become stronger, Americans must respect the diversity of people's faith.

"Diversity is one of America's greatest strengths and, to become stronger, Americans must respect the diversity of people's faith."

To protect religious liberty, Americans need to:

-  Protect religious people from **workplace discrimination and retaliation**
-  Provide **reasonable accommodations** to religious individuals
-  Protect the **religious viewpoints** of licensed professionals
-  Treat **religious and non-religious charities equally**

Reform #1

Protect religious people from workplace discrimination & retaliation

Summary

Most states have laws that protect workers from discrimination because of their race, sex, religion and other protected classes. Yet **many Americans are still afraid to live according to their religion while at work.**

Expanding religious protections in the workplace can help create a more inclusive environment.

A 2022 survey found **three in five Americans² fear sharing their religious and political views outside the workplace** because doing so could result in “negative consequences at work.” Additionally, **one in four Americans³ say they know someone who has experienced negative consequences** in the workplace for “respectfully expressing their religious and political viewpoints.”

Many Americans fear practicing their religion because jobs often do not provide accommodations for their religious customs.



63% of private companies

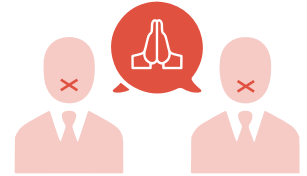
use their brands and money to **support legislation that rolls back free speech and protections for religious liberty**

In 2015, a Muslim woman named Samantha Elauf **was denied a job because she refused to remove her headscarf** in violation of the company's dress code⁴. While the decision to allow Elauf to wear a headscarf was "really easy" according to Justice Antonin Scalia, she still had to take her case to the Supreme Court to protect her religious rights.

Yet, private companies do more than just fail to provide religious accommodation. A 2023 Business Index of 75 leading companies found **63%⁵ use their brands and money to support legislation that rolls back free speech and protections for religious liberty.**

The survey also found **78%⁶ of those companies had policies that prevent or threaten to prevent employees from donating to religious charities.**

**3 in 5
Americans**






fear sharing their religious and political views outside the workplace

**1 in 4
Americans**



know someone who has experienced **negative consequences** in the workplace for "respectfully expressing their religious and political viewpoints

Opportunities for Reform

-  **Expand non-discrimination laws for religious citizens in civil rights acts** as well as in employment, housing and education law to ensure accommodations for religious faith
-  **Require government agencies to adopt reasonable accommodation guidelines** for religious employees and members of the public, allowing them to participate in the public square like any other citizen
-  **Adopt policies that protect religion and speech inside and outside the workplace** so employees can speak freely without fear of reprisal at work

Reform #2

Provide reasonable accommodations to religious individuals

Summary

In America, everyone should have the opportunity to practice their sincerely held religious beliefs without the government telling them how to worship or express their faith. Yet **many Americans are forced to choose between following seemingly oppressive laws or expressing their beliefs.**

Providing reasonable accommodations to religious individuals can make sure religion is protected against government overreach.

In 2021, **63%⁷ of Americans identified as Christian**, which is down from 75% the decade before. Meanwhile, 29% of Americans identified as non-religious, and 6% identified with other religions.

While 6% may seem insignificant, **it encompasses countless religions the government often threatens** in ways one may not suspect.

One such example is the **federal government's ban on owning eagle feathers⁸** despite their religious importance in several Native American tribes. Another example was the **U.S. military's ban on unshorn hair, beard and turban**, which forbade

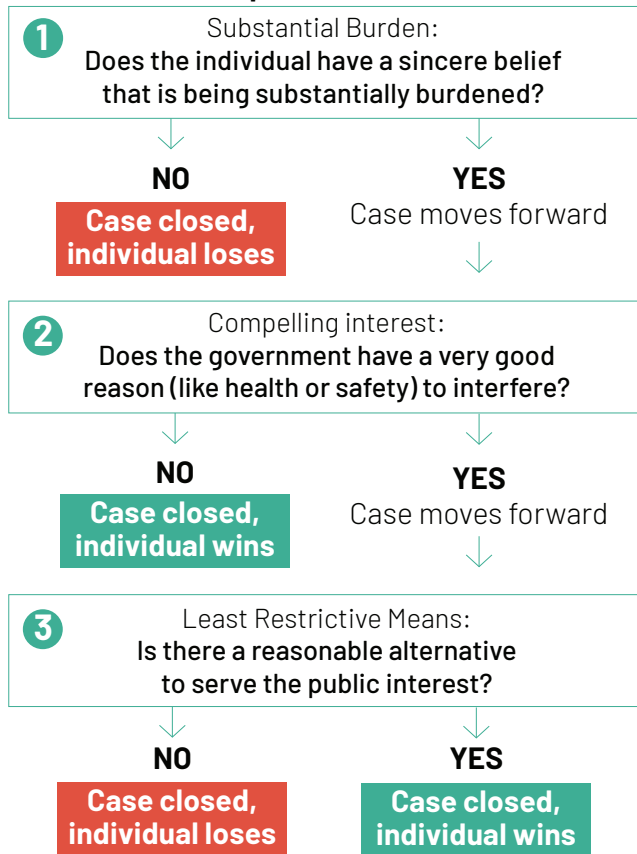
devout religious groups like Sikhs⁹ from serving their country in the military while maintaining their faith.

A good way to protect all religions is for state governments to **adopt the Religious Liberty Restoration Act** like the federal government did in the 1990s. As of 2023, **only 23 states¹⁰ protect the rights of religious people** in this way.

The law allows individuals to sue for a reasonable accommodation against a law that conflicts with their religion, and the way it works¹¹ is simple.



There are three steps¹²:



Religious freedom protects everybody's ability to live according to their conscience, pursuing truth and meaning. It protects everybody from a government so powerful it can stop you from fulfilling your religious obligations and get between you and your conscience in how to express faith.

In America, everyone should have the opportunity to practice their sincerely held religious beliefs without the government telling them how to worship or express their faith.

Opportunities for Reform



Adopt state-level Religious Freedom Restoration Acts to require that laws, rules, policies and any other government actions satisfy strict judicial scrutiny before they stop someone from practicing their faith



Treat religious organizations as essential during a state of emergency to ensure they can continue to assist people

Reform #3

Protect the religious viewpoints of licensed professionals

Summary

Every American should have the opportunity to find honest work and make a living. Yet, **the government sometimes makes it difficult** for Americans to get or keep a professional license because of their religion.

Respecting the religious viewpoints of licensed professionals will give religious Americans an equal opportunity to earn a living.

Every day, good and kind Americans make an effort to live according to their conscience without hurting others. Yet, some licensed professionals such as **realtors and doctors are forced to hide their religious beliefs** to keep their professional licenses.

Hadassah Hubbard Carter is a Christian realtor in Virginia who is at risk of losing her real estate license¹³ for writing “Jesus loves you” in her email signature and having some religious passages on her website. This is because the Virginia Fair Housing Law considers **words or symbols associated with any religion to be evidence of discrimination**, no matter the realtor’s intent.

Hadassah Hubbard Carter

Christian realtor in Virginia

Risk of losing her real estate license



for **writing “Jesus loves you”** in her email signature and having some religious passages on her website



Every American should have the opportunity to find honest work and make a living. Yet, the government sometimes makes it difficult for Americans to get or keep a professional license because of their religion.

Meanwhile, realtor and pastor Brandon Huber was **fined \$5,000** by his realtor association for handing out flyers during a local food bank program about his church's beliefs¹⁴.

In 2021, New Mexico passed a law¹⁵ **forcing doctors to participate in the assisted suicide of their patients even if it was against their religious beliefs**. The law threatened both criminal and civil penalties to doctors who refused to end their patients' lives, which put their medical licenses at risk.





Policies such as these force Americans to choose between practicing their religion and keeping their job. **No state should pass laws that force doctors to violate their Hippocratic oaths or their religious beliefs.**

Brandon Huber
Fined \$5,000 by his realtor association



for **handing out flyers** during a local food bank program **about his church's beliefs**

Opportunities for Reform

-  **Provide state-level alternative licensing** so Americans can continue to pursue their careers when illegitimately kept out by a licensing organization
-  **Pass religious accommodations for licensed professionals** so every American can live consistent with their religious faith
-  **Consider it unprofessional conduct for licensed professionals to target their peers** based on religion
-  **Adopt medical conscience legislation** to ensure that medical professionals can care for their patients while adhering to their faith.

Reform #4

Treat religious and non-religious charities equally

Summary

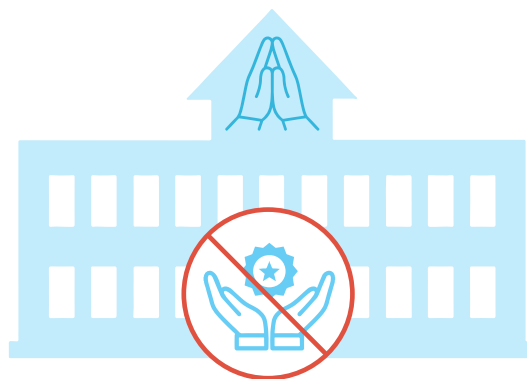
Many organizations like schools, soup kitchens and homeless and women's shelters provide a vital benefit to society – and also have a religious affiliation. Unfortunately, **many states reject working with religions organizations** to meet the needs within the community just because of their religious identity.

Treating religious and non-religious organizations equally protects religious groups from discrimination and ensures the government cannot determine winners and losers based on a group's religious status.

If religious freedom means anything, it means you won't be treated unfairly just because you are religious. Yet, **many governments discriminate against religious charities specifically because of their religion.**

Treating religious groups equally is not only fair but is also required by the First Amendment to our Constitution. The Supreme Court has repeatedly said **states cannot deny publicly-available benefits to religious groups** just because they are religious.

In 2018, **Maine prevented parents from receiving educational benefits** if they chose to enroll their children in a **religious school**



If religious freedom means anything, it means you won't be treated unfairly just because you are religious. Yet, many governments discriminate against religious charities specifically because of their religion.

For example, in 2012 a Lutheran Church¹⁶ in Columbia, Missouri, applied for money to resurface its playground. Yet, **the Missouri Constitution prohibited any money to be given to any religious charity** even if it is to be used for a secular purpose.

Meanwhile, in 2018 **Maine¹⁷ prevented parents from receiving educational benefits if they chose to enroll their children in a religious school.**

Montana tried requiring religious organizations to **renounce their religious convictions¹⁸** to be eligible for public funds.

While the Supreme Court sided with the religious groups in each of these instances, as of 2020, **37 states¹⁹ still have laws that discriminate against public charities** in this manner.



In 2020

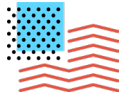
37
states



still have **laws that discriminate against public charities**

Opportunities for Reform

-  **Repeal "Blaine Amendments"** in state constitutions which deny charities public benefits because of their religious status or character
-  **Include accommodations in contracts with religious organizations** to respect the organization's religious purpose that inspires them

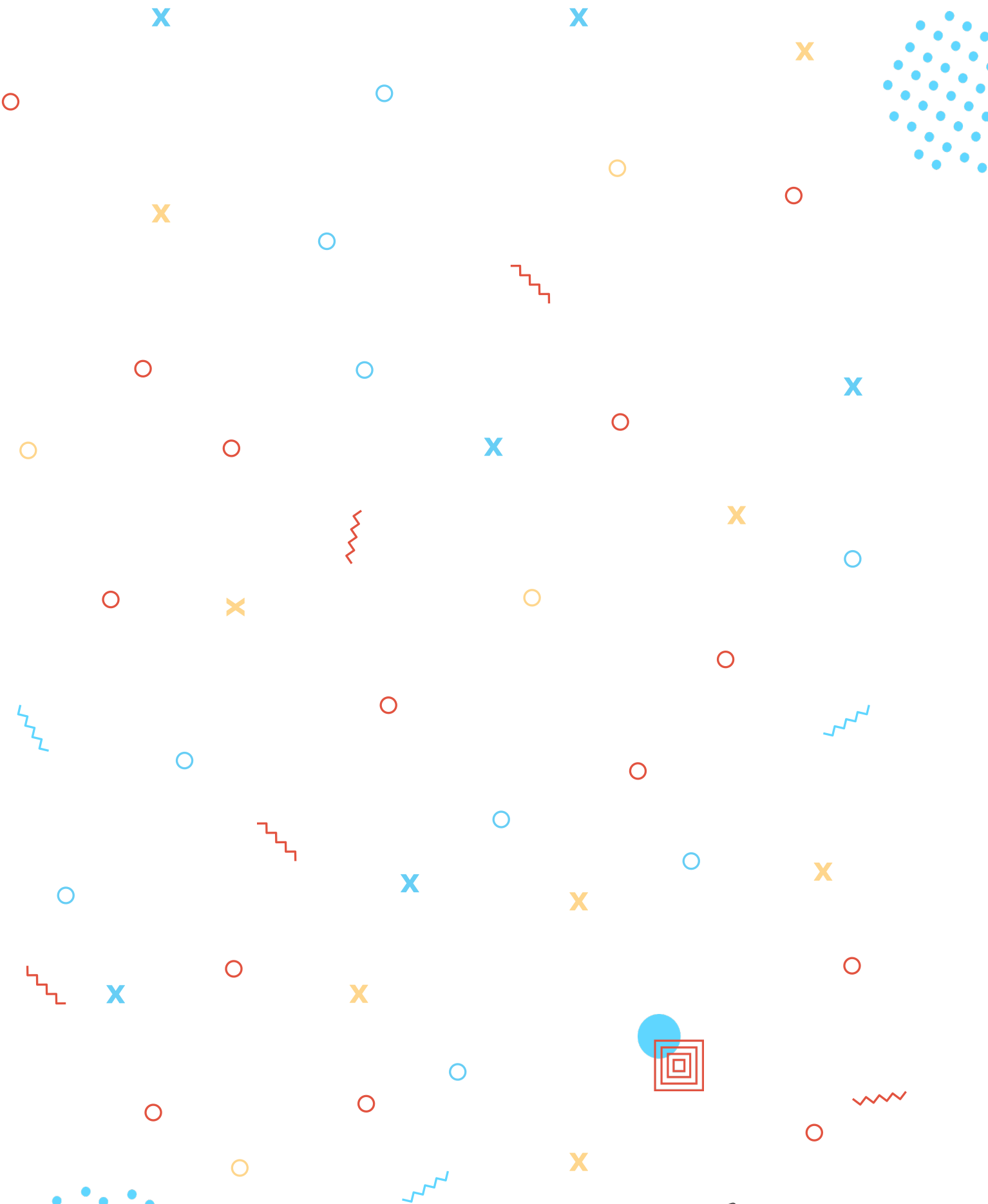


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