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Children's Rights

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/27/alabama-bill-would-jeopardize-children-need-families>

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Governor Should Veto Bill Inviting Discrimination in Adoption, Foster Care

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A view of Alabama State Capital in Montgomery, Alabama, U.S., April 10, 2017.



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A view of Alabama State Capital in Montgomery, Alabama, U.S., April 10, 2017. 2017 Reuters

On Tuesday, the Alabama House [approved](#) a dangerous bill that would allow adoption and foster care agencies with sincerely held religious beliefs to discriminate against prospective parents. Governor Kay Ivey should veto the bill and send a clear message that Alabama will protect vulnerable children by prioritizing their well-being and finding them a loving home.

The bill, [HB 24](#), would set a terrible precedent. Its sweeping language would invite agencies to discriminate based on the religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, and marital status of would-be parents. It would allow agencies to make decisions without considering how

their bias could run roughshod over the rights of foster or adoptive parents, or the states ability to place children in loving homes. For example, a same-sex couple that approaches an agency offering a safe, loving home for a child could be turned away because the agency opposes same-sex relationships on religious grounds.

By restricting enforcement of existing laws, HB 24 would also severely limit the states control and oversight over child placements. Approximately [30 percent of child placement agencies](#) in Alabama are faith-based organizations, and HB 24 would prohibit the state from withholding funding or licenses if those organizations discriminate. It would undermine laws designed to put the best interest of the child at the forefront of placement decisions, and would tie the states hands as it tries to place children with families who can care for them.

In March, South Dakota [enacted a similar law](#), prompting a [firestorm of criticism](#) from childreans and LGBT advocates. North Dakota, Michigan, and Virginia have similar exemptions in place.

Yet most states that have considered religious exemptions in child placement have decided not to adopt them. Efforts to update Georgias adoption laws [faltered this spring](#) after legislators inserted religious exemptions into the bill. Governor Nathan Deal threatened to veto the amended legislation and criticized lawmakers for putting discrimination before the best interests of children.

As HB 24 heads to her desk, Ivey has a similar opportunity to put Alabamas children first. The bills exceptions for religiously motivated prejudice are baseless, discriminatory, and dangerous. By vetoing HB 24, Ivey can help ensure that Alabama will not allow prejudice to stand in the way of placing vulnerable children in safe, healthy, and loving homes.

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