

Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/foster-agencies-get-free-pass-kids-pay-the-price/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Earlier this year, 95 members of Congress [condemned the Trump Administration](#) for granting a waiver to South Carolina allowing a foster care provider to turn away foster and adoptive parents who do not conform to specific Christian beliefs, calling it an egregious violation of every principle of our nation.

The federal waiver is just the latest salvo in an escalating effort to give faith-based organizations a free pass to discriminate against prospective foster or adoptive parents in the name of religious beliefs.

[Nine states](#) have so far enacted provisions that permit federally-funded, faith-based child welfare agencies to deny the applications of prospective non-Christian or LGBTQ foster parents on the basis of religious philosophy. A Republican-sponsored bill has been re-introduced that would penalize states that deny funding to foster agencies based on their illegal discriminatory practices. And there is growing concern that the Administration could eventually grant waivers similar to South Carolinas to any state that requests one. (Texas already has requested one.)

Faith-based foster care agencies do important work to give children loving families and receive millions in taxpayer dollars for their services. But no agency has the moral or the legal right to decide who is a suitable foster care parent based on anything other than their ability to care for a child.

The rise in faith-based exemptions not only discriminates against potential foster parents, it reduces the number of qualified families who can bring children into their home. And the timing couldn't be worse as states struggle to keep up with a surge in the number of children entering the foster care system, due in large part to the [opioid epidemic](#).

South Carolina, for example is already facing a severe shortage of foster homes and inappropriately over uses group homes, to the detriment of the more than 4,000 children in its care. Many of these children like the [nearly 450,000 children](#) in the foster care system nationwide languish in the system for years and suffer serious harm. They are bounced from one placement to another, separated from their siblings, denied basic physical and mental healthcare, and their educations are often disrupted and inadequate. Thousands age out of foster care without ever having found a permanent family, putting them on a path to higher rates of homelessness, unemployment and incarceration as adults.

Turning away foster parents who are Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, of another faith or of no faith, or LGBTQ is a tragedy for these children. By depriving them of suitable homes, our own policies are putting even more children at risk of a lifetime of poor economic circumstances, instability and mental and emotional distress.

The impact is particularly profound for same-sex couples, who are nearly three times as likely as heterosexual couples to foster or adopt a child out of foster care. Discriminatory policies are illegal and harmful to all children, but especially LGBTQ youth, who are overrepresented in the child welfare system and more likely to suffer from harassment and abuse in foster care and juvenile justice settings. They deserve the chance to be with parents who affirm rather than condemn their identity.

We know from our extensive work to reform the foster care system, child-placement agencies including faith-based agencies play a vital role as gatekeepers between at-risk children and safe and caring families. But as thousands of children wait, religious litmus tests must not be allowed to keep them from the loving homes they deserve.

We say we value children, that they are our future. But state-sanctioned, taxpayer-funded policies that do not have their best interests at heart must be challenged. Children entrusted to our care are at risk. Its time we speak on their behalf.

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First Name	Last Name
Email Address	