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ARTICLE

Christian Foster Families Continue To Lose Licenses Over Gender Standards





BY PNW STAFF JANUARY 15, 2026

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The quiet crisis unfolding inside America's foster care system rarely makes national headlines. It doesn't trend on social media. It doesn't inspire mass protests. Yet for countless vulnerable children--and the Christian families willing to open their homes to them--it is devastating all the same. Across the country, faithful foster parents are being pushed out, not for abuse or neglect, but for refusing to affirm a state-imposed gender ideology that conflicts with their deeply held Christian beliefs.

The most recent example comes from Massachusetts, where Lydia and Heath Marvin--a couple the state itself described as "uniquely dedicated"--have lost their foster care license. The Marvins previously cared for eight toddlers under the age of four, some with significant medical needs. Their ministry was not theoretical. It was lived out daily in sleepless nights, hospital visits, and the slow, holy work of loving children who had already known more trauma than most adults ever will.



Yet all of that was deemed irrelevant when the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families demanded that the couple agree to "support, respect, and affirm a foster child's sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression." For toddlers. For children barely old enough to speak in full sentences. The Marvins could not comply--not because they would mistreat a child, but because they would not be compelled to verbally and ideologically affirm beliefs that contradict their Christian faith.

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This is not an isolated incident.



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In Philadelphia, Catholic Social Services (CSS) was barred from participating in the city's foster care system because it would not certify same-sex couples as foster parents. Despite having served children for over a century--and despite no evidence that its practices harmed children--the city cut CSS out entirely. The case ultimately reached the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled unanimously in 2021 that Philadelphia violated the First Amendment. Yet even after that landmark decision, similar policies continue to spread in other jurisdictions, often written more carefully to avoid judicial scrutiny while achieving the same exclusionary outcome.

Another troubling case emerged in Vermont, where a Christian couple was denied the ability to foster after expressing biblical beliefs about gender and sexuality. State officials made clear that affirming a child's chosen gender identity--even if it conflicted with biological reality--was non-negotiable. The couple was deemed unfit, not because of any failure to love or protect children, but because their faith disqualified them in the eyes of the state.

What makes these cases especially alarming is the context. America is facing a severe foster care shortage. Agencies are desperate for stable, loving homes. Children are sleeping in offices, hotels, and emergency shelters. And yet, rather than welcoming qualified families, states are actively removing some of the most proven caregivers simply because they refuse to endorse contested social theories as moral truth.

Even some government officials are sounding the alarm. Andrew Gradison, acting assistant secretary for the Administration for Children and Families, rightly noted that these policies are "deeply troubling," contrary to the purpose of child welfare programs, and in violation of First Amendment protections. The foster system exists to serve children--not to function as an ideological compliance program.

The deeper issue, however, is spiritual. The state is no longer content with regulating behavior; it increasingly seeks to regulate belief. Christians are welcome to serve--so long as they do so silently, privately, and without allowing their convictions to shape their actions or

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As Angus Saul of the Christian Institute rightly observed, this is a clear case of state overreach. Christians understand the cost of discipleship. But we should also be clear-eyed about what is happening: faithful families are being screened out, not because they are unfit, but because they will not bow.

The church must not look away. We must pray, advocate, and speak clearly--because caring for the fatherless has always been at the heart of the Christian witness. And no government policy has the authority to redefine that calling.

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