

April 25, 2019

Dear Senator:

We write with great concern about legislation that authorizes discrimination that will ultimately harm the youth that the child welfare agencies are bound to protect. We ask you to oppose these measures.

The bills are aimed at permitting child welfare providers that receive taxpayer dollars and participate in government-supported child welfare services to discriminate against prospective parents if they are not in full agreement with the religious tenets of a faith-based child welfare provider. We have seen this happen in South Carolina, where a faith-based provider turned away people of the Catholic and Jewish faiths who wanted to help children in foster care—for the sole reason they did not share the same beliefs of the provider.

Permitting taxpayer dollars to subsidize discriminatory practices such as this will hurt children in need of loving and supportive homes. There are more than 8,500 children in the Tennessee foster care system, approximately 1,300 of whom are eligible for adoption. And each year, hundreds of youth “age out” of the foster care system, leaving them at a higher risk for poverty, homelessness, incarceration, and early parenthood than youth adopted while in foster care. These bills would exacerbate the problem by reducing the number of available foster and adoptive homes, thus making it harder for the children of the Tennessee foster care system to find a home. In addition, the bills seek to allow providers to prioritize their own beliefs and interests over the best interests of the children they agree to serve. We oppose the use of taxpayer dollars to subsidize discrimination and reject the idea that government-funded child welfare agencies should enjoy a blanket exemption from professional standards and practices that emphasize that every placement must, first and foremost, be made with the best interest of the child in mind.

As people of faith and faith-based organizations, we celebrate the important work of so many faith-based child welfare agencies that support foster youth. We are also deeply committed to religious freedom, but that freedom doesn't give anyone the right to impose their beliefs on others or to put children in harm's way. To argue that religious freedom justifies the use of taxpayer dollars to discriminate against prospective parents is a distortion of such freedom, and a misunderstanding of civil rights law.

We are partners in the sacred work of those faith-based child welfare agencies seeking to unite children with forever families and share their calling to build a world of wholeness and compassion. Further, our values as Americans and as people of faith compel us to ensure that every child finds a home, and that every family that can provide a safe,

supportive, and loving home for a child is matched with the child that will make their family whole.

Again, we urge you to reject these harmful bills.

Sincerely,

**African American Minister In Action**

**Alliance of Baptists**

**Anti-Defamation League Southeast**

**Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty**

**Bend the Arc: Jewish Action**

**BPFNA ~ Bautistas por la Paz**

**Congregation of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces**

**DignityUSA**

**Disciples Justice Action Network**

**Equal Partners in Faith**

**Franciscan Action Network**

**Global Faith & Justice Project**

**Global Justice Institute, Metropolitan Community Churches**

**Interfaith Alliance**

**The Jewish Federations of North America**

**Jewish Women International**

**Keshet: For LGBTQ equality in Jewish life**

**Methodist Federation for Social Action**

**National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd**

**National Council of Churches**

**National Council of Jewish Women**

**National Council of Jewish Women, Nashville Section**

**NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice**

**Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies**

**Reconstructing Judaism**

**Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association**

**Religious Institute**

**St. Ann's Episcopal Church, Nashville**

**T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights**

**Union for Reform Judaism**

**Unitarian Universalist Association**

**United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries**

**The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church & Society**

**Uri L'Tzedek: Orthodox Social Justice**

**YATOM: The Jewish Foster & Adoption Network**

*List of signers in formation*

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***Local Faith Leaders***

[More than 100 Tennessee faith leaders](#) from a variety of religious traditions also oppose these bills and the entire slate of proposed legislation that “promote[s] discrimination rather than justice and demean[s] the worth of LGBTQ people in our state.”