

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Chairman  
Labor, HHS, Education Appropriations Subcommittee  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Frelinghuysen and Chairman Cole,

We write on behalf of millions of Americans including adoptive parents, child welfare services providers, faith-based organizations, and other groups who desire to keep adoption and foster care friendly to people of faith. We respectfully request the Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act (H.R. 1881)—a bill that protects faith-based adoption and foster agencies—be added to the fiscal year 2019 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

Ultimately, it is the child waiting to be fostered or adopted who stands to benefit or lose from child welfare policies. In order to deliver what every child deserves, our communities must provide parents the ability to choose a provider who shares their values. Birth parents often desire for their child to be placed in a family who shares their moral convictions. Fostering and adopting parents often desire to work with organizations who share their values because they need spiritual support from the early stages of home studies through the unique challenges of parenting. A diversity of providers in the adoption and foster space is the best way to facilitate those critical connections between birth parents and adoptive parents.

The state by state landscape for child welfare providers is increasingly unpredictable and overtly hostile to Americans of faith. Massachusetts, Illinois, California, and the District of Columbia have unjustly excluded credible, experienced groups from providing child welfare services. In those states, providers who wish to operate according to their religiously or morally informed conscience must check their convictions at the door if they wish to serve children.

Nine other states acted to keep the child welfare space inclusive: Alabama, Kansas, Mississippi, Michigan, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Virginia. But the state laws are not sufficient. Michigan is being sued for its law. A well-established Catholic adoption agency in Texas is being targeted by a lawsuit in spite of the state law because some of the group's funding comes from a federal grant. In March, the City of Philadelphia announced its suspension of foster care contracts with Catholic Social Services because of the agency's religious beliefs. Given the heavy investment of the federal government in child services and the woefully inconsistent territory across the states, we believe this problem justifies a federal solution through the Inclusion Act.

The Committee's recent dedication of billions of dollars toward fighting our nation's tragic opioid epidemic rightly recognizes the toll that this crisis takes on our neighborhoods. Our foster care and adoption system is one of the spheres of civil society particularly strained by the opioid epidemic. Now is an especially terrible time to reduce the capacity of state governments to efficiently place children in safe, loving homes. A significant number of those homes are provided by local networks of people of faith

inspired to engage child service because of their faith. Yet, hostile state and local governments are increasingly telling people of faith they are not welcome, limiting opportunities for placement of children in need.

We ask the Committee to continue the leadership it has already shown in its response to the opioid crisis and add the Inclusion Act to Chairman Cole's FY19 appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

Russell Moore  
President  
Southern Baptist Ethics &  
Religious Liberty Commission

Most Rev. Frank J. Dewane  
Bishop of Venice  
Chairman  
USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice  
and Human Development

Most Rev. Joseph E. Kurtz, D.D.  
Archbishop of Louisville  
Chairman  
USCCB Committee for Religious Liberty

Most Rev. James D. Conley  
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America World Adoption

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Kevin Hewitt  
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Christian Family Care

Beth Woods  
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Jacqui Jackson  
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