

May 7, 2018

The Honorable Mary Fallin
Governor of Oklahoma
Oklahoma State Capitol
2300 N. Lincoln Blvd., Room 212
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Re: Support for Senate Bill 1140

Dear Governor Fallin:

We write on behalf of millions of Americans who are deeply concerned about the conscience rights of adoption and foster care providers that seek to assist children in desperate need of loving homes.

Senate Bill 1140 protects child welfare providers from being discriminated against by state government entities due to the providers' religious or moral convictions or policies. SB 1140 prevents the Oklahoma state government as well as local government entities from excluding adoption and foster care agencies because of their beliefs about what is best for each child. SB 1140 *keeps kids first* because it empowers a larger number of child welfare providers to recruit and train more families that can provide loving homes for more vulnerable children in Oklahoma.

Faith-based agencies in Oklahoma have been serving children in need for more than 60 years. Your signing of SB 1140 would allow the good work of these agencies to continue, as well as open the door to more agencies to build even more capacity for serving children.

SB 1140 would provide a remedy to government discrimination by allowing providers to serve parents and children in a manner consistent with the providers' religious or moral convictions. Birth parents who desire to place their children for adoption should be able to choose an agency that shares their values.

In particular, keeping kids first involves protecting the birth mother's choice to place the child with the family she feels is best. According to one birth mother, "I chose Bethany [Christian Services] because their values match mine. Their values match my family's values, and I wanted to choose adoptive parents that share those same values. I can't even fathom, first of all, not having spiritual support from an adoption agency."

Single birth mothers often plan for adoption in those cases in which they cannot provide everything their child deserves. A birth mother should have every opportunity to place her child with a family that reflects her values. Taking away faith-based agencies will reduce options, make the process for birth parents even more difficult, and potentially discourage adoptions.

Likewise, prospective adoptive and foster parents should also be able to choose to work with an agency that can provide spiritual support for them during the home study process and beyond, including post-placement and post-adoption services. SB 1140 recognizes and respects this parental choice.

At a time when the opioid crisis is driving more children into foster care and adoption, we need all available agencies to assist with placing vulnerable children in stable homes. Faith-based agencies in particular excel at recruiting good families who can provide stability for children in crisis; that excellence is propelled by both the faith-driven mission of these agencies as well as their connections to houses of worship where they can recruit prospective foster and adoptive parents.

By signing this bill, Oklahoma would be joining the many states recognizing the need to protect adoption and foster care providers. Seven states (Virginia, Michigan, North Dakota, South Dakota, Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas) have now enacted legislation to protect the conscience rights of adoption and foster care providers. At the same time, everyone who desires to foster or adopt a child still has that ability in every state, provided they meet the basic eligibility requirements. There is clearly momentum for protecting the freedom to serve vulnerable children.

But action is needed in Oklahoma as well. We offer our strong support for SB 1140 and urge you to sign this legislation. The freedom to serve the vulnerable according to one's conscience is foundational to our country.

Sincerely,

Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo
Archbishop of Galveston-Houston
President
United States Conference of Catholic
Bishops (USCCB)

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. Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.
Archbishop of Philadelphia
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Laity,
Marriage, Family Life and Youth

Most Rev. James D. Conley
Bishop of Lincoln
Chairman, USCCB Subcommittee for the
Promotion and Defense of Marriage

Bethany Christian Services

Dr. Russell Moore
President
Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious
Liberty Commission

Rev. Douglas E. Clay
General Superintendent
Assemblies of God
Springfield, Missouri

Rev. H. Franklin Cargill
President
Oklahoma Assemblies of God Ministries
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Rev. Jay Mooney
Executive Director
COMPACT Family Services
Springfield, Missouri

Tony Perkins
President
Family Research Council

Rabbi Pesach Lerner
President
Coalition for Jewish Values

Tim Schultz
President
1st Amendment Partnership

Paul Weber
President & CEO
Family Policy Alliance

Benjamin Bull
Executive Director of Advocacy
First Liberty Institute

Joseph A. Bingham
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First Liberty Institute

David Stevens, MD, MA (Ethics)
CEO
Christian Medical & Dental Associations

Most Rev. William E. Lori
Archbishop of Baltimore
Former Chairman, USCCB Ad Hoc
Committee for Religious Liberty