

May 3, 2018

Dear Lawmaker:

We, the undersigned faith leaders and organizations, write with great concern about SB 284 (formerly HB 2481) as amended by the Senate. We write to ask that you vote against SB 284 unless the Senate's harmful amendment is stripped--which the report out of conference does not do.

If passed as amended, SB 284 would permit child welfare agencies that receive taxpayer dollars and participate in government-supported child welfare services to discriminate against children and prospective parents. As such, the bill would allow these agencies to ignore 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.

Permitting taxpayer dollars to subsidize discriminatory practices such as this will hurt children in need of loving and supportive homes. There are more than 7,200 children in the Kansas foster care system, approximately 2,400 of whom are eligible for adoption. In 2015, nearly 355 Kansas youth "aged 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. This bill will make it harder for the children of the Kansas foster care system to find their forever home.

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 children and 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 their forever 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 the discriminatory language proffered by the Senate as well as by the conference committee. Please do not allow the harms added to SB 284 to become law.

Sincerely,

Kansas Faith Leaders and Organizations (51)

Rabbi Daniel Kirzane, The Temple, Congregation B'nai Jehudah, Overland Park

Rev. Rich Shockey, Church of the Nazarene, Lenexa

Reverend Adrienne Showalter Matlock, Risen Lamb International Church of the Nazarene,
Kansas City, KS

Rev. Kurt Cooper, United Methodist Campus Ministry Emporia State University, Emporia

Rev. Christopher Eshelman, UMC, Pretty Prairie, KS

Rev. Boone D. Clayton, Presbyterian Church (USA), Manhattan

Pastor Susan Peach, First Baptist Church, Olathe

Pastor Jay Peach, First Baptist Church of Olathe, Olathe
 Rev. Lora L. Andrews, Grace United Methodist Church, Winfield
 Reverend Keith A. Phillips, Presbyterian Church (USA), Salina
 Rev. Ashley Prescott Barlow-Thompson, United Methodist Church, Wichita
 The Very Rev. A. Patrick Funston, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Manhattan
 Maria Penrod, United Methodist Church, Overbrook
 Reverend Amanda L. Baker, United Methodist, Marion
 Rev. Kati Collins, PCUSA, Manhattan
 Rev. Caela Simmons Wood, First Congregational United Church of Christ, Manhattan
 Rev. Rebecca Goltry Mohr, Wichita First United Methodist Church
 Rev. Melanie Martin, First UMC, Manhattan
 Shaun-Michael Morse, Seminary Student, Table of Hope Metropolitan Community Church, Wichita
 Rev. Jill Sander-Chali, United Methodist Church, Wichita
 Reverend William S. Vincent, Jr., Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Wamego
 Chelsea Shrack, Campus Minister, Wesley at Kansas State University
 Rev. Sheridan Irick, Partridge Community Church UCC, Partridge
 Rev. Adam Barlow-Thompson, Neighboring Movement, Wichita
 Tobias Schlingensiepen, First Congregational Church UCC, Topeka
 Rev. Rob Santel, Church of the Nazarene, Olathe
 David Woosley, Priest, Community of Christ, Lawrence
 Rev. Joanna Harader, Peace Mennonite Church, Lawrence
 Rev. William B. Rose-Heim, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Overland Park
 Pastor Beth Wilke, United Methodist, Winfield
 Zen Master Judy Roitman, Kansas Zen Center, Lawrence
 Rev. Kyle Reynolds, United Methodist, Olathe
 Rev. Martha McDougal, Osawatomie First United Methodist, Osawatomie
 Rev. Kent H. Little, College Hill United Methodist Church, Wichita
 Rev. Denise Dugan, Saint Andrew Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Olathe
 Rev. Cynthia Meyer, Central Congregational Church UCC, Topeka
 Rev. Michael L. Strickland, First Baptist Church of Atchison, Atchison
 Rabbi Dr. Mark H. Levin, Congregation Beth Torah, Overland Park
 Rabbi Debbie Stiel, Temple Beth Sholom (Topeka)
 Rabbi Javier E. Cattapan, Congregation Beth Torah, Overland Park
 ADL-CRC
 Jewish Family Services of Greater Kansas City
 National Council of Jewish Women - Kansas City Section
 Mercy and Justice Team Great Plains Annual Conference UMC
 Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Manhattan
 Ecumenical Campus Ministries, Kansas State University
 Carbondale Community UCC
 Central Congregational Church UCC, Topeka
 United Church of Christ Kansas-Oklahoma Conference
 Colonial Church in Prairie Village
 UU Fellowship of Topeka
**Affiliations are listed for identification purposes*

National and Statewide Faith-Based Organizations (39)

African American Ministers In Action-Equal Justice Task Force
 Ameinu
 As the Spirit Moves Us

Avodah
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
Catholics for Choice
Columbia Theological Seminary
DignityUSA
Disciples Justice Action Network
Disciples LGBTQ+ Alliance
Equal Partners in Faith
Faith in Public Life
Faith Matters Network
The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries
Global Faith & Justice Project
Global Justice Institute, Metropolitan Community Churches
Institute for Welcoming Resources
Integrity USA - The Episcopal Rainbow
Intersections International
Interfaith Alliance
Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action
Jewish Community Action
Keshet
Methodist Federation for Social Action
Muslims for Progressive Values
National Coalition of American Nuns
National Council of Jewish Women
New Ways Ministry
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Religious Institute
SOJOURN
Tivnu: Building Justice
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
Uri L'Tzedek: Orthodox Social Justice
Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER)
The Workmen's Circle
YATOM: The Jewish Foster & Adoption Network