June 29, 2018

The Honorable Henry McMaster
State House
1100 Gervais Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Governor McMaster:

We, the undersigned faith leaders and organizations, write with great concern about a provision of the budget bill (H. 4950) that deals with faith-based child-placing agencies. We write to ask that you veto paragraph 38.29 in the bill when it is on your desk.

If enacted, this provision 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 and vital services. There are almost 4,000 children in the South Carolina foster care system, approximately 1,300 of whom are eligible for adoption. In 2015, almost 200 South Carolina 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 South Carolina 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 serve children in care and unite them 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 veto this discriminatory measure. Please do not allow the harms in this provision to become law.

Sincerely,

South Carolina Faith Leaders,* Congregations, and Organizations
Rabbi Stephanie Alexander, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, Charleston
Rev. Frank W. Anderson, Lutheran Campus Ministry USC, Columbia
Karen L. Ayers, Lay Servant, United Methodist, St. George
Claudia Smith Brinson, Lay Leader & Board Member, South Carolina Dharma Group, Columbia
Rev. Timothy L. Bupp, Reformation Lutheran Church, Columbia
Rabbi Jonathan Case, Beth Shalom Synagogue, Columbia
Patricia Clancy, Worship Chair, First United Methodist Church, Lancaster
Rev. Dr. Karin Bascom Culp, United Methodist, Columbia
Rev. Dr. Nancy N. Elsenheimer, Garden of Grace United Church of Christ, Columbia
Holli Emore, Founder and Priestess, Temple Osireion, Columbia
Rev. Bud Esper, Non-denominational, Longs
Rev. Adrienne Fink, United Methodist, Cayce
Rev. Michael P. Flanagan, Holy Cross Episcopal Church, Simpsonville
Rev. Dr. Samuel B. George, Ill, United Methodist, Myrtle Beach
Rev. Michael E. Goldston, United Methodist, Greenville
Sue Owen Gover, Stephen Minister, First United Methodist Church, Clover
Rev. Megan Gray, Cokesbury United Methodist Church, North Charleston
Rev. Dr. J. Christopher Greene, Shiloh United Methodist Church, Gilbert
Rev. Wendy Hudson-Jacoby, Two Rivers Church — A United Methodist Community, Charleston
Rabbi Greg Kanter, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, Charleston
Dr. Nancy Kreml, Lay Leader & Board Member, South Carolina Dharma Group, Columbia
Rev. Mitch Kyllonen, United Methodist, Spartanburg
Rabbi Yossi J. Liebowitz, B’nai Israel, Spartanburg
Rev. Dr. Charles H. Lippy, United Methodist, Charleston
Rev. Evelyn Middleton, United Methodist, Chapin
Rabbi Eric Mollo, Tree of Life Congregation, Columbia
Rev. Dr. Steven D. Morgan, United Methodist, Easley
Rev. Elizabeth Murray, United Methodist, Lexington
Rev. Kenneth Nelson, United Methodist, Columbia
Rev. Richard Reams, North Charleston United Methodist Church, North Charleston
Rev. Danny Reed, The Unitarian Church in Charleston, Charleston
Rev. Dr. Jeremy Rutledge, Circular Congregational Church, Charleston
Rev. Robert David Smith, Metropolitan Community Church of Charleston, North Charleston
Rev. Thomas A. Summers, United Methodist, Columbia
Rev. Emily Scales Sutton, Bethel United Methodist Church, Rock Hill
Rt. Rev. W. Andrew Waldo, Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina, Columbia
Rev. Toni L. White, United Methodist, Lexington
Rev. Carly Wicklund, United Methodist, Columbia
Rev. Dr. Paul A. Wood, Jr., United Methodist, Inman

*Affiliations are listed for identification purposes only

Anti-Defamation League Southeast Regional Office
Beth Shalom Synagogue, Columbia
Circular Congregational Church, Charleston
Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina
Garden of Grace United Church of Christ, Columbia
Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, Charleston
Lutheran Campus Ministry USC, Columbia
Metropolitan Community Church of Charleston, North Charleston
North Charleston United Methodist Church, North Charleston
Reconciling Ministries Network, South Carolina
Reformation Lutheran Church, Columbia
Shiloh United Methodist Church, Gilbert
Temple Osireion, Columbia
Two Rivers Church — A United Methodist Community, Charleston

National Religious and Faith-based Organizations
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
EthicsDaily.com
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
Metropolitan Community Churches
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