



Members of the Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG) are deeply troubled by the Administration's recent approval of a waiver request from South Carolina that allows a foster care agency to discriminate against potential foster parents based on their religious beliefs. Current regulations expressly prohibit publicly-funded foster care agencies from discriminating on the basis of religion, gender identity or sexual orientation. This waiver allows the agency to deny adults the ability to be a foster parent unless they share the organization's religious convictions, including creating a Christian family environment for children and youth in foster care. This waiver has the potential to upend decades of federal protections that make safety, permanency and well-being the highest priority for all children and youth involved in the child welfare system. The waiver also sets a dangerous precedent that prioritizes the religious convictions of adults over the developmental needs all young people have to grow into healthy, connected, and productive adults, regardless of their race, religion, or sexual orientation.

***YTFG calls on the Administration to rescind this waiver and uphold current regulations prohibiting discrimination on the basis of religion, gender identity or sexual orientation by private foster care agencies.***

YTFG members strive to ensure the well-being of all young people. We believe all young people are valuable, all young people deserve equitable opportunities, and that every young person should belong in a family that loves and supports them and in a community that provides opportunities for them to thrive and contribute. Perhaps most important in the context of this waiver, young people should have voice and ability to exercise control over their journey to adulthood.

We appreciate the powerful role that faith-based organizations play to engage foster parents who can provide a safe, loving and affirming home for children and youth when they can't safely live in their own homes. But foster care agencies should not be allowed to use that power to narrowly define which adults can play a healing role in a young person's life based on religious convictions or to discriminate against non-Christian and LGBTQ foster parents. Of particular concern is the potential that young people who do not share the religious convictions of their foster parents will be required to follow religious practices that are different from their own, or will not be supported if their sexual orientation is not affirmed by those religious beliefs.

YTFG is fortunate to have young adults as members of our network who help to guide and support our work. Many of the young people we have engaged have spoken about being placed in homes that forced them to practice a religion that was not their own, rejected them for expressing gender non-confirming identities, or failed to accept their unique racial and cultural identities. The overwhelming feeling of being unsafe and threatened by foster parents that did not accept them for who they are caused years of emotional and physical trauma. Simply put, the very systems that were designed to keep them safe and help them thrive in a family had the exact opposite outcome.

Young people need positive connections with supportive people; safe and secure places to live, learn and grow; access to high quality health and mental health care; and chances to engage as learners, team members and workers. This waiver sets a dangerous precedent that formally endorses discriminatory practice, imposes restrictions and barriers for potential foster parents who are able to meet the diversity of young people's needs, and has the potential to harm young people and undermine their well-being.

*YTFG is a national network of over one hundred foundation executives that work together to support the well-being and economic success of vulnerable young people age 14 to 25. We seek to ensure that all young people have lifelong family, personal, and community connections and the opportunities and tools to succeed throughout adulthood. [www.ytfg.org](http://www.ytfg.org)*