



# Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown

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March 5, 2019

The Honorable Lynn Johnson  
Assistant Secretary  
Administration for Children and Families  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
330 C Street, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Re: Support for Religious Liberties in Title IV-E Funded Programs

Dear Ms. Johnson:

As Bishop of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown and as a concerned citizen, I am writing to you today in support of, and in concert with my brother Bishops, regarding a matter of great concern which threatens the practice of our Catholic faith. Pennsylvania's Catholic Charities agencies have worked with state and county agencies for many years to find permanent or transitional homes for thousands of Pennsylvania children in crisis.

These agencies are now facing unconstitutional discrimination because they are observing firmly held tenets of the Roman Catholic faith. Catholic adoption and foster agencies are being forced to choose between maintaining and living out their religious beliefs and participating in the Pennsylvania SWAN (Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network) program, a state program funded with federal Title IV-E dollars.

I am aware that several Catholic Charities agencies have recently written to you requesting relief from Federal regulations which are being unconstitutionally imposed upon faith-based adoption and foster care providers. These new regulations require the foster agency to avoid any discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and religious beliefs. I write to voice my support for, and request relief on behalf of, the Pennsylvania Catholic Charities agencies which are now effectively prohibited from serving the children and families which they have so faithfully served until now.

I was greatly encouraged to read about HHS granting the exemption request by Governor McMaster for faith-based organizations operating under South Carolina's Title IV-E Foster Care Program. I was also encouraged to read President Trump's comments at the recent National Prayer Breakfast that "[w]e will always protect our country's proud tradition of faith-based adoption," and that his "administration is working to ensure that faith-based adoption agencies are able to help vulnerable children find their forever families while following their deeply held beliefs."

It is with this encouragement that I am requesting relief for the Pennsylvania Catholic Charities agencies. Without appropriate relief, the Catholic Charities agencies of Pennsylvania will be forced to either abandon their religious beliefs or be forced to abandon their ministry to children in crisis. For the sake of the children and for the sake of all faith-based organizations, I respectfully ask that you not make that choice necessary, and that you find it appropriate to grant the requested relief.

For the foregoing reasons, I hereby formally request you grant an individual exemption from the nondiscrimination requirements imposed upon the Pennsylvania Catholic Charities agencies.

Thank you for your attention. Please know that I pray for you as you make the right decision by granting this exemption.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Mark L. Bartchak". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Mark L. Bartchak  
Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown