

Chairman Barker, Vice Chair Highland, and members of the committee:

My name is Eric Teetsel and I'm President and Executive Director of Family Policy Alliance of Kansas. We represent thousands of individuals and families across our state who share our desire to make Kansas the best place in America to live and raise a family. We believe every kid in Kansas deserves to be part of a forever family, and that faith-based adoption providers lead the way in finding homes for kids in need. To that end, **we strongly support HB 2687.**

The first orphanage in the United States was founded by the Sisters of the Order of Saint Ursula in New Orleans in 1727. When a treaty transferring ownership of the "Louisiana territory" from France to the United States was signed in 1804, Sister Marie Theresa, Superior of the Sisters of the Order of Saint Ursula, wrote a letter to her new president.

Emboldened by faith, Sister Marie Theresa asked whether, "The Treaty of Cession and still more the spirit of justice which characterizes the United States of America" will guarantee "the continued enjoyment of our present property?"

In other words, "Will we be allowed to continue to do our work in this new America?"

Two months later, the president wrote back.

I have received, holy sisters, the letter you have written me wherein you express anxiety for the property vested in your institution by the former governments of Louisiana. The principles of the constitution and government of the United States are a sure guarantee to you that it will be preserved to you sacred and inviolate, and that your institution will be permitted to govern itself according to it's own voluntary rules, without interference from the civil authority. Whatever diversity of shade may appear in the religious opinions of our fellow citizens, the charitable objects of your institution cannot be indifferent to any; and it's furtherance of the wholesome purposes of society, by training up it's younger members in the way they should go, cannot fail to ensure it the patronage of the government it is under. Be assured it will meet all the protection which my office can give it.

I salute you, holy sisters, with friendship and respect.

Thomas Jefferson

In this short statement, Jefferson affirms the right of conscience, self-governance without interference from civil authority, and the contributions of faith-based groups to society. Jefferson promises to his the full powers of the office of the presidency to defend these rights.

Should the members of the Kansas legislature do any less?

The Adoption Protection Act before you today guarantees the same right as Jefferson's letter, and for the same reasons. Faith-based adoption providers have been helping Kansas kids find forever families for decades. Today, their ability to serve our state by living out their faith is threatened. Some would rather these agencies close their doors than be able to serve if their service is inspired by beliefs with which they don't agree.

That's wrong. It is un-American. And the consequences of their exclusivism fall most heavily on those most in need: homeless kids.

Don't put the sexual politics of adults ahead of the needs of kids. The Adoption Protection Act maximizes the number of agencies available to help kids find homes without infringing the right of any agency to operate according to its values and convictions.

Family Policy Alliance of Kansas urges the committee members to pass HB 2687 and move the bill swiftly to a floor vote.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Eric Teetsel
President & Executive Director
Family Policy Alliance of Kansas