



COLORADO CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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2021 March 30

Thank you, Madame Chair, and thank you esteemed members of the committee.

My name is Brittany Vessely. I am the executive director of the Colorado Catholic Conference, which is the united voice of the four Catholic bishops of Colorado in public policy. I am speaking on behalf of the conference this afternoon to testify **in opposition** to HB 1072.

HB 1072 would prohibit organizations that receive state funding to place children with adoptive or foster parents from discriminating on the basis of “sexual orientation,” “gender identity,” “gender expression,” or “marital status.” Currently, this legislation does not contain an exemption for faith-based agencies, who provide unique inspiration and encouragement to foster and adoptive families and help maximize family placements for children in need.

Each person should be treated with dignity, respect, and compassion. HB 1072 claims to ban discrimination, but it actually *codifies discrimination* against any foster or adoptive care agency with a different belief about human sexuality and marriage and forces them to conform to government-mandated beliefs under threat of criminal and financial penalties.

Faith-based adoptive and foster care agencies must practice their well-founded beliefs on human sexuality, marriage, and the developmental importance of a child being raised *exclusively* by *both* a mother and a father. These beliefs are backed by science, as burden of social science evidence supports the idea that gender-differentiated parenting is important for human development.¹

The government should not deprive children of essential adoptive and fostering services by discriminating against any adoptive or foster care agency’s religious beliefs.

The Catholic Church has encouraged adoption since the Middle Ages and at the founding of the United States. Philadelphia Catholics established our country’s first foster care system in 1797.² This legislation would prohibit the work of organizations like the Catholic Church from being able to care for adoptive and foster care children by placing them in homes with a mother and a father.

Furthermore, whether such a nondiscrimination requirement can be applied to religious organizations in the context of child placement is an issue that is currently being litigated before the U.S. Supreme Court in *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*. In *Fulton*, the City of Philadelphia barred Catholic Social Services from placing children in foster homes because of its policy of not licensing same-sex couples to be foster parents. Because the pending Supreme Court opinion will have a significant impact on the status of this issue, the Colorado legislature should not push ahead in discriminating against faith-based adoption agencies by passing HB 1072.

We respectfully ask for a “no” vote on HB 1072. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Brittany Vessely
Executive Director, Colorado Catholic Conference

¹ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED416035.pdf>

² <https://freetofoster.com/history-of-faith-affirming-agencies>

Written Testimony of Milagro Lebron in Support of HB 21-1072 for the State, Veterans, & Military Affairs Committee Hearing on March 30, 2021

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Milagro Lebron, and I'm 17 years old. I'm from Hayden, Colorado and here to testify in support of this bill because of the 10 months I spent in foster care. I was taken out of my mother's care at age 10 due to neglect, poverty, and her own mental health issues. My sister then took me in, because there was no where else for me to go. For 2 years, I was abused by her, until she dropped me off at social services and left.

At 12, I was placed with a Mormon family who had relations to my brother. They pressured me into following their religion and treated me differently than their own children because of how my trauma affected me behaviorally and mentally. I felt like I had to keep my growing understanding of my sexuality a secret and ignore my trauma to be good for them – hold who I was inside, what I needed, in order to be who they wanted – so that they wouldn't leave. In the end, they left anyways with the promise of adoption broken.

When I moved to my next placement, my behaviors grew worse and the longing for a family intensified. That is when I met a woman who would soon change my life. Her name is Charity Reiser, and she was my caseworker. Our relationship blossomed, as she was always someone I could talk to, who cared. She is now my mother, and I finally have a family I prayed for for 3 years. They accept me for who I am - as part of the LGBTQ+ community, the color of my skin, where I've come from, and what I've done. They've stuck with me for 4 years, when I didn't understand love and was scared they would leave. I fought them and lived up to the name of 'at-risk youth'. It's year 5 now, and I am coming home.

If this bill gets passed, other children like me could have the safety and comfort of a home faster than myself. 7 years is how long it took for me to finally get the help I needed, and to realize how much I needed it. For other youths, it wouldn't have to take so long. They wouldn't have to change or hide themselves because they live with people who have different ideas or beliefs. They wouldn't have to worry about adoptive or foster parents forcing change, or being denied the services and care they need. Parents and children alike should be respected, and that should not be based on who they are. Just as my family and supports have done for me. Because of them, I am comfortable with who I am, and ready to face a world not held back by my past. Because of that, I'm here to help others feel the same. To get what they need in and deserve in a way that benefits and respects all.

I please ask that you vote in favor of this bill. Thank you.

March 24, 2021

Dear Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate State, Veterans, & Military Affairs Committee,

My name is Heather Crate and I am submitting written testimony in support of HB-1072. My wife Jennie and I have been foster parents in Colorado for six years. As a long time foster parent, I recognize the importance of appropriate training and support for foster parents. While we are required to have 20 hours of training a year, we have never been required to attend a training on the topic of supporting LGBTQ children or youth. Although it is well known that LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in out of home placements, for some reason training on this topic has not been a priority of our agency. In fact, as a foster parent who is LGBTQ myself, I often take on the informal role of training my fellow foster parents on these topics.

Given that we know it is likely that LGBTQ young people will be placed in foster homes it is critical that we be trained in supporting these youth. In my experience the foster care system is already overburdened and an agency may not even know if a child being placed identifies as LGBTQ. It is not safe to assume that a child's caseworker or team will be able to provide on the spot coaching or training for a foster parent should the need arise.

My wife and I had the experience of providing care to a child who was questioning their gender and disclosed that to us while they were living with us. We found that some of the caseworkers had very little understanding of gender and did not understand the importance of validating this child's identity exploration or allowing the child to take the lead. We had to provide documentation from the child's pediatrician for our agency to take what the child was saying seriously. When this child eventually moved from our home to another foster care placement it became clear that the other foster parents had no knowledge on how to support a child exploring their gender. It was only with our urging that a caseworker eventually required that family to take a training on supporting LGBTQ children.

With this legislation, foster parents will be equipped with the knowledge of how to support LGBTQ children prior to a placement and it will no longer be reactionary. Having a well informed and trained foster parent network will ultimately support some of Colorado's most vulnerable children and youth. I urge you to vote in favor of HB-1072.

I would like to thank the bill sponsors for proposing this important legislation and thank the committee for taking the time to hear from me.

Sincerely,

Heather Crate

Heather Crate