



Michigan National Organization for Women

1140 Abbot Road, Unit 860
East Lansing, Michigan 48826
(517) 485-9687
www.michnow.org

March 17, 2015

Members of the Michigan House of Representatives
State Capitol
Lansing, Michigan

Greetings:

The Michigan National Organization for Women **opposes House Bills 4188, 4189, and 4190 on second reading today**. The first two bills in this series would amend the Michigan Adoption Code (MCL 710.23b et al.) and Social Welfare Act (MCL 400.5a) to permit a religiously-affiliated child placing agency to carry out discriminatory foster care and adoption practices if these are written policies of the agency. **House Bill 4190** would amend the Social Welfare Act (MCL 400.5a) to specifically prohibit the state Department of Human Services from taking an adverse action against a child placing agency.

Currently, the state contracts about 40% of foster care placement and ALL adoption placements to about 70 agencies, many of which are faith-based. In FY 2014-15, about \$20 million in state and federal funds went toward supporting adoption and foster care placement; \$10 million of that went to faith-based agencies that would be allowed to discriminate under this legislation.

These bills would enshrine in state law discriminatory policies of some religiously-affiliated child placing agencies against divorced people, people who use contraception, lesbians, homosexual men, bi-sexual, and transgendered people among others. Some religions continue to promote anti-homosexual, anti-women's rights, and anti-divorce policies, going so far as to bar participation of members of those groups in its leadership and policy decision-making. Though our system of government protects freedom of religion, including the freedom to believe in wrong-headed, anti-democratic, and societally harmful policies such as these, the anti-woman and anti-homosexual agendas of these religions should not be enshrined into state law as these bills would do.

Further, religiously-affiliated organizations carrying out anti-woman and anti-homosexual agendas should not be given tax exempt status or state funding to help them promote such hate-based and harmful beliefs among the entire population.

Additionally, these bills would narrow the pool of families available for the thousands of children awaiting foster care homes.

We recommend that not only should these bills be defeated, but that any child placing agency which demonstrates biased and discriminatory policies based on religion, race, ethnicity, gender, marital status, and sexual orientation in its written policies or in the conduct of its child placement functions **have its license revoked**. Certainly **no state funding should go to such an agency nor should preferred tax status be allowed**. Child placement agencies, whether religiously affiliated or not, should have as their main purpose the **best interest of the children, not the best interest of their own religion**.

In short, these bills undo many of the civil rights gains of the past and the greater understanding and acceptance of diversity in our society. These bills promote and reward intolerance through state-sanctioned discrimination. We urge you to vote NO on these bills.

Sincerely,

Mary Pollock
Legislative Vice President

NOW's purpose is to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men.