

ACLU's 'petty lawsuit' won't help foster children, families tell court

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Detroit, Mich., Mar 8, 2018 / 05:02 pm (CNA/EWTN News).- A lawsuit threatening a Catholic adoption service is political maneuvering that will do nothing to help children in need of loving homes, families and supporters told a federal court in Michigan during oral arguments this week.

In their latest dispute against a religious entity, *Dumont v. Lyon*, the ACLU sued in September in order to prevent Michigan from working with faith-based adoption agencies that hold traditional views about marriage, including St. Vincent Catholic Charities.

A 2015 law, which was passed with the backing of the Michigan Catholic Conference, prevents state-funded adoption and foster agencies from being forced to place children in violation of their beliefs. The law protects them from civil action and from threats to their public funding. When the law was passed, about 25 percent of Michigan's adoption and foster agencies were faith-based.

Shamber Flore, a young woman who was adopted through the foster care program at St. Vincent's, said that children in foster care need more access to families with loving homes, and that the ACLU's lawsuit endangers that access.

"I grew up exposed to prostitution, poverty and drugs, but thankfully and fortunately my story didn't end there," Flore said in a statement. "I have had the privilege of having my story rewritten and I know this wouldn't have been possible without the help and aid of St. Vincent."

The government cannot find foster homes for every child in need, Flore added, and therefore must rely on private agencies like St. Vincent's to fill in the gaps.

"I am both hurt and confused as to why the ACLU would want to shut down an organization like St. Vincent that only brings good to the greater community," she said.

"(Foster children) deserve more people, more agencies, more open hearts to fill the shortage of families willing to care for kids like myself. If the ACLU has its way, there will be less helping hands, less homes and ultimately less hope for foster kids, and we can't let the ACLU take that away."

The ACLU's new lawsuit will do nothing to actually help the increasing number of foster children in need of safe and loving homes, said Melissa Buck, a mother who adopted five special needs children with St. Vincent's.

"This is a petty, needless lawsuit that prioritizes scoring cheap political points at the expense of children," Buck said in a statement.

“St. Vincent didn’t just save the lives of our children, they’ve accompanied us in the joy of giving them new ones,” Buck noted.

“This is important work. It is also very difficult work. If the ACLU wins their lawsuit, all of this will be taken away...and it would hurt many other families just like mine,” she said.

According to data compiled by Child Trends, more than 600 foster children age out of the foster care system each year in Michigan without ever having been adopted. Studies show that children who age out of foster care without a family are less likely to graduate high school, attend college, or find employment than those who are adopted.

Despite the shortage of available foster families, St. Vincent Catholic Charities found more new foster families than almost 90 percent of other agencies within its service district, according to Becket, the law firm representing the agency.

“St. Vincent particularly excels at finding homes for hard to place children like kids with special needs, larger sibling groups, or older children,” Stephanie Barclay, legal counsel with Becket, said in a statement.

“Despite this heroic and important work, the ACLU sued the state of Michigan to forbid the state from relying on adoption agencies like St. Vincent solely because of its religious beliefs about marriage. But St. Vincent’s beliefs have never prevented a child from being placed in a home,” Barclay said.

This case is not the first time that Catholic Charities has come under fire for reserving adoptions to a mother and a father. In 2006, Catholic Charities of Boston was forced to shut down its adoption services because of a state law barring “sexual orientation discrimination.”

The same year, Catholic Charities of San Francisco was forced to close for similar reasons.

In 2010, after a law redefining marriage, the Washington, D.C. branch of Catholic Charities was forced to close its foster care and adoption services for holding the belief that children should be placed with a married mother and father.

In 2011, Catholic Charities affiliates in Illinois were forced to close after a new requirement stipulated that state money could only go to adoption services that offered those services to same-sex couples.

In the past, gay couples working with other agencies have been able to adopt foster children that were in the care of St. Vincent’s in Michigan, and the ACLU’s clients in *Dumont v. Lyon* could have done the same, Barclay noted. The clients also live closer to four different adoption agencies other than St. Vincent’s.

“Instead...the ACLU has gone out of its way to target St. Vincent and to try to shut down their programs,” Barclay said.

“Based on today’s hearing, we’re hopeful that the court will listen to the stories of the foster families and children before it who will bear the brunt of the ACLU’s petty lawsuit.”