

AN ACT

relating to protection of the rights of conscience for child welfare services providers.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Subtitle D, Title 2, Human Resources Code, is amended by adding Chapter 45 to read as follows:

CHAPTER 45. PROTECTION OF RIGHTS OF CONSCIENCE FOR
CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PROVIDERS

Sec. 45.001. LEGISLATIVE INTENT. It is the intent of the legislature to maintain a diverse network of service providers that offer a range of foster capacity options and that accommodate children from various cultural backgrounds. To that end, the legislature expects reasonable accommodations to be made by the state to allow people of diverse backgrounds and beliefs to be a part of meeting the needs of children in the child welfare system. Decisions regarding the placement of children shall continue to be made in the best interest of the child, including which person is best able to provide for the child's physical, psychological, and emotional needs and development.

Sec. 45.002. DEFINITIONS. In this chapter:

(1) "Adverse action" means any action that directly or indirectly adversely affects the person against whom the adverse action is taken, places the person in a worse position than the person was in before the adverse action was taken, or is likely to

1 deter a reasonable person from acting or refusing to act. An adverse
2 action includes:

3 (A) denying an application for, refusing to
4 renew, or canceling funding;

5 (B) declining to enter into, refusing to renew,
6 or canceling a contract;

7 (C) declining to issue, refusing to renew, or
8 canceling a license;

9 (D) terminating, suspending, demoting, or
10 reassigning a person; and

11 (E) limiting the ability of a person to engage in
12 child welfare services.

13 (2) "Catchment area" means a geographic service area
14 for providing child protective services or child welfare services.

15 (3) "Child welfare services" means social services
16 provided to or on behalf of children, including:

17 (A) assisting abused or neglected children;

18 (B) counseling children or parents;

19 (C) promoting foster parenting;

20 (D) providing foster homes, general residential
21 operations, residential care, adoptive homes, group homes, or
22 temporary group shelters for children;

23 (E) recruiting foster parents;

24 (F) placing children in foster homes;

25 (G) licensing foster homes;

26 (H) promoting adoption or recruiting adoptive
27 parents;

- 1 (I) assisting adoptions or supporting adoptive
2 families;
- 3 (J) performing or assisting home studies;
- 4 (K) assisting kinship guardianships or kinship
5 caregivers;
- 6 (L) providing family preservation services;
- 7 (M) providing family support services;
- 8 (N) providing temporary family reunification
9 services;
- 10 (O) placing children in adoptive homes; and
- 11 (P) serving as a foster parent.

12 (4) "Child welfare services provider" means a person,
13 other than a governmental entity, that provides, seeks to provide,
14 or applies for or receives a contract, subcontract, grant,
15 subgrant, or cooperative agreement to provide child welfare
16 services. The person is not required to be engaged exclusively in
17 child welfare services to be a child welfare services provider.

18 (5) "Governmental entity" means:

19 (A) this state or a municipality or other
20 political subdivision of this state;

21 (B) any agency of this state or of a municipality
22 or other political subdivision of this state, including a
23 department, bureau, board, commission, office, agency, council,
24 and public institution of higher education; or

25 (C) a single source continuum contractor in this
26 state providing services identified under Section 264.126, Family
27 Code.

1 Sec. 45.003. APPLICABILITY. (a) This chapter applies to
2 any ordinance, rule, order, decision, practice, or other exercise
3 of governmental authority.

4 (b) This chapter applies to an act of a governmental entity,
5 in the exercise of governmental authority, granting or refusing to
6 grant a government benefit to a child welfare services provider.

7 Sec. 45.004. CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PROVIDERS PROTECTED. A
8 governmental entity or any person that contracts with this state or
9 operates under governmental authority to refer or place children
10 for child welfare services may not discriminate or take any adverse
11 action against a child welfare services provider on the basis,
12 wholly or partly, that the provider:

13 (1) has declined or will decline to provide,
14 facilitate, or refer a person for child welfare services that
15 conflict with, or under circumstances that conflict with, the
16 provider's sincerely held religious beliefs;

17 (2) provides or intends to provide children under the
18 control, care, guardianship, or direction of the provider with a
19 religious education, including through placing the children in a
20 private or parochial school or otherwise providing a religious
21 education in accordance with the laws of this state;

22 (3) has declined or will decline to provide,
23 facilitate, or refer a person for abortions, contraceptives, or
24 drugs, devices, or services that are potentially
25 abortion-inducing; or

26 (4) refuses to enter into a contract that is
27 inconsistent with or would in any way interfere with or force a

1 provider to surrender the rights created by this chapter.

2 Sec. 45.005. SECONDARY SERVICES PROVIDERS AND REFERRALS.

3 (a) A child welfare services provider may not be required to
4 provide any service that conflicts with the provider's sincerely
5 held religious beliefs.

6 (b) A governmental entity or any person that operates under
7 governmental authority to refer or place children for child welfare
8 services shall:

9 (1) ensure that a secondary child welfare services
10 provider is available in that catchment area to provide a service
11 described by Subsection (a) to a child; or

12 (2) if there is an insufficient number of secondary
13 services providers willing or available in that catchment area to
14 provide that service, provide for one or more secondary services
15 providers in a nearby catchment area.

16 (c) A child welfare services provider who declines to
17 provide a child welfare service as authorized by this section
18 shall:

19 (1) provide to the person seeking the service written
20 information directing the person to:

21 (A) the web page on the department's Internet
22 website that includes a list of other licensed child welfare
23 services providers; or

24 (B) other information sources that identify
25 other licensed child welfare services providers who provide the
26 service being denied;

27 (2) refer the applicant to another licensed child

1 welfare services provider who provides the service being denied; or
2 (3) refer the applicant to the department or to a
3 single source continuum contractor to identify and locate a
4 licensed child welfare services provider who provides the service
5 being denied.

6 Sec. 45.006. PRIVATE RIGHT OF ACTION. A child welfare
7 services provider may assert an actual or threatened violation of
8 this chapter as a claim or defense in a judicial or administrative
9 proceeding and obtain the relief specified in Section 45.007.

10 Sec. 45.007. REMEDIES. (a) A child welfare services
11 provider who successfully asserts a claim or defense under this
12 chapter is entitled to recover:

13 (1) declaratory relief under Chapter 37, Civil
14 Practice and Remedies Code; or

15 (2) injunctive relief to prevent the threatened or
16 continued adverse action.

17 (b) A person may not bring an action for declaratory or
18 injunctive relief against an individual, other than an action
19 brought against an individual acting in the individual's official
20 capacity.

21 Sec. 45.008. IMMUNITY WAIVED. (a) Sovereign and
22 governmental immunity to suit are waived.

23 (b) Notwithstanding Subsection (a), this chapter does not
24 waive or abolish sovereign immunity to suit under the Eleventh
25 Amendment to the United States Constitution.

26 Sec. 45.009. EFFECT ON RIGHTS; CONSTRUCTION OF LAW. (a)
27 This chapter may not be construed to authorize a governmental

1 entity to burden a person's free exercise of religion.

2 (b) The protections of religious freedom afforded by this
3 chapter are in addition to the protections provided under federal
4 or state law and the constitutions of this state and the United
5 States.

6 (c) This chapter may not be construed to supersede any law
7 of this state that is equally as protective of religious beliefs as,
8 or more protective of religious beliefs than, this chapter.

9 (d) This chapter may not be considered to narrow the meaning
10 or application of any other law protecting religious beliefs.

11 (e) This chapter may not be construed to prevent law
12 enforcement officers from exercising duties imposed on the officers
13 under the Family Code and the Penal Code.

14 (f) This chapter may not be construed to allow a child
15 welfare services provider to decline to provide, facilitate, or
16 refer a person for child welfare services on the basis of that
17 person's race, ethnicity, or national origin.

18 (g) This chapter may not be construed to allow a child
19 welfare services provider to deprive a minor of the rights,
20 including the right to medical care, provided by Chapters 32, 263,
21 and 266, Family Code.

22 (h) This chapter may not be construed to prohibit the
23 department from:

24 (1) exercising its duty as the child's managing
25 conservator to make decisions in the child's best interest; or

26 (2) obtaining necessary child welfare services from an
27 alternate child welfare services provider.

1 Sec. 45.010. INTERPRETATION. This chapter shall be
2 liberally construed to effectuate its remedial and deterrent
3 purposes.

4 SECTION 2. This Act takes effect immediately if it receives
5 a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as
6 provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this
7 Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this
8 Act takes effect September 1, 2017.

President of the Senate

Speaker of the House

I certify that H.B. No. 3859 was passed by the House on May 10, 2017, by the following vote: Yeas 93, Nays 49, 3 present, not voting.

Chief Clerk of the House

I certify that H.B. No. 3859 was passed by the Senate on May 22, 2017, by the following vote: Yeas 21, Nays 10.

Secretary of the Senate

APPROVED: _____

Date

Governor