

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Sandy Furnell, Communications & Marketing Director
864.631.0158 or 864.420.7292 (cell)
sfurnell@miraclehill.org



South Carolina DSS Challenges Miracle Hill Foster Care’s Freedom to Recruit Only Christian Foster Parents

De-licensure threat would deepen state’s foster care crisis and leave more vulnerable children without hope for homes

GREENVILLE, SC (February 22, 2018) – The fate of Miracle Hill Ministries’ foster care program, the largest and most successful in the state of South Carolina, hangs in the balance as the Department of Social Services puts pressure on the organization to stop recruiting only Christian families because DSS believes screening on the basis of religion is unacceptable under state regulation and federal law. If the organization is unsuccessful in protecting its religious liberty, Miracle Hill Foster Care’s license may be revoked, creating a significant void in a state already overburdened by a lack of homes for vulnerable children.

“It’s unconscionable that at the time of our state’s great need, the great resource Miracle Hill can provide to meet that need could be disqualified on the basis of our longstanding, sincerely-held religious beliefs,” said Reid Lehman, Miracle Hill’s CEO. “Foster families of other faiths or with no religious faith can be licensed in every South Carolina County through SCDSS or other providers. We only ask for the freedom to serve consistent with our conscience.”

Last year alone, Miracle Hill Foster Care served 418 children, with 31 of those being adopted into forever homes. The program currently has 241 foster families serving under its umbrella, ready to care for abused, neglected or abandoned children. There are more than 4,000 children in the South Carolina foster care system, and as a result of a 2015 federal lawsuit filed by the [Appleseed Legal Justice Center](#) and [Children’s Rights](#), the State is under a mandate to provide family-style care for these children languishing in the system. More than 1,000 additional foster families are needed today in South Carolina.

South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster is taking steps to clarify through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that the licensing and participation of faith-based entities in the state foster care system is a constitutionally protected practice that is not prohibited by federal regulations. The Governor issued a letter on February 21, 2018 assuring Miracle Hill of his commitment to protect religious liberty and Miracle Hill’s ability to serve foster children (see attached).

The value of Miracle Hill’s participation in the foster care system is unmistakable to those who serve with and have been served by the ministry. Jason and Mary Reardon fostered 15 children through Miracle Hill Foster Care and adopted four of them, including a teenager, a demographic often difficult to place. Eighteen-year-old Selena, a sibling of the Reardon’s adopted children said, “It was the most amazing thing that ever happened to me. I used to think that foster care was a terrible thing...but now I see it’s God’s way of giving children a new start, God’s way of taking care of children on earth.”

Because of Miracle Hill Foster Care’s commitment to a holistic approach to family restoration, the program is also affecting the biological families of children in foster care. “When possible, Miracle Hill encourages foster parents to minister to the biological families,” said Jason Reardon. “Often through the process, they get their children back. We’re trying to stop a vicious cycle and ultimately bring a better society. It’s saving the state money. It’s bigger than just these kids. As a nation, we have to step back and look at the bigger picture, the good of these children and the people being affected.”

PHOTOS:



Selena Reardon



Jason and Mary Reardon

ATTACHMENTS:

Letter to Miracle Hill Ministries from SC Governor Henry McMaster

###

About Miracle Hill Ministries

Miracle Hill Ministries is the Upstate’s largest, most comprehensive provider of services to homeless children and adults. Serving the Upstate since 1937, Miracle Hill’s programs include rescue shelters for the homeless, residential addiction recovery, transitional housing, shelters for children, and foster care. Miracle Hill’s eight thrift stores provide employment opportunities for the community as well as Miracle Hill guests transitioning out of programs. Miracle Hill has been recognized as a Certified Mission and has been awarded the Certificate of Excellence by the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions (AGRM), a distinction given to fewer than 30 missions nationwide. For more information about Miracle Hill, please visit www.MiracleHill.org or call 864.268.4357. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).