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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 12, 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 defeating this challenge to religious liberty, Miracle Hill Foster Care may be de-licensed, 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 greatest need, the great resource Miracle Hill can provide to meet that need could be disqualified on the basis of religious beliefs," said Reid Lehman, Miracle Hill's CEO. "There are many other agencies that will license foster families who don't align with Miracle Hill's belief system. We are only asking for the freedom to serve consistent with our conscience."

Last year alone, Miracle Hill Foster Care served 418 children, with 32 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. The South Carolina foster care system has thousands of children waiting to be placed, and as a result of a 2015 federal lawsuit filed by the [Appleseed Legal Justice Center](#) and [Children's Rights](#), is under a mandate to provide homes for these children languishing in the system.

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, who is the older sibling of one of the Reardon's younger 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."

South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster is taking steps to clarify through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that the DSS expectation is an overreach and is in violation of the rights of religious child-serving institutions throughout South Carolina.

PHOTOS:



Selena Reardon

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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](#).