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Freedom of religion wins in South Carolina

Our country's religious liberty protects religious child placing agencies like Miracle Hill Ministries, who defended its right to exist.

Greenville, SC. October 2, 2023. For 86 years, Miracle Hill Ministries has followed the biblical mandate to minister to the poor, the hurting, and the orphans in the state of South Carolina, and has had the constitutional right to do so without government interference. That freedom was threatened by a federal regulation adopted in early 2017, and it was further threatened by subsequent litigation brought by out-of-state special interest groups. After six years of waiting, however, the United States District Court for the District of South Carolina has ruled that the First Amendment and our country's history of religious liberty protect religious child placing agencies like Miracle Hill Ministries and the foster parents with whom we partner.

In the spring of 2019, not long after Governor McMaster and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services ("HHS") had taken action to ensure that government regulations would not shutter Miracle Hill's foster care program, two lawsuits were filed claiming that HHS, certain HHS officials, Governor McMaster, and the Director of the South Carolina Department of Social Services had violated the Establishment and Equal Protection Clauses of the U.S. Constitution by licensing and contracting with Miracle Hill (along with nearly two dozen other child placing agencies in South Carolina) despite the fact that Miracle Hill partners only with foster parents who share its religious beliefs and motivation. Plaintiffs continued to press the lawsuits even after Miracle Hill voluntarily chose to decline all government funding starting in July 2021.

The recent court ruling is a victory for South Carolina's foster children and the foster families who serve them. South Carolina needs more foster parents and providers, not fewer, and religious organizations continue to be a vital resource to eliminate the needless suffering of children. Miracle Hill partners specifically with individuals and families who share its spiritual calling, but Miracle Hill would never prevent or discourage others from seeking to partner with one of nearly two dozen other private foster care providers—not to mention the State itself—that are ready and eager to work with all applicants.

Miracle Hill serves all foster children, as well as adults and children in our shelters and facilities, without regard to race, gender, sexual orientation, faith identity, or other identifying characteristics. Since we started our Foster Care program in 1988, we have continually worked to ensure that children have the resources they need to thrive in the Upstate of South Carolina. But

religious providers and foster parents should not be forced to choose between freely serving those in need and maintaining their own deeply held religious identity and beliefs.

"Miracle Hill is thankful for a justice system that today preserved religious liberty for our ministry as well as for all who serve from a position of faith. Now more than ever, Christian foster care programs are a necessity in our state and country," said Ryan Duerk, CEO and President of Miracle Hill Ministries.

By God's grace, and with the support of a faithful community of believers, ministry partners, and the encouragement of churches and foster families that have been touched by our work, Miracle Hill is grateful to continue to partner with DSS to help the children of the state. We are particularly thankful to Governor McMaster for standing firm for the religious liberty of people of all faiths. We look forward to continuing to serve the vulnerable and needy in our communities.

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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, and foster care. Miracle Hill's eight thrift stores provide employment opportunities for the community as well as former Miracle Hill guests. Miracle Hill has been awarded the Certificate of Excellence as a Certified Mission by [City Gate Network](#), a distinction given to fewer than 30 missions nationwide. Additionally, Miracle Hill's foster care program has been accredited by [CARF International](#). For more information about Miracle Hill, please visit www.MiracleHill.org or call 864.268.4357. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).