



June 6, 2025

**Harmeet K. Dhillon
Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Division
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530**

Re: Religious-Freedom Rights for Arizona Faith-based Rehabilitation Programs

Dear Asst. Attorney General Dhillon:

We write to alert you to ongoing violations of the religious-freedom rights of faith-based organizations in Arizona that are providing crucial services to vulnerable populations. Arizona State licensing agencies are pressuring these organizations to abandon their sincerely held religious beliefs and embrace harmful woke ideologies and practices such as so called "gender-affirming care" and abortion for young teenage girls without the consent of a parent or guardian.

By brief word of introduction, we are friends of the impacted ministries and have been given permission to initiate a conversation on their behalf. Because of the legal and political pressures described herein, this letter does not reveal the specific names of the organizations involved. We will, however, provide those details to your office upon request.

Religious-freedom protections were a hallmark of the first Trump administration. President Trump campaigned on continuing this path and for sound First Amendment and societal reasons. Faith-based religious organizations provide some of the most effective and efficient services in areas such as addiction recovery, food programs, sex-trafficked rescue, life transformation, job training, and other important services to "the least of these."

Faith-based religious organizations are too often limited or restricted by unnecessary, unlawful, and overreaching impositions on their religious freedoms. Unfortunately and wrongfully, this has been the fate of a coalition of religious organizations on whose behalf we are writing this letter ("Coalition").

The religious organizations which make up the Coalition operate faith and community-based programs and outreach that address childhood hunger, life recovery (addiction), human trafficking recovery residential behavioral health, transitional housing, maternity young women dorm, educational opportunities, foster care age out youth residential homes, with residential and case management serving thousands of families, individuals, and children in the foster care system each year and persons transitioning out of the foster care system.

These Coalition programs are built upon a faith-based and inspired approach rooted in Jesus Christ as the source and path toward a vibrant and abundant life. While programs are focused on immediate situations and life challenges, they have an ultimate hope and goal that every person would find God's purpose and dream for their life.

To provide a specific example of the challenge, certain Coalition members engage behavioral health licensed therapists to provide professional care in their programs. State licensure standards under Arizona Governor Hobb's administration are requiring therapists to assess needs and do treatment planning that force Coalition therapists under licensure rules to play a complicit role in providing gender-affirming care or religious expression care. These care options are outside of the sincerely held religious beliefs of Coalition members. For example, therapists would be required to counsel and arrange for medical services for a 13 year old biological female to get a mastectomy with or without parental consent, or arranging for a 13 year old to have a 3rd term partial birth abortion with or without parental consent, or a 13 year old with radicalized religious beliefs to arrange female circumcision with our without parental consent or us being complicit in providing any number of other faith practices that go against our sincerely held Christian beliefs.

Because of this, to their detriment Coalition members were forced not to renew or engage licensed therapists beginning in 2024. This negatively impacted the Coalition members as their licenses were denied. Because of the denial of the license they are not eligible for a contract. Without a contract these nonprofits are unable to bill Medicaid and get reimbursed for therapy services. Medicaid is a federally funded program which they have become ineligible for reimbursement for care provided by these Coalition members. One members had to shutdown their entire program and sell their assets as a result of Governor's policy.

Coalition members, and presumably other charitable organizations seeking to hold to their deeply held religious beliefs and convictions, should not have to sacrifice care and resources because of its provision of care consistent with its sincerely held religious beliefs. Its religious freedom rights are clear. But the effort and cost of having to enforce these rights are burdensome and should be unnecessary.

The Ninth Circuit made it clear that a faith-based organization providing residential housing and a religious-based rehabilitation program is protected in operating their organization in accordance with its religious beliefs. *Intermountain Fair Housing Council v. Boise Rescue Mission*, 657 F.3d 988 (9th Cir. 2011). The Supreme Court ruled that the City of Philadelphia's non-discrimination policy violated Catholic Social Services' First Amendment rights in its efforts to require Catholic Social Services to take actions contradicting its religious beliefs. The City of Philadelphia had suspended the faith-based charity's agency contract for placement of foster children, unless it agreed to certify married same-sex couples as foster parents. *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, 593 U.S. 522 (2021).

The Coalition members have First Amendment protected rights to carry out faith-based programs, exercise their religious beliefs, and provide residential treatment, assistance, and loving care consistent with those beliefs. These rights and practice consistent with sincerely held religious beliefs are protected under the U.S. Constitution, Federal court decisions, and Federal law (e.g. RFRA).

The administration of Arizona Governor Hobbs has gone down a dangerous and harmful path. It is ignoring and trampling on the protected religious freedom rights of Coalition members. These actions are reducing and limiting the availability of programs of care for vulnerable community

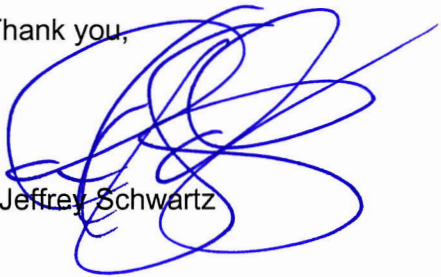
members and citizens who the Governor took an oath to protect and serve.

The Coalition members and the broader nonprofit community are being cautious about raising these challenges publicly for fear of retribution by the Hobbs administration. A Governor's office and licensing agency have broad powers to bring to bear on those who challenge its actions. In addition, responsible nonprofits are always willing to work toward a negotiated resolution and are hesitant to use charitable dollars for legal challenges. But we can no longer sit idle and let them handcuff these religious and humanitarian organizations in trying to continue the impactful and life transformation work they do to help the most vulnerable people of our communities and state.

We respectfully request the Department of Justice intervene and enforce the law of the land as outlined in the First Amendment rights in our Constitution with the opportunities of full force of the office of the DOJ, executive order powers of the president, and the courts.

We would like the opportunity to brief you at your earliest convenience to discuss this matter and build a roadmap for a solution. Please feel free to call either Mr. Schwartz at [REDACTED] or email at [REDACTED] or Mr. Peter Gentala at [REDACTED] or email at [REDACTED]

Thank you,



Jeffrey Schwartz



Peter Gentala

President
Center for Arizona Policy
Azpolicy.org