March 9, 2015

The United States Senate
Washington, DC

Dear Senators:

As leaders of faith-based organizations, religious-freedom advocates, and lawyers who work with faith-based organizations, we ask you to reject the misconceived nondiscrimination clause that S. 262, the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act (Sen. Leahy) would attach to every grant administered by the Administration for Children and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services. The clause will undermine the rights of faith-based social-service providers or even cause many of them to be excluded from these grants. And yet faith-based organizations are pioneers of services for runaway, homeless, and trafficked youth, provide a wide range of services also for other vulnerable people and communities, and are respected partners of government in a very large number of programs.

The undersigned have varied views on the merits of S. 262. The deep concerns of some of us extend beyond the nondiscrimination clause. But we all agree that the bill’s nondiscrimination clause must not be enacted and that it was a grave mistake for the same language to be included with minimal scrutiny when the Violence Against Women Act was reauthorized in 2013. Congress should not repeat this mistake.

A current HHS regulation (45 C.F.R. Part 87—an “Equal Treatment” rule that is mirrored in other federal departments), already bans religious discrimination against beneficiaries and forbids compulsory religious activities in grant-funded programs. The Leahy clause would apply its ban on religious and other discrimination not just to the treatment of the intended beneficiaries of the government-funded services but broadly to all of the operations and programs—even privately funded programs—of all ACF grantees, including faith-based organizations that currently work in partnership with government to provide child-care services, refugee services, marriage and fatherhood programs, abstinence education, TANF services, adoption and foster care assistance, and much more. His clause forbids religious staffing by religious grantees, and yet Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act protect such mission-oriented employment decisions. And his language applies even to grantee programs that receive no government funding. Those privately funded programs could be shut down if a potential participant says that a program is discriminatory because it upholds conservative morality.

Sen. Leahy’s nondiscrimination clause assumes that only grantees that do not engage in religious practices but that do affirm LGBT conduct can be trusted to serve the public with respect. This is plainly wrong. Every day, many faith-based organizations, large and small, here and overseas, serve, in partnership with the federal government, a wide range of persons and families that do not share the convictions and conduct of the organizations. They do so because of, not despite, their religious commitments. The last thing that the Senate should do is discourage their involvement in federal programs.

For further information, contact Stanley Carlson-Thies, Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance, 443-822-7599.
Please reject the Leahy language. Preserve the ability of faith-based services to serve the common good in federal programs. Runaway and homeless youth and trafficked persons need the most effective services and interventions our society can provide, including those offered by faith-based service agencies. Thank you.

Signed—

Stanley Carlson-Thies, Founder and Senior Director, The Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance

Leith Anderson, President, National Association of Evangelicals

Galen Carey, Vice President of Government Relations, National Association of Evangelicals

Russell Moore, President, Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

Rabbi Abba Cohen, Vice President for Federal Affairs, Agudath Israel of America

Jo Anne Lyon, General Superintendent, The Wesleyan Church

Dan Busby, President, Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA)

The Reverend Luis Cortés, Jr., President, Esperanza

Rev. Dr. Samuel Rodriguez, President, NHCLC/CONELA; Hispanic Evangelical Association

David Nammo, Executive Director & CEO, Christian Legal Society

Jeff Mateer, General Counsel, Liberty Institute

Matthew Kacsmaryk, Deputy General Counsel, Liberty Institute

Richard Stearns, President, World Vision, Inc. (US)

Santiago “Jimmy” Mellado, President & CEO, Compassion International

John Ashmen, President, Association of Gospel Rescue Missions

David Stevens, MD, MA (Ethics), CEO, Christian Medical Association

Jedd Medefind, President, Christian Alliance for Orphans

William J Blacquiere, President and CEO, Bethany Christian Services

Shirley V. Hoogstra, President, Council for Christian Colleges and Universities
Thomas J. Cathey, EdD, Director for Legal Legislative Issues, Association of Christian Schools International

Andrew Sears, Executive Director, TechMission; President, City Vision College

Prof. Nicholas Miller, Director, International Religious Liberty Institute, Andrews University

Carl E. Zylstra, Executive Director, Association of Reformed Colleges and Universities

D. Gregory Main, President, St Gregory's University

William L. Armstrong, President, Colorado Christian University

Robert Osburn, PhD, Executive Director, Wilberforce Academy

Ron Sider, President Emeritus, Evangelicals for Social Action

Richard W. Garnett, Professor of Law; Director, Program on Church, State & Society, Notre Dame Law School

Carl H. Esbeck, R.B. Price Professor of Law Emeritus, University of Missouri

James A. Davids, J.D., Ph.D., Associate Professor, Regent University School of Law

Daniel Philpott, Director of the Center for Civil and Human Rights, University of Notre Dame

Stephen V. Monsma, Senior Research Fellow, The Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics, Calvin College

Gail F. Jansen, Trustee, Center for Public Justice

Mr. Case Hoogendoorn, Sr. Partner, Hoogendoorn & Talbot LLP

Mr. Bruce Van Heukelem, Partner, Hoogendoorn & Talbot LLP

Jay H Van Groningen, Director of Training Initiatives, Great Lakes Urban

Rev. Jason A. Poling, D.Min., Senior Pastor, New Hope Community Church; Past President, Eastern Region, Evangelical Theological Society

(In the case of faculty, the institutional affiliation is given only for identification.)