



RICK SCOTT
GOVERNOR

June 11, 2015

Secretary Kenneth W. Detzner
Secretary of State
Florida Department of State
R.A. Gray Building
500 South Bronough Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

FILED
2015 JUN 11 PM 4:47
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

Dear Secretary Detzner:

By the authority vested in me as Governor of the State of Florida, under the provisions of Article III, Section 8, of the Constitution of Florida, I do hereby sign and transmit Committee Substitute for House Bill 7013, enacted during the 117th Session of the Legislature of Florida, during the Regular Session of 2015 and entitled:

An act relating to Adoption and Foster Care...

The fundamental goal of Florida's child welfare system is to find permanent homes for its foster children. The bill furthers this goal by awarding incentive payments to community-based care lead agencies (CBCs) and their subcontractors for achieving specified adoption performance standards. The bill also re-establishes a program that provides adoption benefits for qualifying employees of state agencies who adopt a child from the child welfare system.

Additionally, the bill requires CBCs to offer post-adoption services to adoptive families. In order to ensure that the adopted child's educational needs are met, the bill requires the Department of Children and Families to prioritize educational stability for foster children and to include homeschooling as an option when it is in the child's best interest.

The bill also repeals a provision of Florida law that has not been enforced since 2010 because the Third District Court of Appeal ruled Florida's law prohibiting adoption based on sexual orientation to be unconstitutional. Following the court's 2010 action, the state's adoption law requires officials to assess potential adoptive parents according to the best interests of the child, regardless of the parents' sexual orientation.

Secretary Kenneth W. Detzner
June 11, 2015
Page Two

It is important to note that some private, faith-based child placement agencies have expressed concerns that eliminating this provision in statutes will hamper an agency's ability to operate according to its deeply held religious beliefs, and that Florida's Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1998 does not provide adequate protection. Florida partners with many faith-based groups and organizations to serve the most vulnerable in our society, including those groups that facilitate adoptions. It is important to maintain these partnerships, as private adoption agencies are responsible for placing some of our most vulnerable children, including many with special needs, in stable homes that serve the child's best interests and give the child the best chance of a successful and happy life.

Florida has a long history of protecting religious liberty and expression, and it is my belief that signing this bill codifies the state's current practice into law and does not harm those fundamental rights. To be clear, some of our faith-based child placement agencies do not place children in homes with same sex parents, and this is a matter of their sincerely held religious beliefs, consistent with religious freedom rights granted in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and in Article I of the Florida Constitution.

It is my hope and expectation that the Legislature will take future action to make clear that we will support private, faith-based operators in the child welfare system and ensure that their religious convictions continue to be protected. Florida's laws must protect the free exercise of religious liberty and faith while protecting Floridians from illegal discrimination. These are not, and never should be, mutually exclusive pursuits.

For the reasons stated above, I hereby sign into law Committee Substitute for House Bill 7013.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Scott", written in a cursive style.

Rick Scott
Governor