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An amendment sponsored by a congressman from Alabama and approved by the House Appropriations Committee July 11 aims to protect Catholic and other faith-based agencies that choose, based on their religious conviction, not to place children with same-sex couples for adoption or foster care.

"As co-chairman of the House Coalition on Adoption, my goal was straightforward: to encourage states to include all experienced and licensed child welfare agencies so that children are placed in caring, loving homes where they can thrive," Rep. Robert Aderholt, R-Alabama, said in a statement. "We need more support for these families and children in crisis, not less."

Aderholt noted that in several states and localities across the country, governments are not allowing religious organizations to operate child welfare agencies.

The amendment to an upcoming funding bill would require the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to withhold 15 percent of federal funds for child welfare services from states and localities that discriminate against these agencies.

Over the past several years, government actions in Boston, San Francisco, the District of Columbia and the state of Illinois have prompted local Catholic Charities agencies to stop providing adoption or foster care services because the agencies would not violate church teaching and place children with same-sex or unmarried

heterosexual couples.

The most recent example has occurred in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, where in March, the city of Philadelphia's Department of Human Services froze all new foster care placements with the archdiocese's Catholic Social Services. On average, the Catholic agency serves 127 foster children a day placed with more than 100 families in the city.

At issue is a long-standing practice of CSS not to perform evaluations of the homes of same-sex couples wishing to care for foster children and instead to refer the required process to one of seven other foster agencies contracted by the city's Department of Human Services.

Providing such care for more than a century, the agency adheres to Catholic teaching that opposes same-sex marriage and affirms marriage as a sacrament reserved only to one man and one woman.

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The city's decision also affects foster care services provided by Bethany Christian Services, a global nonprofit that operates in 36 states. The organization and CSS have contracted with the city on foster care since the late 1990s.

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia is suing the city, saying it is breaching its contract with CSS to place at-risk children in foster care homes and is violating religious freedom clauses of the U.S. and Pennsylvania constitutions.

In his statement, Aderholt said: "The amendment I introduced seeks to prevent these governments from discriminating against child welfare providers on the basis that the provider declines to provide a service that conflicts with its sincerely held religious beliefs or moral convictions."