

My name is Jeff Liebmann and I serve as minister of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Midland. As a minister, I join many people of faith throughout Michigan concerned about dangerous attempts to redefine our American understanding of religious freedom. HB 4188, 4189 and 4190, for example, will not only have enormous negative impacts on our children and families throughout the state, but truly threaten the freedom of religious belief of our citizens.

Thomas Jefferson - the primary author of the American understanding of religious freedom - wrote the following. "Almighty God hath created the mind free, and manifested his supreme will that free it shall remain by making it altogether insusceptible of restraint; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments, or burthens, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness...that the impious presumption of legislature and ruler, civil as well as ecclesiastical, who, being themselves but fallible and uninspired men, have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinions and modes of thinking as the only true and infallible, and as such endeavoring to impose them on others, hath established and maintained false religions over the greatest part of the world and through all time ... that our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions, any more than our opinions in physics or geometry."

Jefferson, Adams and the other Founders never intended for governments or agencies acting on behalf of government to possess, let alone exert influence via the application of religious beliefs. They certainly never intended for citizens to be denied rights based on their religion.

Our current adoption system screens prospective parents for necessary qualifications - stability, income, physical and mental health, and motivations. No agency receiving public funding should ever be allowed to impose what in effect would be a state religion on those it serves on behalf of the state.

These bills will permit agencies to discriminate not only against gay or transgender parents, but also nonreligious parents, religious parents who are not Christian (or who are even the 'wrong kind' of Christian, parents who have previously been divorced, or any number of other religion-based criteria. This is not religious freedom. This is a violation of our fundamental right to be free *from* a state-sanctioned religion. These bills are nothing but a licence to discriminate and to promulgate unsubstantiated allegations about people based solely on religious opinion.

People of faith across the state urge you to reject these bills as fraudulent attempts to dismantle a core freedom of this nation.

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Rev. Jeff Liebmann, Minister

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Midland