

Columna de opinión de obispos de diócesis de El Paso y Dallas- “Gov. Abbott, don’t shut down our ministry to care for migrant children”

Texas officials are poised to shutter several religious ministries, which would leave foster children without homes and immigrant children in mass facilities. Unless something changes, this will happen on Aug. 31, in violation of state laws protecting religious freedom.

Across the state of Texas, Catholic Charities provides homelike care to hundreds of vulnerable migrant children every day; many were born in Texas and some were abandoned and alone after crossing the border. Children in our homes often suffer from severe trauma, instability and uncertainty. For those who crossed the border, many escaped or evaded drug cartels and child sex traffickers on their way into this country.

Motivated by our faith, Catholic Charities provides food, clothing and shelter to these children, following Jesus’ command to care for orphans and widows in their distress, to welcome the stranger and to care for those who suffer.

But this work is now in peril. A recent state-level executive order will soon strip the child care licenses from any organization that provides shelter to migrant children, including the six child welfare programs operated by Catholic Charities in Texas. While perhaps well-intentioned, this order has serious unintended consequences. The order wouldn’t just remove migrant children from care; it would also close homes that care for Texas-born foster children. Instead of relieving pressure on Texas’ overstressed foster care system, it would transfer hundreds of these kids each year into a system that is already short on homes.

And it would remove state-level conscience protections for Catholic Charities, exposing us to regulation and pressure from those who do not share our commitment to the dignity, safety and well-being of mothers and children. The move will cost children homes and Texans jobs. Were Catholic Charities to lose their state license, this would strip well over 100 Texas foster children of loving foster families and necessary support, and if our homes closed, it could mean the loss of hundreds of jobs and millions of dollars in economic impact in Houston, San Antonio and Dallas.

If Catholic Charities shelters are forced to close their doors, then the Texas foster children they serve would be taken from these secure and nurturing settings they know to be bounced into new places. Studies show that the more a foster child moves from place to place and changes caseworkers, the more the odds of finding a forever home decrease. The migrant children in our care would be taken from homelike settings and moved to federal facilities that lack the resources and staff necessary to properly care for children who have experienced trauma and trafficking. It is no place for a child to live.

Catholic Charities has a tradition of excellence because our staff is driven by our faith and the call to care for those who suffer. To us, grace and charity are unconditional, and our homes are essential for caring for both migrant and vulnerable Texas-born children. We care for these children as we care for our own, so that they may be comforted and eventually reunited with their families.

The state of Texas has an opportunity to protect children and live up to its commitment to religious freedom. Doing this helps both unaccompanied minors and Texas-born foster children. It also follows state laws that were put in place to protect the religious freedom and conscience rights of those who care for children. Texas should continue to follow the example it has set for protecting religious freedom and life by supporting much-needed social services providers like Catholic Charities in their commitment to serve all vulnerable children.

The Most Rev. Mark J. Seitz is the bishop of El Paso.

The Most Reverend Edward J. Burns is the bishop of Dallas.

They wrote this column for The Dallas Morning News.

NOTA: Se reprodujo íntegramente la columna publicada en el Diario “The Dallas Morning News.” Los autores, señalan que el cierre de albergues para niños migrantes atentaría contra la libertad religiosa.

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