

Testimony of The Rev. Stan J. Sloan

House Oversight and Reform Committee

Hearing on *The Administration's Religious Liberty Assault on LGBT Rights*

February 27, 2020

Good morning. I'm Father Stan Sloan, an Episcopal priest, a Trustee for Union Theological Seminary in New York City, and the CEO of Family Equality, the National organization for LGBTQ people with children and for LGBTQ people wanting to form families.

Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Jordan, Chairman Raskin, and Ranking Member Roy, thank you for permitting me to testify today on a topic of great importance.

I started my journey in the nonprofit sector by working for decades with the homeless in Chicago, the first part of that in Christian service for Episcopal Charities, and the last sixteen years focused on the disproportionately large population of LGBTQ homeless as the CEO of Chicago House.

Genesis 1:27 states that "God created humanity in God's own image." Unfortunately, humanity has been returning that favor ever since, distorting God into whatever image many so-called "Christians" may choose to form of God in order to justify their own comfortable lives and their own discriminatory practices. This distortion is at the very heart of our hearing today.

Religious Liberty laws are not about religion, and they are certainly not about liberty as our country's founders understood it. Decades of working with the homeless taught me what six years of theological study could not: the Christian Gospels have a preferential option for the poor and the marginalized. More, Christ, as seen in the gospel narratives, prefers to spend his time and share his life with those same people, the poor and the marginalized, with the metaphor of overturning tables and cleansing the Temple for those who instead choose to distort religion for their own means. Many of us are here today to begin overturning tables, and to begin cleansing our nation of discrimination dressed as religion that has no place in the separation of Church and State. "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and render unto God the things that are God's."

There are currently over 440,000 children in our child welfare system. Over a quarter of those children are able to be adopted at this moment, and yet over 20,000 of those kids will graduate out of the system this year alone without ever finding parents. Last year Family Equality made the front page of USA Today with our research showing that 63% of LGBTQ Millennials plan on forming families, a huge increase for the decades ahead. If you are LGBTQ in America, you are seven times more likely to foster parent and seven times more likely to adopt a child than if you are straight, and yet eleven states now have laws that allow for legal discrimination against

LGBTQ people in foster care and adoption. Those laws have been put in place under the guise of religion, and in the name of Religious Liberty. Chairman John Lewis' Every Child Deserves a Family Act, HR 3114, will overturn those bad laws nationwide, and if you care about kids in need you will support that Act.

There are those who will tell you that people who are denied medical care at one hospital can simply go to another hospital, and for my husband and I that is largely true. One of the advantages of being middle or upper class is the mobility that it affords. But my decades of working with the homeless in Chicago taught me that mobility is not a luxury afforded to those living in poverty. Being denied proper medical care as a Trans person at the nearest clinic too often means being denied medical care entirely. Similarly, for those in LGBTQ and isolated by poverty or geography, being told "no" when seeking basic human needs such as food or housing can mean being told "no" to survival itself.

The abuse of Christian Scripture and principles to justify prejudice is nothing new. The Book of Philemon was used by "Christians" to justify slavery during the Civil War and, again, to justify racial discrimination in the 1960's. It is my belief that those supporting so called Religious Liberty have chosen "religion" as the battleground for a parallel war of discrimination today. If others who consider ourselves religious meet them on this battlefield, it becomes quickly apparent that any objective reading of Christian Scripture shows Christ himself as a man shunning zealots and embracing the marginalized as he focuses on justice and love.

If, instead, we are respectful of the separation of Church and State, and we move this battlefield of discrimination from religion to our Judicial, Legislative and Executive systems, it becomes readily apparent that discrimination based on religion can not stand if we remain true to our founding principles.

Regardless of the battlefield, it is time that we as a country begin overturning tables and cleansing our nation. For me as a middle-class American this protection of civil rights is important, but for those that are poor and most marginalized it is not only important but necessary. For the sake of those most marginalized in the LGBTQ community, please put an end to legalized discrimination masquerading as religion.

Thank you for allowing me to be here with you today.