

Catholic trafficking victims' shelter shuttered for opposing homosexuality, sues state

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SAN DIEGO, California, November 20, 2019 ([LifeSiteNews](#)) — Children of the Immaculate Heart (CIH), a religious charity that helps women escape from sex trafficking, filed a lawsuit today seeking to end a State of California mandate that is leaving a rescue home for commercially sexually exploited teen girls empty while San Diego County experiences a child sex-trafficking crisis. In *Children of the Immaculate Heart v. Kimberley Johnson, et al.*, the issue is whether religious caretaking organizations can serve victims of sex trafficking consistent with their faith.

The lawsuit demands that the State's Department of Social Services, which regulates California's foster care system, answer for its ongoing refusal to issue CIH a license to open the **Refuge**, a residential treatment home for sex-trafficked teen girls ([see video](#)). Licensing officials have made it clear that they find CIH's Catholic identity "offensive" and that they disagree with the charity's religious beliefs about sexual orientation and reproduction.

The Refuge has been sitting empty for over two years. Evidence shows that licensing officials are stonewalling the Refuge's application to force CIH to either withdraw the application under economic duress or sacrifice its religious beliefs. CIH currently spends \$15K per month to maintain the Refuge and has spent nearly \$600K total since 2015.

"Right now, a desperately needed rescue home for sex-trafficked girls sits empty because the government refuses to license a care provider with Catholic beliefs," said **Paul Jonna**, senior counsel for the Freedom of Conscience Defense Fund. "Every child who is at risk of sex trafficking deserves a safe place with loving caretakers. Charitable agencies that help rescue children from sex trafficking should be protected, not excluded for their faith."

Licensing officials have demanded that CIH certifies that it will promote LGBTQ events, drive residents to get abortions, and inject children with transgender hormone medications. CIH does not object to a child's access to such programs, activities, or actions, but it objects to cooperating in them.

"Hundreds of teenage girls continue to be pimped out in our County every night," said **Grace Williams**, CIH's founder and executive director, "yet the State of California considers prohibiting Children of the Immaculate Heart's free exercise of religion and freedom of speech more important than helping these girls escape a living hell of being raped up to ten times a day."

A joint study by Point Loma Nazarene University and the University of San Diego reported that 4,000-8,000 victims are in gang-involved sex trafficking in San Diego every year. To fight this crisis, Grace Williams founded CIH to serve survivors of sex trafficking through housing and rehabilitative programs under the motto "Restore All Things in Christ." Their Catholic mission drives them to care for each victim regardless of her race, color, sex, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity. CIH currently serves over 13 adult women and their 18 children in rehabilitative homes and programs. No individual has ever complained that the charity's Catholic mission was discriminatory or coercive.

San Diego County District Attorney Summer Stephan, the County Probation Department, and the County Juvenile Court all have endorsed CIH. Based on Probation and Juvenile Court estimates, hundreds of girls currently in California's welfare system are being pimped and prostituted because they have nowhere to find housing, trauma-informed treatment, and safety.

The complaint was filed in state court in San Diego. CIH is represented by the Freedom of Conscience Defense Fund (FCDF), with the St. Thomas More Society serving as co-counsel. FCDF has asked the court to halt the State's harmful mandate and direct the licensing officials to immediately resolve the Refuge's application. A hearing is expected within two weeks.