



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on February 28, 2018

Lesbians Sue Catholic Group for Foster-parent Snub

A lesbian couple in Texas is suing the federal government and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops after a Dallas/Ft. Worth Catholic charity turned them down as foster parents to a refugee child. The two women, identified as Fatma Marouf and Bryn Esplin, “married” one another in 2015 and soon after located to Texas. Marouf grew up in a Muslim household, while Esplin was raised in the Mormon faith.



As a law professor at Texas A&M University and director of the school’s Immigrant Rights Clinic, Marouf was invited by Catholic Charities of Fort Worth (CCFW) to tour its facilities and learn more about the group’s efforts on behalf of unaccompanied refugee children. Subsequently, the women expressed interest in being foster parents to a refugee child. But when it became clear during an interview with Donna Springer, the chair of the CCFW’s board of directors, that Marouf and Esplin were a same-sex couple, Springer informed the two that “foster parents must ‘mirror the holy family,’” according to the legal complaint. “To clarify whether their relationship would be an issue, [Marouf] explicitly stated that she and Bryn are a same-sex couple. Springer responded that they did not ‘qualify’ to foster a child.”

The couple then allegedly inquired if any homosexual refugee children were available as foster children, and were informed that none of CCFW’s young charges identified as such.

Marouf subsequently complained to the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement, which is part of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and when she did not receive an adequate reply the pair filed suit, naming the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Office of Refugee Resettlement, and HHS as defendants in the case.

The lawsuit, filed on behalf of the lesbian pair by the pro-homosexual group Lambda Legal, charges that “by working to ensure that none of the children for which they are responsible are placed in homes of same-sex spouses based on USCCB’s (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’) religious beliefs, USCCB and its sub-grantees not only discriminate against same-sex spouses, but also effectively erase the non-Catholic identities and beliefs of many of the unaccompanied refugee children for which they are responsible.”

Addressing HHS and its Office of Refugee Settlement, the suit charges that the “federal defendants’ failure to remedy the discrimination by USCCB and its sub-grantee in denying [Marouf and Esplin] the opportunity to foster a child under the URM Program or the UC Program based on impermissible religious considerations, of which they are on notice, compounds their constitutional violation.”

In its coverage, the *Dallas Morning News* reported that the CCFW insisted that Springer had never spoken to the women, and that no one within the organization had said anything about children identifying as gay or lesbian. “We do not screen or otherwise ask the children we serve to self-identify if they are LGBT,” Katelin Cortney, a spokesperson for CCFW, told the Dallas paper. “We train our foster families to accept children from all cultures and walks of life so they can be as prepared as possible to



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welcome someone new into their home.”

In its statement, the Texas Conference of Catholic Bishops said that foster programs under its jurisdiction work within the “parameters of the Catholic Church’s teachings” while also making sure to comply with federal regulations.

“Catholic Charities of Fort Worth’s International Foster Care program is an outreach that is faithful to the Church’s mission to care for the poor and vulnerable,” Bishop Michael Olson of the diocese of Fort Worth said in a statement. “This mission is entrusted to the Church by Christ.”

Olson noted that “finding foster parents — and other resources — for refugee children is difficult work. Catholic Charities are often the lead agent in this work. It would be tragic if Catholic Charities were not able to provide this help, in accordance with the Gospel values and family, assistance that is so essential to these children who are vulnerable to being mistreated as meaningless in society.”

Marouf claimed that she felt “shock, disappointment, and anger” after being denied by the Catholic group, and the lesbians insisted to the *Washington Post* that they were not aware of other options for fostering refugee children.

In their suit the women are seeking an injunction that would force CCFW to work with them, and against the Catholic faith that guides it, to foster a refugee child. Additionally, they are requesting an injunction to stop the federal government “from enabling, sanctioning, ratifying, or failing to implement adequate safeguards against the use of religious or other criteria to exclude foster or adoptive parent applicants based on their sexual orientation or sex or the same-sex character of their marriage.”



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