

— OPINION —

The Foster Care Crisis: How Biden’s New HHS Rule Will Make It Harder To Place Kids In Christian Homes

'Sound of Hope' highlights the crucial role Christian families play in the foster care and adoption system, especially as they face exclusion under new Biden administration rules.

By **Daily Wire**

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Gajus. Getty Images.

The following is an edited transcript excerpt of an interview between Daily Wire editor-in-chief John Bickley and Daily Wire culture reporter Megan Basham on a [Sunday Edition of Morning Wire](#).

When it comes to providing homes for at-risk kids, people of faith, especially Christians, are far more likely to adopt and foster than non-religious people. But because of new regulations from the Biden administration, the very religious beliefs that prompt people of faith to adopt and foster could now render them ineligible. The faith-based commitment that inspires many Christians to care for vulnerable children is illustrated in a new film, “Sound of Hope,” which [DailyWire+ has partnered with Angel Studios](#) to get into theaters on July 4th.

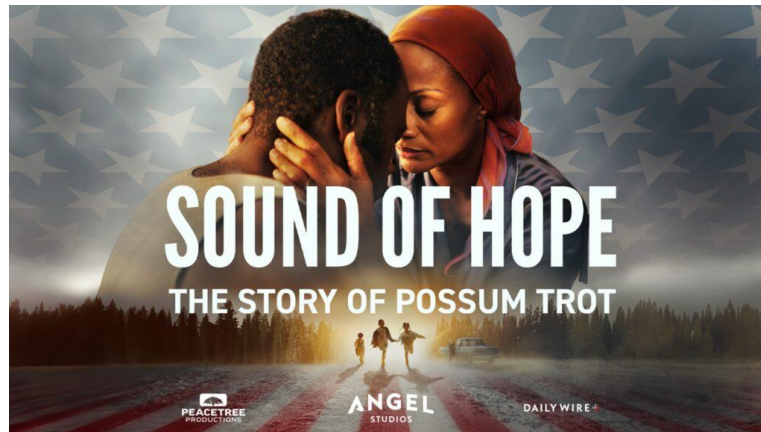
JOHN: Daily Wire culture reporter Megan Basham joins us now to discuss the new PeaceTree Productions film “[Sound of Hope](#),” and how new federal regulations might impact the role communities of faith play in caring for foster children. So Megan, let’s start out by giving some context here. How big of a need is there for adoptive and foster families?

MEGAN: I think it's fair to say heartbreakingly big. So, the most recent year for which we have [data](#) is 2022. In that year, just over 53,000 kids were adopted out of foster care. But well over *twice* that number had a case plan for adoption. Meaning, they just continued in the system because they didn't have any families that case workers believed were safe for them to return to and no one adopted them.

Joe Knittig is the CEO of the Global Orphan Project and founder of CarePortal, a platform that connects churches to kids in need. He was also an executive producer on "Sound of Hope" and he broke down some of the statistics for me in an interview:

Every year in the United States, even though we pour about \$30 billion taxpayer dollars into child welfare, there are more than 7 million children, that's more than 4 million families that are referred to Child Protective Services. So these are families at the front door of the system. And there are nearly 400,000 children that are in foster care right now. And there are more than 100,000 children in the system who are available and waiting for adoption. So that's kind of a big picture look. A myth about child welfare is that every child that's in that system is there because of abuse. That's not true. The number one driver for why those 7 million children go into the system — is not abuse, it is neglect. And it's usually poverty related neglect. So, in sum, we have a very reactive system with many children waiting. We keep flooding more children into the system. Children that shouldn't be going in there in the first place. That is the state of the union of child welfare and child wellbeing in the United States of America.

To give a little more context, the average child in foster care is around 8-years-old. And as they get older, it becomes much harder to place them.



Angel Studios/DailyWire+

JOHN: Definitely heartbreaking. So just how big of a role do people of faith and Christian communities tend to play in providing homes for these kids?

MEGAN: Oh man, just a massive role. According to Barna research, practicing Christians are more than two times more likely to adopt than the general population. For evangelicals, which is who this film focuses on, they're *five times* more likely than other Americans to adopt. They're also more likely to adopt older kids and kids who have special needs or behavioral issues. I spoke to Tony Mitchell, a board member for the Christian Alliance for Orphans, also known as CAFO. That's a nonprofit that represents around 200 organizations and close to a thousand churches. He was adopted out of foster care himself by a Christian family. And he told me that upbringing, and his own personal faith that grew out of it, were the reasons he decided to get involved in this work.

So I was given up at birth to foster care and I remained in the foster care system for two and a half years. Up until late in my life, I did not know what happened during those two and a half years, how many homes, or anything at all. Then I was adopted at two and a half years by a wonderful family. That family, we were not very wealthy, we existed below the poverty level, and then I was the first and only one to go to college. And then after a 30 year, very successful business career, I retired. And now I give time to several ministries and have a ministry focused retirement...

He also told me that Christians are instrumental in caring for at-risk kids, not just in the fostering and adopting they do themselves, but also in how they support those who foster and adopt.

My adoptive parents were people of faith and it had a significant impact on me. My dad would always quote things from the Bible without chapter and verse. I did not know as a child where his sayings, as I called them, came from. And when I opened the Bible for the first time myself, my first reaction was, "Hey, they got this from my dad." So it was definitely a part of my life. And God also touched my life in my foster experience. People of our faith are very key ... many times a church will create a community around foster children, and families, adopted children, families, and even families that are at risk and to help prevent children from being put into the system.

He pointed out that you will often see churches organizing to make sure the foster and adoptive families in their congregations are provided with clothes, beds, and other material needs. They offer baby-sitting, weekend care, homework assistance. Just anything you can think of so these families don't feel like they're bearing the responsibility on their own.

JOHN: Yeah, I've seen that play out personally in communities I've been involved with. So why is it often Christians who tend to be especially engaged in this work?

MEGAN: Because, as Barna Research found, Christians believe they have a biblical command to be involved in this kind of work. 77% of them say they have a personal responsibility to care for orphans. For example, James 1:27 says: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to look after orphans and widows in their affliction." And I'd say that belief is very authentically reflected in "Sound of Hope," which tells the true story of Bennett Chapel, a church located in the small East Texas town of Possum Trot. All 22 families in the church adopted 77 children out of foster care.

JOHN: Yeah. Now when you hear about kids in need in the foster care system and religious families stepping up to fill the need, I think many people find it surprising, even shocking, that this issue has become controversial and a matter of political debate. What's going on there?

MEGAN: Well, essentially, the very thing that makes these families decide to adopt and foster — their Bible-based beliefs — is what's prompting some political leaders to decide they're unfit. So on April 29, the Department of Health and Human Services [enacted](#) a new rule called the Safe and Appropriate Foster Care Placement Requirements. It requires foster families to use a child's "identified pronouns, chosen name," and to allow the child to dress "in a manner that the child believes reflects their self-identified gender identity and expression." In other words, if a girl says she's a boy, the foster parents would be required to treat her as a boy, and vice versa. The rule also says that any foster families "...must commit to establishing an environment that supports the child's LGBTQI+ status or identity." That language could potentially even mean that foster families must commit to something like providing puberty blockers to the child. So these rules conflict with the doctrinal convictions of the [vast majority](#) of church-going Christians in the United States. Here's what Republican Senator James Lankford of Oklahoma said while discussing these concerns during a finance committee hearing last month:

I am getting some concerns from some folks that are coming back to my office on — just the concern the [ACF recent rule](#) on foster care consider situations where a child has been removed from their home. The statement was due in part, or in whole, to a familial conflict about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. I know it's a touchy issue on this, but we've got to figure out how to get as many people as we can possibly to be able to help in the foster system. And what I don't want to have is a message being sent to faith-based organizations or families that believe in a traditional marriage situation that you're no longer welcome to participate.

When HHS proposed the new rule at the end of last year, a group of 18 Republican attorneys general sent a letter to the administration saying it violates the constitution because it discriminates against religious families. They also said the proposal, “will harm children by limiting the number of available foster homes...” But the administration went forward with it anyway.

JOHN: Okay, so the rule has just recently been enacted. Do we know yet how it’s going to be applied?

MEGAN: Not yet, because it’s not scheduled to go into effect until 2026, and if a new administration takes power, they could reverse this, of course. But we can look at how some Democrat-led states are applying similar policies. Oregon’s Department of Human Services also requires foster and adoptive parents to “support” a child’s sexual orientation and gender identity. And there Christians are stepping forward to say the state has not allowed them to foster or adopt because of their Christian beliefs. For example, Alliance Defending Freedom is representing Jessica Bates, a widowed mother of five who says her [application to adopt a pair of siblings out of foster care was denied](#) because of her Christian beliefs.

Also last year, Catholic couple Mike and Kitty Burke said Massachusetts rejected their application to be foster parents. They said the only reason listed on their application was that the state did not believe they would, “be affirming to a child who identified as LGBTQIA.” They have also filed a lawsuit arguing that this is a violation of their constitutional right to religious liberty.

JOHN: You almost wonder whether a story like the one told in “Sound of Hope” would be possible in some states right now.

MEGAN: Yes, and that's something the filmmakers behind the movie are very concerned about. Josh and Rebekah Weigel made this movie together — they were co-writers and Josh directed. And they're also adoptive parents themselves. So this was a serious labor of love for them and an expression of their own faith. They told me policies like the new HHS rule stand to hurt suffering kids the most:

We're Christians and this is a story about a Christian community. And, you know, obviously that kind of legislation would prevent this story from happening again. ... People may not understand that over two thirds of the people helping are people that may not agree with that kind of legislation ... You would have a monumental ocean of traumatized children mounting every year if you were to cut off that kind of care...

Rebekah: Anything that would stand in the way of churches being able to be the answer to this crisis and being able to care for children is going to hurt the kids. And we want to see more churches step in. We want to see them be the solution to this. So any legislation prohibiting that is definitely problematic.

Hopefully, though, the attention this film is getting will encourage audiences, whether religious or not, to consider how they can care for foster kids or support foster and adoptive families.

JOHN: Yes. The most important people we have to remember when considering these policies are the children in need. Thanks for bringing us this report, Megan.

MEGAN: Anytime.