



## The Child-Friendly Faith Project

To: Idaho House of Representatives State Affairs Committee  
Re: House Bill 113  
Date: February 18, 2015

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To Members of the State Affairs Committee:

I'm Janet Heimlich, Executive Director of the Child-Friendly Faith Project. We are a national 501(c)3 public charity that educates the public about child abuse and neglect that is enabled by ideology.

We are not a faith-based organization, nor are we anti-faith. We believe wholeheartedly in the rights of individuals to believe in and practice the religion of their choice. We also believe that everyone has a sacred right to protect children from harm – even when that harm is carried out by people who love them.

We are certain that there is not a single individual involved in this debate who doesn't care about the lives of children. We know that most parents of all faiths and philosophies deeply love their sons and daughters. We know that in most cases, parents make good decisions for their kids.

But that does not mean that parents should be given carte blanche when it comes to decision-making. For many reasons, parents can lack the tools necessary to properly protect their children from harm. Risk factors include a lack of knowledge about child development, stress, mental illness, substance abuse, and a lack of resources to give children what they need to thrive.

The Child-Friendly Faith Project opposes House Bill 113, not because we are against parents having rights, but because we are concerned that passing it will cripple Idaho's ability to protect children who may be subjected to abuse or neglect at the hands of parents who simply may not know any better.

Some critics may call us anti-religion. That could not be farther from the truth. Our boards of directors and advisors include a Pentecostal Christian, a Mormon, an Orthodox Rabbi, a Baptist minister, and a Catholic priest, among other people of faith. But the reason why we serve on these boards is because, while we are respectful of all people's faiths, we also recognize the need to allow government to do its job to look out for the most vulnerable.



## **The Child-Friendly Faith Project**

This mission – that everyone must take part in protecting children from harm – is supported by religious leaders around the world. Dallin H. Oaks, an attorney and a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, writes on the website of the LDS Church,

We are all under the Savior’s command to love and care for each other and especially for the weak and defenseless. Children are highly vulnerable. They have little or no power to protect or provide for themselves and little influence on so much that is vital to their well-being. Children need others to speak for them, and they need decision makers who put their well-being ahead of selfish adult interests.

Religious leaders also acknowledge that having faith alone does not make one immune to abuse and neglect. Boz Tchividjian, an Evangelical Christian who is also the grandson of the Rev. Billy Graham and the Executive Director of GRACE, Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment, writes in an article for Religion New Service:

The heartbreaking reality is that the marginalization of survivors [of abuse] is all too common in the Christian community. . . . Just like the Priest and Levi in the parable of the Good Samaritan, we are often so quick to embrace “rational excuses” for why we walk away. When we do this, we marginalize the very lives that God sees as beautiful and infinitely valuable.

House Bill 113 has potentially far-reaching, negative consequences. Because of its open-ended language, it would shackle lawmakers from passing important legislation to protect children from abuse and neglect. But it’s not only legislators who would have their hands tied. Many others who work toward protecting children would also be unable to do their jobs. For example, social workers would be hindered from protecting children from abusive or neglectful individuals. Prosecutors would not be able to hold those accountable who have harmed a child. And parents who are worried that a former spouse is emotionally or physically hurting a child would be unable to sue for custody.

We urge you to put a stop to this bill that stands to jeopardize the health and lives of Idaho’s most vulnerable.

Sincerely,

Janet Heimlich  
Executive Director  
The Child-Friendly Faith Project  
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