

The Gracehaven Case

Case Name: *Gracehaven v. Montgomery County Department of Job and Family Services*

Case Action: Case filed on December 9th, 2024.

Significance: Whether a religious organization has the right to hire exclusively people who share its faith.



Background:

Gracehaven is a Christian ministry that serves and cares for youth survivors of sex trafficking across the state of Ohio. It was founded in 2008 to be a haven of safety and comfort for young girls who have survived child sex trafficking and abuse. Gracehaven's sex trafficking prevention and rehabilitation work is done through a variety of programs and services, including comprehensive case management services, community outreach, education and training about sex trafficking, therapy and mentoring, and support to families of sex trafficking victims. The ministry operates three state-licensed group homes in which girls are placed through the foster care system. For years, Gracehaven contracted with the Montgomery County Department of Job and Family Services to place girls in its group homes and to receive funding for its foster care services. When Gracehaven went to renew its contract in 2024, it discovered an employment non-discrimination provision that prohibited the ministry from employing only those who share its religious beliefs. So, the ministry told county officials that it would sign the contract "as is," but by doing so, it was not surrendering its legal right to hire those who share its faith. In response, the county refused to renew its contract with Gracehaven, prohibiting the ministry from serving the children in Montgomery County and from receiving public funds. Religious organizations like Gracehaven have the right to employ only like-minded people without being penalized by the government.

Key Points

- Gracehaven should not have to choose between hiring those who share its faith or furthering its mission to help youth survivors of sex trafficking.
- Without a contract with Montgomery County, Gracehaven cannot reach or care for youth sex trafficking survivors in Montgomery County who are in desperate need of a safe and loving home.
- The county's actions are taking resources away from vulnerable young girls.

Key Facts

- Gracehaven is qualified to receive public funds, as it always has been, and stripping its funding violates the First Amendment.

The Bottom Line: The government should never penalize a ministry because of its religious exercise.