



STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

KRISTI NOEM | GOVERNOR

December 21, 2022

South Dakota Family Heritage Alliance  
2620 Jackson Blvd, Suite E  
Rapid City, SD 57702

Dear Board Members of the South Dakota Family Heritage Alliance:

I write to you today in response to a letter from Norman Woods, the executive director of the Family Heritage Alliance. I am disappointed in Mr. Woods' decision to attack me publicly by sending this letter out of the blue and releasing it to the media at the same time, instead of reaching out to my office to have a productive conversation about how we can work together. This behavior is both counterproductive and unbecoming of the executive director of your organization, but unfortunately it has become a pattern in recent years.

As a result, my office will no longer work with the Alliance until and unless its executive director chooses to act professionally. I share the Alliance's values of defending faith, family, and freedom in South Dakota, and I am disappointed that your executive director has made it impossible for us to work together to accomplish our shared goals.

In my first term as governor, I have worked to advance policies that support families more than any governor in America. I consistently remind the people of South Dakota that strong families are the center of my policy decisions. Here are a few of the major actions that I have taken with the goal of strengthening South Dakota families:

- I signed the strongest law in America to protect fairness in girls' sports;
- I led the charge to revamp our state's social studies standards and set the bar for the teaching of America's true and honest history to our kids and grandkids;
- I have stood against the racist and divisive teachings of Critical Race Theory, both by bringing legislation and by signing executive orders;
- I have brought legislation that helped make South Dakota the most pro-life state in the nation, and when other national political figures were covering in the wake of the *Dobbs* decision, I defended this victory in front of the national media;

- I brought legislation to return opportunities for prayer to South Dakota schools;
- I have focused on recruiting foster families across the state, with more than 300 new foster families signing up for my “Stronger Families Together” initiative just in the first year;
- I successfully brought legislation to provide paid family leave benefits to state employees in 2020 and plan to build on this program during this year’s legislative session;
- I have included funding for family-focused programs in my budget every year, including expanding the Bright Start program statewide in 2022;
- I have committed to eliminating the sales tax on groceries – which would be largest tax cut in South Dakota history – to provide relief for families across the state; and
- In my Budget Address, I announced several pro-family policy areas that I will further discuss in my upcoming State of the State Address.

It is deeply unfortunate that under Mr. Woods’ leadership, the Alliance more often chooses to attack me publicly rather than building a strong relationship with my office. The Family Heritage Alliance should be supporting and working closely with a pro-family Governor in pursuit of these pro-family policies.

Though the letter was written on the Alliance’s letterhead, it appears to be extremely personal in nature. It does not appear to outline any policy differences between myself and the Alliance, though it is indicative of Mr. Woods’ personal political disputes with me.

I am taking action on the specific issue that Mr. Woods is highlighting. Just last week, I terminated a contract with The Transformation Project. South Dakota does not support this organization’s efforts, and state government should not be participating in them or funding them. The contract was signed without my knowledge or approval. When I became aware of it, I took swift action.

With regards to the three specific questions posed by Mr. Woods in his letter, I offer the following responses:

- 1) I am glad that South Dakota already has a strong decency law on the books. To Mr. Woods’ point, I would welcome a clarification from the Attorney General’s Office on whether or not the event at South Dakota State University violated the state’s decency statute. However, that is not for me to determine as Governor. I know what my job is – and what it isn’t.

- 2) I will continue to support legislation that builds stronger families in South Dakota and review any bill that the South Dakota State Legislature sends to my desk.
- 3) I have already discussed this issue with several members of the Board of Regents. In response to my conversations with them, the Board has already changed its policies for events, suspending any youth participation in events that take place at our Board of Regents institutions. They also announced their intention to work on legislation on this issue in the upcoming legislative session. I will have the opportunity to appoint at least three new Regents in the coming months. I look forward to appointing individuals who share my values and the values of South Dakotans.

I'd encourage the Family Heritage Alliance to evaluate the purpose of your organization. Is it to promote family values – or is it to attack the most conservative governor in the country? I believe it is the former and urge you to focus your efforts on bringing our shared pro-family message to the people of South Dakota. I suggest you find an executive director who agrees.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kristi Noem". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and a long, sweeping underline.

Kristi Noem, Governor of South Dakota

CC:

Cindy Howell  
Patrick Clinch  
Michael Brandt  
Carrie Cisle  
Corey Wattenhofer  
Larry Begley  
Bill Buck