



Oklahoma House of Representatives
2300 N Lincoln Blvd.
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

The undersigned nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations are dedicated to ensuring the safety, permanency and wellbeing for children and families that are connected to adoption and foster care. This includes providing leadership and education that improves laws, policies and practices through sound research, analysis and advocacy. Eliminating policy and practice barriers for children in foster care awaiting permanent homes is one of our priorities.

The Oklahoma House of Representatives will soon consider legislation that would significantly limit the opportunities for the nearly 10,000 Oklahoma children waiting in foster care to be placed in permanent, adoptive homes. This bill – SB 1140— would make it harder for kids to find foster and adoptive families by allowing taxpayer-funded government contractors to refuse to work with LGBTQ individuals, same-sex families, or other qualified prospective parents who don't meet a contractor's religious criteria. A recently added amendment would limit the number of children harmed by the bill, but any amount of state-sanctioned discrimination is too much.

Making a placement in the best interest of each child should be the state's primary goal. No one's interest is served when discriminatory practices are endorsed by the state. SB 1140 stands in opposition to the robust base of professional knowledge that highlights the critical need for the largest possible pool of potentially qualified parents to adopt children languishing in the child welfare system, and the harm to children that results from excluding any single class of potentially qualified parents (such as LGBTQ people) from that pool.

The reality is, a quarter century of research has found that children raised by lesbian and gay parents fare just as well as those reared by heterosexual parents. Child welfare professionals, including the American Medical Association and the American Psychological Association, as well as national and state child welfare organizations, overwhelmingly support adoptions by qualified same-sex parents. There is no professional justification for refusing to allow a same-sex couple or LGBTQ individual to adopt.

There are all too many children in temporary living situations, and the biggest issue in terms of placing children in homes is a lack of qualified prospective parents. In Oklahoma alone, the most recent statistics

from Oklahoma Fosters indicate that there are 8,705 children in the custody of the Department of Human Services, with 650 children waiting for families and an estimated 1080 foster families needed in 2018. The outcomes facing youth who exit foster care on their own as opposed to being placed with a permanent family are staggering; these young people are more likely to flounder in society with higher rates of homelessness and unemployment compared to their peers who are adopted. These numbers illustrate the critical need for the largest possible pool of potentially qualified parents to adopt children from the child welfare system.

Stability and security are vital for children's healthy development. Allowing agencies that serve children waiting for homes to discriminate against potentially qualified parents limits opportunities for children.

If we truly wish to act in good conscience towards children in care, we must not enshrine discriminatory practices into the law.

Signed,

Human Rights Campaign

Freedom Oklahoma

Child Welfare League of America

North American Council on Adoptable Children

National Center for Adoption and Permanency

Foster Club

Voice For Adoption