

March 1, 2016

11 S Union St.,
Montgomery, AL 36130

To Members of the Senate Education and Youth Committee:

The undersigned nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations are dedicated to ensuring safety, permanency and wellbeing for children and families that are connected to adoption and foster care. This includes providing leadership that improves laws, policies and practices through sound research, analysis, education and advocacy. Eliminating policy and practice barriers -- including obstacles faced by gay and lesbian individuals and couples -- to adoption for children in foster care waiting for homes is one of our priorities. As such, we are in opposition to SB 204, The Alabama Child Care Provider Inclusion Act.

This letter explains our opposition to this bill by providing the state of professional knowledge on the critical need for the largest possible pool of qualified parents to adopt children languishing in the child welfare system, and the harm to children that results from excluding any single qualified class of parents (such as gay and lesbian couples) from that pool.

A quarter century of research has found that children raised by lesbian and gay parents fare well -- on par with those reared by heterosexual parents. Major professional groups, 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.

According to the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, same-sex couples raising children are four times more likely than their different-sex counterparts to be raising an adopted child. More than 16,000 same-sex couples are raising an estimated 22,000 adopted children throughout the United States. Studies have also documented that lesbian and gay adults are willing to adopt the very children most in need of homes and those who wait in temporary foster care the longest, those who are older and who may have special needs; these families also do so at a higher rate than heterosexual adults.

In Alabama alone, the most recent statistics from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System indicate that 4,556 children are in foster care with 1,027 children waiting for adoption by permanent, loving families. Nationally, 22,000 children aged out of foster care in 2015 without a permanent family. The outcomes facing youth who exit foster care on their own,

rather than to a 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 and outcomes illustrate the critical need for the largest possible pool of qualified parents to foster and adopt children from Alabama's child welfare system. Allowing agencies that serve waiting children to discriminate against prospective qualified parents undermines the prospects of Alabama's children being placed with loving families.

We urge you to examine the research that demonstrates if we truly wish to act in good conscience towards children waiting for permanent families, we must not exclude potentially qualified and eager prospective foster and adoptive parents. Foster and adoptive parent applicants should be judged based on their qualifications, not their sexual orientation or gender identity. Enshrining discrimination into law, on the other hand, will undermine the safety and wellbeing of Alabama's children. We urge you to stop this bill from advancing.

Thank you for your attention to ensuring Alabama's waiting children are not limited in their opportunity to join stable, loving families.

Sincerely,

April Dinwoodie, Chief Executive, The Donaldson Adoption Institute

Joe Kroll, Interim Executive Director, Voice for Adoption

Mary Boo, Executive Director, North American Council on Adoptable Children

Adam Pertman, President and CEO, National Center on Adoption and Permanency

John Sciamanna, Vice President of Public Policy, Child Welfare League of America