



THE DONALDSON  
ADOPTION INSTITUTE



*Voice for Adoption*  
SPEAKING OUT FOR OUR NATION'S WAITING CHILDREN

February 28, 2017

The Honorable Joe Straus  
Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives  
Room 2W.13  
PO Box 2910  
Austin, TX 78768

Dear Mr. Straus:

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 Texas state legislature may soon consider legislation which would significantly limit opportunities for the 12,643 Texas children waiting in foster care for permanent, adoptive homes. Additionally, the bills would sanction discrimination against LGBTQ children in care. Under the guise of religious freedom, these bills would allow a foster or adoption agency to deny a placement based on that agency's moral or religious beliefs, even if the agency receives public funds. Further, agencies would face no consequence if they forced LGBTQ children to engage in religious based counseling, or even subjected them to the discredited practice of 'conversion therapy.'

These bills stand in opposition to the robust base of professional knowledge that highlights 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. The best interest of children should be the state's primary goal and no one's interest is being served when discriminatory practices are endorsed by the state, even allowing taxpayer-funded organizations to insert their personal religious beliefs into their professional mandate to ensure the wellbeing of children.

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. 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 a study published in 2013 by the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, among same-sex couples with children under the age of 18 in the home, 13% have an adopted child, compared to only 3% of opposite-sex couples. 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 – and these families also do so at a higher rate than heterosexual adults.

There are all too many children in temporary living situations. In Texas alone, the most recent statistics from FY 2015 indicate there are 29,990 children in foster care with 12,643 children waiting in care for a permanent adoptive family. During FY 2015, more than 47,492 children were served by foster care. Nationally, the most recent statistics indicate that more than 21,000 children aged out of foster care without a permanent family structure. 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 qualified parents to adopt children from the child welfare system.

Stability and security are vital for children's healthy development. Allowing agencies that serve waiting children to discriminate against potentially qualified parents limits opportunities for children. It is also essential that children are supported in developing a healthy identity; subjecting children to discredited and abusive therapeutic techniques on the grounds of moral convictions does not serve their best interest. If we truly wish to act in good conscience towards children in care, we must not enshrine discriminatory practices into the law.

Sincerely,

Adoption Exchange Association  
Child Welfare League of America  
The Donaldson Adoption Institute  
FosterClub  
National Center on Adoption and Permanency  
North American Council on Adoptable Children  
Voices for Adoption