

June 2, 2015

Honorable Paul Ryan
Chairman
House Ways and Means Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Sander Levin
Ranking Member
House Ways and Means Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Ryan and Ranking Member Levin:

On behalf of the three million parents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) and their six million children, we the undersigned submit this letter in support of H.R. 2449, the Every Child Deserves a Family Act (ECDF), which was introduced by Representatives John Lewis and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen on May 19, 2015, and referred to the Committee. ECDF is a crucial piece of legislation that would ensure that adoption and foster care service providers put the best interests of children in care before their own biases, and would help break down barriers preventing foster youth from finding the loving, forever family that they deserve.

There are approximately 400,000 children in the U.S. foster care system, 100,000 of whom are waiting to be adopted. Unfortunately, because of a lack of available adoptive parents, 23,000 of these youth will leave foster care without ever finding a permanent, loving home, putting them at greater risk of poverty, homelessness, early pregnancy, incarceration, and trafficking. For many of these youth, this doesn't have to be the case: there are a projected two million potential LGBT adults who would consider adopting from the public system. However, restrictive state policies, practices, and procedures prevent these otherwise qualified adults from adopting from the public system.

In fact, while a handful of states prohibit discrimination in adoption and foster care, several states continue to restrict the ability of LGBT people to become parents. Some states give preference to married men and women, while others prohibit anyone who is living with an unmarried partner from fostering or adopting children. The majority of states are silent on this issue, leaving children and potential parents at the mercy of the biases of agencies and individual case workers.

The American family comes in various shapes and sizes. Policies restricting the ability of LGBT individuals and couples to foster and adopt children reflect neither the reality of American parenthood, the opinion of the American public, nor the weight of 30 years of social science research showing that the children of LGBT parents are as healthy and well-adjusted as the children of married different-sex couples. It is time for a federal standard that focuses on the best interest of children in foster care by ensuring service providers make available every qualified and loving parent.

The Every Child Deserves a Family Act (ECDF) would create a federal standard of nondiscrimination by prohibiting discrimination in public adoption and foster care on the basis of the potential parents'

sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status. It also protects children in care by prohibiting discrimination on the basis of the sexual orientation and gender identity of foster youth. The Administration of Children and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services already promotes the recruitment of LGBT foster and adoptive parents, but lacks the mandate to enforce these policies. The Every Child Deserves a Family Act provides this mandate.

For the 100,000 children waiting to find a forever family and the two million potential LGBT parents facing discrimination, we urge you to advance the Every Child Deserves a Family Act (H.R. 2449) without delay. All of our nation's children deserve to be a part of a permanent and loving family.

We very much appreciate your leadership and look forward to answering any questions you or your staff may have about this important legislation.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Adopting Older Children
Adoption Rhode Island
Alliance for Strong Families and Communities
American Civil Liberties Union
American Psychological Association
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
Center for Adoption Support and Education
Center for Inquiry
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
Child Welfare League of America
Children Awaiting Parents
Children's Advocacy Alliance (NV)
Colorado Coalition of Adoptive Families
Consortium for Children
DignityUSA
Equality Federation
Equality Florida
Equality Michigan
Equality Virginia
Family Equality Council
First Focus Campaign for Children
Foster Care to Success
Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD)
Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality
Human Rights Campaign

Interfaith Alliance
Lambda Legal
Lilliput Children's Services
Marriage Equality USA
Michigan's Children
Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association, Kansas
Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association, Missouri
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Center on Adoption and Permanency
National Council of Jewish Women
National Foster Parent Association
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
Nebraska Applesseed Center for Law in the Public Interest
North American Council on Adoptable Children
Oregon Post Adoption Resource Center and Oregon Adoption Resource Exchange, programs of
Northwest Resource Associates
People For the American Way
PFLAG National
Secular Coalition for America
The Adoption Exchange
The Donaldson Adoption Institute
The Trevor Project
True Colors Fund
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association
Voice for Adoption
Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER)