

## Proponent Testimony for HB2311

Jeremiah Gress

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My name is Jeremiah Gress, and I have been married to my wife, Rachel, for 12 ½ years. Together, we are the proud parents of four incredible children—three through adoption and one biological. Two of our children were adopted through the Kansas foster care system, one came to us from China through international adoption, and our youngest is our only biological child, our only daughter, and the only Caucasian child in our family. Yet, despite their differences in background, nationality, and skin color, my children know only one thing: they are brothers and sister. Our daughter, with her blonde hair and blue eyes, looks up to her older brothers—some of whom come from halfway across the world—and she admires them not as children who are different from her, but as her brothers.

Our family is beautifully unique, a reflection of the diversity and love that mirrors the heart of God. When I consider why we chose adoption, the answer is simple: God. Long before Rachel and I married, we knew adoption was part of our calling. From the very beginning, it was Plan A for our family.

### **God's Heart for Adoption**

The Bible is clear about God's deep concern for orphans, the marginalized, and the voiceless. Psalm 68 tells us that God is a father to the fatherless and that He is present in His holy dwelling. James 1:27 defines pure and faultless religion as "to look after orphans and widows in their distress." Deuteronomy 10:18 reminds us that God defends the cause of the fatherless. Over and over, Scripture affirms that God's people are called to care for children who need families. Adoption is not just a calling for my wife and me—it is the very heartbeat of God. Through Christ and his work on the cross, sinful people are brought into the family of God.

Not only has adoption transformed my own family, but I can also look around my local church and see countless other families who have been deeply impacted by foster care and adoption. Many of them are either providing loving homes for children or actively supporting those who do. The faith community plays a vital role in caring for these children, living out the biblical command to defend the fatherless.

### **A Troubling Political Shift**

It is heartbreaking to see ideological gamesmanship threaten the ability of families like mine to adopt or foster children here in Kansas. Some proposed draft guidance from an agency would require adopting families to affirm behavior that is against God's design—a requirement that would effectively disqualify faith-driven families like mine from participating in foster care and adoption.

Let me be clear: my beliefs may differ from those of agency leaders and lawmakers, but no agency should restrict loving, Christian families from providing stable homes to children simply because of their faith. My allegiance is to God and His Word, and I cannot affirm behavior that contradict my biblical convictions.

### **A Crisis in Kansas Foster Care**

There are approximately 6,000 children in the Kansas foster care system in need of loving homes. Shrinking the pool of eligible families—especially those who are motivated by faith to adopt and foster—is neither fair nor wise. In my experience working with the foster care system, the primary goal has always been “the best interest of the child.” If that remains true, then faithful, Jesus-loving families must not be excluded from adoption and foster care.

### **A Final Plea**

My hope and prayer are that lawmakers will prioritize what is best for children over political & ideological agendas. I urge you to recognize the critical role that faith-based families play in providing safe, loving homes for children in need. The approval of HB2311 is about protecting these 6,000 children. I encourage you to support this bill.

May God grant you His blessing and favor!