

Tiffany Applegate, Proponent
HB 2311
March 13, 2025
Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

Hi, my name is Tiffany Applegate, and I am honored to be an adoptive mother. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of House Bill 2311.

I have been intimately involved with foster care and adoption for over 20 years. We have 3 adopted children, and it has been one of the greatest blessings of our lives to raise them and our other children. I can't imagine if that opportunity had been taken from us, simply because of our religious beliefs, specifically regarding sexuality and marriage.

According to Bipartisanpolicy.org, over 65% of foster families attend church services weekly. Research (Barna) shows that practicing Christians are twice as likely to foster or adopt than the general population and are more likely to welcome sibling groups, older youth, and children with special needs. These are the children that are hardest to place and it's the people of faith that are most likely to step up and meet this need.

These are families, like ours, that believe we are called to care for the orphan and the widow, even if it's hard. Families that are following the call of Christ to lay down our lives, pick up our cross, and follow Him. That means we step in the gap, love these children, and we help them heal. And our biblical view of marriage and sexuality does nothing to impede this calling.

Let's look at the statistics and the cost of excluding Christian families simply for their religious beliefs. There are close to 6,000 children in the foster care system in KS at any given time, and according to reports, there are less than 2,500 licensed foster homes. That means there are children that have been rescued, are hurting, and have nowhere to go. They are sleeping in offices, hotel rooms, or are being left in dangerous situations.

Now imagine if 65% of our KS foster families are Christian and are no longer allowed to receive placements or adopt because of their beliefs. That means we will only have approximately 875 families left to serve the almost 6,000 children in care. Can you imagine if it was your child that was scared, alone, and with no safe bed to sleep in? Can you imagine them sleeping on the floor of a social worker's office or in a hotel room? We already have a shortage of families and as I mentioned, research shows that Christians are twice as likely to foster and adopt. So why in the world would we do anything to exacerbate the problem even more?

We need to find a solution for this shortage and help these kids, but it's not by eliminating good families through religious discrimination. If we allow families to be denied placement for their strongly held religious beliefs, these precious children are the ones that will pay

the price. So I'm asking you to support HB2311 and protect foster and adoptive families from religious discrimination. Thank you.

Testimony Before the Kansas State Legislature

In Support of House Bill 2311

Wednesday, March 13, 2025

Stacey Chik

Chairperson, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in strong support of House Bill 2311. My name is Stacey Chik. I am a wife of 22 years, an Executive Vice President of a national nonprofit, and a mother to seven wonderful children, 3 biological, and 4 of whom we fostered for many years and adopted here in the state of Kansas. I am an Educational Advocate and a licensed Trauma Informed Care Practitioner. In my day job, I work tirelessly to protect the most vulnerable across our country, and I am here today because Kansas foster children deserve to have protections in place ensuring that more safe, healthy families can serve as foster placements for years to come.

Every year, thousands of Kansas children enter the foster system through no fault of their own. They are removed from their homes due to abuse, neglect, or family crisis, and they enter a world of uncertainty, fear, and trauma. Our duty as a state is to ensure that these children have a safe and loving place to land—a home where they can begin to heal. Foster families provide that home.

But today, we face an alarming reality: we are at risk of losing these families. Without the protections provided by House Bill 2311, we send a message to people of faith that their beliefs disqualify them from caring for children in need. That is not only a loss to the families willing to open their hearts and homes—it is a loss to every child in our system.

I want to highlight three key reasons this legislation is essential:

1. Without this law, we will lose foster families—families Kansas children desperately need.

Foster care is already in crisis. We struggle to recruit and retain families who are willing to serve, especially families who can provide long-term, stable placements. As of October 31, 2024, there were 5,762 children in out-of-home placements in Kansas (source: Kansas Department for Children and Families, Foster Care/Adoption Summary Reports, dcf.ks.gov). That number is staggering on its own, but what is even more troubling is that our system is so overwhelmed that some of these children have nowhere to go.

In 2023, 57 children in Kansas had to spend 68 nights in offices or unlicensed facilities because there were no available foster homes. This is unacceptable. A child who has already been traumatized by removal from their home should not have to sleep in a government office or a hotel room with a rotating roster of caseworkers watching over them. That is not a solution—it is the state imposing further trauma. Imagine what it says to even one child in care about their self-worth... to one of the 57 sweet souls who find themselves sleeping in an office building or a hotel

rather than being welcomed by a family they otherwise could have had but for the shortage - a shortage that will increase if this bill is not passed.

2. Foster parents focus on meeting a child's most fundamental needs—healing trauma and reunification.

When our first foster placements came to us they were 2 & 4. Neither were potty trained, neither spoke past a few monosyllabic words and feral grunts. They were emaciated, under-sized for their age, had hollow eyes that spoke of unknown horrors. The younger of the two had a mishapen head from being left in a pack and play 24/7 for months on end and had chewed one of his fingers to bits out of desperate hunger. The last thing on our minds was church, teaching them our belief system, or even prayer. We are devout Catholics so that may come as a surprise to those who know us, but we went from being trained through the state to the deep end of a trauma war zone and it was a bloodbath. There was no time to think about the higher-level things like where they will go to school and what does their future look like? We were inundated with the 24/7 trauma responses of these children and every moment was an emergency to meet their most basic needs that had clearly gone unmet for so long. Fed, hydrated, clean, clothed, warm, loved. Rinse and repeat. Literally 24 hours a day. There was no reprieve. Only front lines trauma work.

Foster parents are now trained in most states on trauma-informed care principles. This training reinforces Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as the foundation for helping children transition from constant fight-or-flight survival mode into a state of felt safety. When children experience neglect and abuse, their nervous systems are conditioned to expect instability and danger. Trauma-informed care equips foster parents to methodically rebuild their sense of trust in the world by consistently meeting their fundamental needs—ensuring they are fed, sheltered, and protected. Over time, this structured security allows children to begin to heal and move beyond survival into true developmental and emotional growth. Regardless of a parent's religious beliefs, previous parenting experience, or even convictions about simple things like screen time and snacks, all foster parents must operate through a lens of trauma informed care principles in order to provide what is best for the children.

Good foster parenting follows a clear priority: ensuring children feel safe, secure, and loved. It aligns with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs—providing food, shelter, stability, and emotional security so that trauma-affected children can begin to heal. Children in foster care do not need to be caught between the crosshairs of ideologies - the state should be safeguarding families like ours and ensuring they can participate in this fundamental healing work of the community.

3. The church has historically been the largest provider of foster families and support for children in crisis.

There is an old adage "It takes a village" - my village just happens to be my faith community. The faith community has long been at the forefront of foster care and adoption. For centuries, people of faith have stepped up to serve orphaned, abandoned, and vulnerable children, driven by their conviction to care for the least of these. The state depends on these families to shoulder the

burden of foster care, and yet, we now find ourselves at a crossroads where those same families risk being pushed out because of their religious beliefs.

What's more is that it is the families who are firmly rooted in faith communities that tend to thrive as healthy and healing homes for foster children precisely because they are surrounded by a community who loves them and loves the service they are doing. They rally. When the foster family is exhausted beyond measure and can barely get two thoughts together to form a sentence, the Church shows up, with a casserole and a bag of coloring stuff for the kids. When the foster family has to be six places at once for parent visits, social workers, a court hearing, a medical visit, and a principals meeting, who shows up to stand in the gap? The Church. When we adopted our children in the state of Kansas, who filled the courtroom on National Adoption Day? Our church family! They have been the champions in these children's lives since day one. It is incomprehensible to me that we would not want to ensure that families who are believers can continue pouring into their foster placements with an entire community of love and support bolstering their efforts.

Conclusion

House Bill 2311 ensures that no foster parent or agency is forced to affirm or comply with ideological mandates that conflict with their sincerely held religious or moral beliefs. It does not limit the ability of the state to consider the best interests of the child. It does not prevent children from being placed in affirming homes. It simply ensures that families will not be excluded from the system or denied licensure because they hold to their faith-based convictions.

Kansas foster children deserve safe, loving homes. They deserve stability. They deserve families who are focused on meeting their fundamental needs, not ideological conformity. The passage of HB 2311 is not just about protecting religious liberty—it is about protecting the thousands of children who rely on the generosity of faith-driven families to care for them in their most vulnerable moments.

I urge you to support this bill and send a clear message that Kansas welcomes and values all families who step up to care for children in need. Thank you for your time.

From: Todd R. Chipman, Ph.D.

To: The Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee of the State of Kansas

Re: HB2311 Hearing on March 13, 2025

I am here to testify on behalf of HB 2311. I wish to thank the House Child Welfare and Foster Care Committee and Representative Humphries for considering our perspectives concerning Kansas children. Your work for children and families casts a long shadow across Kansas, affecting multiple generations in each legislative session.

I sometimes wonder what legislative committees were laboring in the Nebraska Unicameral in 1971 when I was adopted as an infant. I grew up in a healthy family that enjoyed the support of a faith community. That faith community, in essence, adopted me. Their values and convictions made sense and shaped me into the man I am today.

I have worked to pass the blessing of a safe and healthy home on to children in foster care. My wife and I are the bio parents of five children and have adopted two from foster care. As a pastor, my faith community rallied around my wife and family as we took two failure-to-thrive abused and neglected children into our home in 2016. Members of my faith community have mentored, taught, encouraged, challenged, comforted, trained, supported, and supplied my adopted daughters just as they did my bio children. So overwhelming was their support that I was compelled to write a book, *Until Every Child is Home* (Moody Publishers, 2019). I tell stories of faith leaders who have fostered and adopted and how their convictions have met the needs of vulnerable children.

The faith community in which I was raised, the faith community that I lead, and many other such congregations offer loving support to families welcoming children into their homes. The individuals and families that constitute these communities sincerely hold their beliefs. This is the first of two reasons why I beseech this committee to pass HB2311. Suppose the secretary were to require an individual or family of faith convictions to compromise those convictions to serve the state by caring for vulnerable children. In that case, the secretary implicitly compromises that individual or family's commitment to their faith community and support network.

Second, suppose the secretary was to prevent otherwise eligible individuals or families from fostering or adopting simply because said families wish to maintain their sincerely held religious beliefs. In that case, the secretary will exclude a substantial number of individuals who might serve Kansas children. This is simply an argument from supply and demand. The demand for foster families is high. Why cut a large supply chain by excluding those with religious convictions about sexuality and gender from serving such a great need in the State of Kansas?

Thank you for your service and patience in hearing me today.

Kansas Family Voice Testimony in Support of H.B. 2311

Senate Committee Public Health and Welfare

Brittany Jones

March 13, 2025

Chairwoman Gossage, and members of the Committee, my name is Brittany Jones. I am an attorney and the Director of Policy and Engagement for Kansas Family Voice. Kansas Family Voice cares deeply about ensuring our laws protect the conscience rights of Kansas families who want to follow the biblical command to care for children in need through foster care and adoption. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you our reasons for supporting H.B. 2311.

A staggering number of children are in the foster care system or are waiting to be adopted. According to a Department for Children and Families (DCF) a report from last year, there were almost 6,000 children in foster care at any given time in the state.¹ Many of those who want to adopt, or foster do so because their faith compels them. It does not make sense for our state to capitalize on the Judeo-Christian belief to care for the widow and orphan and then ask those same families to leave their beliefs about sexuality and marriage at the door when being considered for placement.

This bill does a few simple things:

- 1) Instructs the Secretary for Children and Families not to adopt a policy that requires foster or adoptive families to affirm a government policy regarding sexuality or marriage that violates a sincerely held belief or prohibits that families selection or licensure to foster or adopt. It simply ensures that there is not a pre-emptive bar for families whose sincerely held religious beliefs conflict with the Department's.
- 2) It adds some clarity that the secretary is still allowed to consider the beliefs of the child or the child's family when placing the child and the child's best interest.
- 3) It allows the potential adoptive or foster care family to sue for being denied a placement or licensure solely for the family's belief.

Every child in need of a family and every courageous birth mom who pursues adoption should be at the center of Kansas' foster care and adoption policy. Shouldn't we pursue *more* opportunities for children without families and birth moms—not less? The government's job isn't to choose which beliefs are worthy. The government's job is to protect religious freedom for all equally. When the government excludes an entire faith community from adoption and foster care it only takes away opportunities from children. We need more foster and adoptive families to take in children—not fewer.

Unfortunately, we have already seen other states take action against families for simply living out their faith. Colorado has passed a law that would exclude any family

¹FY 2024 Removals, Exits and Out of Home Summary,
https://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Documents/FY2024DataReports/FCAD_Summary/FACTSRemovalsExitsOOHSFY24.pdf.

that did not agree with the state's belief about sexuality.² In Massachusetts, Oregon, and Washington, families have already been denied licensure and placements because of their beliefs.

A Seventh-day Adventists Washington couple was denied the right to adopt their granddaughter because of religious conflict with Washington's policy.³ The Court in this case found that the policy burdened "potential caregivers with sincere religious beliefs yet almost no others." Similarly, the DeGross family, who had fostered for nearly a decade, accepting children from all backgrounds, were denied renewal of their foster care license because they refused to affirm Washington's statement of belief about sexuality.⁴

In Oregon, Julia Bates sued the state because its regulations for foster care and adoption have excluded her because of her deeply held religious beliefs on human sexuality.⁵ Mrs. Bates decided to foster because she felt that it was God's calling for her family. Mrs. Bates family told state officials that they would happily care for and accept any child, but they could not affirm beliefs and actions that go against their Christian beliefs. As a result, the state denied the application to adopt foster siblings. This violates her First Amendment to be free from compelled speech and her right to freely exercise her faith. Oregon is categorically excluding people of faith from participation and creating a religious litmus test for families.

Similarly in Massachusetts, a Roman Catholic couple, Mike and Kitty Burke, sued the state in August after their application to foster was denied due to their beliefs about gender and sexuality.⁶

And in Vermont at least two families are suing the state for violating their First Amendment rights when it comes to fostering and adopting. ⁷ Brian and Katy Wuoti and Michael and Rebecca Gantt were both licensed as foster parents for years and had cared for multiple children in need. Both families tried to renew their licenses after the state instituted a new requirement that foster families agreed to fully embrace and affirm a child's sexual orientation and gender identity, even if it was contrary to the families' belief. They were informed that they would be required to use pronouns inconsistent with their children's sex, take children to events like pride parades, and agree to affirm ideas and beliefs about gender. As devoted Christians, both families are willing to love and care for any child, but they cannot be complicit in lying to children about gender or taking them to events that violate their religious beliefs. These families were told they were ineligible for placements and eventually their licenses were revoked.

And these laws do not just effect Christians. There are many faiths that believe that sexuality is given by a higher being and it cannot be changed. It is important that

² CO HB 24-1017.

³ *Blais v. Hunter*, 493 F. Supp. 3d 984 (E.D. Wash. 2020).

⁴ *DeGross v. Hunter*, Case No. 3:24-cv-05225 (W.D. Wash. 2024).

⁵ *Bates v. Pakseresht*, Case No. 2:23-cv-00474-AN (D. Or. 2023).

⁶ *Burke v. Walsh*, Case No. 1:23-cv-11798 (D. Mass 2023).

⁷ *Wuoti v. Winters*, Case No. Case No. 2:24-cv-614 (D. Ver. 2024).

our system focus on finding placements for the children in their care, not worry about policing family's beliefs.

Unfortunately, this sort of religious animus is not just limited to other states. DCF has taken several actions during Gov. Kelly's administration that could create concern for families interested in adopting or fostering. In 2019, a draft policy was released from the Governor's Administration that would have violated the faith of many Kansas families.⁸ After receiving a lot of push back the Administration stated it was merely a draft rule and had not been finalized. However, this draft rule may have directly played a role in at least one family's denial. We are aware of at least one family that was denied, and all the evidence points to their denial being based on their beliefs about sexuality and marriage. There may be other families that this has happened to in the last six years. We need to make sure this never happens to a Kansas family again.

Recently, DCF issued a foster care regulation that requires training that could include training on human sexuality and gender identity. It states,

Each licensee shall obtain eight clock-hours of training each licensing year. At least two of the required eight clock-hours shall include instruction between an instructor and participant. The training topics shall provide the opportunity to develop competency in two or more of the following areas:....(7) human sexuality, including gender identification.⁹

It does not appear that families are mandated to take this course, but it is possible that a family could feel coerced to take the course or self-select out of providing foster care because policies like this express that the Kansas Government does not welcome them. H.B. 2311 is important to ensure that families know that no matter what the Administration believes, the family's religious beliefs still have to be respected.

It is important to point out that this policy does not mandate that a child has to be placed with a family or even that the best interest of the child cannot be considered. It simply ensures that families cannot be automatically excluded from placements or licensure because of their beliefs.

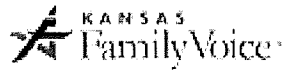
People of faith have long played a critical role in caring for children in need. Christian and other faith groups started some of this country's first orphanages. Even today, according to one survey, practicing U.S. Christians are more than twice as likely to adopt than the general population.¹⁰ At least two other states are considering a similar law.¹¹ We should join them and Tennessee, Idaho, and Arizona who are already protecting adoptive and foster families.

⁸ The Associated Press, *New Kansas governor brings sharp shift on LGBTQ foster kids*, NBC News, Aug. 6, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/new-kansas-governor-brings-sharp-shift-lgbtq-foster-kids-n1039686>.

⁹ K.A.R. 30-47-806

¹⁰ Jedd Medefind & Natalie Bergstrasser, *New BPC/Harris Polling Data on Religion and Child Welfare*, Bipartisan Policy Center, Feb. 2024, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/new-bpc-harris-polling-data-on-religion-and-child-welfare/>

¹¹ Iowa and West Virginia.



Many Kansans whether they ascribe to a particular faith, share the Judeo-Christian belief that they are called to care for widows and orphans. But they also believe that the two sexes are given by God and cannot be changed. Excluding these families from caring for children in need only hurts the children in need who we know still are being sheltered in offices. I ask that you pass H.B. 2311 favorably for passage.

Thank you!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brittany".

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KANSAS STATEHOUSE OFFICE
Kansas Catholic Conference
204 SW 8th Ave.
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Written PROPONENT testimony in favor of HB 2311. AN ACT concerning children and minors; relating to the secretary for children and families; prohibiting the secretary from adopting and enforcing policies for placement, custody or appointment of a custodian that may conflict with sincerely held religious or moral beliefs regarding sexual orientation or gender identity; creating a right of action for violations.

TO: Madam Chair Senator Gossage and members of Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

FROM: Lucrecia Nold, Public Policy Specialist, Kansas Catholic Conference

DATE: March 12, 2025

Madam Chair Gossage and committee members,

My name is Lucrecia Nold and I am the policy specialist for the Kansas Catholic Conference, representing the Catholic Bishops of Kansas. Thank you for the opportunity to voice our support for HB 2311.

“Be fruitful and multiply.” These words, spoken in the first chapter of Genesis, are familiar to many. They are not only familiar but taken to heart, for many couples who desire deeply to grow their family through the gift of children. However, all too often and for reasons unknown, couples struggle with infertility. An unfortunate reality that many Kansans themselves face. Often causing much heartache and pain, as couples deeply desire to start or grow their family.

The beauty of adoption is a wonderful opportunity for couples struggling with infertility. Adoption opens doors to couples who strongly want to share their love and home with a child. However, the process of adoption is often an emotional rollercoaster for these couples. An additional fear of possibly being discriminated against because of their Catholic or Christian faith, is unnecessary and something we can prevent from happening. Helping to make the adoption process as peaceful and smooth as possible.

Catholics and many other Christian couples are often those who choose to grow their families through adoption. HB 2311 will ensure these couples maintain the freedom to adopt and provide children with a stabilized and loving forever home.

In the words of Pope Francis, “One of the highest forms of parenthood is to take on the responsibility of becoming adoptive parents, prepared to welcome an orphaned or abandoned child as part of one’s own family.”

Let us allow couples this highest form of parenthood. By helping them feel supported, confident and peaceful in their decision of growing their family through adoption.

We strongly encourage you to support HB 2311. Please reach out if there are any questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LNold'.

Lucrecia Nold
Public Policy Specialist
Kansas Catholic Conference
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