

TESTIMONY OF INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS AND LEADERS

IN OPPOSITION TO SENATE BILL 401

MARCH 16, 2018

Chairman Estes and members of the Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs,

There is no room for discrimination in foster care and adoption in Kansas. Senate Bill 401 will allow agencies to discriminate against LGBT families and others at a time when Kansas's foster care system is stretched beyond capacity and faces real challenges. **For these reasons, we oppose SB 401.**

Allowing discrimination against LGBT families and others would only exacerbate the capacity issues facing our system and offers no solutions to our system's challenges. This legislation does nothing to try improve our system so that more kids can stay safely at home with their families. It does nothing to make sure kids can have more stability when they have to come into foster care. And it does nothing to make sure kids spend less time in foster care and can return home to their families or get adopted more quickly. This is not legislation designed to meet the challenges we face. It is designed and coordinated by out-of-state entities and moves us away from a more inclusive vision for Kansas.

Kansas has had an unfortunate history with allegations of discrimination in our foster care system. In December, new Department for Children and Families Secretary Gina Meier-Hummel stated that she would have "zero tolerance" for discrimination by DCF employees in foster care and adoption. That standard should extend to all of the organizations that provide foster care and adoption services in Kansas. SB 401 exempts child placing agencies that currently have contracts with DCF; we should not allow a parallel system of foster care and adoption that permits discrimination, but should expect non-discrimination as a standard across our system.

We urge you to reject this discriminatory legislation and focus on changes to:

- improve our foster care system so that more kids can stay safely at home with their families.
- make sure kids can have more stability when they have to come into foster care.
- help kids spend less time in foster care and return home to their families or get adopted more quickly.

We need solutions to the real problems our system faces.

Respectfully submitted,

FosterAdopt Connect

Kansas African American Foster/Adoption Coalition

Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice

Kansas Association of Community Action Programs

Carl Burris, young leader and former foster care youth

Don Jordan, retired social services administrator

Zachary Brown, young leader and former foster care youth