

THE DONALDSON ADOPTION INSTITUTE

The Honorable Greg Smith
Committee Vice Chair
Senate Judiciary Committee
February 19, 2014

RE: Adoption Institute Letter re: HB 2453

Dear Senator Smith,

The Donaldson Adoption Institute is an independent/nonpartisan, nonprofit research, policy and education organization. We conduct research and analysis in order to improve adoption-related laws, policies and practices. This written testimony regarding HB 2453 is intended to explain the state of professional knowledge on one of those issues: the critical need for the largest possible pool of qualified parents to adopt girls and boys languishing in the child welfare system, and the harm to children that results from excluding any single qualified class of parents (such as gay men and lesbian couples) from that pool. The Institute has conducted the most extensive studies to date on this issue – [Expanding Resources for Children I, II, and III](#).

We believe that passing HB 2453 – which would permit child-placement agencies in Kansas to exclude some qualified prospective adoptive or foster parents because of religious tenets – would hurt some children who need families. Nationally, there are over 102,000 "waiting" children, who on average have been in care for three years, and in Kansas there are approximately 1,800 foster youth waiting for adoptive families (also for an average of three years). Multiple recent studies find these children, most of whom are older and have special developmental challenges, are at considerable risk of serious negative outcomes if they are not adopted. These risks include poverty, homelessness, incarceration, victimization, early parenthood, and significant physical and mental health problems. To succeed, they need adoptive parents who can provide them with nurture and support, not just during childhood but throughout young adulthood.

Even though adoptions from foster care have grown over the past decade, the percentage of youth exiting care remain too high- over 23,000 (444 in Kansas) "graduate" each year from foster care without such families. Of children waiting to be adopted in Kansas, 44 percent are 9 years or older; for these youth, the likelihood of being adopted drops significantly. An analysis of adoption from care in Kansas found that older children are not as likely to be adopted as younger children: the average age of Kansas's adopted children was 6.7, while waiting children were, on average, 8.0.

Lesbian and gay parents are important family resources for waiting children throughout our country. Several studies have documented that lesbian and gay adults are willing to adopt the very children most in need of homes – those who are older and have special needs – and do so at a higher rate than heterosexual adults. Among same-sex couples raising children, 19% have adopted (which is a much higher percentage than is true of the general population); according to

the U.S. census, 2.5 percent of all children are adopted. Gay and lesbian adults provide a significant number of families for children who need foster or adoptive homes – over 14,000 children are estimated to live in lesbian- or gay-led foster families today, while at least 65,000 adopted children are being raised by such parents.

Major professional groups, including the American Medical Association and the American Psychological Association, as well as child welfare organizations overwhelmingly support adoptions by qualified gay and lesbian parents. The support of these professional organizations is not surprising. A quarter century of research on children has found that those raised by gay and lesbian parents fare well – on par with those reared by heterosexual parents.

Every minute we retain the status quo by allowing agencies who serve children in the child welfare system to discriminate against these families undermines the prospects of some boys and girls for finding permanent, loving families. Including gays and lesbians as adoptive parents for these children also would save the state substantial funds annually, resulting from moving children from foster care to adoption. Applicants should be judged on their qualifications, not their sexual orientation.

Too often, public policy relating to adoption has been based on aberrational anecdotes, emotional appeals, and corrosive myths. Instead, please examine the research. I believe that, after you do, you will come to the same conclusion: To exclude qualified and eager prospective foster and adoptive parents is to place the wishes/beliefs of some individuals over the desperate need for homes for children. The Donaldson Adoption Institute strongly urges you to vote against this legislation. Please feel free to contact me at [\(617\) 332-8944](tel:6173328944) or apertman@adoptioninstitute.org if you have questions or need more information. Thank you for your attention and for your important work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam Pertman', written in a cursive style.

Adam Pertman
President