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Children's Alliance of Kansas
In opposition to HB 2687
Before the Committee on Federal and State Affairs

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to HB 2687. Children's Alliance represents 17 private, nonprofit member agencies that coordinate child welfare activities and programming across Kansas to strengthen families. While HB 2687 would not directly affect the child placing agencies that are part of the Children's Alliance, it negatively affects our top priority -- the Kansas children we serve. With a record number of children in state custody, we need all qualified families who are willing to open their hearts and homes to children in need.

Rooted in religion and guided by research to serve the best interest of the child.

Historically, religious communities founded and managed most orphanages in the United States. Many of the member organizations of the Children's Alliance are deeply rooted in religious traditions and some remain faith-based organizations. Thousands of our child welfare staff as well as foster and adoptive parents are active in religious communities across Kansas. It may have been their faith that motivated them to work in child welfare in the first place. A high level of personal commitment to the work oftentimes comes from a deep sense of calling or purpose it provides.

But no matter what personal religious beliefs we hold, our decisions must be guided by the best interest of the child. HB 2687 puts the needs of some child welfare providers above those of the children we are tasked to serve. Our collective experience shows -- and research backs it up -- that children are most likely to flourish in families that provide love, security and support whatever their family structure. Prejudice and discrimination are bad for children, whatever their family structure. Whether children have one parent or two, whether their parents are male or female, whether their parents are of the same sex or the opposite sex, matter less for children than does the quality of family relationships and the support of their community.

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Narrowing the pool of prospective families hurts kids.

Allowing any agency to turn away qualified families based on religious objections to those families means children are losing opportunities to find families that may be best suited to meet their needs, or possibly the only family willing and able to care for them.

For example, if an agency turns away a prospective adoptive parent who is a doctor or nurse with the skill to care for a child with severe medical needs based on a religious objection, the child may have to remain in an institution rather than have the chance to be part of a loving family. Or if a family willing to care for a large sibling group is turned away, there may not be other families able to do so and those brothers and sisters may end up being separated.

We can't count on prospective families who have been turned away because of their sexual orientation, faith or other religious-based criteria will continue knocking on doors of other agencies, each time facing the risk of rejection. We can't afford to lose any qualified families.

We are "no matter what" agencies here for the long haul.

The child welfare system was created and designed to protect children, to allow them to reach their full potential and to help them become thriving members of society. HB 2687 will make that more difficult for many kids. As contractors, sub-contractors and partners of the State of Kansas, members of the Children's Alliance work to match children with "no matter what families." These are families that will love kids no matter what daunting challenges they face together. We also take pride in being no matter what agencies. While some agencies have threatened to close if they don't agree with the rules, Children's Alliance members are committed to serving children *no matter what*. We will not prioritize the religious beliefs of child welfare agencies over the protection of children *no matter what*. We will explore all potential avenues to ensure children join safe and loving families *no matter what*.