

Janice Kopper

Opponent statement on HB 2687

House Committee on Federal and State Affairs

March 21, 2018

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

My name is Janice Kopper. My wife is Janet Boyce. We are from Wichita. We have adopted seven children with special needs. We are not a same-sex couple with special needs kids. We are a FAMILY.

One parent works and one stays home to run the household and be a caregiver. Brothers and sisters go between hugging and wanting to bury each other in the backyard. We worry about bills and taxes. Sometimes it seems impossible to get the laundry done, the house clean, and everyone to their appointments. Sounds like every other family in the world. Doesn't it?

Our family was not created in the traditional manor. Instead it was put together by God who made things happen at the right time and in the right order. When we least expected it, we would get a phone call asking us to take a child that social workers couldn't find anyone else to take. Each time we seriously considered the child's needs and our abilities. We never knew how long we would have the child. It could be a few days or years. With the exception of our youngest child, we didn't know adoption would be an option. We were occasionally asked to take children with disabilities that we weren't sure we were equipped to handle. In the end we rose to the challenge each time. We have always felt that each child that was placed with us prepared us in some way for the next.

One time we were asked to take a child on a temporary basis because our apartment really wasn't big enough. Somehow I think the social workers knew we would fall in love with him and find a way to move to a bigger place to keep him. They were right, in fact, he was the first child we adopted.

Any time we didn't know where the money was going to come from or where we were going to live, or how we were going to purchase a bigger vehicle, God provided. We are constantly blessed by Him.

During our fourteen years as foster parents we had approximately 15 children with special needs and one without. Their disabilities ranged from mild developmental delays to cerebral palsy with severe multiple physical, mental, and medical issues. As the kids in our care parental rights were terminated, we fought to adopt them.

Our permanent family consists of Carlos, a Hispanic child with the developmental age. He weighed 17 ½ pounds when I picked him up from the hospital. Janet insisted that I take him back because he couldn't possibly be the three year old we agreed to take. He eventually turned into a plump little boy who at the age of nine was learning to walk with a walker and wheel his wheelchair.

We have two siblings, Logan and Ethel, who were ages five and two when they came to live with us. Logan is now 31 and lives in a group home setting, working four days a week in supportive employment and one day a week in the mess hall at McConnell Air Force Base. Ethel is 28. She has a rare

chromosome disorder and Muscular Dystrophy. She lives at home and works in a supportive employment setting. She is our boy crazy, social butterfly.

Our 30 year old daughter, Sophia, comes from Gypsy parents who abandoned her. When she came to us at age eight she was only diagnosed with cerebral palsy. We soon discovered she has scoliosis, seizures, and sleep apnea. She has since developed respiratory failure and began aspirating. She now is on a ventilator full time and is tube fed.

Tony came into our lives when he was about seven weeks old. He was premature because his birth mother had cancer. She passed away when he was a month old. He was later diagnosed with autism. Tony is now 20 years old. He attends Chisholm Life Skills Center where he learns vocational skills

Larry and Jamie are biological brothers who were born two years apart. They are black and were both born at approximately 26 weeks gestation to parents who were not equipped to handle their special needs. Larry has mild developmental delays. He is 19 and recently graduated from high school and is looking for employment. Jamie has more severe delays and behavior issues. He is 17 and currently attends a special day school.

Our goal is to raise children by helping nurture the gifts they already have inside them so that they can change the world. Every one of our amazing kids continue to do this on a daily basis. Talk to them for 30 seconds. I promise they'll change you in a very positive way.

These wonderful kids (actually, adults) have overcome various disabilities, abuse of all kinds, bullying, and being socially ostracized. Part of the reason they have been able to overcome these challenges is that we, as parents, have experienced similar things and have been able to guide them.

We became foster parents because we wanted to care for one very special teenager that we had cared for in a residential facility. His social worker didn't think there was a foster home that would take him so she had no problem placing him with lesbians. That was the beginning of our journey 30 years ago.

Last summer our family had the opportunity to vacation with other gay and lesbian families. It made us realize that there are many ways that we as lesbians could have created our family. We chose to take kids that tend to have difficulties finding homes. The chances of our two siblings groups of two having been able to stay together are very low. This has made for a uniquely wonderful family that we wouldn't trade for anything. Our family exists out of a love for God, each other, and genuine caring and respect for others.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am available to stand for questions.