



**fosteradopt  
connect**

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*Lori Ross is President and CEO of FosterAdopt Connect, a bi-state nonprofit agency serving foster, kinship and adoptive families and the children they care for. (www.fosteradopt.org). Lori and her husband are also foster parents, originally licensed to foster by SRS in Wyandotte County, KS in August of 1985. She has fostered more than 400 children since that time in Wyandotte and Johnson Counties in Kansas, and in Jackson County in Missouri, working with both public and private agencies.*

John. E. Barker, Chairman  
Kansas House Committee on Federal and State Affairs  
Room 285-N State Capitol  
Topeka, KS

#### HB 2687 - OPPOSED

FosterAdopt Connect is a bi-state social service agency serving foster and adoptive families. We were created by foster parents for foster parents.

**With more than 400 Kansas foster, kinship and adoptive families as members of our organization, we are submitting testimony today in opposition to HB 2687 because we strongly believe that HB 2687 is bad for Kansas kids.**

Child welfare services should be guided by the overarching principle that guides all family law: all determinations should be in the “best interest of the child”. It isn’t in the best interest of a child to deny them a qualified, loving family simply because that family doesn’t share some or all of the tenets of the placing agency’s faith.

Further, discrimination on the taxpayer’s dime is unacceptable. Caring for children who are wards of the state is the state’s exclusive responsibility, and state contractors should not be given a license to discriminate against members of the public they’ve been paid with taxpayer dollars to serve.

A deeper dive:

- The best interests of the child are not served by enshrining taxpayer-funded discrimination into law; the best interests of the child are served by making a case by case determination about whether placement of a child with a prospective family is in that child’s best interest.
- Child welfare agencies such as the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Counseling Association, the Child Welfare League of America, the National Association of School Psychologists, and the National Education Association have condemned similar bills.

#### *Our Mission*

*“To provide foster and adoptive children a stable, loving and nurturing family environment by support and advocacy for abused and neglected children and the families caring for them.”*

- Religious organizations have an important, constitutionally protected fundamental right to believe what they wish. However, when they elect to take on a role of a state contractor providing taxpayer-funded services to the public, they are not permitted to pick and choose which members of the public they serve.
- Discriminating against qualified prospective parents does a disservice both to the children who need homes and to the entire state.
- One of the worst consequences of this legislation is that it would allow agencies to refuse to place foster children with members of their extended families – a practice often considered to be in the best interest of the child – based solely on the agency’s religious beliefs. A loving, LGBTQ grandparent, for example, or a stable, welcoming LGBTQ relative could be deemed unsuitable under the proposed law.
- Data shows that the biggest obstacle to placing children with families in a timely fashion is a lack of qualified prospective parents, not a lack of agencies willing to provide these services. In states where agencies have followed through on threats to withdraw from providing services as a result of being forced to serve same-sex couples, other agencies have been able to continue the provision of services so that children’s wait times and placement rates do not substantially change.

This Kansas legislature has made a significant public commitment to doing what is necessary to improve the child welfare system, and to address the need for more foster homes, especially those willing to take in foster children who are older or who have special needs. This is a step in the opposite direction and could undue much of the good work the legislature is already doing.

At a time when the current administration and leadership at the Department for Children and Families has taken the wise step to move forward on this subject, it is disappointing to see attempts to move backwards. For the sake of the children in Kansas who desperately need your help and the “forever families” who love them, please do not move this legislation forward.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Ross  
 President and CEO  
 FosterAdopt Connect

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