



The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senate
478 Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

June 15, 2015

Dear Senator Gillibrand:

On behalf of the First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions, I would like to express our support for the *Every Child Deserves a Family Act* (S.1382). This legislation prohibits entities that receive federal funds from discriminating against any prospective or adoptive parent based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status. This bill, if passed, will create more opportunities for youth in foster care and those waiting to be adopted to find loving homes.

Currently, in the United States, there are over 400,000 children in the foster care system of which 107,000 children are awaiting adoption. Every year, over 23,000 youth age out of foster care and face significant challenges navigating the transition into adulthood. Discriminating against people who are willing to welcome these children into their homes deprives tens of thousands of children and youth from the opportunity to achieve stability and thrive. Furthermore, it perpetuates the stigma that LGBTQ parents are less fit caretakers for their children. Studies show that children with same-sex parents have the same advantages and the same outcomes for health, social and psychological adjustment, and development as children with heterosexual parents.

Allowing discrimination of foster and adoptive parents based on their sexual orientation, gender identity or marital status also negatively impacts the thousands of children who are already being raised in these families. These children are often harassed or told that they do not belong to “normal” families – and such messages are amplified when the government continues its discriminatory practices. Such stigmatization can contribute to poor academic performance in school, and psychological issues including depression and anxiety. It is in the best interest of children that society, as a whole, recognizes that there is no formula for what a family should look like and that federal laws and policies reflect this basic principle.

This bill is an important step forward in ensuring that kids have every opportunity to be placed in a safe home with caregivers who have the ability to provide stability and a positive impact on their lives. We are encouraged that the legislation clearly prohibits any entity receiving federal funds from discriminatory practices, including different or additional screening processes, and creates a federal right of action for individuals who are aggrieved on the basis of their gender identity, sexual orientation or marital status. In addition, this legislation directs the Department of Health and Human Services to provide technical assistance to entities on laws and policies that may be inconsistent with this bill, helps expand recruitment efforts to ensure consideration of all qualified foster and adoptive parents, and necessary trainings to both prospective parents and judges and attorneys. We applaud this holistic approach to reducing discrimination in practice, in addition to making it clear in law that such policies will not be tolerated.

We thank you for your leadership in introducing this legislation and believe that it has the potential to help thousands of children in the foster care system find loving homes. This approach not only makes sense but also is cost-effective in that fewer kids will be in the care of the state. We look forward to working with you in the future to continue to promote such efforts aimed at helping our nation's most vulnerable youth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Lesley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

Bruce Lesley
President