

July 20, 2018

Senator Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader

Representative Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House

Senator Charles Schumer
Senate Democratic Leader

Representative Nancy Pelosi
House Democratic Leader

Dear Senator McConnell and Senator Schumer:
Dear Representative Ryan and Representative Pelosi:

The undersigned organizations call on the Congress to immediately reject a recent amendment that was included in the House Appropriations for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services and Education. Sponsored by Congressman Robert Aderholt, the amendment is described as an attempt to promote religious freedom. It is based on legislation that has been offered in both houses of Congress. At its core, the amendment would undermine the best interest of children and punish states that are seeking to prevent discrimination against children and families.

Child welfare policy must always be driven by what is in the best interest of children, which means encouraging policies that reflect our society's diversity and supporting children, youth, and families who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT), as well as prospective parents who are single, unmarried couples, and children or families of varied religious or non-religious belief systems. The Aderholt amendment proponents argue that it favors religious freedom but instead it undercuts a child's best interest, resulting in tragedy both for religious providers who are essential to the human service community and, more importantly, for the children and families falling victim to this political war.

Across the country, there is a shortage of homes available to children in need of a permanent, loving family. By rewarding states that discriminate—and punishing those that seek to prevent discrimination—we will reduce the potential number of foster and adoptive families even more, as LGBT parents or parents of different faiths will be turned away from agencies. Children who are LGBT or of a different faith can be refused by these agencies, and single parents seeking to care for children in need could be denied family preservation services or opportunities to be foster or adoptive parents. But the impact goes beyond these children and families. In states that seek to prevent discrimination, the amendment would cut a significant portion of the state's child welfare funds, giving agencies fewer resources to reunify families, provide support services and recruit foster and adoptive families.

Imagine children placed in group homes instead of finding comfort in the arms of their relatives, who happen to be LGBT or unmarried. Imagine youth in foster homes across the country who are beginning to find the love and care needed to heal from past trauma, being removed from their new homes and re-traumatized because they identify as LGBT. Imagine

children who spend years in foster care, eventually aging out of the system, because prospective foster and adoptive parents are of a different faith than an agency's leaders.

These horror stories will become a reality if this amendment remains in place. Under the Aderholt Amendment, all 600,000 children in foster care, 118,000 children waiting to be adopted, 57,000 children adopted from foster care, and 670,000 children substantiated as victims of child maltreatment each year will be negatively affected. In trying to harm an imagined enemy, this political war has hit some of the most vulnerable residents of our society—children in need of permanent, loving families.

The federal government has a responsibility to ensure that children in need have a good outcome, either by overcoming challenges with their birth family and reuniting with them after time spent in foster care or finding a forever home with adoptive parents or relatives. In each and every case, the families that help these children grow and heal will be made up of unique, diverse individuals of different faiths, marital statuses, and orientations—reflecting the varied fabric of our society.

We call on the Congress to value all of our children, youth, and families by rejecting this legislation and amendment.

Signed,

A Baby Step Adoption
A Family For Every Child
Access Education
Adopt America Network
Adoption Advocacy Center
Adoption Center of Illinois at Family Resource Center
Adoption Exchange Association
Adoption Network
Adoption Rhode Island
Adoptions Together
Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition of New York
Adoptive Parents' Committee
Advokids
Agape Adoptions
Amara
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Psychological Association
Ampersand Families
Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families Attorney
California Alliance of Child and Family Services
CASA, Maryland
Center for Adoption Support and Education
Center for Family Representation

Child and Family Services of Erie County
Child Welfare League of America
Children Awaiting Parents
Children NEED Parents, Inc. (Campaign)
Children's Action Alliance
Children's Advocacy Institute
Children's Home Society of America
Children's Mental Health Network
Children's Service Society of Utah
Citizens' Committee for Children
Colorado Coalition of Adoptive Families (COCAF)
Community Youth Services
Consortium For Children
Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies
Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption
Deborah Gray Law
Divine Sisters
Donald Corbett Adoption Agency
Etsky Consulting
Every Child Matters
Family & Youth Initiative
Family Builders Network
Family Builders by Adoption
Family Focus Adoption Services
Family Focused Treatment Association
First Star Institute
Florida's Children First
Foster Kinship
Foster Parents Association of Washington State
FosterAdopt
Fostering Change for Children
Full Circle Adoptions
Generations United
GJV 4 Kids
Harmony Family Center
Healthy Teen Network
Jewish Family and Children's Service of Greater Boston
Juvenile Law Center, PA
Kansas Appleseed
Kentucky Youth Law Project, Inc.
Lund
Madison Adoption Associates
Many Lights Foundation
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Michelle Warren Law LLC

MomsRising
National Alliance of Children's Trust & Prevention Funds
National Assoc. of Counsel for Children
National Association of Social Workers
National Center on Adoption and Permanency
National Child Abuse Coalition
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Indian Child Welfare Association
National Indian Education Association
National Network for Youth
Nebraska Appleseed
Next Place Therapy Services
North American Council on Adoptable Children
Northwest Resource Associates
Palouse Advocacy League
Partners for Our Children
Pegasus Legal Services
Pinebelt Association for Families
Project Jigsaw
Ray Helper Society
REACH
RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy
Seneca Family of Agencies
Spaulding for Children
The Adoption Exchange
The Cradle
The Home for Little Wanderers
Three Rivers Adoption Council
Treehouse, Washington
Unruh Law
Voice For Adoption
W Blu Designs
Wesley Family Services
Wyoming Kinship Advocacy: A Program of Youth Alternatives
You Gotta Believe
Youth Dynamics
Youth Law Center
Zero To Three