

**Written Statement of
Ellen Kahn
Family Project Director
Human Rights Campaign
to the
Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources
United States House of Representatives
Hearing on Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care
February 27, 2013**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Ellen Kahn, and I am the Family Project Director for the Human Rights Campaign, America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBT citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. On behalf of our over one million members and supporters nationwide, I am honored to submit this statement into the record for this important hearing on increasing adoptions from foster care.

Although we are not able to accurately count the number of LGBT youth in foster care we do know that this population is overrepresented in child welfare, including among the homeless and runaway population. Based on many years of engagement with public child welfare agencies and via direct contact with LGBT youth formerly in care, we know anecdotally that members of this population typically spend longer periods of time in foster care, often have to lie or hide who they are, and endure significant disruptions due to rejection or mistreatment by foster parents. They often do not feel safe in their foster or congregate care situation and report verbal and physical harassment based on their LGBT identity; many homeless and runaway LGBT youth say that they feel safer on the streets than they do in foster care.

While agencies struggle to recruit and retain qualified resource families for *all* children and youth in care, there are fewer known resources for LGBT youth; prospective foster and adoptive parents are not assessed in the pre-licensing process regarding their attitudes and beliefs about LGBT youth nor on their ability to provide a safe, supportive environment for LGBT youth. There is no "screening out" of those families who would reject or otherwise do harm to an LGBT child or teen placed in their home. Not only do we need to better assess and prepare all prospective foster/adoptive parents to support and affirm LGBT youth, but we also need to ensure that all qualified LGBT individuals and couples who wish to foster or adopt are able to do so without facing discrimination or bias. While it is not the case that LGBT foster or adoptive parents are the only resource, or the best resource for LGBT youth, the pool of resource families must include *all* families including those who may be better equipped and more willing

to have an LGBT youth placed in their home; by leaving out qualified LGBT resource families we are missing opportunities to reduce long term care for LGBT youth and all other youth who face the daunting prospect of aging out before achieving a permanent connection.

Since the Human Rights Campaign Foundation launched our All Children—All Families initiative in 2007, over 60 agencies charged with achieving permanency for children and youth in foster care have partnered with us to put in place LGBT-inclusive policies and practices with the goal of expanding their pool of qualified resource families and improving their practice with LGBT youth and families. Even in the most conservative states and where laws are still ambiguous at best, agency leaders—the experts in the field—are reaching out to HRC to help fill in gaps where federal and state laws fall short, and where bias and discrimination continue to keep out some of the most highly motivated families simply because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. We provide technical assistance and state of the art LGBT cultural competency training to these agencies as they work toward achieving a seal of recognition for their success in providing the best possible services to LGBT youth and families. (See attached list of agencies).

We know that LGBT foster and adoptive parents are a valuable resource for children and youth in care; we know that more agencies—both public and private—are doing their part to become more welcoming and supportive of LGBT resource families. We know that many agencies are becoming proactive in better serving LGBT youth in care and we appreciate the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Children and Families' leadership on promoting well-being for LGBT youth. And we know that prospective LGBT foster/adoptive parents continue to face barriers in their pursuit of becoming licensed resource families and are often overlooked when placement decisions are being made. We know that LGBT youth are often afraid to be out, open and honest due to the fear of being treated poorly by their peers, agency staff, or missing out on the chance for a forever family. We are eager to partner on removing these barriers and look forward to collaborating to achieve the goal of permanency for all children and youth in foster care.

All Children – All Families Participating Agencies

The agencies listed below are participating in the All Children – All Families initiative and are committed to implementing policies and practices that welcome, affirm and support LGBT foster and adoptive parents. This list tracks the agencies’ progress toward meeting all the benchmarks of LGBT cultural competency as outlined in the All Children – All Families Promising Practices Guide. For more information, visit www.hrc.org/acaf.

	Agency Name	City	State	Leaders
1	Acadia Adoption Center	Kennebunk	ME	
2	Adopt A Special Kid (AASK)	Oakland	CA	✓
3	Adoption & Counseling Services for Families Inc.	Overland Park	KS	
4	Adoption Connection	San Francisco	CA	
5	Adoption Options	Aurora	CO	✓
6	Adoption Resource Associates	Cambridge	MA	
7	Adoption Resources & Counseling Inc.	Kennesaw	GA	✓
8	Adoption Resources of Wisconsin	Milwaukee	WI	✓
9	Adoptions From The Heart	Wynnewood	PA	✓
10	Adoptions Together	Silver Spring	MD	✓
11	AdoptLink	Los Gatos	CA	
12	Alameda County Social Services Agency	Oakland	CA	✓
13	Amara	Seattle	WA	
14	Anchor House	Trenton	NJ	
15	Apple Grove Foster Care Agency	Las Vegas	NV	
16	Arizona’s Children Association	Phoenix	AZ	
17	Aviva Family and Children's Services	Los Angeles	CA	
18	Bellefaire Jewish Children’s Bureau	Shaker Heights	OH	
19	Camelot Care Centers Inc.	Itasca	IL	
20	Casey Family Programs	Seattle	WA	
21	The Center for Adoption Support and Education Inc.	Burtonsville	MD	

	Agency Name	City	State	Leaders
22	Chatham County Department of Social Services	Pittboro	NC	
23	Child and Family Services Agency	Washington	DC	
24	Childnet Inc.	Plantation	FL	
25	Children's Home + Aid	Chicago	IL	
26	Choice Network	Columbus	OH	✓
27	Clark County Department of Family Services	Las Vegas	NV	
28	Connecting Hearts Adoption Services (Florida)	Windermere	FL	✓
29	Devereux Arizona	Maricopa, Pima and Cochise Counties	AZ	✓
30	Diakon Adoption and Foster Care	Mechanicsburg	PA	
31	EMQ FamiliesFirst	Campbell	CA	✓
32	Family Builders	Oakland, San Francisco	CA	✓
33	Family Focus Adoption Services	Little Neck	NY	✓
34	Family to Family Adoptions Inc.	Richmond	TX	
35	Five Acres	El Monte	CA	
36	Forever Families Through Adoption Inc.	Rye Brook	NY	✓
37	Fostering Futures	Ypsilanti	MI	✓
38	Friends in Adoption	Middletown Springs	VT	
39	Hands Across The Water	Ann Arbor	MI	✓
40	Hillsborough Kids	Tampa	FL	
41	Hillside Children's Center	Rochester	NY	
42	Holy Family Services	Los Angeles	CA	
43	Independent Adoption Center	Pleasant Hill	CA	✓
44	Institute of Professional Practice	Woodbridge	CT	✓
45	Klingberg Family Centers	New Britain	CT	
46	La Familia Inc.	Albuquerque	NM	

	Agency Name	City	State	Leaders
47	LifeLong Adoption Inc.	Newport Beach	CA	
48	Lighthouse Youth Services	Cincinnati	OH	
49	Little City Foundation	Chicago	IL	✓
50	Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services	Pasadena	CA	✓
51	Lund Family Center	Burlington	VT	✓
52	Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois	River Forest	IL	
53	Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange	Boston	MA	
54	McKinley Children's Center	San Dimas	CA	✓
55	Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association (MFCAA)	Independence	MO	✓
56	Nathanson Adoption Services	Charlotte	NC	
57	National Adoption Center	Philadelphia	PA	✓
58	New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services	Trenton	NJ	✓
59	New York Council on Adoptable Children	New York	NY	✓
60	Our Small World Foster Family Agency	Orange County	CA	
61	Pact, An Adoption Alliance	Oakland	CA	
62	Penny Lane Centers	North Hills	CA	✓
63	Project Patchwork Inc.	St. Petersburg	FL	✓
64	Southern California Foster Family and Adoption Agency	Los Angeles	CA	✓
65	TLC Child and Family Services	Sebastopol	CA	
66	The Village Family Services	North Hollywood	CA	✓
67	Your Adoptive Family	Vashon	WA	