

# Child Welfare

## Who's raising our children?

By Sancha N. Smith

YOUTH

According to the Heritage Foundation, roughly 400,000 children spend time in the foster care system in the United States, and one quarter of those are looking to be adopted by a loving family. The sad reality is that many of these children will never be adopted and will bounce from house to house.

One in five Americans has considered or is considering adopting children from foster care. Yet the foster care system itself often dissuades potential parents from continuing or even beginning the process of adoption. Policies need to be implemented that focus on finding permanent homes for the children in foster care and to increase the number of available families eligible for adoption.

There are more than 1,000 private, licensed foster care and adoption providers in the United States. Many of these providers are faith-based organizations whose religious and moral beliefs play a major role in serving our nation's needy children.

However, in a number of states, "sexual orientation" laws, coupled with the redefinition of marriage, are threatening faith-based private foster care and adoption providers who believe children deserve a married mother and father.

It is a disturbing trend that faith-based charities have been forced out of the adoption and foster care services because of their religious beliefs that children belong with both a mother and father. Already in Massachusetts, Illinois, California and D.C., providers have closed their doors rather than violate their convictions.

In 2011 in Illinois, a new state civil union law, coupled with an existing "sexual orientation" policy, effectively forced private agencies to license unmarried, cohabitating couples, including same-sex couples, as foster care parents in order to keep state contracts.

For years, the Evangelical Child and Family Agency (ECFA) had contracted with Illinois to provide foster care services. Because ECFA



decided that children deserved to have a married mother and father, the state would not renew its foster care contract. As a result, ECFA was forced to stop serving 2,000 of Illinois' most vulnerable children.

Private providers should not be forced to violate their beliefs. Public agencies and some private providers can choose to license unmarried and same-sex couples for adoption. Nothing is lost if some private providers choose not to place children with same-sex couples. The legal right of an unmarried or same-sex couple to adopt, where it exists, should not require every adoption provider to perform such adoptions.

On March 4, 2015, Rep. Mike Kelly (R-Pennsylvania) reintroduced the Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act, H.R. 1299. This legislation ensures that charitable organizations can continue to provide child welfare services by requiring any state accepting federal child welfare funding to respect the religious liberty of the providers.

Yahweh's purpose has always been

clear. Scripture is replete with instructions regarding both "father" and "mother." Because God's plan is perfect, we should seek to include and support those who steward a biblical worldview as it relates to life-giving parenting.

**Pray:** That foster children across the nation will find loving homes with a mother and father to raise them. *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. James 1:27*

**Act:** Please call your representative at 202-225-3121 and ask him/her to cosponsor the Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act, H.R. 1299.

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