



## Position Statement on Equality for LGBTQ Families and Youth

May 2017

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), Donaldson Adoption Institute (DAI), North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC), Voice for Adoption (VFA), National Center for Adoption and Permanency (NCAP), Foster Club, and RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association all affirm that LGBTQ parents are as well suited to raise children as their heterosexual counterparts and that LGBTQ youth and families deserve equal treatment under the law.

### Issue

CWLA, DAI, NACAC, VFA, NCAP, Foster Club and RESOLVE believe that children and youth deserve every opportunity to have permanent, loving families, and that discriminating against potentially qualified prospective parents limits the options for these vulnerable young people to achieve permanency and stability. We oppose policies and practices that categorically discriminate against prospective parents, including but not limited to discrimination based on age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, marital status, family size, disability, medical condition, geographic location, employment status, occupation, and educational attainment. We support making decisions about approving prospective parents and matching waiting children on a case-by-case basis, based on the strengths of the family, safety of the home, and best interests of each child. In addition, we oppose policies that treat LGBTQ youth unequally and/or subject them to discredited and/or abusive therapeutic techniques. All youth deserve to be raised in an environment in which they are affirmed and supported in developing a healthy identity.

Laws, policies and regulations that sanction discrimination and prohibit placement with potentially qualified families based on sexual orientation are not in any child's best interest. These laws maintain that "religious liberty" should be a sufficient rationale for adoption service providers, even those who receive public funding, to deny services based on religious convictions or individual beliefs. Can the same rationale be used to exclude prospective parents because of their race? The standard needs to be best interest of the child, and that is served by practices that promote the largest possible pool of potentially qualified parents to adopt children from the child welfare system. Research and experience both bolster that professionally accepted understanding; conversely, it is widely accepted that it is children who suffer the consequences from excluding any class of potentially qualified parents (such as gay and lesbian couples) from that pool. Further, these laws would allow adoption agencies to refuse or delay services to an LGBTQ youth in foster care, causing additional stress and harm to young people who have already faced trauma and loss.

Our organizations and our members have worked for decades to ensure that abused, neglected and other vulnerable children are protected from harm and allowed to flourish. We advance research-based best practices and sound public policy on behalf of the millions of vulnerable and voiceless children affected by

child welfare agencies across the country. We value and encourage approaches to child welfare that are culturally competent and responsive to the specific needs of our society's broad and diverse population. Included in our definition of cultural competence is the ability to support LGBTQ children, youth, parents and families, as well as those individuals who may be questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity.

## Research

There are already an estimated 2 million children in America who are being raised by LGBT parents or same-sex couples. Although the country has made progress, resistance to lesbian and gay equal rights continues to force many people to remain silent about their sexual orientation and relationships. The Williams Institute concludes that there are an additional two million LGBT people across the country who would step forward to foster or adopt children from foster care,<sup>1</sup> but state laws, policies, and practices that deliberately limit or downright prevent qualified LGBT parents from coming forward harm our nation's children who are waiting for permanent families.

Based on more than three decades of social science research, we believe that families with LGBTQ members deserve the same rights and levels of support afforded other families. Scientific evidence demonstrates that children who grow up with one or two parents who are gay or lesbian fare as well in emotional, cognitive, social, and sexual functioning as do children whose parents are heterosexual.<sup>2</sup> Further, research has demonstrated there is no empirical foundation to beliefs that lesbian and gay adults are unfit parents (American Psychological Association, 1995). In fact, evidence shows that children's optimal development is influenced more by the nature of the relationships and interactions within the family unit than by its particular structural form (Perrin, 2002).

According to a study published in 2013 by the Williams Institute, same-sex couples with children are over four times more likely to have an adopted child than opposite-sex couples with children are. Studies have also documented that lesbian and gay adults are willing to adopt the very children most in need of homes and those who wait in temporary foster care the longest – those who are older and who may have special needs – and these families also do so at a higher rate than heterosexual adults

No studies have found risks to or disadvantages for children growing up in families with one or more gay parents, compared to children growing up with heterosexual parents (Perrin, 2002). Indeed, evidence suggests home environments provided by lesbian and gay parents support and enable children's psychosocial growth, just as do those provided by heterosexual parents (Patterson, 1995).

## Position

CWLA, DAI, NACAC, VFA, NCAP, Foster Club and RESOLVE re-affirm their principles and standards that LGBTQ parents are as well suited to raise children as their heterosexual counterparts and that the needs of children and youth who are LGBTQ must be addressed based on their best interests. Therefore, we firmly stand against any federal, state, or agency laws or policies that prohibit or discriminate against any potentially qualified individuals and couples from becoming parents due to philosophical or religious beliefs as well as any policy that treats LGBTQ youth unequally.

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<sup>1</sup> Gary J Gates, M.V. Lee Badgett, et al, Adoption and Foster Care by Gay and Lesbian Parents in the United States, The Williams Institute and the Urban Institute, March 2007, accessed online at: [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411437\\_Adoption\\_Foster\\_Care.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411437_Adoption_Foster_Care.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Perrin, E.C. (2002). Technical report: Co-parent or second-parent adoption by same-sex parents. *Pediatrics*, 109(2), 341-344