



Angels in Adoption®

Gala

Gala Program

First Course

Welcome

Master of Ceremony, Barbara Harrison

Invocation

Message from CCAI

Bethany Haley, CCAI Interim Executive Director

Remembering Becky Weichhand

Musical Performance

Haylee Dubert

Main Course

Message from 2019 Congressional Foster Youth Intern

Ria Esteves

Dessert

2019 National Angels in Adoption® Awards

NVIDIA

Sean Anders

Message from CCAI Board of Directors' Chair

The Honorable Mary L. Landrieu

Closing

Barbara Harrison



Angels in Adoption®

Menu

FIRST COURSE

Autumn Salad

Scallion, Dill, Feta, Parmesan Dressing

MAIN COURSE

Oven Roasted Breast Of Chicken

Goat Cheese Mashed Potatoes, Sautéed Asparagus, and Red Wine Sauce

**Vegetarian and Vegan Main is Orecchiette Pasta with Asparagus, Spinach,
and Vodka Tomato Sauce*

DESSERT

Flourless Chocolate Cake Sphere

Hawaiian Lava Sea Salt Caramel Center, Milk Chocolate Sauce

WINES

Chateau St. Jean Merlot

Alverdi Pinot Grigio

All three courses are nut free and gluten free





Gala

CCAI 2019 PARTNERS

Platinum Partners

(\$50,000 and above)

Bella Grazia Fund
Curtis L. Carlson Family Foundation
Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption
Jack and Claudette Gerard
Jockey Being Family

Gold Partners

(\$25,000-\$49,999)

American Council of Life Insurers
Amy and Philip Goldman Foundation
Annie E. Casey Foundation
Arnold & Porter
Both Ends Believing / Tyler Technologies
Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck
Casey Family Programs
Retail Orphan Initiative

Silver Partners

(\$10,000-\$24,999)

Bethany Christian Services
CenturyLink
Chevron
Comcast NBCUniversal
ConocoPhillips
Integrated Legislative Strategies, LLC
International Esperanza Project
LiUNA
Minnesota Vikings
Orphan Outreach
Rita M. Lewis
Singer Family Charitable Gift Fund
Susan K. Neely
The J. Willard and Alice S.
Marriott Foundation
Williams & Jensen

Bronze Partners

(\$5,000-\$9,999)

Academy of Adoption and
Assisted Reproduction Attorneys
Adams & Reese LLP
American Petroleum Institute
American Retirement Association
Anita Antenucci (Houlihan Lokey) &
Gail Dady (DC Capital Partners)
Brian and Renee Luwis
Buckner International
Center for Adoption Support and Education
(C.A.S.E)
Cox Enterprises, Inc.
David and Suzanne Chavern &
News Media Alliance
Dean Madeleine M. Landrieu
& Kim and Kristyn Carver
Facebook
Gift of Adoption
Gulf Coast Bank & Trust Company
Holt International Children's Services
Insured Retirement Institute, Inc.
Jaime and Margaret Spellings
Jane and Greg Castanias
Jeff Ruby Foundation
Joyce and Don Meyer
Kathleen and Matt Strottman &
Jeffrey and Lisa Brooks
Kirk and Eleanor Baker
Massachusetts Mutual Life
Insurance Company
Pacific Life Insurance Company
Pharmaceutical Research &
Manufacturers of America
Randy Russell Group
Sara and Joel Fagen
The Honorable Dave Camp
The Honorable Mary L. Landrieu &
Van Ness Feldman LLC
The Internet & Television Association
The Men and Women of
Hunt Consolidated, Inc.
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Friends Partners (\$1,000-\$4,999)

Ameritas
Brad Knox
Brooks and Gregg Brunson-Pitts
Communities Foundation of Texas
Community Foundation of Greater Fort
Wayne
Court Appointed Special Advocates

Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund
Gail MacKinnon
Jacki Deason
Jennie P. May
Kidsave International
National Council for Adoption
One Simple Wish
Patrick Hulehan

PepsiCo
Principal
Rick Olson and Jay Timmons
SoulCycle
T. Rowe Price Charitable Giving
Program
Walmart



Angels in Adoption®

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



It's pitch black outside as I waken to the sound of little feet shuffling in footie pajamas to the side of my bed. Somewhere around 3am every night, the youngest of my four children gets out of his bed and comes to stand beside mine.

"Mommy? Me sleep with you?"

The first time this happened, I tried to convince him to return to his own bed.

"It's nighttime, Charlie. Let's go back to your bed. It's still time for sleeping."

My two-year-old sniffled with crocodile tears: "Me sleep with you? You my mommy." And in his most desperate whimper: "You my mommy."

And with that, my resolve melted and I pulled him into bed, where he curled up like a kitten against my back and went right to sleep.

Some might observe I have grown softer (lazier?) in my commitment to sleep training since my first child came along! But as life has evolved, so has my understanding of a child's brain development and their fundamental need to know that someone will give them comfort, warmth, and reassurance when they whimper in the night.

Ever since this ritual began, the words "you my mommy" ring in my head often, in the sound of my little boy's voice.

Several decades of neuroscience now reveal what we have always known intuitively through life experience: the love, safety, nurture of a family is essential to a child's healthy development. It forms the foundation of our sense of identity, our sense of belonging, and our ability to relate in a healthy way to the world around us.

Every child is born needing to know they are loved, cared for, and that they belong. Yet tonight, as we sit here together, millions of children are still waiting to know just that. Still waiting for a family all their own.

The mission of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI) is to raise awareness about children in the United States and around the world in need of permanent families, and to eliminate policy barriers that hinder these children from growing up in the care of families. This mission is the heart of tonight's gala, and of each of our programs throughout the year.

In all of our work, CCAI strives to be a resource that brings objective, relevant information to the members of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption, one of Congress' premier caucuses. We are honored to bring the voices of experience and expertise to this very active, bipartisan, and bicameral group of policymakers.

Earlier this year, during our Foster Youth Internship Program, we hosted a luncheon where Members of Congress could come meet the interns and share a bit about what it is like to work in Congress. There were several themes in what the Members shared with our interns:

"Our system was meant to work slowly and deliberately."

"Don't get discouraged when change doesn't happen overnight."





Gala



But also: “Your story is important. We need your voice here. We need your passion and energy.”

Listening to those Members share with our Foster Youth Interns, I was reminded just how important is this work of elevating the voices of those who have lived in our child welfare system, who can uniquely be a voice for those still waiting.

To that end – this year, an amazing 122 Angels, from all 50 states and D.C., were honored as Angels in Adoption. These Angels helped lead an incredible army of 304 people who canvassed Capitol Hill earlier today, to share their stories with lawmakers.

Each one of you, our Angels in Adoption® and guests of honor, are the real superheroes, and the reason we all gather here tonight. We are honored to get to celebrate the profound ways you are pouring out your time, talent, and treasure to move us closer to a day when every child is home.

To the dedicated and passionate co-chairs of the adoption caucus, U.S. Senators Roy Blunt (R-MO) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and U.S. Representatives Robert Aderholt (R-AL) and Donna Shalala (D-FL) – and their amazing staff! – thank you for your passionate leadership in the U.S. Congress on behalf of children in need of families.

I also want to extend our team’s heartfelt gratitude to CCAI’s wonderful Board of Directors and Advisory Council, as well as our Partners and volunteers who so generously support our mission. We’re so deeply grateful for the sacrifices and generosity that make our work possible, tonight and all year long.

Finally, I also want to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of CCAI’s extraordinary staff – Kate, Taylor, Erika, and Carly – and the many amazing volunteers who help make the Angels program possible. Your amazing, dedicated, and giving hearts make it a privilege to serve beside you.

To all our guests tonight: welcome to the 21st Annual Angels in Adoption® Program Gala! Thank you for joining us this evening to help celebrate the power of family in the life of a child. May tonight be a moment to “press pause” – to celebrate the victories, big and small, and to renew our commitment to carrying on the mission of a family for every child, in whatever capacity we find ourselves. We need one another, and we need to lift up the “Angel” stories that remind us why every day, every child, matters.

So tonight: celebrate with us. Tomorrow?

Upward and onward, until every child is home.

Gratefully,

Bethany Haley

Bethany Haley

Interim Executive Director



Angels in Adoption®

IN LOVING MEMORY OF BECKY WEICHHAND

On November 27, 2018, CCAI's passionate and loving Executive Director, Becky Weichhand, passed away after a valiant battle with cancer. For more than ten years, Becky lived and breathed the mission of CCAI. Joining the team first as the Director of Policy and ultimately becoming the Executive Director, Becky treated every task as if it were the most important and every person as though they were truly special, because she believed they were. She was fiercely loyal, kind, gentle, determined, and focused on the calling of her life: serving God, loving her neighbor, and tackling the barriers that separate children from permanent families.



During her time at CCAI, Becky led nine congressional delegations, both in the United States and abroad, mentored 123 Foster Youth Interns, and helped host 1,121 Angels in Adoption honorees here in Washington, D.C.

Whether at home or at work, Becky lived life with faith-filled optimism and open arms — always ready to listen, to encourage, to host anyone who needed a place to stay, to share a meal, to pray, to write handwritten notes, to laugh, and to push others toward fulfilling their own life's purpose, as she fought to fulfill hers.

She will always be a part of our mission at CCAI. We will celebrate her life and legacy every year during our new annual 5K race. We will remember her every time we see something decorated with gold stars, or hear the word “moxie,” or think of her twirling. And we will honor her legacy every year we carry on the programs she loved so much, building platforms to give orphans and foster youth a voice.

Thank you, Becky, for showing us how to live life on mission, how to love well, and how to dream big dreams.





Gala



United States
of America

Congressional Record

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Senate

REMEMBERING BECKY WEICHHAND

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, during this season of Advent, millions of Americans join Christians around the world to celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ.

A central tenet of Christianity is born in the belief that Jesus is the Light of the World.

On December 25, we celebrate the light, the hope, and the joy our Lord and Savior brings into the world.

Today, I come to the floor of the U.S. Senate to pay tribute to a servant of Christ who dedicated her life to bring light, hope, and joy to children and families around the world.

Her name is Becky Weichhand.

Becky blazed a trail of hope and love to spread joy to children, especially those awaiting adoption.

To those who knew her best, Becky was an unconditional prayer warrior, who graciously shared love and loyalty to friends and strangers alike.

By all accounts, Becky shared uncommon devotion in her advocacy for children, especially those in our Nation's foster care system.

Since 2014, Becky served as executive director of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute.

Before that, she served as director of policy, where she shined light on the needs of children here in the United States and abroad, including the United Kingdom, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Cambodia, Vietnam, South Korea, and Haiti.

Since first joining the corps of dedicated professionals working to help the foster youth community, Becky had a plan.

She had a plan for kids who went to bed each night praying for a forever home.

She had a plan for young people who were growing up without a mom or dad.

She had a plan to connect as many kids as possible with a forever family.

Becky worked tirelessly to educate, organize and advocate here on Capitol Hill and at the grassroots.

She devoted her life and career to making dreams come true for adoptive parents and their children.

Among her priorities and achievements, I know that Becky was committed to growing the Foster Youth Internship Program that connects foster youth and congressional offices.

The program provides opportunities for foster youth to work on Capitol Hill.

Through this program, foster youth collaborate and bring real-life perspective to the policymaking tables.

I have been fortunate to have an intern through this program who worked with my staff to help develop Federal child welfare reforms.

They identified more effective ways to serve foster kids, including those who age out of the system.

Becky also worked to grow the Angels in Adoption Program.

It brings recognition to families who go above and beyond the call to action in their local communities to open their hearts and homes to children awaiting adoption.

Shining light on the good deeds and unmet needs of others was her way of bringing light to the world.

As a founder and cochair of the Congressional Caucus on Foster Youth, I would like to turn the spotlight on Becky's good works.

She was driven to find a forever family for every child. She was a problem solver brimming with energy. Her advocacy led to important reforms. She believed in miracles. She made every effort to work miracles for children and families.

Becky mentored foster youth and paved the way for kids to dream big. She gave them reason to hope that their dreams can come true.

I extend my condolences to Becky's family, friends, and loved ones.

At age 36, Becky lost a brave battle to cancer.

Her legacy will live on and bring joy to countless children and moms and dads where it matters the most: in a forever family united through the blessing of adoption.

On Saturday, December 15, a celebration of life will take place at the First Church of God in Becky's hometown of St. Joseph, MI.

On this day, her loved ones will celebrate the light, joy, and hope she brought to this world.

May the blessings of God's Heavenly embrace welcome Becky into her new forever home for life everlasting.

Chuck Grassley



Angels in Adoption®

Congressional Coalition on Adoption Members: 116th Congress

U.S. Senate Co-Chairs: Roy Blunt (R-MO) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)

U.S. House Co-Chairs: Robert Aderholt (R-AL) and Donna Shalala (D-FL)

Alabama

Rep. Robert Aderholt (R)*

Alaska

Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R)

Arizona

Rep. Ruben Gallego (D)
Rep. Raul Grijalva (D)
Rep. David Schweikert (R)

Arkansas

Sen. John Boozman (R)
Sen. Tom Cotton (R)
Rep. Bruce Westerman (R)

California

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D)
Rep. Nanette Diaz Barragán (D)
Rep. Karen Bass (D)
Rep. Ami Bera (D)
Rep. Julia Brownley (D)
Rep. Ken Calvert (R)
Rep. Anna Eshoo (D)
Rep. Jared Huffman (D)
Rep. Doug LaMalfa (R)
Rep. Barbara Lee (D)
Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D)
Rep. Doris Matsui (D)
Rep. Linda Sanchez (D)
Rep. Adam Schiff (D)
Rep. Brad Sherman (D)
Rep. Eric Swalwell (D)

Colorado

Sen. Cory Gardner (R)
Rep. Doug Lamborn (R)
Rep. Scott Tipton (R)

Connecticut

Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D)
Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D)
Rep. Jim Himes (D)
District of Columbia
Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D)

Florida

Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R)
Rep. Donna Shalala (D)*

Georgia

Sen. Johnny Isakson (R)
Rep. Doug Collins (R)
Rep. John Lewis (D)
Rep. Barry Loudermilk (R)
Rep. David Scott (D)

Idaho

Sen. James Risch (R)

Illinois

Sen. Richard Durbin (D)
Rep. Danny Davis (D)
Rep. Dan Lipinski (D)
Rep. John Shimkus (R)

Iowa

Sen. Chuck Grassley (R)
Rep. Steve King (R)

Kansas

Sen. Jerry Moran (R)
Sen. Pat Roberts (R)

Kentucky

Rep. James Comer (R)

Louisiana

Sen. Bill Cassidy (R)
Sen. John Kennedy (R)
Rep. Garret Graves (R)
Rep. Mike Johnson (R)
Rep. Steve Scalise (R)

Maine

Sen. Susan Collins (R)
Sen. Angus King, Jr. (I)
Rep. Chellie Pingree (D)

Maryland

Sen. Ben Cardin (D)
Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D)

Massachusetts

Rep. Stephen Lynch (D)
Rep. Seth Moulton (D)

Michigan

Sen. Gary Peters (D)
Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D)
Rep. Bill Huizenga (R)
Rep. Dan Kildee (D)
Rep. Brenda L. Lawrence (D)
Rep. John Moolenaar (R)
Rep. Fred Upton (R)
Rep. Tim Walberg (R)

Minnesota

Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D)*
Rep. Dean Phillips (D)
Rep. Pete Steuber (R)
Rep. Tom Emmer (R)
Rep. Collin Peterson (D)
Rep. Angie Craig (D)*



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Mississippi

Sen. Roger F. Wicker (R)
Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith (R)

Missouri

Sen. Roy Blunt (R)*
Sen. Josh Hawley (R)
Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (D)
Rep. Vicky Hartzler (R)
Rep. Blaine Luetkemeyer (R)
Rep. Jason Smith (R)

Montana

Sen. Steve Daines (R)

Nebraska

Rep. Don Bacon (R)

Nevada

Sen. Jacky Rosen (D)

New Hampshire

Sen. Maggie Hassan (D)
Rep. Ann McLane Kuster (D)

New Jersey

Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr. (D)
Rep. Bill Pascrell, Jr. (D)
Rep. Christopher Smith (R)

New York

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D)
Rep. Peter King (R)
Rep. Nita Lowey (D)
Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D)
Rep. Sean Maloney (D)
Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D)

North Carolina

Sen. Richard Burr (R)
Sen. Thom Tillis (R)
Rep. Mark Meadows (R)

North Dakota

Sen. Kevin Cramer (R)

Ohio

Rep. Dave Joyce (R)
Rep. Steve Stivers (R)

Oklahoma

Sen. James Inhofe (R)
Sen. James Lankford (R)
Rep. Markwayne Mullin (R)
Rep. Kendra Horn (D)

Oregon

Sen. Ron Wyden (D)
Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D)
Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D)
Rep. Peter DeFazio (D)
Rep. Kurt Schrader (D)
Rep. Greg Walden (R)

Pennsylvania

Sen. Robert Casey, Jr. (D)
Rep. Brendan Boyle (D)
Rep. Mike Doyle (D)
Rep. Mike Kelly (R)
Rep. Glenn Thompson (R)

Rhode Island

Rep. James Langevin (D)

South Carolina

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R)
Rep. Joe Wilson (R)

South Dakota

Sen. John Thune (R)

Tennessee

Sen. Marsha Blackburn (R)
Rep. Jim Cooper (D)
Rep. Phil Roe (R)

Texas

Rep. Kevin Brady (R)
Rep. John Carter (R)
Rep. Joaquin Castro (D)
Rep. Mike Conaway (R)
Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D)
Rep. Sylvia Garcia (D-TX)
Rep. Kay Granger (R)
Rep. Mac Thornberry (R)

Utah

Rep. Rob Bishop (R)
Rep. Ben McAdams (D)**

Vermont

Sen. Patrick Leahy (D)

Virginia

Sen. Mark Warner (D)
Rep. Gerry Connolly (D)
Rep. Rob Wittman (R)

Washington

Sen. Patty Murray (D)
Sen. Maria Cantwell (D)
Rep. Adam Smith (D)

West Virginia

Sen. Joe Manchin, III (D)
Wisconsin
Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D)
Rep. Mike Gallagher (R)
Rep. Ron Kind (D)
Rep. James Sensenbrenner, Jr. (R)
Rep. Glenn Grothman (R)

Wyoming

Sen. Michael Enzi (R)



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Mary Landrieu, Chair

Senator Mary Landrieu served in the United States Senate for three terms, first elected in 1996. As a member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee – and then,

ultimately, as Chair of that Committee – she passed several important pieces of legislation; most notably the landmark Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA); the Israel American Energy Alliance; and the RESTORE Act – the single largest federal investment in the Gulf Coast in US history.

She also served on the Senate Armed Services Committee, Appropriations Committee, and chaired the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee. In her role as Chair of the Small Business Committee, she was the lead sponsor of the Small Business Jobs Act of 2010, which helped to create and retain over 650,000 American jobs.

During her time in the Senate, Landrieu was known for her bipartisan approach to addressing national challenges and for her passionate advocacy for her home state of Louisiana, particularly in the aftermaths of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Prior to serving in the U.S. Senate, she served in the Louisiana State Legislature from 1979 – 1987. For eight years, she successfully championed causes related to women and children, flood protection, and education reform. In 1987, she was elected State Treasurer and served with distinction for two terms. Strong fiscal management, pension fund diversification, debt limitation, and the creation of the first-ever municipal investment fund (now valued at over \$2 billion) are some of her noteworthy accomplishments.

Senator Landrieu serves on the Board of Directors of CenturyLink, the second largest US communications provider to global enterprise customers. In the non-profit space, she serves on the boards of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools; Resources for the Future; and chairs the Board of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (which represents over 150 Members of Congress who work in a bipartisan fashion, supporting and finding families for orphan children here in the US and around the world).

She graduated from Louisiana State University and is married to Frank Snellings, an attorney and real estate broker in Washington, DC. They have two grown children and one grandchild.



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Susan K. Neely, Vice Chair

Susan K. Neely is the president and CEO of the American Council of Life Insurers (ACLI), the nation's leading trade association dedicated

to providing products and services that contribute to Americans' financial and retirement security. As president and CEO, Neely drives public policy and advocacy on behalf of ACLI's member companies that represent 95 percent of industry assets and serve 90 million families.

Neely has long been recognized as a leading voice in public policy and advocacy in Washington, D.C. She served as special assistant to President George W. Bush and helped create the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and later became the first DHS Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs. Neely was a senior executive at the Association of American Medical Colleges and the Health Insurance Association of America (HIAA), where she designed award-winning national advocacy programs and initiatives, like HIAA's ground-breaking Harry & Louise campaign.

Most recently, she led the American Beverage Association (ABA) for 13 years as president and CEO. Under her leadership, ABA instituted first-of-their-kind initiatives with President Clinton's Global Initiative and First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move campaign. These partnerships decreased calories from beverages sold in schools by 90 percent, put transparent calorie labels on millions of beverage containers, and reduced sugar consumed from beverages in the American diet.

Neely has been named Trade Association CEO of the year by two different national organizations. She is a past chair of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Association Committee of 100 of the largest trade associations and the American Society of Association Executives.

A native of Iowa, Neely holds an undergraduate degree in journalism and French civilization from the University of Iowa and a master's degree in public administration from Drake University. She is the mother of two children, Eve and Ben.



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Susan Hirschmann, Secretary

Susan B. Hirschmann is Chairman of the Board and CEO of Williams & Jensen, having served as a Principal in the firm since 2002. Williams & Jensen is consistently ranked as one of the top lobby firms and is proud to be one of Washington, D.C.'s oldest independent lobbying firms.

Hailed as one of D.C.'s premier lobbyists, Susan has a reputation for effective advocacy and creative strategies. She has helped clients achieve success on issues ranging from health care and taxation to financial services, transportation, education, and appropriations. Whether it was working with a client to secure tax permanency for 529 education savings accounts, which was the first Bush Era tax cut to be made permanent; running the coalition to pass Medicare Part D; securing a rare Jones Act Waiver; or securing funding for the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF) after it had been removed from the President's budget; Susan's ability to win on tough issues is why her clients believe that there is no one better at "snatching victory out of the jaws of defeat."

Additionally, Susan brings a breadth of expertise in third-party coalition building and grassroots organizing. Her experience in state, local, and national youth politics and her years spent working for a national activist women's organization gave her the background to found Integrated Legislative Strategies – an organization

which pairs grassroots programs with legislative strategy, and where she oversees dozens of field staff across the country and works to build successful coalitions.

Prior to joining Williams & Jensen, Susan was Chief of Staff to the Majority Whip of the House of Representatives. During her time working for House Leadership, she worked with Congress and the White House to develop and execute strategy on major trade, health care, and tax issues. This experience gave her an intimate understanding of and ability to advise clients on the intricacy of the inner workings of the Hill.

Susan has been recognized for her achievements in D.C. She has been named her one of D.C.'s top lobbyists, one of the most powerful women in Washington, and one of the top 100 most highly regarded staffers on Capitol Hill.

She is also a strong voice on behalf of women, having served as one of three U.S. delegates to the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women in 2005, and having written an essay for Harvard University's John F. Kennedy Institute of Politics' book: *Skirting Tradition: Women in Politics Speak to the Next Generation*, while serving as a visiting fellow. She frequently speaks and serves on panels promoting women.



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Russ Sullivan, Treasurer

Russ Sullivan provides strategic counsel, offering comprehensive solutions from an administrative, regulatory and legislative

perspective on client's most complex matters. He brings a unique perspective to a wide variety of issues for a broad range of industries, including tax, healthcare, energy, pensions, transportation, education, trade and economic development, as well as matters involving the nonprofit and for-benefit enterprise sectors. In addition to providing strategic legal counsel, Russ advises clients on business planning and public affairs.

Russ joined the Senate Finance Committee staff in 1999 before rising to staff director in 2004, a role in which he served until he retired in 2013. From that position, he saw some of the most important and complex issues within the business community come before the committee. Along with advising former committee chair Sen. Max Baucus, Russ also helped devise and implement strategies on the 2001 tax cuts, the JOBS Act of 2004, the Medicare Modernization Act of 2004, the Pension Protection Act of 2006 and the Affordable Care Act of 2009.

Russ has served as legal or designated guardian for 22 teenagers over the past 15 years.



Rita Lewis

Rita Lewis is a senior strategist and independent government relations consultant with more than 35 years of experience in managing numerous successful coalitions, issue advocacy, and public affairs campaigns

on behalf of Fortune 500 companies as well as national organizations and trade associations. She is President of RML Strategies, a boutique Washington, DC consulting firm she started in 2018. Previously, Lewis served a decade as Senior Vice President of NCTA, the Internet and Television Association. During her tenure, she directed Congressional relations for some of the industry's most significant technology and telecommunications policy issues. She also pioneered NCTA's efforts to

increase education and personal outreach to every Member of Congress and their staff. Immediately prior to joining NCTA, Lewis was a Partner and the senior Senate Democratic lobbyist for The Washington Group, where she focused on a broad range of issues including telecommunications, transportation, real estate, and health care. In addition to serving in several positions for former U.S. Senate Minority and Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-SD), her experience includes roles as Deputy Executive Director and Political Director for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee and Director of Congressional Affairs at the U.S. Department of Education.

In 2000, Lewis adopted her daughter, Maria, from Guatemala, and she continues to provide support and information to families considering adoption.



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Kerry Marks Hasenbalg

Kerry Marks Hasenbalg is a respected writer and speaker. She began her work on Capitol Hill as the fellow for the Congressional Coalition on Adoption (CCA), a

bipartisan, bicameral caucus of more than 170 members of Congress. In 2002, together with the four congressional co-chairs of the CCA, Kerry created the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute. As the organization's founding executive director, she worked closely with the congressional members on child welfare issues in the U.S. and abroad. Under her leadership, all five of the organization's main programs were created, including the congressional Angels in Adoption awards program and the congressional Foster Youth Internship program. Kerry has visited more than 40 countries, and led more than a dozen congressional delegations abroad, meeting with both high-ranking government officials and the poorest of the poor in every location, to advocate for improved child welfare policies and practices.

Kerry has authored curriculum for faith communities including devotionals, retreat material, and inspirational essays. As a *Magna cum laude* graduate of Bucknell University, Kerry earned dual degrees in Russian and international studies and has done post-graduate work at the American University in Russian language and at Calvary Chapel Bible College in counseling and biblical studies.

Prior to her work in DC, she spent three years working in Russia as an interpreter for missional organizations and child welfare groups.

Over the years, Kerry and her husband, Scott, have been known to work in tandem for children's causes. In their joint efforts, they have been instrumental in the creation of several charitable organizations in addition to CCAI, which are all flourishing today, including: Christian Alliance for Orphans, where Scott served as a founding board member; Calvary Chapel DC Metro; Orphan Institute, where Kerry and Scott both serve as founding executive board members; and Show Hope, where Scott served as the Executive Director for 12 years under the board leadership of its founders, Steven Curtis and Mary Beth Chapman.

Currently, Kerry spends much of her time working alongside Scott to assist philanthropists in stewarding their resources for social investment and capacity building in the developing world. In addition, Kerry recently joined the executive board of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute in Washington, DC, the advisory board of the Hands and Feet Project in Nashville, TN, and the ethics board of Geisinger Medical Center in Danville, Pennsylvania.

In recent years, Kerry has led dozens of private retreats for leaders and lay people from the US and abroad. She and Scott live together in Danville, Pennsylvania, with their four children, Cole, Maya, Leah, and Annika, whom she homeschools.



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Rick Spielman

Rick Spielman enters his 8th season as General Manager of the club and 14th overall with the Vikings in 2019, the 29th season he has worked in the NFL. The Vikings have won 4 NFC North titles and have made the playoffs 5 times in the past 11 seasons.

Spielman joined the Vikings as Vice President of Player Personnel on May 30, 2006 and directed scouting, free agency and draft preparations for the club before taking on General Manager duties in 2012. Spielman has climbed the ranks of NFL personnel departments with Detroit, Chicago and Miami

prior to joining the Vikings. Spielman's tenure with all 3 franchises has been highlighted by drafting impact players throughout the seven rounds and making key trades and free agency acquisitions. Spielman's teams have won 7 divisional titles and advanced to the playoffs 11 times. For the 2017 season, Spielman was named NFL Executive of the Year by Pro Football Weekly.

Spielman has a bachelor's degree from Southern Illinois and a master's from Ohio State. He and his wife, Michele, have been active with children's charities. The couple has adopted six children, Juan, Luis, Ronnie, J.D., Omie and Whitney.



Kelly Gage

Kelly is an accomplished public speaker, educator, advisor, and philanthropist, with nearly 20 years of experience with foundations and NGOs dealing with human trafficking,

public media, arts and culture, education, and community development. She is passionate about fighting exploitation in women and children. Prior to joining Nomi Network, Kelly served as an Associate Professor in the Department of Apparel, Merchandising and Design at St. Catherine University. She holds a doctorate in apparel studies from the Department of Design, Housing, and Apparel at the University of Minnesota, a master's degree in Art History from the University of St. Thomas and a bachelor's degree in economics from Northwestern University. She has also sat on the boards of the World Childhood

Foundation, an organization that combats the sexual exploitation of women and children, and the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute. Aside from being an analytical thinker and an impeccable dresser, Kelly is the proud mom of two sets of twins.

Kelly shows excellent relationship building and management skills throughout professional, academic, and social circles and utilizes her vast experience mentoring, coaching, and serving as a valuable resource to colleagues, students and graduates. Kelly's particular areas of international expertise are Brazil, Cambodia and India. Her areas of specialization include Afro Brazilian slave dress, major gifts development, relationship building, development of grant-making programs and Portuguese. Kelly was a board member at the Curtis L. Carlson Foundation between 1997 to 2003 as well.



Angels in Adoption®

CCAI BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Kim Carver

Kim Carver is the Senior Vice President of Government Relations at Gulf Coast Bank & Trust Company in New Orleans, Louisiana. In that role, Kim handles all relationships and efforts with federal, state

and local elected officials on behalf of the bank. Additionally, he manages the human resources and corporate training departments and represents the bank with numerous economic development and community organizations.

Kim is active on many boards and holds several appointed commissions. He was most recently reappointed by Governor John Bel Edwards to his second term as a Commissioner on the Louisiana Tobacco Finance Corporation, is immediate past Chairman of the Louisiana Lottery Corporation Board of Directors, and is a member of the Public Policy Committee and Finance Committee for GNO, Inc.

Kim holds a Bachelor's Degree in Biological & Environmental Engineering from the Louisiana State University and completed his Masters of Business Administration from the University of New Orleans. He holds certificates from the Graduate School of Banking at LSU and LSU Continuing Education Department in Human Resource Management. Kim is a fellow of the Institute of Politics at Loyola University in New Orleans and the Early Childhood Policy Leadership Institute at Tulane University Medical School. He has completed training in the Trust Based Relational Intervention from Texas Christian University's Institute of Child Development in Fort Worth, Texas.

Kim is a fierce advocate in the field of foster care and adoption. Through his personal journey through foster care and adoption, Kim joined

several friends in starting CrossroadsNOLA – a faith based non-profit organization that recruits, supports and develops high quality/high caliber foster families for the 5,000+ Louisiana children in care. Kim now serves on the board and is the Treasurer of CrossroadsNOLA, which has expanded its reach to include over 50 church network partners across southeast Louisiana. He partnered with New Orleans based culinary phenomenon District Donuts Sliders & Brew to launch a food truck – the District Streatcar – to raise public awareness about the plight of children in foster care in Louisiana, to give the public a lower barrier of entry to be involved in solving the problem & to generate a revenue stream for the work of recruiting foster families as 100% of the profits from the food truck support the work of CrossroadsNOLA.

Along with Dean of the Loyola School of Law in New Orleans Madeleine Landrieu, state Senator Ronnie Johns, Speaker Pro Tem Walt Leger, Kim founded the Louisiana Institute of Children in Families – an organization to support the work of a foster and adoption caucus within the Louisiana Legislature. He serves on the Advisory Board for Secretary Marketa Walters of the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services. Kim most recently helped launch Louisiana Fosters with Louisiana First Lady Donna Edwards - a broad call for the public to assist with the plight of the state's foster care system – one of the first such initiatives in the country.

Kim and his wife Kristyn Smith Carver, PhD live in Mandeville with their three daughters Ellie (9), Caroline (7) and Suzie (6). All adopted, and the youngest from foster care, Kim's daughters are his inspiration for dedicating his time and resources towards improving the outcomes for children in care in Louisiana.



Gala

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Brian H. Graff

Brian H. Graff, Esq., is the Chief Executive Officer of the American Retirement Association, the umbrella organization for the American Society of Pension Professionals and

Actuaries (ASPPA), the ASPPA College of Pension Actuaries (ACOPA), the National Association of Plan Advisors (NAPA), the National Tax-deferred Savings Association (NTSA), and the Plan Sponsor Council of America (PSCA). Graff oversees the American Retirement Association's operations, and working with the Board of Directors, charts the strategic direction for the organization. Graff also serves as the Executive Director of ASPPA and NAPA. The American Retirement Association is a national organization of more than 25,000 retirement plan professionals who provide advisory and administrative services for qualified retirement plans covering tens of millions of American workers. In addition to representing the interests of its members before Congress and federal regulatory agencies on a combined basis, the American Retirement Association annually conducts more than a dozen industry conferences, and annually administers more than 5,000 examinations leading to various industry-related professional credentials.

Graff actively speaks on behalf of the retirement plan system and has been quoted in *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and interviewed by various television outlets. He has testified on retirement policy issues before Congress and various federal regulators on numerous occasions.

An attorney (District of Columbia) and certified public accountant (New York-inactive), Graff was formerly Legislation Counsel to the U.S. Congress Joint Committee on Taxation where he provided policy and technical analysis relating to employee benefits, health care and Social Security to members of Congress. While working for Congress, Graff participated in the development of legislation, including the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996 and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996. Prior to working on Capitol Hill, Graff was associated with the Washington, DC, law firm, The Groom Law Group, which specializes in employee benefits. Graff received his doctoral degree in law, cum laude, from the University of Pennsylvania Law School in Philadelphia. He holds a bachelor of science in accounting with distinction from Cornell University in Ithaca, NY.

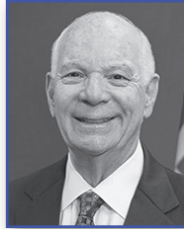


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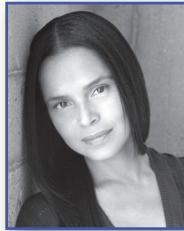
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Gala

2019 MASTER OF CEREMONIES

Barbara Harrison

Barbara Harrison is an award-winning journalist in Washington, D.C. While applauded as one of the longest-serving anchors for NBC4 here in the nation's capital, she is perhaps best known for her in-depth interviews with newsmakers ranging from politics to performing arts and decades of feature reports that inform and inspire fans throughout the greater Washington community.



Well known nationally for her work in the adoption arena, Barbara created Wednesday's Child at the NBC television station in Washington D.C. nearly 30 years ago. Her weekly segments highlighting foster children awaiting permanent adoptive homes, became the model for many similar programs across the country. Hundreds of children have found their adoptive family after appearing on her segments and most recently she has been finding and telling the stories of those now-grown up children who she helped find homes over the last 30 years.

Barbara has been singled out for many local and national accolades including the prestigious Board of Governor's Award from the National Association of Television Arts and Sciences, honoring her contribution to journalism and service to the community. She has also emceed nearly every National Adoption Day celebration in the D.C. courts each November since its founding in 1987. She has been honored by many organizations that promote adoption across the nation including the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute.

Barbara grew up in Prairie View, Texas, studied at Vassar College, and earned a master's degree from Columbia University in New York City. She is currently serving as Director of Community Engagement for the 150th birthday celebration for Children's National Hospital.



Angels in Adoption®

2019 NATIONAL ANGELS IN ADOPTION AWARDEE

NVIDIA

Best Adoption-Friendly Workplace 2019

NVIDIA is the world leader in accelerated computing, which it applies to enable computer graphics, AI, robotics and self-driving cars.

Since its founding in 1993, NVIDIA has been led by Jensen Huang who last month was ranked No. 1 on *Harvard Business Review's* list of the world's best CEOs over the life of their tenure.



The company, based in Silicon Valley, has consistently pushed technology boundaries, investing \$17 billion in research & development activities since its start. Its fundamental invention, the graphics processing unit (or GPU), has revolutionized the gaming industry, transformed professional graphics and high performance computing, has since become a key force behind artificial intelligence. NVIDIA crafts a culture where people do their life's work, striving to support its employees at whatever their stage of life.

Among its most innovative practices are an adoption program extended to all full- and part-time employees, which covers unlimited reimbursement for related costs; a program that helps pay off employees' student loans; and up to 30 weeks of parental leave, including 20 weeks of paid leave for adoptive parents.

NVIDIA has been featured for the past three years in Fortune magazine's list of the country's Best Places to Work. Among other honors, it's been included in Fortune's 50 Best Workplaces for Parents and on the Human Rights Campaign Best Places to Work for LGBTQ Equality list.





2019 NATIONAL ANGELS IN ADOPTION A WARDEE

Sean Anders

Director, Writer, & Producer of
Instant Family

Sean Anders is a writer, director, and producer known for *Instant Family* (2018), *That's My Boy* (2012) and *Daddy's Home* (2015). *Instant Family* depicts the highs and lows of the fostering process. But there's one big difference: *Instant Family* is drawn from Anders' actual experiences fostering and later adopting three children with his wife, Beth. "I made this stupid joke one day where I said, 'I feel like I'm going to be one of those old dads. What if we adopt a 5-year-old? It'll be like we had started five years ago'" Anders told TODAY Parents. "That joke made my wife look into foster care and adoption."



When Sean and Beth were going through the adoption process, every step was new and the more he thought about it, movies that focused on foster care were gut-wrenching dramas that reinforced negative stereotypes. Sean wanted to tell a more complete story that didn't shy away from difficult areas, but got into all the real laughter, love, and joy in foster care and adoption too. "When people hear the words 'foster care,' it brings these feelings of fear and pity, and I want people to go through this journey with Pete and Ellie, and when they come out on the other side, they have a better understanding of how these families are formed and who these kids really are."

Sean's story of his own family has all these ups and downs and twists and turns and hard times and good times, but he says "it's the best thing I ever have done and my kids are the best thing that ever happened to me." Sean lives in California with his wife Beth and three kids, Johnny, Cha-Cha, and Josh.





Angels in Adoption®

2019 ENTERTAINMENT

Haylee Dubert

Haylee Dubert is sixteen years old and from the state Kentucky. She has been a Boys & Girls Club of Glasgow-Barren County member since 2016.

After fourteen placements, Haylee found her forever home and has been a strong advocate for foster care. She also advocates for self-confidence in young girls and teen suicide prevention.

She currently serves on the First Lady's Youth Leadership Council (FLYLC) with Kentucky's First Lady, Glenna Bevin. Members of the Council represent a cross-section of Kentucky youth who either have a special interest in advocating for children who have been involved in the child welfare system.





Gala

CCAI PROGRAMS

As CCAI's signature public awareness program, **ANGELS IN ADOPTION®**, Members of Congress have an opportunity to honor individuals, families, and organizations from across the country that have made extraordinary contributions on behalf of children in need of families. Once selected, Angels travel to Washington, D.C. to personally meet with federal policymakers, receive advocacy training, participate in an official pinning ceremony with their Members of Congress, and receive recognition at a gala held in their honor. Since 1999, thousands of Angels have traveled to Washington, D.C. to take part in this program, and these extraordinary leaders return home better equipped to effect change on behalf of children in need of families.

The **FOSTER YOUTH INTERNSHIP PROGRAM®** provides talented young adults who have spent their formative years in U.S. foster care the opportunity to intern in a congressional office on Capitol Hill. Throughout the program, CCAI also coordinates retreats, advocacy training, networking lunches, and meetings with policymakers and child welfare experts. The Foster Youth Interns also research policy recommendations based on their experiences in foster care and present their policy proposals to the U.S. Congress and White House. Many of these policy recommendations have been passed into law. Moreover, the Foster Youth Interns leave Washington, D.C. with experience and skills that continue to bolster their careers and provide a foundation for them to become lifelong advocates for youth in foster care.

Through the **CONGRESSIONAL RESOURCE PROGRAM**, CCAI serves as a key educational resource for policymakers. Throughout the year, we advise Members of Congress and their staff, provide them with newsletters and policy reports, and host briefings and congressional roundtables that allow experts to communicate with key leaders on Capitol Hill and in the Administration. These efforts facilitate knowledge and dialogue amongst the leaders who desire to improve outcomes for child welfare and adoption policy, and as a result, they are able to effect real legislative change. Since its founding, CCAI's educational efforts have helped produce over 100 pieces of child welfare and adoption-related legislation.

CCAI with the **20/20 VISION PROGRAM** facilitates positive dialogue, education, and fact-finding trips between Members of Congress, foreign and domestic government officials, and private sector leaders. These trips bring leaders and national policymakers face to face with the realities faced by children outside of family care, and present opportunities to share knowledge, innovation, and experience in providing safe, loving, and permanent homes for children. CCAI 20/20 Vision delegations have visited California, Florida, Ohio, Ethiopia, Chile, Romania, Russia, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Uganda, India, Vietnam, Cambodia, and others. CCAI also hosts foreign leaders and dignitaries from around the globe in the nation's capital and coordinates meetings with congressional leadership.

NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY is a collective national effort to raise awareness of the more than 125,000 children in foster care waiting to find permanent, loving families. For the last nineteen years, NAD has made the dreams of thousands of children come true by working with courts, judges, attorneys, adoption professionals, child welfare agencies and advocates to finalize adoptions and find permanent, loving homes for children in foster care. Each year, approximately 5,000 children are adopted during over 400 events throughout the country. Since the program's inception, more than 75,000 children have been adopted on National Adoption Day.



Angels in Adoption®

2019 ANGELS IN ADOPTION® BIOGRAPHIES

Alabama

Shane and Jessica Wheeler

*Recommended by
Representative Robert Aderholt*

Shane and Jessica Wheeler, along with their two biological children Sam and Hallie Ruth, welcomed an adoptive son Silas from a very difficult situation in another state. In addition to Silas' family situation, he also faced medical challenges. The Wheeler Family took Silas in, gave him a new life and made him one of their own.

Alaska

Pamela Washington

Recommended by Senator Lisa Mukowski

Pamela Washington is a passionate advocate for the adoption of children. Pamela adopted a son who entered foster care as a two year old and did not have permanency for 4 years after 11 placements. She openly shares her son's story and how the laws had to be changed to reflect the best interests of children over the interests of parents. She testified before lawmakers in Juneau and advocated for concurrent reunification and adoption case planning so a child could have permanency sooner. When the law was changed to require concurrent case planning with reasonable timelines, then Alaska State Governor Tony Knowles invited Pamela to the official bill signing. Impacting the lives of children in foster care is still her passion and is shared by her entire family. Pamela is a member of Links, Inc., If: Lead Alaska, and Faith Christian Community where she and her husband, Dr. Stephen Washington, lead the marriage ministry. Pamela is founder of the Last Wives' Club, a Christian support group for wives. Pamela and her husband are parents to three adult children and the proud grandparents to five amazing grandsons. Pamela has been a member of the Alaska Bar for 25 years and her legal practice included both public and private adoptions.

Arizona

ASA Now

Recommended by Representative Andy Biggs

In 2016, three foster and adoptive mothers saw the need for reform within Arizona's child welfare system. Anika Robinson, Susan Woodruff, and Angela Teachout experienced firsthand a system that kept their traumatized children waiting a year or more to receive behavioral health services. As private citizens, they wrote legislation, presented solutions to their legislators, and got the community involved. H.B. 2442, known as Jacob's Law, passed unanimously with an emergency clause. Jacob's Law consists of 29 solutions that established a mandated time frame for delivery of behavioral health services and protections for caregivers. In May 2016, the trio founded ASA Now, an all volunteer-run 501c3 nonprofit organization dedicated to providing Advocacy, Support, and Assistance to children and families impacted by foster care. They started by providing basic necessities, respite care, peer-to-peer support groups, life skills classes, birthday parties, family activities, Christmas gifts, school backpacks, and advocacy for families and children. In just over 3 years, ASA Now has served 2,450 families and 6,560 children. Wishing to make a bigger impact, the founders purchased a building on 3 acres and have spent the last year renovating with the community's help. Opening soon, Jacob's Mission Community Center will be the first of its kind in Arizona. In addition to existing services, ASA Now will provide tutoring, music, art, dance, therapeutic programs, emergency food boxes, clothing, and extracurricular activities.



Gala

2019 ANGELS IN ADOPTION BIOGRAPHIES

Arkansas

The CALL in Conway & Faulkner County of Arkansas

Recommended by Senator John Boozman

The CALL is a faith based, all volunteer run, non-profit that recruits, trains and supports foster and adoptive homes in the state of Arkansas. Under the direction of County Coordinator Louise Witcher, The CALL of Conway and Faulkner Counties is a leader in finding homes for Arkansas children and supporting the families who care for them, including biological families who are reunited. They train an average of 50-60 homes per year as foster homes and facilitate families adopting an average of 20+ children each year. The CALL is responsible for almost 100% of available foster homes in In Conway County, and more than 90% in Faulkner county. Among the resources they provide is a Support Center which serves the foster, adoptive and biological parents with clothing for their children, has a visitation center for children to visit with their parents while in foster care, a training/party area, and a bathroom for lice treatment or baths. They also have beds, bedding, and other necessities that families who are reuniting with their children and foster families might need. Everything is provided free of charge as the organization works with the local community for needed donations. The CALL's 12 members of the Board provide countless hours of help and support, and all of the volunteers that are making a difference in the lives of these children.

California

Drew & Jennifer Bryson

Recommended by Representative Ken Calvert

Drew and Jennifer Bryson's foster care and adoption journey began in 2012. They knew there were too many kids in the system needing a home and they could do something. In the years since, they have watched 2 foster placements be adopted into their forever home, one returned to her biological parents and two were placed with their biological grandparents. In 2016 they adopted a sibling set and in 2018 they adopted another little girl. They currently have 5 kids at home, 3 adopted from foster care and 2 biological children. Passionate for promoting foster care, they have navigated a very hard system and tried to advocate for change. They manage a non- profit, MOAKleys, that helps encourage others to walk alongside foster families, so they are not alone. Whether they have them for a week or forever, they strongly believe every child deserves to be fought for and loved more than they can ever imagine.

Katie Wynen, MSW

*Recommended by
Representative Barbara Lee*

Katie Wynen, MSW is a transracial/international Colombian adoptee with a Masters in Social Work. During grad school, Katie studied under Dr. Joyce Maguire Pavao in Boston before moving to California and joining the staff at Pact, an Adoption Alliance in 2012. Katie has worked with the adoption community, specifically adoptees and pre-adoptive and adoptive parents, since 2006. At Pact, Katie works in the infant placement program, conducts home studies, leads educational webinars, presents on transracial adoption locally and nationally, works with adopted youth and leads a monthly support group for adult adoptees of color.



Angels in Adoption®

2019 ANGELS IN ADOPTION® BIOGRAPHIES

Luis & Ryan Blazer

*Recommended by
Representative Nanette Diaz Barragan*

Luis and Ryan Blazer are experienced foster parents. Their first fostering experience was with an 8-month old little girl named Mia in 2016. Little did they know that their son Bruno, whom they adopted in 2018, would come into their lives just 2 weeks after Mia's placement as a 6-day old newborn on a "fast-track to adoption" path. After Mia was successfully reunified with her mother, Luis and Ryan began their adoption match process with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services. They were soon matched with siblings, Abraham, Josephine, & Benjamin through Los Angeles Fox 11's segment Wednesday's Child. The three children had been in and out of foster care since 2014 and all in separate homes. Coming into the Blazer household has allowed the three children live together as a family – something that the children had never experienced. Luis and Ryan have truly gone above and beyond to provide and advocate for their soon to be adopted children.

Gerry Rubey, CASA/ Ventura County

*Recommended by
Representative Julia Brownley*

Gerry, having just celebrated her 20th anniversary with CASA of Ventura County, is the organization's longest serving Volunteer Advocate and Senior Peer Coordinator. Court Appointed Special Advocates, or CASAs, are specially trained and supervised advocates for abused, neglected and/or foster children who need assistance, support and a voice during their time in dependency system. Last year, Gerry was appointed to her 20th case where she serves as an exemplary advocate while also managing

25 cases for other CASAs in the organization. Over the 20-year span of her involvement, Gerry has managed upwards of 400 different CASAs with their appointees. In addition, she presents the CASA experience alongside one of several of her former appointees at the organization's initial 40-hour volunteer trainings (6 per year) and represents CASA weekly in the Juvenile Dependency Court with assigned volunteers. When CASA of Ventura County became an independent 501(c)3 in June 2011, Gerry and others donated the seed money which helped the non-profit become financially stable. As an enduring testament to her commitment, she and her husband were also foster parents for more than 10 years when she realized how the shortage of foster families impacted youth in dependency. Her contributions to foster children in Ventura County have made a positive and transformative impact for individuals and organizations.

Elitania Alvarez

*Recommended by
Representative Tony Cardenas*

Born in the San Fernando Valley and raised by a single mother of four, Elly Alvarez's commitment to serving her community was shaped by her mother's tireless dedication to providing for her children. Elly comes from a family of public servants and is passionate about working with youth and creating opportunities for children living at the margins of society. As an Intensive Treatment Foster Parent, Elly devotes her time to mentoring and providing a stable home for young children. In partnership with her sister, LAPD Officer Claudia De La Cruz, Elly founded Ballet Folklórico Joyas Divinas del Valle, a traditional Mexican dance group whose impact goes far beyond its musical performances. The group serves as a community network for local families working together to shape the next generation of leaders in the San Fernando Valley. Elly also volunteers her time supporting youth at the



Gala

2019 ANGELS IN ADOPTION BIOGRAPHIES

Los Angeles Police Department Cadet leadership program. In 2016, Elly was recognized by the County of Los Angeles for her advocacy and dedication to serving foster youth and was awarded “Parent of the Year” for Intensive Treatment Foster Care on behalf of The Village Family Services. Elly serves as the Office Manager to City of Los Angeles Councilwoman Monica Rodriguez and is the proud mother of three.

The Means DeLaca Family

*Recommended by
Representative Mike Thompson*

Shelby and Chad are not only foster parents, they are heavily involved in the foster care community. Shelby is the Program Director of TLC Child & Family Services Transitional Housing Program (THP) serving current and former foster youth. Chad is a Senior Medical Assistant in the Student Health Services Department at the Santa Rosa Junior College as well as a designated foster youth ally on campus. Chad is also a volunteer for the THP program, helping youth gain behind the wheel driving experience. The couple are active members of the Sonoma County Foster Youth Coalition and serve on the board of a budding non-profit serving resource families as well as foster children and youth. The two are married and live with three forever children. Their youngest child joined their family as an emergency foster care placement when he was three weeks old and was recently adopted in 2018. Their children are the ages of 16, 12 and 2. They are currently caring for three foster youth; infant twins and a 13-year-old. Overall, Chad and Shelby have fostered a total of 17 children. Their love extends beyond humans to include foster dogs, three of which they have adopted. They have been fostering for nine years and have recently committed to welcoming siblings groups into their home.

Angels of Grace Foster Family Agency

Recommended by Representative Jim Costa

Angels of Grace was founded by Lisa Cazares in 2000. With over twenty years of foster care and social agency management experience, Lisa founded the agency in order to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children in need. Each year, Angels of Grace assists hundreds of abused and neglected children in California’s Central Valley. Lisa was set on the path of social work after escaping an abusive marriage and finding the inner strength to forge a new life for her and her children. As a mother and survivor of domestic violence, she truly has compassion and empathy for everyone who walks into her door. Every child served by Angel of Grace receives essentials, such as clothes, shoes and medication and are treated with dignity. Their culturally diverse treatment programs provide an array of services to families in order to sustain the physical and emotional needs of the children. In conjunction with this mission, in 2008 Lisa founded Angels of Grace Safe Haven Transitional Home. The home provided housing and independent living skills to young women who have aged out, at age 18, of the foster care system. The home was closed due to the passing of AB12, a bill implemented by the State of California, which allowed children in foster care to stay in their foster homes until the age of 21.

Mrs. Earcylene Beavers

Recommended by Representative Karen Bass

Mrs. Beavers was born into a family in Arkansas, among the eldest of 18 children. Her stepfather was abusive and she lost her mother at a young age, resulting in her caring for her two youngest siblings, more as parent than a sister. She attended MTI Business College in Hollywood, where she obtained a data processing and business degree. During



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2019 ANGELS IN ADOPTION® BIOGRAPHIES

these years, she raised her two youngest sisters, who nominated her for Mom USA, an honor she won in 1996. Mrs. Beavers tried for five long years to have children, then she was blessed with her only biological daughter, Erika. To expand her love for children and to fulfill her dream of having a large family, she turned to DCFS. Since then, she has cared for more than 1000 children. During her years doing Respite Shelter for newborns, she often received two babies in the middle of the night without warning, often with no information about the child and sometimes with no clothing. In time, she adopted three youth – Steven, Keanna, and Jake. She is legal guardian to Denyshia and Sydney, who have been part of her family for more than five years. Mrs. Beavers is a natural born leader with vision, virtue, integrity with purpose, and extraordinary talents, all carried out with a smile. She is an inspiration to all who meet her.

Colorado

John and Daesha Willingham

Recommended by Senator Cory Gardner

John and Daesha bring compassion, love, and commitment to children in need of families. John and Daesha live in Colorado Springs, Colorado with their 3 children, Kalani, David, and Kiran. Having felt a calling to help children in their community, they adopted Kalani, a 14-year-old boy who had previously been labeled “unadoptable.” When most would have given up, they continued to fight and were eventually successful in providing him with a family of his own. In the years since, they have welcomed another son by birth, named Kiran, and another son by adoption, named David, a teen who had been in foster care for 10 years. They also have periodically fostered other teens and volunteer as leaders of a new foster parent support

group. John and Daesha continue to inspire their community with their kindness, faith, and humility. Daesha works as the current Executive Director of Connections at Trace Church in Colorado Springs and John owns his own business. John and Daesha consistently advocate for children in need, especially teens, and will always be a friend to the adoption and foster care community.

MaryLee Lane, Founder & CEO of Hand In Hand International Adoptions

Recommended by Senator Michael Bennet

MaryLee Lane founded Hand In Hand International Adoptions over 45 years ago and has been a tireless and extraordinary advocate for orphaned children all over the world. While living in the Philippines during the 1970’s, she recognized the enormous plight of hundreds of abandoned children in orphanages who were unlikely to live even to age five. She could not forget those little ones’ pleading looks and arms extended for love. She immediately understood her purpose in life and began working with the government of the Philippines as they established international adoption laws to protect and provide for the homeless children. Over the years, MaryLee has worked with 22 countries of the world to provide forever families for their children that could not be placed in their birth country, placing over 9,500 children into permanent homes in the U.S. MaryLee continues to advocate for children all over the world is herself a mother of 6 children, 5 of whom were adopted internationally. She has the utmost integrity and compassion for children and families formed through adoption and continues to dedicate her life so that every child can have a loving and forever family.



Gala

2019 ANGELS IN ADOPTION BIOGRAPHIES

Nicholas Thompson

*Recommended by
Representative Doug Lamborn*

Nicholas Thompson is providing much-needed foster care for teenage boys in El Paso County. He is committed to providing strong leadership and a male role model for numerous young men. While everyone else in the community is asking what to do with teenage boys who require care and attention, Nicholas has stepped up to meet this vital need in his community.

Connecticut

Sandra M. Fine

Recommended by Senator Richard Blumenthal

Sandra Fine has a passion for making a difference in the lives of children and she is on a mission to change what she calls the “negative stigma” that surrounds adoption. Sandra has worked tirelessly in adoption since 1991 and has helped countless families formed through adoption. Sandra is the Program Director of the Connecticut Adoption Services program of Waterford Country School and is an active leader in the Connecticut Council on Adoption which looks to shape policy and practice throughout the State of Connecticut. Sandra works to change the way adoptions are viewed and her goals include giving more children a fighting chance at growing up in a loving home, one family at a time. Sandra has been employed by CAS since 1998. She has worked as the Director since 2005 and has 28 years of experience with special needs, international, and domestic private adoptions. She previously was employed as the clinical supervisor at another Connecticut adoption agency. Mrs. Fine heads up the Connecticut Collaboration of Private Adoption Agencies, a group formed by CAS to help find families for harder-to-place newborns. She is on the executive Board of the Connecticut Council

on Adoption as the Probate Court Liaison and as the Nominating Committee Chairperson. Mrs. Fine is also an active member of the Connecticut Adoption Community Network.

Delaware

Cynthia Aman

Recommended by Senator Chris Coons

Cynthia Aman, a veteran of the U.S. Army from Wilmington, Delaware, has dedicated her career to public service. Cindy’s experience as a police officer, corrections officer, substance abuse counselor, mitigation specialist for the public defender’s office, and her development of a prisoner re-entry program demonstrates her commitment and compassion for others. As a foster parent with her fiancé Eric Daniels, Cindy saw flaws in the laws of Delaware and wanted to make a change. During this period, the couple learned that only married or single persons could adopt a foster child; however, for cohabitating couples, adoption was not an option. The pair thought it unfair to a foster child to be able to live with them but could not join their family through adoption as their goal is to foster to adopt. Recently, Cindy worked with members of the state legislature to change the law via Delaware Senate Bill 94. Invited by the Delaware governor, Cindy gave the keynote address at the bill signing for S.B. 94 on July 30, 2019.

District of Columbia

Family & Youth Initiative

*Recommended by
Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton*

DCFYI is an organization committed to finding lifelong connections for youth in foster care who



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are at risk of aging out. They know that one stable, loving connection can make all the difference for a youth in care. They find mentors and adoptive homes for youth in DC's foster care system. They work with a population that too often is overlooked or considered "unadoptable". They make sure that these phenomenal young men and women have people in their corners who are cheering for them and there for them, and, in doing this, they prevent these young people from experiencing some of the worst injustices.

Florida

Dr. Kate Callahan

*Recommended by
Representative Donna Shalala*

Dr. Callahan is currently Chairwoman of the Board of Directors of the OurKids Organization (OK). This non-profit organization is the lead agency in Miami-Dade and Monroe counties caring for the 3,200 children in foster care. As the lead agency, OK's organization lead the work of the Community Based Care organization system (CBC's) of Florida. "We strive to find foster and adoptive homes that are culturally comfortable for the children in our care," said Dr. Callahan. Prior to joining the board of OurKids, Dr. Callahan served for many years as a member of a citizen review panel for the Florida Foster Care Review (FFCR) organization. In that capacity, along with other community volunteers, she worked to advance the safety, stability and success of children in foster care by connecting them to essential services, supportive relationships and permanent families. She now serves on the Board of Directors of the Florida Foster Care Review. Dr. Callahan also has a long history working with homeless families in her community as a board member of Camillus House and worked with homeless families in her capacity as a nurse.

She believes that working with foster youth and helping to find permanent adoptive homes for these children will slow the growth of homelessness in her community.

Reverend Vanessa Tinsley

*Recommended by
Representative Debbie Mucarsel-Powell*

Reverend Vanessa Tinsley has played a major role in child welfare in South Florida for more than 30 years. As an adoptee herself, she is passionate about inspiring foster/adopted children to reach their fullest potential and to ensuring they feel loved and valued. She is the Executive Director and Founder of Bridge to Hope, a nonprofit that provides comprehensive wrap-around supports designed to build self-sufficiency for low-income and in-crisis families. She has assisted families that provide foster care and focused on child welfare through targeted programs and services that increase their access to opportunity, raise their quality of life and standard of living. In addition to home basics, the nonprofit also provides 300 backpacks, more than 7,500 meals and distributes of over 35,000 bags of food and hygiene products annually to low-income families.

Yvette DuBose

*Recommended by
Representative Alcee Hastings*

Yvette DuBose has been a child advocate for more than 18 years. She is currently the CEO/Executive Director of the Heart Gallery of Broward County, which has assisted with more than 350 adoptions of foster children to their forever families since its founding in 2006. She also serves as a Board Member for the Heart Gallery of Florida and an At-Large Board Member for Children Families Leadership Association in Broward County. In these roles, she raises awareness of adoption from foster care, recruits foster and adoptive parents, advocates for legislation,



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and advocates for faith- and community-based care agency partnerships. At an early age, Yvette learned of the importance of adoption from foster care. Her own mother was a hard-to-place foster child that lingered as a ward of the state from age six to 16 until she was adopted, changing the trajectory of her life. After learning first-hand the importance of adoption and the need to break the cycle of abuse, Yvette began volunteering during her formative years, going on to become an adoption advocate and foster mom to a sibling group of three. Yvette is the proud wife of State Representative Bobby DuBose of Florida's 94th district and mother to five children, three of which were adopted. Through two decades of service, Yvette DuBose has truly demonstrated her dedication to advocating for children in need of families.

Kellie Chestnut

*Recommended by
Representative John Rutherford*

Kellie Chestnut is a former therapist from Kentucky who specializes in interdisciplinary early childhood education. It was through her work that she had the opportunity to meet her now adopted son, Travis. After working extensively with Travis as his therapist, Kellie chose to welcome him and his three sisters – Harley, Hannah, and Kamryn – into her family through adoption. The four children have grown into successful young adults and are now on track to graduate high school, enrolled in college, or working independently in Kentucky. Kellie's two oldest, Krista and Megan, are both married and have children of their own. Recently, Kellie invited all of Travis's siblings into her home so they could get to know one another and remain in each other's lives. Kellie continues to stay in contact with their biological mother. Kellie has shown her commitment to supporting children and families in need both through her professional role as a therapist and her role as a loving mother. Her dedication to the

care and education of children has impacted the lives of many and her heart for others does not go unnoticed. "These children have been more of a blessing to me than I could have ever been to them," said Kellie. "They changed my life."

Dr. Arie Collins Sailor

Recommended by Representative Al Lawson

Dr. Arie Collins Sailor has been a champion for adoption in this state since 1987, and has served as Executive Director for One Church One Child of Florida since 2002. Under her leadership, the agency has signed over 800 partner churches, recruited and referred over 2000 resource families for adoption, foster care and mentoring, and continues to develop new community and business partnerships each year to help support children in foster care and local families. She has also worked for Florida Department of Education, Tallahassee Community College, Florida State University, Florida Commission on Community Service, and the Florida Department of Children and Families. Her service includes adoption counselor, parent trainer, adoption specialist, training facilitator, program manager, budget account manager, administrator, AmeriCorps funding consultant, program specialist and national service director. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in social work from Florida A & M University and a doctorate degree in ministry from Andersonville Theological Seminary. Personally, she is very involved in church ministries, working alongside her husband, Edward, who is also her Pastor. They are the parents of five children, one of which was adopted from Florida's foster care system over 35 years ago, nine grandchildren and two great grandchildren.



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Georgia

Calvary Children's Home, Inc.

*Recommended by
Representative Barry Loudermilk*

Rev. Ben Turner (1927-2006) realized the tremendous need for the family to stay together after witnessing the emotional pain and impact on children who were separated from their parents and siblings when placed in foster care. He created Calvary Children's Home to provide a safe, loving, Christian home for children. Children entrusted in care receive the best skills training, education, and values so that they may become responsible, productive members of society. Attending church, local schools, and school activities provide a sense of normalcy in their lives. As the children age and demonstrate maturity and responsibility, they may hold part-time jobs in the community. Calvary started with one building on one acre of land with room for 10 - 15 children with house parents. Once Calvary began accepting children, local juvenile courts, pastors, and individuals in the area began requesting assistance to house other children in need. The demand and support prompted Calvary to move to a 13-acre campus which now cares for 35 - 40 children with house parents. Calvary has served as home to over 400 children. The children of look toward each other as family and for many children, Calvary is their home and family.

Hawaii

Abigail Sylvester, LCSW

Recommended by Representative Ed Case

Abigail Sylvester serves as Director of Social Work for Hawaii International Child, a non-profit adoption agency. Her career in child welfare spans

over 15 years and her passion for helping children extends beyond her profession and is reflected in her volunteer work and her family life. As Director of Social Work, Abby provides counseling, home studies, and other supports for children in Hawaii's foster care system. She says the best part of her job is the journey to achieve all aspects of success: helping youth to be placed in permanent families; helping families through the transition; helping adoptive families to understand, respect, honor and celebrate their adoptive child's first family; and celebrating ethnicity and birth culture. Abby has also served as a board member for It Takes an 'Ohana, a family resource organization. She is an active member of Hawaii Adoption and Permanency Alliance (HAPA) and many other family support organizations. Abby's impressive professional accomplishments coupled with her volunteer activities are even more remarkable considering her family life is also full of children. She is the mother of 11 of whom eight are adopted. She adopted three sibling groups through Hawaii's foster care system. And while she served as a caseworker for a child named Mala in the foster care system, Mala requested that Abby become her mother. They made their bond official when Abby adopted 21 year-old Mala.

Idaho

Janet Lee Hibbert

Recommended by Senator James Risch

It all began in 1973 when they were asked by their church to sponsor a Native American child for the academic school year. Dale was welcomed into their home and was family for the next four years. This was the start of Janet's working with young people in distress. Janet received her state license and for the next 15 years assisted local social workers, in providing fostering services in eastern Idaho. Children would be brought to her home at times



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with up to 3 of their siblings, and were taken in and quickly mainstreamed into a loving family life and activities. Janet and her husband cumulatively served as foster parents for 68 children. One five-year-old girl was adopted and became her seventh special child. This was one of the brightest moments in her fostering experience. Janet was called on many times to provide care for children in distress, especially for working migrant families who could not find, nor afford, traditional daycare. She was reliable and conscientious and word traveled fast of her ability to handle difficult and distressed situations. She was heard to say that fostering children was simply a labor of love, and that by imagining herself in like situations, even for an instant, motivated her to continue helping.

Illinois

Alicia Wehby

*Recommended by
Representative Lauren Underwood*

A mother of 4 children, including 3 foster turned adopted children, took action and mobilized the community around children in the foster system in response to the news of five year old, AJ Freund's death in Crystal Lake, Illinois. The high profile tragedy shook the community and the nation, bringing attention to our child welfare system. With communities filled with sadness and loss of how to help, many members of their community felt anxious and compelled to act but were not sure where to direct their efforts. Mobilizing the community to act on the welfare of children, Alicia Wehby created an outlet for people of any age to make a difference in a child's life. Alicia co-created an event with her husband, Matt, called "Stuff the Duffel" which aimed at providing foster children necessary items as they transitioned into their new homes. These backpacks

were filled with necessity and comfort items that would aid babies to teenagers. Families, children, and various community members all worked together to pack 4,000 care bags in one month. With the overflow of donations, the group was able to donate these generous duffels to various foster agencies across the state. Alicia and Matt went on to start a nonprofit called Second Bridge Inc. to continue supporting foster children during and post placement.

Chris & Julie Tracy

Recommended by Representative John Shimkus

Julie and Chris Tracy had two biological children, Summer and Wyatt. One day, the Tracys decided to adopt children with special needs from China, and they began their journey. Fourteen months later, they met their daughter, Ellie, then 22 months old, who arrived at her forever home in March 2012. Julie and Chris's passion to grow their family and help others in need began to blossom as they bonded with Ellie. Tracy and Chris began the process of adopting another child and were contacted about 7-month-old Isaac, and only four months later, he found his forever home with the Tracys in June 2013 followed by three-year-old Sophie in 2015. While in China picking up Sophie, Chris and Julie learned of a little red-haired boy named Patrick. Tragically, Patrick became very ill and was classified medically unadoptable. Though he passed away at age 5 and was never allowed to come to his forever home, the Tracys have given several adoption grants in his name. Chris and Julie also began an organization named Equipping the Called in 2014. It started with one gift basket for a family who was getting a newborn but quickly outgrew several locations. Now, a foster parent can call at any time and set up an appointment to visit and select supplies at no cost with a volunteer at the storefront in Troy, Illinois.



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Indiana

Dininger Family

Recommended by Senator Mike Braun

The Dininger Family are huge advocates of foster care in their community of Lebanon Indiana where they are also devoted parents to their biological, adopted, and foster children. Kevin and Brianne have welcomed children from foster care into their home for many years and just recently officially adopted their foster daughter, Haley. The Dingers are an extraordinary family committed to helping children and families in their community in their capacity as foster parents and through their connections to other local organizations.

Jacob & Jessica Phillips

Recommended by Representative Greg Pence

Jacob Phillips has been a reservist in the U.S. Marine Corps for the past 26 years and currently serves as a Command Sergeant Major. A medically retired Police Officer from California, he now works as a contracted Logistics Analyst for helicopter missile systems. He has also been a Volunteer Firefighter (and Chaplain) for the past 7 years. Jessica and Jacob Phillips have been married for 22 years and have 5 children (two biological, ages 20 and 18, and three adopted at birth, ages 8, 4, and 1). Jessica has always homeschooled their children. She founded and coordinates a Christian adoption support group in Central Indiana. An unexpected blessing for this family in relocating to Indiana about a decade ago was learning that it is such an adoption-friendly state. The Phillips family feels that they have not done anything exceptional, and are not worthy of any recognition. Jacob and Jessica are shining examples of servant hearts in their gracious leadership to be a family to three children in need.

Monica Kelsey

Recommended by Representative Jim Banks

Monica Kelsey, founded Safe Haven Baby Boxes (SHBB), Inc. after learning she was abandoned as an infant and after seeing a “baby box” in operation at a church, in Cape Town, South Africa. She has made it her personal mission to educate others on the Safe Haven Law and to do whatever it takes to save the lives of innocent babies from being abandoned. The Safe Haven Baby Box takes the face to face interaction out of the surrender and protects the mother from being seen. As a former firefighter and medic, Monica understands how first responders can take proactive steps to eliminate illegal abandonment. Monica and the SHBB team have referred over 500 women to crisis pregnancy centers, assisted in 6 adoption referrals, and have helped with 59 legal Safe Haven surrenders. Monica shares her personal story to thousands of people every year and has made a goal to one day have a baby box in every state and eliminate illegal infant abandonment.

Iowa

Elizabeth and Jake Skurdal

Recommended by Senator Charles Grassley

Liz and Jake Skurdal met working at a residential treatment facility for troubled teens and even before they were married they became licensed for foster care and adoption. Their first foster child came to their home just one week after their wedding. In 2011 two siblings (ages 3 and 21 months) were placed with Liz and Jake as an emergency placement. The two children went back and forth to their biological parents for five years, but when the parents completely relapsed into drug use and violence, the children were returned to Jake and Liz’ care and were adopted. During this time period, another sibling group came to the Skurdal home, ages 4 months, 2, and 6. Liz and Jake adopted all



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three children. Another 21 month-old boy, whose mother was homeless, was placed with Jake and Liz, who eventually adopted him. Liz and Jake continue to keep in contact with the biological parents of their children with email updates, phone calls, and supervised visits. All 6 children were special needs adoptions due to mental health and behavioral/emotional issues that continue to present anxiety and other challenges. Throughout the process of fostering and adopting their six children, the Skurdals also fostered 19 children. They advocate for adoption and foster care, hoping to inspire more to become foster parents.

Melissa King

Recommended by Representative Steve King

Melissa (Missy) King has been serving children and families in Iowa for 20 years. She began her career working with adolescent sexual offenders as a counselor in a structured residential program. (1999-2005). In 2012, Missy took on a role within the IA Department of Human Services, as a child protection assessor. Her role as an assessor was to investigate allegations of child and dependent adult abuse. In assessing these situations, it is critical to thoroughly assess the needs of the children and their families to help insure their safety, strengthen their families and build self-sufficiency. Missy's skill in engaging families in crisis was both compassionate and creative, setting the stage for them to start making positive steps toward health and safety. At the beginning of 2017, Missy transitioned into her current role with the IA Department of Human Services as an adoption specialist. Missy now works with special needs children, who have been freed for adoption. She locates homes and coordinates services to facilitate permanency for children in their forever homes. Missy is a strong advocate for children and knows that the key to helping is building strong relationships with those she serves, her co-workers, her community partners and other professionals within the child welfare.

Kansas

Honorable Kevin M. Smith

Recommended by Senator Pat Roberts

District Court Judge Kevin M. Smith has presented the dire statistics on foster care to any group who will listen since shortly after taking the bench January 2016, advocating for the plight of kids in state's custody. He speaks to churches, community organizations, and other groups about what it takes to be a foster parent, how the community can support foster parents, how best to support kids in care, and how to be a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer, or mentor foster children in other ways. His efforts have brought the issue to people who want to help but don't know how. Recently, with pediatrician Dr. Rebecca Reddy, he co-hosted a round table with more than 80 stakeholders at Central Christian Church to discuss how the community can support foster families and their children. His efforts have sparked the interest of the Wichita community to get more involved when it comes to children in need of families.

David Saul & Jeff Antoniewicz

Recommended by Representative Sharice Davids

Jeff and David are a same sex couple that took 3 young boys out of the foster care system. These 3 boys bounced around several different homes until they met Jeff and David. After spending a temporary period of time with them and getting to know and care for the boys, Jeff and David decided to adopt. During the adoption process, they received extraordinary support from the Judge on their case who helped the loving dads finalize the adoption and become legal fathers of all three boys. They have now been thriving as a family of five for the past 8 years.



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Jeff and Mollie Carey

Recommended by Senator Jerry Moran

Jeff and Mollie have long had an interest in adoption, dating back to high school for Mollie. After having three healthy biological boys, the couple began talking about expanding the family by adding a girl. With an ear to God, they began to begin the laborious process of international adoption. For them, the trip to China and the experience of having a new daughter and member of the family was life-changing. Willa arrived home in Kansas one day before her first birthday, and she bonded with the entire family almost instantly. However, Willa was born with a cleft lip and palate, and within three months of coming home, the Careys arranged for her first surgery. Again, remaining open to God's plan for their family, Jeff and Mollie once again heard the call to bring another member to the family through adoption. Though they started down the path of adopting from China once more, they saw Isabel was available in Korea. A year into the process, the Careys hope to have a court date set in the next couple of months. She will turn two in September, and she is a healthy, vibrant little girl. All of their children are excited to bring Isabel home and be of help, and Jeff and Mollie hope to bring the whole family to Korea when it's time to bring little Isabel home.

Kentucky

James and Kasey Perry

Recommended by Representative Brett Guthrie

James and Kasey Perry already had six children at home when they became aware of the plight of the orphans with disabilities in Ukraine. Heartbroken for the vast need for special needs adoptions in the country, in 2017 they set out to Ukraine to adopt and bring home their sweet Daisy. Since Daisy has been home, the family has continued to advocate fiercely for other children, and at least two other children have been adopted as a direct result, with

the domino effect continuing from there. The Perry's work hard to raise grant money for waiting children and to help other families fundraise for their own adoptions. They dream of helping raise money for medical therapies for disabled children in Ukraine so that more families will feel equipped to raise their children born with special needs, rather than send them to orphanages for care. Presently, the Perrys are adopting once again in Ukraine, with plans to bring a child home early in 2020.

Representative David Meade

Recommended by Representative Hal Rogers

Kentucky State Representative & Speaker Pro Tem David Meade has successfully overhauled Kentucky's adoption and foster care system over the last six years. His fierce determination to help the nearly 9,000 children in Kentucky's foster care system is inspiring. In 2018, he spearheaded the state's monumental Adoption and Foster Care Reform legislation, which was praised by leaders beyond the borders of Kentucky and noted as a national model. Most recently, he authored and advocated for the "Kentucky's Foster Child Bill of Rights" which was signed into law on June 5, 2019, catapulting Kentucky as a national leader in adoption and foster care. His mission was born from the compassion he has for children in the foster care system without a voice, combined with his personal passion as an adoptive father. He and his wife fully understand what it means to open their home and their hearts to a child who needs a forever family, as well as the child's right to advocate for a better future. The three child welfare bills sponsored by Rep. Meade are now effective state laws in Kentucky, putting the Commonwealth one year ahead of national standards. Rep. Meade's courage of conviction to secure a better and safer future for children in foster care was the drive behind stellar legislative action that has changed the course of their futures in Kentucky.



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Chris & Angie Thomas

Recommended by Senator Mitch McConnell

Chris and Angie Thomas were in the process of adopting their son Rowan Yachalu from Ethiopia when the Ethiopian government suspended all international adoptions in April 2017. This was devastating to the Thomas Family who had started their adoption journey in 2010, never anticipating the long and arduous road that lie ahead. Although the Ethiopian adoption suspension was full of unknowns, the Thomas's were determined to fight for Rowan's adoption to be completed in a timely manner. They contacted Senator McConnell to request assistance for the 200 American families like their own who were trying to bring their adopted children home from Ethiopia. Senator McConnell and several members of the Kentucky delegation sent a letter to the Ethiopian Ambassador to the U.S. to advocate for the safe, proper and expeditious completion of their cases. Several months later, Chris and Angie were finally able to bring their son home to Louisville after a seven-year adoption journey. Rowan Yachalu has thrived. His bright smile and vibrant personality are a constant reminder of why every child is worth fighting for and deserves a forever family. He has brought life, vitality and beauty to the Thomas family and has only deepened their gratitude for the gift of adoption.

Louisiana

Children's Advocacy Network

*Recommended by
Representative Ralph Abraham*

In 1995 the Rapides Children's Advocacy Center was founded by a group of individuals focused on helping victims of child abuse. Their original has since expanded and led to the establishment of the Children's Advocacy Network (CAN). Located in Alexandria, La, CAN has been instrumental in improving the health and safety of children in the

Central Louisiana Community. CAN provides invaluable services and systems of support for over 1,000 children a year, aiding victims of child abuse and those in the foster care system. The Children's Advocacy Network's programs use a holistic and comprehensive approach to caring for victims of child abuse and their families. CAN is the region's only not-for-profit organization that coordinates the efforts of child protection staff, law enforcement professionals, family advocates, medical experts and mental health clinicians under one roof fostering hope and healing for children and their families. Additionally, they offer the Court Appointed Special Advocate program (CASA) to aid children in the foster care system in seven parishes. CASA assigns a community volunteer to advocate on behalf of children in the foster care system to find safe and permanent homes. CAN also provides trauma focused therapy for children and families, helping to rebuild the lives of those affected by child abuse. The network works tirelessly to champion the causes of children in the Central Louisiana community.

Paula Cimino Davis

Recommended by Senator John Kennedy

Paula Cimino Davis, LCSW-BACS, Clinical Director at Maternity, Adoption, and Behavioral Health of Catholic Charities Diocese of Baton Rouge, has more than 20 years of domestic and international adoption experience working with birth parents, adoptive parents and adopted people. She also provides counseling and support for families post-adoption, including working with those who are initiating a search. In 2008, she completed the Hunter College Post-Graduate Certificate Program in Adoption Competence. She is passionate about educating the community about adoption and dispelling adoption myths and has presented at state and local conferences. Paula has dedicated her career to serving children who have special needs and their families. She has directly helped to place over 100 children in loving homes and has indirectly helped to place many more. In preparing families and walking



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with them throughout the lifelong journey of adoption, Paula continues to make a lasting impact on the lives of many. Paula received her MSW from Louisiana State University and has been an adjunct instructor at LSU School of Social Work since 2000. In addition, Paula has helped form hundreds of social work students and social workers by her work at LSU and by supervising new social workers. She also serves on the Louisiana Law Institute's Children's Code Committee to draft legislation that ensures that adoptions are more ethical and transparent in the State of Louisiana.

Honorable Judge Ree J. Casey-Jones

Recommended by Congressman Mike Johnson

Judge Ree J. Casey-Jones handles every adoption in Caddo Parish, Louisiana. She wakes up every morning knowing that her purpose in life is that she makes a positive difference in the lives of those around her, and she feels that the strongest when a family becomes legally whole. Judge Casey-Jones has presided over 200 adoptions in the nearly 3 years that she has been on the bench. Additionally, she hears over half of the cases in the 10 specialty courts in Caddo Parish's Juvenile Court. Out of all of these cases, adoptions are what she looks forward to the most. Her compassion helps her to see beyond often horrific situations to the underlying needs of these children and families. Judge Casey-Jones is also an advocate for children in foster care and volunteers many hours each year mentoring children and contributing to foster care programs. Judge Casey-Jones believes it is the community's collective obligation to nurture children, protect them, teach them what is best and love them unconditionally. As a wife, mother to an 8-year-old son, daughter and judge, she cares for many people, and she knew that becoming a judge also came with a lot more responsibility. What she did not know was the impact that she would have on the people she serves daily and the impact that it would have in her own life.

Megan Boudreaux Anderson

Recommended by Senator Bill Cassidy

Megan Boudreaux founded Respire Haiti in 2011, a non-profit to fight for the freedom of Haiti's estimated 300,000 child slaves. Megan began a feeding program and transformed a barren hillside into a refuge including a school for 500 children, a medical clinic that includes mental health therapy, physical and occupational therapy as well as tennis and soccer programs. Megan is an advocate, first and foremost, for family preservation. She works diligently with a family reunification coalition in Haiti to educate individuals about the importance of children belonging in families and combating the crisis of orphanages by encouraging deinstitutionalization in Haiti. Megan married her husband, Joshua Anderson, in 2013. Together they have adopted three Haitian children and in October 2018 they welcomed a new baby girl. Megan and Josh reside with their family in Gressier, Haiti.

Marketa Garner Walters

*Recommended by
Representative Cedric Richmond*

A national leader in the field of child welfare, Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services Secretary Marketa Garner Walters has dedicated her career to improving the lives of children and families. While Walters was serving as CEO of Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana, Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco tapped her to serve as Assistant Secretary of the Department of Social Services, Louisiana's child welfare agency in 2004. After serving four years under Governor Blanco and another year under Governor Bobby Jindal, Walters accepted a position on the national stage as Director of the Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center, a technical assistance center focused on best practices in child welfare. She then served as a child welfare consultant until Governor John Bel Edwards



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appointed her DCFS Secretary in January 2016. Under her leadership, DCFS revolutionized its approach to foster care with the Quality Parenting Initiative and Louisiana Fosters, which enhances supports to foster parents. Last year, Louisiana raised the age of foster care from 18 to 21 and is proud to be a Wendy's Wonderful Kids partner. During Walters' tenure, Louisiana has set annual records for adoptions out of foster care, adopting over 3,250 children and youth into forever families.

Maine

Herbert and Stephanie Spencer

Recommended by Senator Susan Collins

The Spencer's have two biological children, six adopted children, and are currently fostering 3 children. Their kids range from two weeks to 21 years old, they also have a god daughter they met through foster care that is very close to them. Their oldest daughter has an 11-month-old so they are also new grandparents. In 2012 the Spencer's became involved in foster care when a child they were watching needed a placement. Herbert and Stephanie chose to pursue the foster care license and take on his older sibling who they have sense adopted. They have had 20 more placements since they began fostering, including children who are drug affected and those that have required special services. Stephanie also has Multiple Sclerosis which comes with its own challenges. Although Herbert and Stephanie have had children from all ages they enjoy taking teenagers and hope to one day open a home for teens in foster care.

Maryland

Baltimore Child Abuse Center

Recommended by Sen. Chris Van Hollen

Baltimore Child Abuse Center provides victims of child sexual abuse and other adverse childhood experiences with crisis intervention along with medical and mental health treatment with a goal of preventing future trauma. Since 2014, BCAC, a nationally accredited child advocacy center, has provided the required medical examinations for almost all children in Baltimore City who enter foster care – an average of 47 foster care children each month. BCAC's trauma-informed, child-sensitive approach makes it an ideal place for children who have experienced trauma to receive care. Without BCAC's medical intervention, foster children of all ages would be seen at chaotic city emergency rooms or community health clinics by medical practitioners not versed in child maltreatment, or would wait weeks to be seen by a provider – neither which is as comprehensive as care received at BCAC. BCAC's Board-certified child abuse pediatricians and other medical professionals are experts in understanding child maltreatment and are uniquely equipped to work with fragile children and youth. BCAC's expert medical team have found evidence of sexual trauma and physical maltreatment that often goes undetected by other medical providers. Baltimore Child Abuse Center makes a transformative difference in the lives of children in foster care in Baltimore.

Charlotte E. Elder

Recommended by Senator Ben Cardin

Charlotte Elder is a strong, intelligent, and kind single woman who has enthusiastically welcomed over 40 foster children into her home over the past 7 years. She was a resource for emergency placements,



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respite placements, long term placements and bilingual placements for newborns to 18 year olds transitioning to independence. She now joyfully claims 3 siblings as her permanent family. Charlotte continues to be a resource to new and existing foster families as a mentor, as a support to navigate the on-boarding process. Charlotte often tables at community events to recruit new foster parents, and regularly attends national foster and adoption conferences. Her future focus includes increasing social support and resources for transracial foster families, new foster families, and families with challenging placements.

Massachusetts

Dakota Roundtree-Swain

Recommended by Senator Ed Markey

Dakota is an inspirational young woman who has already spent years working to improve the lives of foster youth. Having aged out of the foster care system herself, she is now pursuing her Ph.D in Social Policy at Brandeis University, with a focus on how foster care policy affects children, youth, and families. After graduating from Emmanuel College in Boston, she worked as a Court Appointed Special Advocate to assist children and families that have survived abuse, and even created an older youth program within CASA. More recently, Dakota helped elect Rachael Rollins' as Suffolk County's District Attorney, starting as an organizer and quickly working up to become Field Director, while also lending her expertise to Rollins' juvenile policy portfolio. Her academic pursuits, volunteer time, and professional career have all been for the betterment of vulnerable children and families.

Michigan

Janet Sanford

Recommended by Tim Walberg

Twenty-three years ago, Janet Sanford knew that she wanted to be a mother, but she never dreamed she would foster 164 children, adopting ten of them along the way. Her ten adopted children include Sera, 34, Brittany, 33, Dawnn, 26, Tosha, 25, Nick and Nora (twins), 21, Marissa, 19, Bree and Audrey (twins), 17, and Derek, 15. She currently also has five foster children in her home. She is the proud grandma of 12 grandchildren. Over the years, Janet has not only provided a loving home for children in crisis, but has come to understand that her role as a foster parent includes helping to reunite families whenever possible. She has made it her mission to work toward family reunification. With her wealth of wisdom, love, and experience, she continually reaches out to the struggling parents of the children she fosters, making every effort to help them learn, grow, and heal. Friends and co-workers recognize that she is a special person with a gift for nurturing children, especially those with special needs. The message Janet wants to share with others is that not everyone is called to be a foster parent, but everyone can do something – even bringing a meal to a family who fosters or extending another small kindness.

Erik Berryman & Cassie Harris-Berryman

Recommended by Senator Gary Peters

Cassie and Erik were licensed for foster care in 2010 and received their first foster care placement, Hailey, a relative of Cassie's, that same year. Since then, they have had foster care placement of 3 of Hailey's half-siblings, all of whom have extensive special needs due to prenatal drug and alcohol exposure. The Berrymans adopted Hailey in 2012, her half-brother, Oliver, in 2013, her half-brother, Gabriel, in



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2019, and are soon to adopt another half-sibling in 2019. They also had foster care placement, eventually leading to adoption in 2014, of Kaprixa, Kavexah, & Kavonix, another sibling set of 3 with special needs. The Harris-Berymans are now a family of 13 with 4 biological children and 7 adopted children, all of which have various special needs. They are fierce advocates for the needs of their children, with appointments almost every day of the week. They encourage extra-curricular activities, reading, music, ballet, theater, church activities and associations to enrich their lives, keep them thinking and learning. The Berryman family are committed to keeping siblings together and maintaining relationships with appropriate biological relatives.

Elizabeth Davis and Gordon Thompson

Recommended by Representative John Moolenaar

Elizabeth Davis and Gordon Thompson are a newly married couple who have opened their hearts and home to Nate, a troubled teen who experienced abuse and neglect for much of his life. Finding adoptive homes for a teen is not easy, but Liz and Gordon were ready. They have taken now 18-year-old Nate into their family and are providing the security, guidance and love that he has so desperately needed. He is now thriving as a charismatic, friendly young man.

Spaulding for Children - Stronger Families Build Stronger Communities

Recommended by Representative Rashida Tlaib

Spaulding for Children's commitment to their work has allowed them to make impactful and positive change in the countless families they have brought together through fostering and adoption. Since its founding in 1968, Spaulding for Children has worked to provide stable and loving homes for children who

have been neglected and abused. Spaulding's staff and leadership has demonstrated an unwavering commitment in its mission to provide safe permanent housing for children, all while nurturing loving homes. Beyond offering foster and adoptive services, Spaulding has committed to early intervention in the lives of the most vulnerable with its home visit program for families at risk. They are a tremendous asset to the families of the State of Michigan. Spaulding for Children is a true advocate for human and family development and they exemplify that through their everyday work and services.

Minnesota

Hal Kaufman

Recommended by Senator Amy Klobuchar and Representative Dean Phillips

Hal Kaufman and his wife, Julie Berman, adopted their two sons through open, domestic adoptions in 2005 and 2007. They have incredibly strong relationships with their boys' birth families and are models and ardent advocates for domestic adoption and open adoption. In 2008, Hal started My Adoption Advisor, LLC and has spent the last 11 years helping adopting parents who are trying to fulfill their parenting dreams connect with expectant parents who want to place their child for adoption. Hal works closely with reputable adoption agencies and attorneys from across the country, many of whom are past Angels in Adoption Honorees. Hal shares his passion for reducing barriers to adoption through his volunteer work, as well. For more than a decade, Hal has worked to reduce the stigma and myths surrounding adoption by facilitating and speaking on adoption panels in high schools across Minnesota. He's done this as a volunteer for Bellis, a Minnesota-based, non-profit organization that focuses on adoption education and support. In addition to educating thousands of high school students, Hal also speaks to hopeful adopting parents



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at RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association's Infertility, Adoption, and Family Building Summit. For the past 10 years, he has coordinated all aspects of the Summit's adoption panels and facilitates and/or speaks on most of the panels, as well.

Stacy Manning

Recommended by Representative Tom Emmer

Stacy Manning was on a mission to help adoptive and foster families get to happy and healthy. She and her husband Pat have 6 children and 1 granddaughter. After becoming an adoptive mom, Stacy realized new parenting tools and new parenting support methods were needed. She vowed that if it was up to her, no one would ever do this alone. She created Hope Connections and served thousands and thousands of adoptive and foster families around the world through her online coaching group CONNECT, trainings, speaking at conferences, her book *Adoptive Parent Intentional Parent*, and her Facebook Page – Adoptive & Foster Parenting. Parent after parent said that Stacy saved their family. She was always quick to credit the work the parents did, not what she did. Recently, Stacy began a new outreach to support teachers of students who've been impacted by trauma. Through her Facebook Page – Trauma-Sensitive Teachers, as well as her membership group IMPACT she provided teachers tools, trainings, and support so all students can feel safe, loved, & capable. Unfortunately, Stacy unexpectedly passed away in April, 2019. Her family and her team have chosen to carry on Stacy's mission by continuing to serve adoptive and foster families and teachers through both coaching groups and Facebook pages. Stacy dedicated her life to her family and to her mission of helping Adopted and Foster Children.

Mississippi

Diane Adkins

Recommended by Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith

Diane Adkins has served as a foster parent to infants for more than 20 years. Even when she had the babies for only a short time, she made sure they were loved as if they were her own. In addition to caring for healthy babies, Diane readily accepted infants with special needs, ensuring these children received anything they required. Diane has also opened her home to mothers, infants, and adoptive families. Amy Bowles, Diane's friend says, "There are so many children in this world thriving in homes with parents who love and cherish them because Diane stood in the gap for them. She's a gift to us all." Debbie Velie, says that so many families and children have been helped by Diane, they began having yearly "reunions" centered around her. Amy and Debbie also shared that Diane was always available to take in a child at any time and would drive however far she needed to pick up the little one for whom she would be caring. Diane says that her biggest accomplishment in life is being the mother of two, her daughter Megan and her son Trey. It is obvious that caring for children, is Diane Adkins' greatest joy. She has delivered all this care with deepest love.

Dr. Lee & Suzanne Walker

Recommended by Senator Roger Wicker

In 2017, Dr. Lee and Suzanne Walker felt called by their faith to adopt seven foster care children to raise with their one biological child. Dr. Walker and Suzanne continue to advocate tirelessly for the care and adoptions of foster children.



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Missouri

Zach & Joanna Holden

Recommended by Representative Billy Long

Joanna and Zach Holden began fostering in May 2010 as a young couple with three young girls of their own. They entered the world of foster care committed to making an impact on the lives of children knowing that it wouldn't always be easy on their family. In early 2012, they began a small ministry out of their garage called The Caring Closet which later merged with Fostering Hope, another local foster care ministry. Joanna tirelessly worked at gathering and sorting donations, putting together packs of clothes, and distributing them to local foster families whenever there was a need. Fostering Hope now supports children in foster care, foster families, and foster care agency workers across several different communities in Southwest Missouri. Throughout their 9-year journey in the foster care world, the Holdens have had 30 foster children come through their home and have adopted two children through foster care. They have shown love, built relationships, and provided support to biological families, other foster families, agency workers, and countless children in the foster care system. They have faced challenges with grace and love and have been a shining example to those in their community about what it means to show God's love to others, especially to the vulnerable and hurting children.

Kristin & Justin Akin

Recommended by Senator Roy Blunt

After thirty-three months in three different pediatric hospitals and four bone marrow transplants, Kristin and Justin Akin lost both of our their sons, Matthew, age 5, and Andrew, age 2, within eight months of each other. They both

agreed that life would never be nearly as fulfilling not being parents and decided to explore adoption. Just four short months after the death of their older son, Matthew, the Akins received a phone call from their OBGYN friend who had a young teenage patient who had no prenatal care and was due in two weeks, with no plans to keep the baby and asked if they were interested. After phone calls with the birth mother and family, everyone agreed that they were meant to be the parents of the unborn boy. One week later, the Akins welcomed their son, William Clayton Akin, into the world. Seven years later, the same friend reached out to them again with a similar patient situation. They spoke briefly with the mom, and all decided this baby boy was meant to be theirs as well and the couple was invited to be a part of the birth. A few short weeks later, at the same hospital where William was born, Kirstin and Justin welcomed their son, Christopher Mason Akin, into the world. The couple has no doubt that their two angel brothers in heaven helped make this happen. The Akins remain grateful and in awe of the power of adoption and overwhelming love for their four boys.

Kim McDaniel

Recommended by Senator Josh Hawley

Kim had just started working as a nurse when she was assigned to the case of a little girl named Brooklyn in the NICU. Brooklyn had a massive tumor in her mouth that grew from the base of her tongue. Things took a dark turn when Brooklyn's birth parents abandoned her at the hospital. "It just broke my heart every time she would go for surgery. When they would bring her back, there was no one for the doctors to talk to. There was no one waiting for her," Kim said. She and the other nurses were compelled to be Brooklyn's family, taking turns holding her and caring for her beyond what their



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job required of them. Kim became convinced that she was the family Brooklyn needed, even though, as a single woman, the thought of raising a child with severe medical complications seemed especially difficult. Putting aside her fears, she decided to permanently and legally make Brooklyn part of her family. In April 2018, on her own birthday, Kim adopted the baby that had once been her patient. Since the adoption, the McDaniel's have faced difficulties. At almost two years old, Brooklyn has had 11 surgeries in the past year and there is nothing more doctors can do, surgically. Kim said Brooklyn has changed life for her and her other children. "Everything revolves around Brooklyn, and it's in the best way. We just love her so much."

Jody and Mary Ann Allen-Parker

Recommended by Representative Jason Smith

Mary Ann Parker is a Southeast Missourian who embodies and instills the attributes of family, sacrifice, and opportunity. Nearly two decades ago, Mary Ann witnessed a tragic circumstance involving one of her son's friends. He explained the challenging and disturbing situation that he and his family were in and asked Mary Ann to share her household. She took this child and his two siblings under her care without hesitation and continued day-to-day living along with her own two children. After Court proceedings and generous efforts, Mary Ann established custody over the three children and to this day is the love and support structure for them. Beyond providing basic necessities, Mary Ann inspired hope and changed the lives of these children and their family for generations. The oldest joined the Marine Corps and the other two are still at home with Mary Ann. Today, Mary Ann still works within ideas of "giving back." She is happy in teaching what love is about and hopes to make a difference daily. Providing structure, learning, and hope to these 3 children helped pave the way of independence.

Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition

Recommended by Representative Ann Wagner

In 1989, a pioneering group from all corners of child welfare formed the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition. As the crack cocaine epidemic gripped our community, the founders of the Coalition saw children languish for years in foster care. They believed in a different future, one in which no child grew up without the love and support of a family. Today, with 30 years of experience in system change and grassroots advocacy, combined with undiminished passion, their vision remains: "For Every Child ... A Place to Call Home." Recognized by the New York Times and TIME Magazine for its groundbreaking and data-driven work in foster care and adoption, The Coalition is a regional leader in responding to the opioid epidemic that currently threatens our most vulnerable children. To help create permanency in every child's life, The Coalition focuses on two areas: 1) finding more qualified, well-trained, and culturally competent homes for children impacted by the opioid epidemic; and 2) providing ramped up supports for those families to help meet these children's elevated needs. Their service model is unique in the country. By never duplicating another agency's programs and only filling gaps in the community, they maximize efficiency and become a one-stop-shop for the region's toughest foster care and adoption cases.

Rachel and Peter Donatti

*Recommended by
Representative Vicky Hartzler*

Pete and Rachel Donatti are true champions in adoption. The Donatti's journey in adoption began in 2011 when they decided to become foster parents. Their decision to foster was due partly because they could not have children of their own. In 2012, they took classes and signed up to foster children 0-6 years of age in hopes of providing a safe, stable and loving environment in which a child could thrive.



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Just seven years later they are the proud parents of four adopted children. In June of 2012 they received their first foster child, a nine-year-old girl, followed by an eight-year-old girl and later two young siblings. Together as a family the Donatti's have had to face multiple challenges inherited by experiences some of the children encountered prior to finding their home with Pete and Rachel. Rachel is deeply passionate about the state foster care system and a staunch advocate for improving awareness of the neglect children are faced with in communities across Missouri. Pete and Rachel continue to focus on nurturing their child's creativity and doing their part to ensure their children grow up to be happy and healthy adults.

Montana

Jose and Marleen Vaca

Recommended by Senator Steve Daines

Jose and Marleen Vaca have been fostering for the past 14 years and have adopted 3 children from foster care. As adults, many of the children continue to count on the Vacas as parent figures and remain in their lives in a positive manner. The Vacas guide their foster children through difficulties as if they were their own and teach them that no matter what a person may be going through, giving back to the community is always possible. Jose's parents were immigrants from Mexico. He worked hard and met Marleen while working in a restaurant in Seattle. Marleen is originally from Idaho. They worked diligently and saved their money until they were able to purchase their own restaurant in Hamilton, Montana. Their staff is diverse and are treated like family, many are legal immigrants and family members who have learned through the Vacas to work hard and give back to the community. Although the Vacas have three biological children, there has never been a time when they do not have a house full of children of every age and welcomed a new baby in August. In addition,

they have their adopted children and many times they will care for more than one foster child at a time. Their entire family are truly the epitome of foster care, adoptions and a lifelong endeavor to give back to their community.

Lynne and Myron Malnaa

*Recommended by
Representative Greg Gianforte*

Myron and Lynne have been active in the foster care system for approximately 18 years and have had over 150 children in their home during that time. The length of time ranges from overnight to 14+ years. Two children have been adopted and they have guardianship of another. Lynne has worked full time for close to 15 years for the State of Montana office of public assistance and prior to that, ran a daycare in her home for 25 years. Myron was a sworn peace officer in the state of Montana for 25 years, an employee of the Montana Department of Revenue and for the last 20 years a farm and ranch Senior Appraiser for Northwest Farm Credit Services. Lynne's experience and reputation as a child care provider and Myron's Law Enforcement connections, provided an immediate safe-haven at all hours of the day and night, for neglected, abused, and children in need of care and compassion.

Nebraska

Brian & Heather Sams

Recommended by Senator Ben Sasse

Heather and Brian Sams of Lincoln, NE had plenty of support on July 12th, when they welcomed five new members into their family. Sitting still was not an option for one 5-year-old, though; the atmosphere was just too exciting. Madison bounced in her chair, hummed into the microphone and smiled wide as she and her brothers Bryson, 7, and Riley, 8, had their adoption proceedings finalized



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by Judge Roger Heideman. And the excitement continued when Judge Linda Porter affirmed the adoption of their other foster siblings, Trynai, 10, and Trystyne, 12. Though each of the five children have been living with the Sams family for more than a year, Brian Sams said making it official meant the world to their growing family. “They were already part of our family, but now they’re officially our family,” he said. That official status was moving for Brian and Heather, who became foster parents after already having four grown children out of the house and two teenage girls still at home. For Heather, the finalization comes at the end of what can be an exhausting process that demanded their full dedication. “There’s a lot of doubt and confusion that comes during the adoption process,” she said. “But now everything is official and it was all worth it.”

The Bush Family

Recommended by Senator Deb Fischer

Lauren and Jake Bush were always drawn to the idea of adoption. After 6 years of marriage and several months providing a respite care home, an email arrived asking them to foster a nine-year-old boy, Sterling, with whom the couple quickly bonded. Lauren and Jake soon discovered the traumatic and complicated past that caused Sterling to bounce between homes and found him on the brink of being placed in a group home. With plenty of patience and unconditional love, Sterling has flourished in their home and has recently completed fourth grade. Sterling succeeded both academically and socially – enjoying new activities such as choir, robotics, and board game club. The couple later learned that Sterling’s younger brother, Payton, was potentially to be placed hours away and asked that Payton be reunited with Sterling as a part of the Bush family. Payton underwent dramatic transformation in their loving and stable home. Initially unable to read, he began reading at his grade level in only three months with tremendous support and encouragement

both at school and at home. Payton’s adoption was finalized in June 2019. Now, Lauren and Jake are laying the groundwork to begin communication between Sterling and Payton’s half-sister. The Bushes recognize there are so many precious life moments that Sterling and Payton hadn’t experienced, and love providing and cherishing all of their “firsts” right along with them.

Dean and Shanna Haidle

Recommended by Representative Adrian Smith

Pastor Dean and Shanna Haidle had a heart for adoption from the early years of their marriage, and about 12 years ago, they, along with their 2 oldest children, Kelsey and Brett, felt led to complete their home study, then see what child would come into their lives. As it turned out, it would take 3 years to be matched, and it would be 3 children, a sibling strip of ages 2, 3, and 5, whose adoptions were supposed to be finalized within 6 months. After a long and bumpy 5 year fostering journey, including case complications, health challenges, and a house fire, their adoptions were at last finalized in 2015. Now ages 15, 13, and 11, the children are thriving, and no one in the family can imagine their lives without one another. The Haidles are being recognized as Congressman Adrian Smith’s nominee for Angels in Adoption for their commitment to their family and their community.

Amy J. Muell

*Recommended by
Representative Donald Bacon*

Amy Muell works hard all day to help “kiddos” cope with unimaginable challenges as the RSafe 10-14 Project Supervisor at Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska. The RSafe Program is dedicated to emotionally healing children, teens and families affected by sexual abuse. Muell also concurrently served as the RSafe Treatment Foster Care



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coordinator for four years. Two years ago, as a Child Saving Institute foster parent, she took in her first foster child, an eight-year-old African American boy named Shomore. "I told him I just knew when he walked in, 'You have so much sunshine in your heart, you bring sunshine to mine'". After a while, Shomore's older brother Ja'Rell, needed an emergency removal from his foster home. "It was just supposed to be for a week, so I said okay," Amy said. "He was 13 and had never lived with his sibling. He didn't want to leave." So, he never left. Since their adoption in 2012, she continues to care for her boys, even ensuring that they maintain relationships with their other blood relatives. The foster care and adoption processes have not been without their challenges but despite hardship, Ms. Muell continues to provide the supportive and loving environment that is so pivotal for both Shomore and Ja'Rell.

Nevada

Children's Advocacy Alliance

Recommended by Senator Jacky Rosen

Children's Advocacy Alliance serves as a state-wide organization working to improve the lives of children in Nevada. They focus on a wide range of issues, including health, safety, and education. They have a strong focus on improving outcomes for vulnerable children, including foster children. Their tireless work brings the child welfare community together in the state to make sure that Nevada's foster youth are never forgotten. Children's Advocacy Alliance is working to improve the state's data collection and ensure a modern system to better serve their children, and put in place more effective prevention. The Children's Alliance Network is constantly working towards a Nevada where every foster child is either safely reunited with biological family or finds their adoptive forever family.

Brian Knudsen

*Recommended by
Senator Catherine Cortez Masto*

Las Vegas City Councilman Brian Knudsen is a fierce advocate for closing the adoption gap in Southern Nevada. In addition to his official duties, Brian serves as the Chairman of the Las Vegas advisory board of the Adoption Exchange, a non-profit child welfare organization created to establish safety and permanence in the lives of foster children. Last year, Brian spearheaded a successful effort to dramatically increase the Adoption Exchange's funding for adoption outreach. Brian's past work also includes developing and promoting programs that provide disenfranchised students with access to the wrap around services necessary to increase academic and social success. Recently, Brian organized and advised a coalition of non-profit and government leaders to combat the current homelessness crisis in Southern Nevada. Brian understands the intersectionality of homelessness with homophobia and transphobia and the need to support programs specifically aimed to address the needs of LGBTQ youth. Brian and his husband, Brian Eagan, are proud adoptive dads to two children, Andrew (age 4) and Katherine (age 2). They often share their experiences to promote greater visibility and support for similar children and families living in Southern Nevada. Brian Knudsen's outstanding leadership on issues concerning children and families led to his election to the Las Vegas City Council. Brian is the first openly LGBTQ person elected to a local government office in Southern Nevada. He is serving his first term.



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New Hampshire

Donald and Kathleen White

*Recommended by Senators Jeanne Shaheen
and Maggie Hassan*

Kate and Don White are the parents of eight; four biological and four adopted children and have also fostered for many years. One thing that makes this family special is that less than 7 years ago, they were licensed to adopt only through an adoption agency, with no interest in fostering as they felt their calling was to adopt. Knowing the great need for adoption, they were planning to adopt a medically compromised child and had arranged their life to be able to meet that need. Then they learned of an emergency foster care placement of two medically challenged little girls. They were asked if they would consider fostering and upon thoughtful reflection opened their home and hearts to these two girls. The family did wonderful work in meeting their needs and learned they also had a lot to offer children and families in foster care. Therefore, after the adoption of their sixth child with significant special needs, they continued to foster. Since then they have adopted a blind/medically complex infant and fostered to adopt an infant with medical needs due to being born three months premature. Don and Kate share, "The need for fostering and adopting is huge, we hope that more people will see this need and open their hearts to loving these incredible kiddos."

New Jersey

Lynn M. Riker

Recommended by Senator Robert Menendez

Lynn Riker and her spouse, Stuart Turnbull, domestically adopted two multiracial boys as infants, now ages 16 and 13. Lynn quickly decided to become

involved with the adoptive parent support group, Concerned Persons for Adoption (CPFA), which has been in existence since 1972. Lynn joined the group's executive board, leading and serving on several committees including mini-conference, membership, newsletter development, social, website development, treasurer, and is currently the lead coordinator of CPFA's "Let's Talk Adoption" Conference. This yearly conference, now in its 37th year, is co-sponsored by the Rutgers University School of Social Work and is the flagship conference in Northern NJ for families and professionals. Prior to becoming the lead coordinator, Lynn was registration and volunteer coordinator. As lead coordinator, Lynn heads the programming team and 25 volunteers, selecting the speakers, workshops, exhibitors and book seller; all while parenting and working full time. In 2015 CPFA was the recipient of the "Voice for Adoption" national "Continuing Service to Adoptive Families" award primarily due to Lynn's volunteer work. Lynn's enthusiastic adoption advocacy as well as her continued interest in increasing her own development as an adoptive parent is evident by her and Stuart's attendance at various parenting programs and adoption-related events.

Evelyn & David Marain & Family

*Recommended by
Representative Josh Gottheimer*

Dave and Evelyn Marain fostered their first child over forty years ago, starting a lifelong devotion to caring for children. Together they fostered almost thirty children, many of whom were medically fragile infants and toddlers. The couple had 7 children, six of whom were adopted and have always been immensely proud of each of them. Evelyn always said that she never believed in putting a ceiling on a child, regardless of disabilities. In the 90's the Marains were named Foster Parents of the Year in NJ. They advocated for policies that promoted early childhood education, early intervention



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therapies, and the rights of children globally. Evelyn volunteered in the NICU of Hackensack University Medical Center until she passed away in 2012. Dave remains a fierce children's rights advocate and, as a mathematics educator for 37 years, he dedicated himself to helping each student be successful. Dave would like to accept this nomination on behalf of his wife, Evelyn, who continues to inspire the family every day. He would also like to share this award with his seven children. Dawn, Danny, Melissa, Heather, Denise, Elijah, and Jack.

Charell Star

Recommended by Senator Cory Booker

Charell Star is the Director of Content and Innovation at Essence Global, a leading advertising agency, as well as a digital journalist and featured TV, lifestyle, tech, and fashion contributor. As a storyteller, she is passionate about creating experiences that connect people in ways that celebrate, inspires, entertains and empowers. Charell loves working across all mediums to tell rich stories and believes the most powerful messages are delivered through authenticity, personal connection, and conversation.

Charell is also a former foster youth who spent much of her youth in the New York City child welfare system. As an adult, she uses her voice to advocate for the needs of foster youth and those aging out of the system and has spoken to community leaders, child welfare organizations, judges, social workers, as well as current and prospective foster parents across the country. In 2015, Charell was the feature subject in "Feeling Wanted" a foster care film that recounted her years in care. The award-winning documentary by Yasmin Mistry has become a training tool for child welfare organizations across the country and has been screened to audiences around the world. Charell is also a volunteer Board Member of CASA NYC and City Living NY, two non-profit organizations that provide support to youth in care and young adults who have aged out.

The Craig Family

Recommended by Representative Donald Norcross

The joyous noise of three young brothers has filled Aminah and Dwayne Craig's home for nearly 17 months. On National Adoption Day the Lindenwold, Camden County, couple officially gained parental rights to the brothers, adopting Cyer, 4; Kade, 3; and Legend, 1, into their family. The three boys join the Craigs' two biological children – Donell, 15, and Jeremiah, 13 – to make a family of seven. "If you can open your heart to love a child, it's a great thing," Aminah Craig said. "Adoption, to me, is nothing to be embarrassed about. It's nothing to hide. It's the most wonderful thing to be able to choose a child and say, 'I want this child. I want you to come into my home.'" When Cyer heard the judge finalize his adoption, he reacted with excitement, Aminah Craig said. And she nearly teared up. "He's so excited to be with us and we're so excited to have him as our child," Craig said. The Craig family first became foster parents to help another family they knew. Once they finished fostering the child, they gave greater thought to taking in more children, discussing the idea with their biological children. "We just came to the conclusion that we're all God's children," Craig said. "There's just so many more out there that need somebody to love them and need a place to go."

Ruthy and Pedro Rios

Recommended by Representative Bill Pascrell

Pedro and Ruthy Rios have dedicated the last nine years to fostering and caring for seven children all under the age of ten, five of whom were siblings and two with special needs who lived with them for thirteen months before being returned to the biological mother for the third time. They have a little boy who they have fostered since birth and is now 3 1/2 years old and are currently waiting for an appeal decision to finalize adoption.



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Carol Arnott

Recommended by Representative Mikie Sherrill

Carol Arnott has been a CASA volunteer, a CASA Senior Case Supervisor and Educational Specialist at Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for Children of Essex County, and an Assistant Director at CASA for Children of Morris & Sussex Counties. She is not only an exceptional advocate for children in foster care, but has developed expertise in the specialized and highly nuanced field of educational advocacy. In her day-to-day work, Ms. Arnott is a recruiter and trainer for new and existing CASA volunteers on matters of child welfare and education. Carol supervises and instructs CASA's and other case supervisors on how to successfully advocate for foster children in family court and in their schools. She has created pragmatic tools for CASA Essex, including a best practices protocol and an action step checklist for educational advocacy, with the goal of improving consistency and effectiveness of this work. Of her work ethic, her colleagues write, "Carol uses her technical legal training to ensure that every case child she meets has access to an excellent education, despite his or her current circumstances." More than 5,600 foster children have benefited from Ms. Arnott's educational advocacy and her training of advocates over the last nine years. The positive impact she has had on these children's lives cannot be overstated.

New Mexico

Ellen Covey

Recommended by Senator Tom Udall

Ellen Covey has adopted 14 children and is the process of adopting 2 more. The last 7 children were adopted by Ellen and her sister. Together they have fostered hundreds of children over the last 34 years. Their motto has always been "If we have room in our home, we will always have room in our hearts."

New York

Planned Parenthood Mohawk Hudson

Recommended by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand

Planned Parenthood Mohawk Hudson is a leader in quality reproductive and primary health care. They strive to honestly educate individuals and advocate for the reproductive rights of all people. PPMH provides compassionate care and medically accurate information that takes into account each patient's unique circumstances, identity and needs to empower them to live healthy lives and aid them in planning for their futures. A critical component of this is connecting people to the services they need such as adoption facilitation. PPMH provides individuals who are pregnant the time and space to make informed decisions about their needs in a supportive and judgment-free environment. As part of this broad array of services, PPMH clinical staff provide pregnancy options counseling. Non-directive guidance is provided to women on their options, including parenting, adoption and termination and the associated benefits and risks of each choice. Patients who express interest in adoption are connected to an adoption specialist who is a licensed social worker trained on adoption issues and counseling. Those patients then work directly with Spence-Chapin Services to Families and Children and PPMH's social worker to ensure a smooth transition. The final decision of the birth mother is always respected and supported.

North Carolina

Steve and Teresa Ball

Recommended by Senator Thom Tillis

Teresa already had 2 "almost" grown children, one with a debilitating illness requiring a lot of her time and attention. In an amazing turn of events, she



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and her new husband, Steve, were put on the path of fostering 5 young siblings, ages 5, 4, 3, and 18 month-old twins, who had been split up and placed in multiple foster homes in California. They have conquered unbelievable hurdles in bringing these 5 children to their home in NC. They had to leave their home and jobs to move to California temporarily, and then find a new house in NC to accommodate their new, at the time temporary, family. They overcame the emotional struggles of loving and helping heal these abused and forgotten children. There have been miraculous answers to prayers as 4 of these siblings have been able to be adopted by Teresa and Steve, and are thriving beyond expectations. Through this experience, Teresa and Steve have maintained an endless attitude of cheerfulness, a spirit to fight for these children with all they have, and a continual effort to make it fun. They have remained selfless in providing a loving home and family for these four beautiful children.

Shelli & Daniel Craig

Recommended by Representative Mark Walker

The Craig Family has 8 children - 3 by the miracle of birth and 5 by the miracle of adoption. Shelli and Daniel's birth children are Josh (25 who has Cerebral Palsy), MacKenzie (21) and Emma (15). Children Annabelle, (16 - adopted at 2), Jack (18 - adopted at 5), Sarah Jane (25 - adopted at 12), and Julie (15 - adopted at 12) are adopted from China, and Will (17 - adopted at 8) is adopted from Taiwan. Each of their adopted children were considered a special needs adoption - cleft lip and palate, spina bifida, and cerebral palsy - but Shelli Craig shares that "as parents of a birth child with cerebral palsy, we knew that the diagnosis didn't define the child, so adopting kids with special needs was just an extension of what we already knew how to do. We always hope to share adoption with others (especially older child adoption) and encourage both international and domestic adoption!" As a photographer, Shelli photographs foster and adoptive families through Red

Thread Sessions - free sessions for these families. She also volunteers to photograph adoptable foster children through Seven Homes in an effort to provide beautiful portraits that encourage families to see the children in the most positive light. Shelli affirms, "Adoption is so important to us and we hope we can share how it has changed our lives for the better."

Dawn Whitehead Wilson

Recommended by Senator Richard Burr

Dawn Wilson has dedicated her 33-year career to serving our most vulnerable families in the child welfare and mental health fields. She currently serves as Director of the federally funded National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI) at the Center for Adoption Support and Education. As Director, Ms. Wilson lead development, implementation, and evaluation of two state-of-the-art web-based trainings to help child welfare and mental health professionals effectively address the complex challenges of children, adolescents and their foster, adoptive and guardianship families. The results of her efforts have impacted over 9,000 professionals across 8 pilot states and one tribal nation. NTI has proven to be a promising practice for our field with far reaching impact in improving child-well-being and permanency and building an adoption competent workforce. Previously Ms. Wilson served as a Child Welfare Program Manager with Catawba County (NC) Social Services. She collaborated with The Duke Endowment on the Child Well-Being Project to develop an evidence-informed service, Success Coach, to provide case management and in-home therapeutic services to improve outcomes for adoptive, guardianship and reunified families following foster care. The Success Coach Service garnered national attention as an innovative and promising practice. Ms. Wilson received her B.A. Degree in Psychology from Appalachian State University and her Master of Social Work degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



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North Dakota

Michelle Kommer

Recommended by Senator Kevin Cramer

Michelle Kommer and her husband, Toby, became foster parents 20 years ago as newlyweds. In the years since, they have fostered 16 children, including their middle daughter, who they adopted. Today their family consists of daughters Morgan, 18, Mya, 17, and Channing, 12. In 2008, Michelle had the inspiration to establish the North Dakota Heart Gallery (ndheartgallery.org), based on similar programs in other states. She assembled a board of directors consisting of individuals committed to creating a greater awareness of adoption-eligible children by sharing their professional portraits in gallery exhibits across the state. Now 11 years later, 250 children have been served through the work of this non-profit organization. Michelle remains the president of the North Dakota Heart Gallery, and hopes to implement a new initiative by the end of this year that will provide young people with experience in leadership and non-profit management by having a youth board of directors (with adult mentors) manage the non-profit. As a lawyer who is currently serving the State of North Dakota as its Commissioner of the Department of Commerce, Michelle has been an invaluable advocate for adoption and foster care. She and her family have made an immeasurable impact fostering hope for hundreds of North Dakota children seeking forever homes.

Nancy J. Germain

Recommended by Senator John Hoeven

Nancy Germain's social work career has spanned 32 years, primarily working in the area of children and family services. She grew up on a farm outside of Galesburg, North Dakota and earned her social work degree at the University of North Dakota. There she also pursued her passion for music as a member of

the UND Concert Choir. Nancy has been married to Mike for over 28 years and they have three adult children: Mitch, Nick, and Katie. Since 2003, Nancy has been an adoption specialist with the Adults Adopting Special Kids (AASK) program in Fargo, North Dakota and is employed in this capacity through Catholic Charities North Dakota. Nancy serves as the Lead Adoption Worker statewide for AASK and trains new staff, supervises student interns, and manages a caseload of children and families. Nancy is a past board member of the North Dakota Family-Based Services Association and was honored with their Lifetime Award in 2013. She has been a part of finding permanency for many children and families over the years, having finalized the adoptions of over 250 children in foster care. Nancy is a true advocate for children and families.

Ohio

Malia Lewis and Margot Damaser

Recommended by Representative Marcia Fudge

Malia Lewis and Margot Damaser of Cleveland Heights, Ohio are pioneers in adoption. A gay couple, they have been together for over 30 years. They got married on their 18th anniversary, but their marriage was not recognized by U.S. law until 2015. In Chicago, 15 years prior, they adopted their newborn son, Claude. Less than a year later, Claude's biological sister was born, and they adopted Ella too. They became a transracial (Caucasian & African American), Jewish, adoptive family with two moms. They have had to navigate legal, cultural, and social complexities, and are a reminder that families come in all shapes and sizes. Claude and Ella both graduated from high school in May 2019, and are now freshmen at Morehouse College and Howard University, respectively. In addition to her parenting duties and running her own business, Malia serves on the School Board for the Cleveland Heights-University Heights (Ohio) School District, where



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she champions Career & Technical Education, and has been involved in major facilities renovations. The family has been actively involved with Adoption Network Cleveland: The Ohio Family Connection since 2005. Malia recently participated in Adoption Network Cleveland's Lobby Day, helping educate Ohio's state legislators about adoption, foster, and kinship care. Although their path has not been easy, the Lewis-Damasers continue to be an inspiring, ground-breaking family.

Oklahoma

Rocky & Samantha Ausbrooks

Recommended by Senator Jim Inhofe

As a pastor-nurse-entrepreneur duo, Rocky and Samantha Ausbrooks' adoption journey began in 2012 when the couple was in Honduras on a medical mission trip. Samantha's passion for adoption was kindled after a mother approached Samantha and asked her to take the woman's baby home. This experience in Honduras led the Ausbrooks to begin pursuing International adoption from Ethiopia in 2013. In October 2014, they were referred to their future-daughter Addisyn, who was born fifty days after Samantha gave birth to their son Kaleb and came home in 2016. While adopting Addisyn, the Ausbrooks met a nine-year old name Tesfaye. After bringing Addisyn home, Rocky and Samantha could not stop thinking about Tesfaye; in December 2016, they began pursuing his adoption. Tesfaye's adoption faced a major hurdle when, in April 2017, the Ethiopian government announced its intent to suspend international adoptions, putting all pending adoptions in jeopardy and sparking an effort on Capitol Hill to complete these adoptions. The Ausbrooks brought their case forward in meetings with the Department of State and several congressional offices. Fortunately, these efforts paid off. The Prime Minister agreed to complete pending adoptions, and several Oklahoma families were able to bring their children home, including the Ausbrooks.

In January 2018, Tesfaye was finally united with his new family. The Ausbrooks' commitment to child welfare is evident through their passion for adoption and perseverance through difficulty.

David and Lora Rogers

*Recommended by
Representative Markwayne Mullin*

The Rogers family has been established as a Choctaw Nation Foster and Adoption home since March 4, 2004. During this time, David and Lora Rogers have had the honor to care for 22 beautiful Choctaw Children. Out of 22 children, they have adopted three and are currently in a trial adoption status with two siblings. In all the years that David and Lora have cared for and loved the children, they have been diligent in working alongside the biological parents for the reunification for many of these children. David and Lora have always supported, loved, and prayed passionately over these families for restoration. There have been many tears of joy and pain, both in children returning to their families and for the children to which they are parents today. David and Lora have never hesitated to love unconditionally all the children and their biological parents. They always maintain as much involvement with the biological parents as feasible and as responsibly possible. The Rogers family are the epitome of unconditional love and the Grace and Mercy that God so allows them to give. The Rogers family is truly the most dedicated loving family that deserves all the praise and honor. They are giving all the Praise to God. God truly called them to be a Father and Mother to not only their children but to many more!

Peppers Ranch Foster Care Community

Recommended by Senator James Lankford

Peppers Ranch is an equestrian program that teaches children responsibility, independence, and self-esteem. Located in Guthrie, Oklahoma, 415



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acres of land are maintained where foster families live in a vibrant community with extensive support services. Each foster family accesses learning centers, playgrounds, community, and carpooling. The mission of Peppers is to “provide a community of foster care families for children and sibling groups from birth to beyond setting the foundation for individualized success for every child.” There are many foster families at Peppers that could be nominated for their commitment to fostering and adoption. Part of what makes Peppers Ranch successful is the whole community working together to create a safe and successful fostering environment for the whole family. Peppers Ranch continues to find creative ways to support each other. In many cases the foster parents at Peppers become a child’s forever home. Exciting things lie ahead at Peppers Ranch as they expand their facilities and develop a much needed “aging out” community for those foster children that age out of the system. Children who age-out can choose to live at Peppers Ranch in one of the homes while they work and/or seek a higher education degree or certificate.

Steven and Lisa Buck

Recommended by Representative Kendra Horn

Steven and Lisa Buck began their journey with foster care ten years ago as respite care providers after becoming acutely aware of the needs of foster and at-risk children, as well as the complications of the foster care system. Not only did they begin their own fostering journey, they became active advocates as well. Lisa serves as a founding and current board member of the 111 Project, a faith based advocacy group; a foster/ adoption Representative on the Oklahoma Post Adjudication Review Board; and five years ago, Lisa became the first Foster Care Ombudsman for the state to resolve complaints and grievances of foster parents and foster children. She was instrumental in the creation of the grievance and complaint process for both foster parents and foster children, ensuring their rights are acknowledged

and protected. This process aims to reduce foster parent stress and placement turnover and give foster children statutorily protected rights while in care. Steve serves as the executive director for the Office of Juvenile Affairs, working with at-risk children in the courts system and those in dual custody with OKDHS, as well as serving as the cabinet Secretary for Human Services and Early Childhood Initiatives. Steve and Lisa have thirteen children that call them mom and dad - four biological, seven fostered through the state (two of which they adopted), and two through a faith-based mentoring program.

Oregon

King Estate Winery

Recommended by Representative Peter DeFazio

King Estate Winery is one of Oregon’s most generous corporate citizens. They have consistently been a gracious sponsor and supporter of adoption and child welfare in the community. In addition to being a vocal advocate for children and families, for the past several years they have generously contributed to Holt International’s fundraising events in Oregon. They have helped raise thousands of dollars to support adoption, and they’ve been particularly supportive of programs for adoption of children with special needs.

Georgene and Leonard Bernhardt

*Recommended by
Representative Suzanne Bonamici*

Bio:Georgene and Leonard Bernhardt exemplify generosity and compassion. For several decades they supported organizations whose mission it is to find homes for orphaned and abandoned children. They have a heart for all children and in addition to supporting adoption, they fund programs to keep



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families together. Over the years they have supported family preservation programs for children and families in Korea, Vietnam, Mongolia, Romania, India and Uganda and supported college education for children in Vietnam and Mongolia. Leonard has made dozens of trips to visit the children they support, bringing with him cases of vitamins for the children. Leonard and Georgene have grandchildren from Korea and Romania and this unwavering commitment to adoption and families is shared by their entire family. Leonard was touched by the children he saw in Korea during his service in the Korean War and never forgot them. He is impressed by how grateful the Korean people are to the Veterans and how they teach younger generations to appreciate the sacrifice of the Veterans and has been a link to the first generation of Korean adoptees who were profoundly impacted by the Korean War. The Bernhardtts are hardworking, down to earth people who want to make a difference in the world. It “makes them feel good” to share their wisdom, love and financial resources to help children and families.

Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries

Recommended by Senator Ron Wyden

The Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries provides comprehensive family support and therapeutic early childhood services designed to address the needs of families with young children at risk for child abuse and neglect. Families served by Relief Nurseries experience multiple life stressors including financial insecurity, prior involvement in child protective services, mental health disorders, substance abuse, limited personal support system and domestic violence. The model includes therapeutic early childhood education in classroom settings, home visits, parent education, mental health support, respite care and assistance accessing other community services. Programs ultimately work to reduce family risks linked to maltreatment, stabilize families so that children can live safely

with their parents and minimize child welfare contact. Relief Nurseries are currently operating in 31 sites throughout Oregon and are important community-based prevention programs that rely on a public-private partnership to achieve their mission. Seeing firsthand the incredible work being accomplished at Relief Nurseries, Senator Wyden was inspired to develop the Family First Prevention Services Act in order to allow for federal child welfare funding to be used to help struggling families and prevent kids from entering foster care when it is safe to do so. Now that this landmark bipartisan bill has become law, Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries is honored to be an inspiration to the nation to invest in families for generations to come.

Pennsylvania

Wayne & Lacey Rexroth

Recommended by Senator Bob Casey

Lacey and Wayne Rexroth are angels in adoption for children of special needs having adopted 4 children who have been abused or substance addicted as infants. They first came to be foster parents after a family member was working as a nurse for a family who was caring for a severely medically fragile little boy. The boy needed a forever family when the Rexroth family stepped up. Approximately a year after his adoption, they received a call from the agency wanting to know if they wanted a little sister for their new son. The little girl also needed a family who could tend to her very special needs. The Rexroth family was available to take the call and finalized an adoption shortly after. In the fall of 2016 they adopted their third child, an infant girl that was born with multiple substances in her system and was in withdrawal when they first brought her home. In January 2019 the Rexroth's adopted their fourth child who was born a 26 week preemie with severe neurological problems. They now work to encourage and inspire others to open their hearts to



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children still in need of loving families. The family brings a whole new meaning to “Forever Family” as these children will forever need the care of the loving Rexroth Family! They family is committed to caring for God’s children until God calls them home.

Rhode Island

Amanda & Cliff Choiniere

*Recommended by
Representative David Cicilline*

Amanda & Cliff Choiniere are the parents of a beautiful blended family. Between them, they have five children, 2 of which are adopted biological siblings. Bella and Ben were both adopted in 2012, after being separated in foster care for three and a half years. In the process of adopting these siblings, it became apparent to Amanda and Cliff that children in care needed someone to advocate for them. This became this couple’s passion. Amanda began co-leading licensing classes at RI DCYF. Since 2014, Amanda has been working as an Adoption & Permanency Coordinator with Adoption Rhode Island, preparing youth for adoption and working to find them forever families. However, the work doesn’t stop there. Both Amanda and Cliff take every opportunity possible to share their own adoption story with others looking to become licensed. The couple also strongly believes that siblings should be provided the opportunity to spend quality time together, enjoying normal childhood activities. Because of this, Amanda has co-developed a Sibling Camp for siblings impacted by foster care & adoption. As an adoptive parent and now an adoption professional herself, Amanda asks policymakers to mandate more training for child welfare professionals, especially related to the effects of trauma on children. She also sees a need for more post-adoption support.

Iannone-Kwasniewski Family

Senator Sheldon Whitehouse

Joe Iannone and Dan Kwasniewski married later in life, and both knew they wanted to raise a family together. As they began the adoptive process, they attended an adoptive workshop and met Daylyn, one of two young sons of underage parents – a mother who ultimately abandoned her family and a father who then struggled to provide for his boys on his own. Their grandmother briefly took them in, but when she passed away both sons entered the foster system. After learning that Daylyn had a brother, Brayden, both Joe and Dan wanted to avoid having them split apart so they decided to foster both brothers and eventually adopted them. Shortly thereafter the boys’ mother gave birth to a baby girl – of whom the state assumed custody at birth. Upon learning that their sons now had a half-sister, Joe and Dan felt they also should take in this young baby, Hailey, as a foster child. They did so, and had just initiated adoption proceedings for her when, tragically, Dan suddenly passed away in March 2019 at the age of 52 – leaving Joe to care for their three young children on his own. Nonetheless, he continued adoption proceedings – which were completed as of May 22, 2019 – and now all four live together as a family on a historic farmstead in South Kingstown, Rhode Island.

Ted Sullivan

Recommended by Representative Jim Langevin

Ted Sullivan’s lifelong dedication to service has made him a vital asset within his community. Ted resides in Lincoln, Rhode Island, where he has served as a School Board member and a member of the Town Budget Board. He and his wife, Teena, are the proud parents of two fine young men; both Eagle Scouts, one of whom is currently serving as a member of the United States Air Force Reserve while attending college.

Ted began his relationship with Bethany Christian



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Services as an adoptive Dad in 1997 and has served the organization as a supporter, volunteer, and national board member. After a successful career in health care, Ted joined the team at Bethany as Senior Director of Mission Advancement and has testified before the Rhode Island State Legislature about the importance of family strengthening services. Bethany serves vulnerable children in the U.S. through family strengthening programs, foster care, and adoption services. They protect and support refugees and immigrants in the US and around the globe, and they find families for children in their own country rather than placing them in orphanages. Ted recently commented that, "At Bethany, we believe safe and loving families are the best place for children to heal and that adoptive parents often need continued training and support to care for the children they have permanently welcomed into their family."

Families Together Program, Providence Children's Museum

Recommended by Senator Jack Reed

Families Together, a program of Providence Children's Museum, in partnership with Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF), was developed specifically to provide court-separated families opportunities to engage in play and rebuild their relationships. Founded in 1992 by Heidi Brinig, herself an adoptee, the program is an important resource offering parent child visitation with real-time coaching from skilled clinicians as the parents interact with their children and strengthen kinship connections for families. Locations include the creative spaces of Providence Children's Museum, or Nina's House, their home-like setting for visitation. Families Together offers therapeutic visitation for infants to 18-year-olds and their parents, case management, clinical assessments, parent education, permanency planning, and visitation training for social service workers from DCYF and private agencies. Providence Children's

Museum is a beloved institution in Rhode Island and highly regarded resource for child welfare agencies across Rhode Island and nationally. The Museum's commitment to serving children and families has led to successful partnerships with school districts, other non-profits, and government agencies. Providence Children's Museum's Families Together program has a long history of serving children and families while providing an innovative and therapeutic approach to promoting child welfare in Rhode Island.

South Carolina

Carole Walters, Calvary Home for Children

Recommended by Senator Lindsey Graham

Through her work in Calvary Home for Children, Carole Walters has exhibited dedication and passion for ensuring that all foster children are supported. Carole has worked with the Calvary Home for Children as a volunteer board member and part-time Director of Development. She began revolutionizing their donor relations and partnerships with the community. Due to her work, more businesses partnered with Calvary Home for Children to offer their financial support. She shared Calvary Home's vision for a new Foster Family Community, a community of six single-family, six bedroom homes for foster children, and helped secure a \$300,000 donation toward this effort and leveraged the donation to use it as a match to begin fundraising for the second home. Today, Calvary Home is in the process of constructing two new homes for the Foster Family Community. Carole's community engagement and fundraising work has made a significant impact on South Carolina's foster care system by providing homes for children who need them.



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Rebecca Donovan

Recommended by Senator Tim Scott

Becky Donovan became the Executive Director of the Palmetto Women's Center (PWC) in York County in the spring of 2014. She was chosen to lead the organization based on her 17 years of service as a volunteer, administrative assistant, client advocate and her leadership as the director of the Lake Wylie and Fort Mill Satellite Offices of PWC. Palmetto Women's Center is a faith-based non-profit ministry that operates to help women in unplanned pregnancies. Their team works together to promote adoptions and counsel women as they make life-changing decisions. Becky taught that adoption is a way for women in unplanned pregnancies to take charge and help "plan their baby's life". She helped them walk into an adoption plan knowing that there would be challenges along the way. Along with managing the PWC, Becky also served as the voice of the ministry in saving lives in the community with a note-worthy speaking schedule. With the purchase of a mobile clinic in 2017, Becky fulfilled her desire to expand the services of the ministry into the outlying communities.

Becky retired in 2019 after five years as Executive Director and 21 years involved in the PWC ministry. Because of Becky's years of dedication to her work at PWC, she left behind a stronger organization committed to saving lives.

South Dakota

Mike & Kim Adams

Recommended by Senator John Thune

Mike and Kim Adams are from South Dakota and are the proud parents of nine children. Their family felt the call to adopt on four occasions. Their adopted children from Ethiopia and Uganda have been a tremendous blessing and wonderful addition to their family, and have helped to inform their Foundation's

work. Mike and Kim founded Adams Thermal Foundation in 2013 when a pair of schools in Ethiopia serving the poorest communities were scheduled to close because the organization supporting them ran out of resources. Today, ATF schools serve over 1200 students. ATF was formed to save the schools and to expand their mission to confront human poverty in our nation and our world. ATF also provides programs for women and mothers of students to learn business and job skills in Ethiopia. Over 500 women are involved in the economic development programs at ATF. While Mike serves as the CEO of Adams companies, he also volunteers his time as president of ATF. Kim is the Co-Founder of ATF and volunteers as a Child Advocate regarding children and family programs for the foundation's Africa operations. She also serves on an advisory board focused on child health and holistic development in Ethiopia. Both Mike and Kim continue to be passionate about meeting the needs of the most vulnerable in our nation and in our world.

Kevin & Megan Kinney

Recommended by

Representative Dusty Johnson

Kevin and Megan Kinney are a Rapid City couple, raising four beautiful daughters. Their oldest daughter Emma just turned 16, but when Emma was still a child herself, the Kinney's decided to become a foster family and took three sisters into their home. Angel was 3, Alicia was 2 and Kylee was just a baby. It didn't take long for the Kinney's to make the decision to adopt all three sisters into their family. Kevin plays an active part within the community and serves as a Highway Patrolman for the State of South Dakota. Megan stays active as a mom, and recently wrote her first book, *Dakota Peace*, which will be published next year. The Kinney's desire to foster children led them to take that extra leap of faith and legally adopt these three sisters. Even though they knew it would be a challenge to foster three siblings under the age of 3, they understood the importance of not separating these sisters.



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Sean and Caresa O'Connor

Recommended by Senator Mike Rounds

As Sean and Caresa's first three children were getting older, they felt they had more love to give and started to talk about adoption. They explored their options after deciding to pursue domestic private adoption they were told to expect a wait time of one to five years. Sean and Caresa started the process and quickly completed their home study and after only a few short weeks later, they traveled to Wichita to bring their daughter, Winnie, home. Nearing Winnie's first birthday, the couple decided that their family was still not complete and hoped to soon have a younger sibling for Winnie. Sean and Caresa began to pursue the adoption process for a second time. Their second attempt faced more challenges but after two disruptions, they were successfully matched and traveled to St. Louis around Christmas of 2016. Sean and Caresa were able to attend the birth of their son RJ and brought him home just a few weeks later.

where children in the DCS system can be brought to wait – a place that is safe with friendly and loving volunteers who provide clean clothes, smiles, toys, and snuggly blankets. This space allows children to receive the comfort and care they need while DCS staff are able to do the necessary paperwork and identify a good foster placement. Isaiah 117 currently serves a three-county area in northeast Tennessee. This year, Isaiah 117 will open three new houses in northeast Tennessee and is laying the groundwork for five new houses across the state of Tennessee and one in Indiana.

Kevin W. Weaver

Recommended by Senator Marsha Blackburn

Kevin W. Weaver is a partner in the Cordova, Tennessee law firm of Weaver & Craig, P.C., where his practice is devoted primarily to adoption. During his 34 year adoption practice, he has represented adopting couples, birth parents and adoption agencies in matters including surrenders, termination of parental rights and interstate, international, relative and private placement adoptions. Mr. Weaver has been a frequent speaker to the Tennessee State Court Clerks Association and various Tennessee judicial conferences on the procedural aspects and substantive law concerning adoption. He is a frequent speaker at CLE seminars to fellow attorneys on adoption law issues. He received his B.A. degree from Baylor University and his J.D. degree from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, where he was managing editor of the Tennessee Law Review. He is a member of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys and a member of the Tennessee Bar Association's Adoption Law Section.

Tennessee

Ronda Vaught Paulson Founder Isaiah 117 House

Recommended by Rep. Phil Roe

Ronda Paulson is the founder and director of Isaiah 117 House. During her training to become a foster parent, she was informed that when children are removed from their homes they often have to come to the DCS office and wait for placement. As Ronda looked around the cubicle filled space, she couldn't imagine a scared child sitting in such a sterile, cold environment waiting to learn their fate. One year later, on November 5, 2015, Ronda received a call from another nearby DCS office to pick up her foster son. When they arrived, their foster son was dirty, wearing clothes that were too small for him. That is when Ronda believes God put on her heart the Isaiah 117 House, which provides a comforting home



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Texas

Melodie Chandler, Journey of a Joyful Life

Recommended by Congressman Kevin Brady

Melodie Chandler's heart was captured in China. For the past eight years, she has lived in China and served as director of a foster home for children with special needs and helped find forever homes for many of the children she served. She built a life there — serving and fostering children, marrying her husband and becoming the mother of six children, some biological and some adopted. She recently returned from China to her home in Montgomery County, Texas and as a former music teacher and with her experiences fostering children with special needs in China she could not let her passion for serving the special needs community fall by the wayside. Just a few months after returning to the United States, Chandler started the Journey School for students with differing abilities from ages 3 to 21. Opening its doors for the first time on Aug. 14, the school offers full-time private Christian education with various therapists on-site for children's needs.

Sandy Barber

Recommended by Congressman John Ratcliffe

Sandy Barber is a well-recognized leader in the Texoma region as a fierce advocate for children. Sandy has served 18 years as the Executive Director of the Fannin County Children's Center. Sandy has several major accomplishments, including: a successful capital campaign to relocate the center to a larger facility; increase the agency budget from \$160,000 to \$840,000; added counseling programs, Rainbow Room, child abuse prevention programs; increased staff size from 4 to 12, to keep up with the needs of the community; launched "No Excuse for Child Abuse" campaign; invited to provide testimony at a Texas State Senate hearing regarding

the child welfare system; invited to participate in numerous committees for Texas CASA and Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas and has served on the board of both state associations. These are just some of her accomplishments. Past-President of the Fannin County Children's Center, Bill Wilson said "The board, FCCC team, partner agencies and, most importantly, the children of Fannin County are blessed to have Sandy leading a wonderful team of caring and passionate professionals at the center. Sandy brings an outsized spirit of service and professionalism to our community. She always displays a genuine and heartfelt commitment to our community at large and our most needy children." Sandy is a wonderful community leader who places the well-being of children in her community first.

Joy Alessi

*Recommended by
Representative Joaquin Castro*

Orphaned in South Korea, Joy was adopted by an American family at age seven months. When Joy's family environment collapsed, she entered state foster care. Joy became homeless when foster care ended, and soon after, discovered that her U.S. citizenship had not been secured during adoption. After quietly struggling with her immigration status for two decades, Joy learned that thousands of international adoptees suffer citizenship failure. Since then, Joy has spoken on the difficulties of living without citizenship at adoptee community events and conferences, law universities, and before Congress. Joy collaborated with Members of Congress on the Adoptee Citizenship Act of 2018 (ACA) and the ACA of 2019 and has met with more than one hundred congressional offices to ask for policy solutions. As Director of the Adoptee Rights Campaign, Joy steers the campaign's mission to educate and engage communities and to help affected adoptees with legal aid, emergency healthcare, and documentation recovery. Under Joy's leadership, the Adoptee Rights Campaign has



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expanded its coalition through national partnerships and helped foster Resolutions supporting the federal legislation from City Councils and State legislatures in Texas, California, Washington, Nevada, Illinois, Kentucky, Georgia, and Pennsylvania.

Utah

Bonnie Hilton

Recommended by Mitt Romney

First and foremost, Bonnie is the mother of nine children, five of whom are adopted. Three were adopted domestically and two were adopted internationally. Mothering and raising her children with her husband, Brett, is the joy of her life. Bonnie is a licensed clinical social worker and has served as the Clinical Director for Heart to Heart Adoptions in Salt Lake City, Utah since 2016. In this role, she carefully and personally navigates around 20 adoptions a year and oversees around 60 adoptions each year. This involves supporting, loving, and counseling with birth families both before and after the adoption takes place. Her greatest hope is that every child can thrive in a strong and stable family. Bonnie is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and currently serves as the President of the women's organization in her congregation. Nothing makes Bonnie happier than lifting and leading women to greater happiness and fulfillment in life.

Doug and Janet McLain

Recommended by Representative Benjamin McAdams

Doug and Janet McLain support and promote the foster care and adoption communities in Utah. They have been foster parents for eight years and have adopted six children. Doug and Janet speak at foster care trainings to share their story, answer questions, and recruit foster parents. Doug is on the board of

The Adoption Exchange and in 2018 was awarded Utah Foster Care's "Foster Dad of the Year." Janet is a support group leader for Utah Foster Care. She meets with adoptive and foster families monthly to provide support and training. The training's focus on topics such as childhood trauma, foster care laws and dealing with grief. Janet has also been a mentor for Utah Foster Care, where she uses her personal experiences (both as a foster parent and as a child in foster care) to support foster families. Janet, on her own experiences, says, "We love fostering and our children have been a huge blessing in our lives. They have changed our hearts for the better and we are very blessed to have them in our family". Doug, in an interview with the Deseret News, explained that the reward of fostering and adopting is "...you get a glimpse that you're helping break a cycle of neglect and abuse. There's real joy to see emerging from all this chaos; tiny, tiny successes".

Vermont

Christina R. Shuma

Recommended by Representative Peter Welch

Christina began employment at Lund in Burlington, Vermont in 2000. Her first position at Lund was as a Permanency Planning Counselor. After several years she moved to Post Permanency Support Services to families joined by Adoption or Guardianship. As the program grew, she took on supervision of staff and coordination of the program. In 2007 Christina additionally began facilitating the Vermont Adoption Registry and was co-located between Lund and DCF. In the last three years Christina took on the position of QIC-AG Site Implementation Manager. With this federal project ending in 2019, Christina will transition to be the Post-Adoption Contact Agreement Worker for the State of Vermont. Christina has been a pioneer in the work and development of the Post Permanency Program at Lund and in Vermont. She has been an integral



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part of the Vermont Consortium for Adoption and Guardianship to establish best practice standards for Post-Permanency Support agencies that the other three agencies would share. In the work of the QIC-AG she has helped bring about changes to the Vermont system of care to enhance responsiveness, service and support to families joined by Adoption or Guardianship. In the last 3 years she has grown into a skilled and well-prepared presenter and increased her knowledge of utilizing data to make informed changes for practice enhancement.

Virginia

Paul & Bettina Stevens

Recommended by Senator Mark Warner

Paul and Bettina brought their sons, Jordan and Sebastian, home from Uganda in 2015 and adopted their daughter, Olivia, from China in 2017. Both Jordan and Olivia have special needs, and all three children have considerable levels of trauma. As a result, they have navigated seasons of intense crisis.. In 2018, they started Thrive, a support and advocacy group for foster and adoptive families in their city. Since then, they have expanded into helping families navigate IEPs, medicaid, community resources, trauma and attachment, and caregiver needs. They also advocate for trauma informed training in schools and host various conferences to educate families and the community. After completing their foster care certification in Spring 2019, they continued to be moved by the needs around them. As a result, they launched a nonprofit, Reclaimed Hope Initiative (RHI) to target both the local and national needs of foster, adoptive, and special needs families. RHI was created to be a light for families who need help in their darkest moments. Paul and Bettina desire any family walking through crisis the ability to come out on the other side stronger, better equipped, and more confident to not only parent their children, but champion their dreams as a family.

Sabrina Darden and Family

*Recommended by
Representative Gerald Connolly*

Reginald and Sabrina Darden started providing foster care in Connecticut almost 30 years ago and have provided a home for children with severe medical and emotional needs. Before leaving Connecticut to come to Virginia, the Dardens cared for almost 200 children. After relocating to Virginia, “Auntie Sabrina” and “Uncle Reggie” began to care for teenagers who they call their nieces and nephews, six of whom have graduated from high school during the last three years. The Dardens have adopted three children from foster care through Fairfax County, and the ones that couldn’t be adopted were placed in permanent foster care with them. Mrs. Darden started a non-profit organization called Kingdom Provision, LLC, designed to provide resources for young exiting foster care or transitioning to independence. Mrs. Darden also encourages strong relationships between her foster and adopted children and their birth families and has attended baby showers and family events, bought the birth families groceries, clothes or other necessities, and acknowledged birth family birthdays with cards and gifts. One Thanksgiving morning she drove each of her children around the D.C. area to visit their birth families, an amazing gift for the children. Adoption and foster care can be extremely challenging but this has not discouraged or deterred them from their mission.

Anne Holton

*Recommended by
Representative Donald McEachin*

On Aug. 1, 2019, Anne Holton became the seventh president of George Mason University, the largest, most diverse and fastest-growing university in Virginia. The former Virginia Secretary of Education is the first female president in Mason history. Mason’s mission of access to excellence mirrors Holton’s impactful career in education, law and public service, leading efforts on behalf of



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families and children. After earning her law degree at Harvard, Holton worked as an attorney for low-income families from 1985 to 1998 with the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society. She then served as a judge on the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court for the city of Richmond from 1998 to 2005. As Virginia's First Lady when her husband, Sen. Tim Kaine, was governor from 2006 to 2010, Holton championed foster care system reform. Her program, For Keeps: Families for All Virginia Teens, helped find permanent families for foster children of all ages. Holton consulted on national foster care reform with the Annie E. Casey Foundation Child Welfare Strategy Group and later directed Great Expectations, a Virginia Foundation for Community College Education program that assists foster youth in pursuing a college education. Holton, a Roanoke, Va., native, graduated magna cum laude from Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs in 1980 and earned her law degree from Harvard in 1983.

Washington

Hand in Hand

Recommended by Maria Cantwell

In 2010, Hand in Hand was born from a group of foster parents, social workers and child advocates seeking to make positive, systemic changes in how children enter and are cared for in the foster system. Today, Hand in Hand exists to foster hope and opportunity for children and families in crisis through three critical programs: Safe Place, Outreach Program, and Foster Support Services. Safe Place, Hand in Hand's emergency shelter, was the first of its kind in Washington state, initiating HB 1261 (the 'safe place bill') and has become a robust support model in Snohomish and surrounding counties. Hand in Hand's Outreach Program was created to prevent youth from entering foster care by providing school and soccer outreach, emergency food boxes,

clothing giveaways and rental and utility assistance. Hand in Hand's Foster Support Services Program is a new program, comprised of the following services: Hand in Hand Resource Center, Parent-Child Visitation, Foster Support Groups and a unique foster care model aimed at promoting engagement and overall support of youth in out-of-home care. Since 2010, Hand in Hand has served over 1,500 youth through the Safe Place shelter, provided emergency food to over 400 individuals, assisted 753 individuals with rent and utilities, impacted 396 students through School Outreach programs, and made sports accessible to 700 children through Soccer Outreach.

Teen & Kid Closet

Recommended by

Representative Cathy McMorris-Rodgers

Teen & Kid Closet is a brick and mortar shop, serving all of eastern Washington and North Idaho. For the last 12 years TKC has provided new or gently used clothing to thousands of children who need it with the main focus on youth in foster care or in poverty. Most of the young people served have no access to nice clothes. Teen & Kid Closet caters to this need, providing them with fashionable, good quality clothing and accessories at no charge. The goal is dignity for children and youth who often aren't afforded it. The store is run by volunteers, which allows for donations to go directly to operating the store and purchasing needed items for the young shoppers.

Jake and Angie Moore

Recommended by

Representative Dan Newhouse

Jake and Angie Moore have always had a passion for children, especially those with special needs and those who are trauma affected. Angie is a speech paraprofessional for 5th and 6th graders and Jake is a special education paraprofessional in a high



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school. He is also in the middle of college for a dual teaching license in both general education and special education. Jake and Angie have been together for eight years and married for four. On their first wedding anniversary they were told that it would be a miracle if they ever became pregnant. After giving it a lot of thought and prayer, they decided to move forward with foster care. They always knew they would foster someday so this was God's perfect timing. Their first child was a 5 day old baby girl who they had until just before her first birthday when she was reunited with biological extended family. When she was eight months old they brought home another baby, a four month old girl who they will be adopting at the end of 2019. They have faced many struggles and hardship in the foster care system, but are excited to continue to take in children to give them unconditional love and be the advocate that many of them do not have.

Kentucky/West Virginia

NECCO

*Recommended by WV Senator Joe Manchin
& KY Representative*

Necco has built over 25,000 families and facilitated 5,768 adoptions and counting. Since 1996, founder and CEO, Beau Necco has led a tribe of passionate, loving advocates that support traumatized children and caring families across West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, and Georgia. In June 2017, University of Chicago's Chapin Hall, one of the world's most respected child welfare research institutes, presented the findings of a five-year study of Necco. They reported over 90% of children placed with families through Necco experience one move or less to permanency (compared to the national average of 4.83 moves per child). This significantly reduced the amount of trauma children experience, increased the likelihood of the success of a foster-to-adopt placement and saved the taxpayer millions of dollars. Necco's north star is to disrupt the current system

so profoundly, it forces the nation's child welfare system to permanently change for the better. Simply put there is "too much unnecessary waiting" in the foster care and adoption journey. Outdated regulations and infrastructure create barriers to finding loving homes. Necco has long partnered with champions in the state legislatures and executive branches to successfully pass bipartisan legislation that reduces unnecessary delays for children, foster and adoptive parents. Most recently the passage of HB 1 in Kentucky and HB 2010 in West Virginia are examples of significant progress of this work.

Wisconsin

Judge Christopher Foley

Recommended by Senator Tammy Baldwin

Judge Christopher Foley has presided over hundreds of adoptions during his thirty-year career in the Milwaukee courts. Judge Foley routinely opens the doors of his courtroom to anyone that the family wants to help celebrate adoptions and engages the families and the children in anyway he can. He is often the voice for older children and those with special needs, who are harder to place. In 2018, he was the recipient of the Jockey Being Family Award of Excellence in recognition of his efforts on behalf of adoptive families and children.

Les & Jody Muck

*Recommended by
Representative Mike Gallagher*

Les and Jody Muck have been fostering for over 12 years. They adopted a young woman in 2009 from foster care. They engaged with this young woman despite difficult behaviors and supported her as a member of their family wholeheartedly. Les and Jody have also more recently accepted placement of very challenging youth who would otherwise



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have needed to be placed in very restrictive settings outside of their community. Despite turning their lives upside down, Les and Jody are always willing to accommodate the extreme needs of these children, even when it has a significant impact on their schedules, church activities, or personal lives. Jody also takes her passion for trauma-informed care and community service to the Human Services Committee in Waupaca County, which helps ensure that the county has a truly trauma-informed approach in its policies and procedures.

Donna Strayer

Recommended by Senator Ron Johnson

Donna Strayer has worked in this field for 22 years, a field which often has substantial turnover. Her long-term consistency placing children for adoption is matched few other adoption professionals in the state of Wisconsin. After a career in the healthcare field, Donna Strayer became the program manager for Special Beginnings Adoption Services, Inc. In this position, she was involved in birth parent counseling and performing home studies for prospective adoptive couples. In 1999, she started her own agency, Adoption Services, Inc., which has been one of the leading adoption agencies in the state of Wisconsin for the past 20 years. Donna has personally handled hundreds of adoptions for Wisconsin couples, particularly in Southeastern Wisconsin. She has also testified in court many times in support of her adoptive parents. She has been a frequent presenter on the topic of adoption in the community and has been a long-time member and active participant in the southeastern Wisconsin meetings of adoption agencies in the area, as well as statewide adoption organizations. Donna's caring and professional manner has made her one of the most respected adoption professionals in the state of Wisconsin. She has also been an active volunteer for her church and for a Milwaukee area meal program.

Wyoming

Melinda and Melissa Stevens

Recommended by Senator Mike Enzi

Major Melissa Stevens and Melinda Stevens started fostering children in 2008 when Melissa was a Charge Nurse leading the Cheyenne Regional Medical Center ER and serving in the Wyoming Air Guard and Melinda was a stay-at-home parent to their biological daughter, Emily (25). They began the journey with trepidation as they did not know any other gay foster parents. When "the Mel's" welcomed brothers Michael (13) and Hayden (11) into their home at ages 3 and 1, they knew they were meant to be adoptive parents. They cared for and eventually adopted Surieck (10), Brylee (11), Andy (8), and Wyatt (10). They have also fostered Adrian (18 months) since birth. Each child has a story of early physical and emotional trauma. Melinda and Melissa believe their mission is to offer their children a stable, loving, values-based childhood to help them grow into the healthiest adults possible. They have taught Sunday school, coached sports teams, ran dozens of races, logged hundreds of miles trail riding and chauffeured kids to more band, sports and robotics clubs than the average parent. Melinda has become a mentor among local foster families for her advocacy and guidance ensuring children receive needed school support and therapies. While their journey has not been easy with Melinda leading the family during Melissa's overseas military deployments, the Stevens mothers cannot imagine life without their children.



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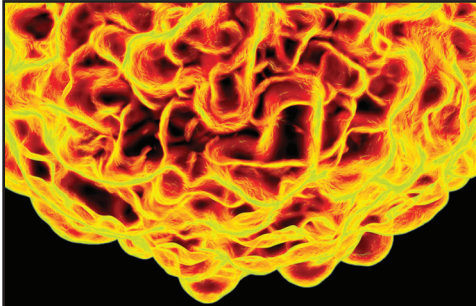
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