



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

April 15, 2016

The Honorable Mike Carroll  
Secretary  
Florida Department of Children and Families  
1317 Winewood Blvd.  
Building 1, Room 202  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0700

Dear Secretary Carroll:

We write with concern about the recent decision by the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) to repeal the proposed protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender foster youth residing in the 290 foster care group homes in Florida. Removing these badly needed protections will place thousands of LGBTQ youth at greater risk for bullying, harassment, and psychologically damaging “conversion therapy” from the very individuals and organizations meant to provide a stable, nurturing home for vulnerable youth.

For months, legal experts, child welfare experts, and advocates for youth worked with DCF to draft inclusive language that would prevent discrimination and harassment of LGBTQ youth, forbid the use of dangerous “conversion therapy,” provided appropriate clothing, hygienic, and grooming items for transgender and gender nonconforming youth, outlined guidelines for the appropriate placement of youth according to their gender identity, and required inclusive, research-driven training for foster youth group home administrators and caregivers. These protections and guidelines are recommended by leading child welfare organizations, endorsed by the federal government, and essential to meeting the DCF’s mandate to ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of youth in its care.

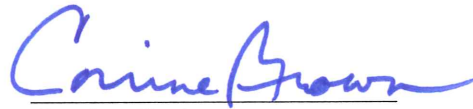
LGBTQ youth comprise an estimate 20 percent of all youth in foster care, and 40 percent of homeless youth in some areas. LGBTQ youth in congregate care are at particularly high risk of mistreatment and harassment, especially in where staff have received no training on how to support this population and clear guidance regarding acceptable treatment. Without protective policies in place, these youth face rejection by the caregivers and systems meant to keep them safe. Rejection by caregivers places youth at greater risk of depression, generalized anxiety disorder, conduct disorder, and substance abuse. This is particularly true among youth who have already experienced trauma or rejection earlier in life. Indeed, many LGBTQ former foster youth recount devastating experiences including “conversion therapy,” expulsion from religious schools, and isolation while in group home care.

I know that your administration has been very concerned about child victims of trafficking. LGBTQ youth who flee group homes because they are unwanted or feel unsafe are at high risk of homelessness and exploitation. These outcomes are preventable and the original rule proposed by DCF would have taken important steps in the right direction.


As the Secretary for the Florida Department of Children and Families, we implore you to provide stable, nurturing group homes that “recognize the uniqueness of each kid” and reinstate protections for LGBTQ youth. DCF has an obligation to tailor its services to each child and their family. An “all kids are the same” approach is contrary to basic child welfare practice. Providers must have information about the unique experiences and needs of LGBTQ youth to do their jobs and receive a clear message that mistreatment based on sexual orientation and gender identity is not permitted.

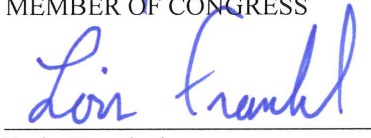
Sincerely,

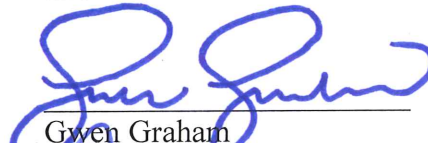
  
Patrick E. Murphy  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

  
Corrine Brown  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

  
Kathy Castor  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

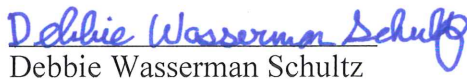
  
Theodore E. Deutch  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

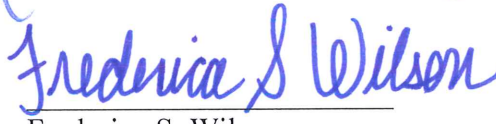
  
Lois Frankel  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

  
Gwen Graham  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

  
Alan Grayson  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

  
Alcee L. Hastings  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

  
Debbie Wasserman Schultz  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

  
Frederica S. Wilson  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS