



**Testimony Presented to the
Senate Committee on Families, Seniors and Human Services
HB 4188, 4189 and 4190**

Gilda Z. Jacobs, President & CEO
April 22, 2015

Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the committee. My name is Gilda Jacobs. I am the President/CEO at the Michigan League for Public Policy, a nonpartisan policy institute dedicated to economic opportunity for all.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to **HB 4188, 4189 and 4190**.

The League is home to the state's Kids Count project, which monitors child well-being in the state and throughout its counties and communities in order to improve the lives of disadvantaged children.

The child welfare system emphasizes the best interest of the child as the paramount goal. For this reason we are opposed to these bills. We are concerned that allowing agencies funded by public dollars to discriminate based on their religious beliefs against potential foster or adoptive parents is not in the best interests of the children in the child welfare system. Because Michigan depends on so many faith-based agencies to deliver foster care and adoptive services, this legislation could subject large numbers of vulnerable children to extended stays in residential or foster care facilities because of the restrictions based on religious preferences limiting better options.

Of the more than 3,000 children awaiting adoption in Michigan in 2013, roughly half had been waiting over two years, a long time in the life of a child. Surely we do not want to put more barriers into the process of establishing permanency for these children. Children who are placed in foster care or adoption have already suffered. Why would we compound their trauma and keep them from a stable, loving home by rejecting potential foster or adoptive parents based on religious preferences?

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify today.

Children In Foster Care Waiting For Adoption By Amount Of Time Waiting

Year(s): 5 selected | Time: All | Data Type: All

Data Provided by: National KIDS COUNT

Location	Time	Data Type	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Michigan	< 12 months	Number	468	833	613	506	613
		Percent	10%	16%	14%	14%	18%
	12 to 23 months	Number	1,432	1,547	1,315	1,110	1,088
		Percent	30%	30%	31%	31%	33%
	24 to 35 months	Number	1,184	1,202	922	892	766
		Percent	25%	23%	22%	25%	23%
	3 to 4 years	Number	1,022	978	810	609	504
		Percent	21%	19%	19%	17%	15%
	5 or more years	Number	796	667	574	468	366
		Percent	16%	13%	14%	13%	11%
	Total	Number	4,902	5,227	4,234	3,585	3,337
		Percent	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

DEFINITIONS & SOURCES

COLLAPSE ▲

Definitions: Children and youth in foster care waiting for adoption from birth up to age 20, by amount of time waiting. Time waiting is calculated by subtracting the date of a child's most recent entry into foster care from the date of the end of the fiscal year.