

SNAPSHOT: LGBTQ+ ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE PARENTING IN MICHIGAN

Across the United States, approximately 3 million lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ+) Americans have had a child, and as many as 6 million American children and adults have an LGBTQ+ parent. Among LGBTQ+ adults under 50 living alone or with a spouse or partner, 48% of women and 20% of men are raising a child under 18. Over 25% of transgender adults report being parents.

Michigan

Adoption Figures:

- In 2021, of the more than 391,000 youth in foster care in the U.S., 9,529 of them resided in Michigan, 3,321 of whom were waiting to be adopted at the end of the fiscal year.
- In 2021, 1,689 children were adopted from the foster care system in Michigan.
- In Michigan, 373,000 people identify as LGBTQ+, 4% of the total population. Of the LGBTQ+ adult population, 27% are raising children.

Foster Care and Adoption Laws:

- Michigan law allows any adult to petition to adopt. Mich. Comp. Laws Ann. § 710.24. There are no provisions that explicitly prohibit LGBTQ individuals from petitioning to adopt.
- State law provides that a married person and “his or her spouse” may petition to adopt jointly. Mich. Comp. Laws Ann. § 710.24.
- Michigan law permits any married person to adopt the child of their spouse via stepparent adoption. Mich. Comp. Laws Ann. § 710.51(6). Michigan statutes do not address second parent adoption, which is the adoption of a child by an additional parent without the first parent losing parental rights and without requiring the additional parent to be a spouse.
- In 2015, Michigan passed a law allowing child-placement organizations to discriminate against prospective parents on the ground of sincerely held religious beliefs as stated in an agency’s policy or statement of faith. Mich. Comp. Laws Ann. § 722.124e. Under a settlement agreement reached in a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the law, the State of Michigan committed to ensuring that all taxpayer-funded, government-contracted child placing agencies comply with its nondiscrimination requirements, including sexual orientation and gender identity. *Dumont v. Gordon*, 341 F. Supp. 3d 706 (E.D. Mich. 2018). In the wake of that settlement, a taxpayer-funded child placing agency sued the State of Michigan, claiming a constitutional right to discriminate. In a settlement reached in January of 2022, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services agreed not to take any action against the discriminating charity, and also agreed to pay \$550,000 in attorney’s fees and costs. *Buck v. Gordon*, 429 F.Supp. 3d 447 (W.D. Mich. 2019).
- Michigan does not have a statewide ban on the discredited practice of so-called “conversion therapy.” However, on June 14, 2021, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed an executive order prohibiting the use of state or federal funds for conversion therapy on minors. Executive Order 2021-3.

Across the United States

More than 33,000 same-sex couples are raising adopted children in the U.S.

- While LGBTQ+ parents are raising children all over the U.S., the highest proportions of LGBTQ+ parents raising children reside in Mountain West, Southern, and Midwestern states – areas with the fewest protections for LGBTQ+ families.
- The states with the highest proportions of LGBTQ+ parents raising children are Idaho (44%), Utah (40%) and Oklahoma (38%).
- Same-sex couples raising children are seven times more likely than their different-sex counterparts to be raising adopted or foster children.

Approximately 5,500 same-sex couples are raising foster children in the U.S. Same-sex couples raising children are seven times more likely than their different-sex counterparts to be raising foster children.

Many states are silent on the issue of LGBTQ+ people fostering and adopting children, which leaves these families vulnerable to the potential bias of individual agencies, child welfare professionals, and family court judges at the local level. Further, although LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system, many states lack state-level non-discrimination protections or affirming policies for LGBTQ+ youth in care.

- Only half of the states in the U.S. have laws or regulations that explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Only ten states ensure that individuals interested in acting as foster parents are not discriminated against based on their sexual orientation; fewer provide protections based on gender identity.
- In contrast, thirteen states – Alabama, Arizona, Kansas, Michigan, Mississippi, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and Virginia – allow an agency to turn away prospective foster and adoptive parents who do not meet the agency’s religious requirements. In at least nine of those states this is true even where an agency receives taxpayer funding. Advocates successfully defeated attempts in several other states to pass similar discriminatory laws.
- Married same-sex couples should have the same right to foster and adopt as married different-sex couples. Even with nationwide marriage equality, however, LGBTQ+ people and same-sex couples in some states may still face foster care and adoption laws, policies, or practices that permit agencies to continue to discriminate against them.
- Twenty states allow unmarried LGBTQ+ people to petition to adopt their own children through second-parent adoption.
- **Approximately 1 in 3 foster youth over the age of 12 identify as LGBTQ+.**
- **Over half of all states have no laws or regulations specifically prohibiting discrimination for LGBTQ+ youth receiving foster care and adoption services; most states provide no explicit guidance about transgender youth in the child welfare system.**
- **Only three states have passed laws or regulations that require placement of transgender youth in facilities based on their gender identity.**
- **Only six states have laws or regulations in place requiring LGBTQ+-inclusive cultural competency training for child welfare staff and/or foster parents.**

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EVERY CHILD DESERVES A FAMILY ACT

To cosponsor in the Senate contact Anna_Song@gillibrand.senate.gov in Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand's office.

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