



Angels in Adoption®

ALABAMA

ALASKA

ARIZONA

ARKANSAS

CALIFORNIA

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CONNECTICUT

DELAWARE

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ILLINOIS

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RHODE ISLAND

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SOUTH DAKOTA

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VERMONT

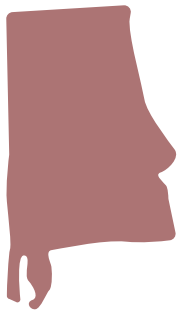
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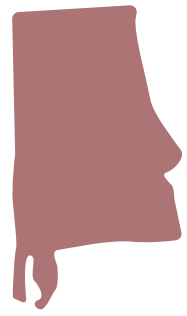
WEST VIRGINIA

WISCONSIN

WYOMING



# ALABAMA



Your state did not receive any community recommendations this year, but that does not mean there are not people in your state going above and beyond to support children and families in extraordinary ways.

To find an individual, couple, family, or organization to recommend, connect with CCAI Programs Coordinator, Sara Schleicher, at [sara@ccainstitute.org](mailto:sara@ccainstitute.org) for a list of governmental and non-governmental foster care and adoption-related organizations. These agencies have connections with those doing exceptional things in your state. Additional options for identifying a recommendee include (1) calling foster care and adoption-related agencies in your state and/or (2) asking constituents for input on potential candidates.





# ALASKA



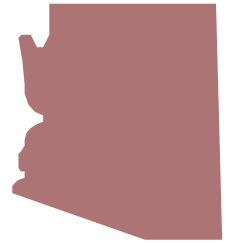
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# ARIZONA



## **Advocacy 31nine**

Senator Mark Kelly | Senator Krysten Sinema

1718 S. Sierra Vista  
Tempe, Arizona, 85282

Advocacy 31nine advocates for children in foster care who move from family to family. Many foster children "fall through the cracks" because they are moved from school to school. A recent study showed that children who live with trauma early in life are 32 times more likely to struggle and have learning difficulties in school. Advocacy 31nine tracks the children, advocates for them, attends and educates the foster parents on IEPs and attends meetings about said IEPs. Children have benefited from this organization by receiving the services that they need to be successful and to live a full life after they leave the foster care program. Since its inception, Advocacy 31nine has unlocked over \$3 million dollars of services. They have served over 1,000 students and have the backing of over 25 community partners. Without these interventions, many of the foster children will end up in jail or dropping out of school because they had no one to advocate for them. Nicole Marshall and Jenny Mullins are the cofounders of this organization and have already helped multiple families unlock services that otherwise would not be available.

## **Peter and Julie Bartolini**

Senator Mark Kelly | Senator Krysten Sinema

19237 N 92nd Way  
Scottsdale, Arizona, 85255

Peter and Julie Bartolini are the founders of Firm Foundation Youth Homes. Peter has spent the last 25 years working with and advocating for children who come from hard places. Since Peter and Julie first becoming foster parents in 2004, they have had over 30 kids placed in their home. Since 2001, Peter has worked with Royal Family Kids' Camp and Hope & a Future, putting on week-long summer camps and a life-skills mentoring program for kids who are in foster care. Peter is also a speaker and trainer for Family Matters, a national ministry that helps parents raise truly great kids. Julie is a trained practitioner for Trust-Based Relational Intervention® (TBRI®). During the years of foster care in their home, Peter and Julie took in all comers from newborns who needed immediate respite to multiple kids whose families had failed them. In all cases the children were received with joy and love. Because of the tranquility with which foster kids were received in the home, Peter and Julia's biological children, Natalie and Sam, have been an added component of care, making family love a reality for every child they bring into their home. Peter and Julia have maintained open lines of communication with the families of their kids, even when their time of fostering was over. Many of these relationships remain fresh and vibrant today for the benefit of the child. When adoption was available, Peter and Julia were willing to seek it: three of their five children are adopted.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



## More Than A Bed

Senator Mark Kelly | Senator Krysten Sinema

3637 North 1st Avenue  
Tucson, Arizona, 85719

More Than a Bed provides free essentials to Southern Arizona foster, kinship, and adoptive families because a child that has been removed from their home often arrives with little-to-no belongings. More Than a Bed provides car seats, underwear, shoes, and, yes, beds. More Than a Bed understands it is the basics that give children and their families dignity and a sense of value and hope.

More Than a Bed's 5000 sq. ft. warehouse of donated clothing and household goods is open to foster, kinship, and adoptive families to shop for what they need. They also provide urgent services and goods for families that receive an emergency placement. More Than a Bed has seen exponential growth in the number of families and children they serve, growing from 5 families served in 2014 to 796 families in 2020. On average they serve 27 new families per month. The COVID-19 pandemic did not slow the need of the community's children and More Than a Bed adopted the necessary protocols to safely keep their doors open.

Time and time again, families credit More Than a Bed with providing an invaluable service to them during their foster care journey. The accolades usually begin with phrases such as, "We couldn't have done it without Grace and More Than a Bed..." or "More Than a Bed saved us when the kids arrived..."

## Jenny Mullins

Senator Mark Kelly | Senator Krysten Sinema

625 N Gilbert Rd #103  
Gilbert, Arizona, 85234

Jenny Mullins is an advocate for all children. She and the agency Advocacy31nine, which she co- founded, has been an immense support and resource for youth and parents in the foster care system. When the public school wanted to push children out because of issues they were having due to trauma, Advocacy31nine informed foster care parents of their rights. Jenny and Advocacy31nine gives resources to help foster parents make the best choice for the education of their children. Jenny is there to help every step of the way, while empowering families with knowledge and choice.

## Amelia Valenzuela & Arnoldo Nevarez

Senator Mark Kelly | Senator Krysten Sinema

1101 N 4th Ave  
Tucson, Arizona, 85705

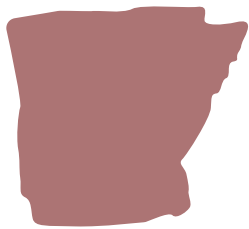
Amelia and Arnoldo have been foster parents since June 2015. They helped a young man that had Type 1 diabetes get healthier and maintain contact with his step-siblings while he was in their care. They also helped him transition to an adoptive home. Currently they are working with siblings, ages 3 and 6. The 3 yr old girl is lively, energetic, very creative, and imaginative. Her older brother has been diagnosed with Autism. This is their 4th placement since being in the foster care system for 2 years. The little girl attends a learning center where she has excelled in her social skills.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)

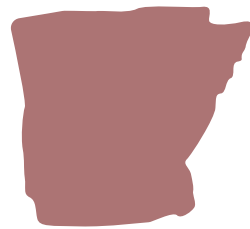


The 6 yr old started in person school because virtual school was difficult for him. In the foster home he can anticipate his routine and helps his sister as well as picks on her, as any big brother would. Amelia and Arnold, at the beginning, were feeling that they may not be the best match for the kids. The 6 yr old had daily tantrums where he would throw himself on the floor and was not willing to participate in activities. His sister was afraid of him and the foster parents' own son, who is 5 yrs old, was not wanting to play with either child. The pandemic made it extra difficult as they were limited to being home, not even able to go out to parks as they were closed. Services were not coming into the foster home. However, Amelia and Arnold persevered and both kids are successful. The siblings take pride in caring for their belongings and being able to meet their needs met. The little girl has had the services necessary to have her developmental needs met. The little boy has the desire to do things and be a helper, also improving in all areas of development. Amelia & Arnoldo and their son have been loving, patient, resourceful and most of all inclusive. They continue to support the children in maintaining a meaningful relationship with their biological parents.





# ARKANSAS



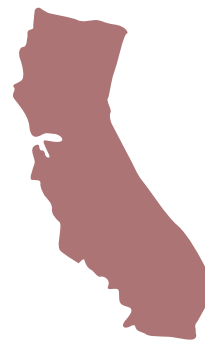
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# CALIFORNIA



## **Tyerae Bailey**

Senator Dianne Feinstein | Senator Alex Padilla

2057 N Bush St  
Santa Ana, California, 92706

As a former foster youth, Tyerae Bailey has endured some of the hardest challenges foster youth can endure. Mr. Bailey grew up in the foster care system his whole life: living in foster care homes in Dallas, Texas to group homes in Van Nuys, California. Mr. Bailey found his forever family with the help of Kidsave and CEO Randi Thompson. Tyerae Bailey has been a figure for foster youth all across the country: saying “We must progress together, no matter how long it may take.” Mr. Bailey has been a spokesperson for Kidsave International for over 2 years and a child advocate his entire life. Mr. Bailey travels across the country from Los Angeles to Washington D.C.. Most recently he helped Kidsave International open a new program in Houston Texas! Mr. Bailey has been able to be a part of an Emmy Award winning national television show on the A&E Network called “The Day I Picked My Parents!”, produced by Naked Entertainment. Tyerae Bailey aims to dedicate his life to making the lives of each and every child and citizen of the world better everyday. Mr. Bailey enjoys being around children and spending time with them because it allows him to reflect and remember why he does what he does and why he loves it!

## **Angela Featherstone**

Senator Dianne Feinstein | Senator Alex Padilla

8424 Santa Monica Blvd. #A104  
West Hollywood, California, 90069

Angela Featherstone experienced abuse and neglect growing up which continued when she was put into the foster care system in Canada at the age of 16. The abuse and neglect stopped when she was emancipated at age 17.5. Within a year of emancipation, Featherstone became one of Canada's top models. However, the effects of her traumatic past continued and she did not have the coping mechanisms to handle all of life's ups and downs. This led her to start a nonprofit called Fostering Care in 2020. Fostering Care is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based on Featherstone's first-hand experience with trauma and the foster care system. Fostering Care offers a holistic healing school for youth aging out of foster care. This school is the first of its kind and hopes to alleviate the negative outcomes that many youth experience after aging out of the foster care system. To do this, Fostering Care ensures each student receives a teaching certificate in a healing modality, such as yoga, meditation, or breathwork. Additionally, Fostering Care hosts guest lectures on topics such as drug dependency, nutrition, and various life skills. Featherstone hopes each student is able to achieve self-sufficiency, positively contribute to society, and help others heal upon completion of the healing school. [Click to go back to the first page](#)





## Sari Grant

Senator Dianne Feinstein | Senator Alex Padilla

9543 Bianca Avenue  
Northridge, California, 91325

Sari Grant is a passionate, committed advocate for foster youth. She is a licensed clinical social worker who has worked for the Los Angeles County Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) for over 30 years. Sari is currently a DCFS Children's Services Administrator III responsible for child-specific, targeted, and general recruitment of adoptive families. She also oversees DCFS's Permanency Partners Program, which is responsible for family finding and engagement services for LA County.

Sari is DCFS's Liaison for Kidsave's Los Angeles Weekend Miracles program (LAWM), an innovative family visit program that helps older foster youth in LA County (ages 9-17) find adoptive families and lasting connections with caring adult mentors. LAWM provides a unique opportunity for children and prospective families to meet, and for relationships to form naturally. Once people meet and get to know the children, their challenges become something the families want to help them overcome. Participating youth in care are given a choice as to which families they want to form a weekend hosting and/or permanent relationship with. LAWM is changing how child welfare systems search for families for older children. Sari was largely responsible for changing DCFS social worker reluctance to referring children to LAWM, many of whom did not believe that families could be found for these youth.

## John Burton Foundation

Senator Dianne Feinstein | Senator Alex Padilla

235 Montgomery St #1142  
San Francisco, California, 94104

John Burton Foundation has been the pioneers when it comes to legislation and advocacy for youth that have experienced homelessness and foster care. They championed many bills that have positively impacted the lives of these populations such as cosponsoring AB12 (Extended Foster Care), AB153 Housing Investments for TAY foster youth, AB153 Expectant Parent Payment for pregnant foster youth, AB132 establish a Basic Needs Center in CA Community Colleges, and much more. This organization proactively addresses the challenges and opportunities our youth face from housing and homelessness, K-12 and higher education, economic security, health, and basic needs. When COVID-19 hit, they were in the frontlines of advocacy sharing the outcries of current and former foster youth through their publication: "JBAY: Hanging By a Thread." This publication exposed the trauma and deficits of resources that youth in care encountered. In our nation's crisis of COVID-19, JBAY was able to spread resources and awareness about youth in care. Youth were able to remain in the foster care system beyond age 21 (through December 31, 2021) which helped prevent them from being homeless during a health crisis.

JBAY doesn't just stop at passing bills but prides themselves in implementation. One great example is Homekey which is included in Governor Newsom's \$2.75 billion program to reduce homelessness. JBAY successfully advocated for 8% of this funding to address youth homelessness. That's \$220 million! Recently, JBAY launched their Critical Needs and Opportunity Fund which

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



pays for critical needs for youth, ages 16-26. For example, former foster youth Patrick was forced to leave his apartment due to his roommate being contracted with COVID-19. With no family support, JBAY stepped in to pay for a hotel thus preventing him from being homeless. This type of support saves the lives of many foster youth.

This organization doesn't ever stop thinking big and continues to be the heroes in our communities.

## Celeste Liversidge

Senator Dianne Feinstein | Senator Alex Padilla

1369 E Altadena Dr  
Altadena, California, 91001

Attorney Celeste Liversidge has been practicing exclusively in the field of adoption law since 2001. She is a fellow of both the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys and the Academy of California Adoption Lawyers and a member of the National Association of Counsel for Children, Christian Adoption Legal Services, National Council For Adoption, and the North American Council on Adoptable Children. Celeste earned her law degree from Pepperdine University School of Law and her undergraduate degree from Westmont College. She has served on numerous boards and is an adjunct professor at Pepperdine School of Law.

Celeste founded Ethical Family Building, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization which encompasses AdoptMatch, which is committed to promoting ethical standards in domestic adoption, TruAdopt, a nonprofit law firm that exists solely to provide free legal representation to expectant moms considering adoption, AdoptConnect, a platform where adoptive parents and birth parents can securely share photos and communication in an open adoption, and Adoption Law Group, a law firm dedicated exclusively to adoption. Celeste is a powerful advocate for safe, child-centered adoptions and providing support for birth moms after placement. Celeste is an impactful leader among adoption attorneys nationwide, always pushing for higher ethical standards in the adoption field.

## Helena Lopez

Senator Dianne Feinstein | Senator Alex Padilla

3745 Palos Verdes Drive North  
Rancho Palos Verdes, California, 90274

Helena Lopez's service to children in need began when she was a child. When she was 10 years old, Lopez's mother opened three group homes for teenagers in foster youth. Lopez saw the residents as her siblings and fondly remembers how many of them attended her Junior High School promotion: "I had the biggest crowd of family there." Years later, Lopez became a Case Manager at the Greater Hope Society group home, where she relished in empowering foster youth.

After law school, Lopez worked in real estate law in San Francisco until she received a fateful phone call. Her mother needed Lopez's signature tenacity and leadership in launching a foster family agency called A Greater Hope in Barstow, California. The County of San Bernardino needed an agency in their community as no other providers would travel to the High Desert at that time.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



Demonstrating her characteristic compassion, Lopez told her mother "yes" and moved to Barstow, California. Lopez put her expertise in management, contracts, and research to work as she served as A Greater Hope's Executive Director for 17 years. In January of 2019, Lopez was appointed CEO. Under Lopez's leadership the organization has grown to four locations with multiple programs, more than 50 employees, and is the largest provider of safe and loving families for foster children in San Bernardino County. Since 2002, more than 6,000 children have found loving foster homes through A Greater Hope.

A recognized leader in foster care, Lopez is the 2021 President of the California Alliance for Children and Family Services. She is also a member of the Alliance's Leaders of Color group. She served as the past President of the Inland Empire Alliance and is currently the Co-Chair of the Association of Foster Family Agencies.

## **Theresa Marcroft**

Senator Dianne Feinstein | Senator Alex Padilla

1658 Topeka Avenue  
San Jose, California, 95126

Terri's, passion for adoption originated over 21 years ago, when she became a mom. Terri's daughter's birthmother made an adoption plan in 1999, while she was a senior in high school. Terri and her husband witnessed Sydney's birth and brought her home from the hospital when she was only 24 hours old. They have cultivated and enjoyed an open adoption since then.

Terri's passion for adoption goes far beyond being an adoptive Mom. In 2008, Terri identified the need to actively advocate for adoption. When many of her friends were facing infertility, they looked into adoption but few newborns were available. Terri's research, plus a series of focus groups and interviews, showed that young women today don't even realize that adoption is an option. As a result, less than 2% of young American women facing unplanned pregnancy choose adoption for their babies. In California, that number is less than 1%. At the same time, there are over one million childless couples in the US hoping to adopt.

After ten gratifying years of parenthood, and 25 in high tech marketing & communications, Terri founded Unplanned Good Inc. to get adoption on the radar of young women facing unplanned pregnancy. She leads the organization's efforts to encourage pregnant girls to consider adoption. Unplanned Good partners with local pregnancy & medical clinics to provide information and encouragement about adoption. The Unplanned Good web site offers testimonials from birthmothers, adoptees, and adoptive parents so that young women can learn more about this option. They publish a monthly newsletter, advertise online, and speak at both local and national conferences. Terri and her team spread the word that open adoption can be a huge blessing for all involved.

Terri is also on the Board of Pharaoh's Daughters, a community serving orphans and vulnerable children.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



## **Mausami Momaya, BASW, MSW, LCSW**

Senator Dianne Feinstein | Senator Alex Padilla

5199 E PCH #204  
Long Beach, California, 90804

Mausami Momaya, BASW, MSW, LCSW, has tirelessly served children in need in the foster care community and in domestic/international adoption. She began her journey in child welfare on her summer vacations as a child when visiting orphanages in her native country of India. The children would all line up while Mausami placed assorted fruits in their hands. This simple gesture taught her the spirit of giving, and illuminated the discussion of children who are the same but have different circumstances. These direct actions placed a permanent seed in Mausami to see what she was able to accomplish. Mausami graduated with high academic honors in her undergraduate and graduate school education. She completed internships with the LA DCFS in domestic adoption and foster care, as well as serving the Native American Community. Post-graduation, she began her working career as a Domestic Adoption & Foster Care Social Worker. In 2000, Mausami joined the family business her mother started, Bal Jagat -Children's World Inc agency. Mausami traveled to orphanages in Vietnam, Thailand, Moldova, Romania, China, and India opening programs. As the Director of Social Services, she supervises social workers while being a social worker herself. There have been countless humanitarian projects spearheaded by Mausami including hiring more caregivers to provide additional nurturance at orphanages and opening a home for physically disabled children to receive physical and occupational therapies. Mausami acquired various foreign countries' licensures and completed the agency's Hague accreditation paperwork in 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020. Mausami's pursuit to unite orphaned children with loving adoptive parents here in the US is active and in full force. She has helped an estimated 5,000+ orphan children to have loving families over the last 27 years.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)





# COLORADO



## Virginia Frank

Senator John Hickenlooper | Senator Michael Bennett

1434 Spruce Street #100  
Boulder, Colorado, 80302

Virginia Frank is a Fellow of the Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys. She is also the owner of Adoption Choices agencies, which operates as licensed agencies in several states. Ginny says that it is her mission to help birth mothers make choices that are right for them and their babies. Through the option of adoption, women can be given another “Choice” for their child. The marriage of two families through the framework of adoption is a beautiful and inclusive journey that everyone should have the opportunity to understand and choose, if they wish. Ginny feels blessed to have been one of the only attorneys in the United States to dedicate her entire legal and business career to family formation through adoption.

## Jen Winkelmann

Senator John Hickenlooper | Senator Michael Bennett

521 W Crestline Cir  
Littleton, Colorado, 80120

Jen Winkelmann is neither an adoptee, an adoptive parent, foster parent, nor a birth parent. Yet she has helped perhaps thousands of adoptees, adoptive parents, foster parents, and birth parents through her counseling, her training, her work in a public school system, and her signature Blueprints program that focuses on healthy attachment. Jen is an unheralded gem for adoptees and adoptive families in Colorado's 1st, 2nd, 4th, 6th, and 7th congressional districts (and soon-to-be 8th).





# CONNECTICUT



## **Christopher Baker-Scott**

Senator Chris Murphy | Senator Richard Blumenthal

69 Haystack Road  
Manchester, Connecticut, 06040

After entering foster care at age eight, Christopher became all too familiar with the hardships that youth in the child welfare system face. He wanted to lessen these hardships for other foster and adopted youth. He first recognized the power of education as the "great equalizer" as a recently aged-out youth at Tunxis Community College. Today, as a recent Harvard graduate, he remembers this lesson as clearly as ever. Christopher founded Sun Scholars Inc. in order to remove some of the barriers to entry that former foster and adopted youth face during post-secondary education. Sun Scholars Inc. began as a small program operating out of a single university and, since receiving funding from the Connecticut Department of Children and Families, has grown to serve students around the entire state. Christopher has raised \$1.2 million to fund Sun Scholars mission, grown the organization's staff to 7+ professionals who all have lived experience in foster care, and have helped hundreds of young adults in the foster care system with direct service. He goes beyond academic support to help his students tackle issues such as housing and food insecurity, and his organization has a proven track record of increased enrollment and retention. Christopher and his organization are committed to improving educational equity and college graduation rates by using a student-first mentality. Through all of his work and advocacy, Christopher is breaking down the hardships faced by those going through the child welfare system. Christopher is also a 2019 Foster Youth Intern Program alumni, was recognized as one of Connecticut Magazine's "40 under 40" in 2022, and holds a Governor's Appointment on the Department of Children and Families State Advisory Council. Christopher now resides in Manchester with his wife, foster daughter, and pets Puchakaya (rabbit) and Fig Newton (cat).

## **Loraine Ireland**

Senator Chris Murphy | Senator Richard Blumenthal

1031 Windsor Ave  
Windsor, Connecticut, 06095

Loraine Ireland started her career in foster care in 2014. Ireland has consistently worked above and beyond the expectations of foster parents to ensure the children in her home have everything they need, physically, mentally and emotionally. Ireland has adopted and is presently in the process of adopting 2 more little girls and has stepped forward to be an adoptive resource for 2 emergency placements placed in her home only a few months ago. Ireland is loving, patient and consistent despite the struggles children experience because of past trauma. Ireland advocates for the needs of the children in her home, regardless of push back received at times. Most recently, Ireland has started in-home therapy for 3 of her girls because she realized they needed more

[Click to go back to the first page](#)

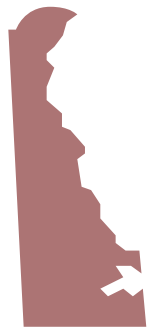


support than just their foster care social workers. She provides positive reinforcement, explains rules and sets achievable and realistic goals and expectations. Ireland's foster care approach is one that leads to positive long term outcomes for our children.





# DELAWARE

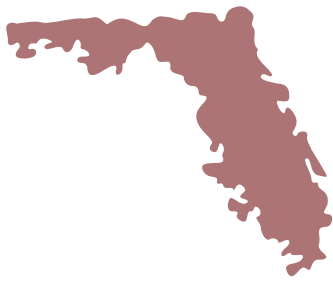


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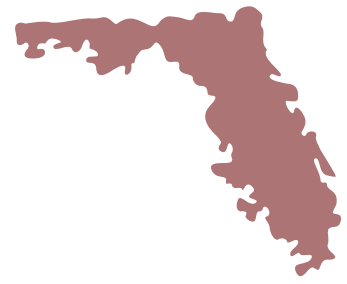
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# FLORIDA



## **Taylor Adams**

Senator Marco Rubio | Senator Rick Scott

14041 Icot Blvd  
Clearwater, Florida, 33760

Taylor is the heart of the community she serves. She works tirelessly to engage the community, recruit families, work with photographers, and create social media content to bring awareness to children who need their forever home. She networks on her time off and is always thinking of creative ways to let the beautiful light of each Heart Gallery child shine. Taylor is never without ideas, commitment, and determination.

No matter the task she is there with a smile, committed to supporting families on their adoption journey from start to finish. Taylor is the birthday wisher, the gallery organizer, the celebration planner, the question answerer and the guiding light for so many families who long to adopt. This journey is not always an easy one, but Taylor is there to make sure every child is represented and every family is supported.

Taylor has been a strong influence, every day, behind the scenes to help kids find their forever family. With each glimmer of hope from a child, with each click on the Heart Gallery link, with each email, question, and answer, Taylor is an ambassador and a joyful guiding light in the walk of adoption.

## **Elizabeth Berkowitz**

Senator Marco Rubio | Senator Rick Scott

712 US highway 1 suite 300-1  
North Palm Beach, Florida, 33408

Elizabeth Berkowitz has made an extraordinary impact in the world of adoption through her meticulous care for adoptive families and birth parents throughout the legal process of private adoption. From start to finish, she is an advocate for the welfare of each and every child. Elizabeth Berkowitz deeply invests in birth parents' well-being and recovery. She often takes phone calls from birth parents and adoption families beyond business hours and has sacrificed her own vacation time to make sure her adoptive families and birth mothers feel supported and cared for. She truly becomes like family to the children and families she has matched. Through difficult situations, where many others would quit, she has left no stone unturned when it comes to finding forever families for infants and children in need. She has also done extensive work through the Florida Adoption Counsel implementing necessary education and leadership throughout the adoption community in the state of Florida.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



## The Brydges Family

Senator Marco Rubio | Senator Rick Scott

12018 Ambrosia Court  
Jacksonville, Florida, 32223

Robbin and Steve are the adoptive parents of two brothers who were adopted through the Dave Thomas foundation. Since they began their adoption journey, Robbin and Steve have been outspoken advocates for kids in foster care and adoption through the foster care system, including medically fragile children and sibling groups. Their oldest son, Dalton, is 15 and has Cerebral Palsy and is medically fragile. Dawson, his younger brother, is 12 and in 6th grade.

Their family was featured in the film "Instant Family" and often appear on the local news addressing issues that affect adoptive families, children and medically fragile children. Robbin's passion for her family and advocacy for children and the adoptive community is something spectacular. Steve is an amazing father and wonderful provider for his family. The Brydges Family are truly exemplary of the happy ending so many children in care dream of. Dawson says that "every night he wishes that other children find good moms and dads" like he and his brother did. They also started the Bridging America in Support of Forever Families organization to support and educate on issues related to adoption through foster care.

## Richard Fardo

Senator Marco Rubio | Senator Rick Scott

10398 Mcalester Circle  
Port Charlotte, Florida, 33981

Richard Fardo is a single-father of an 11 and 10 year old. From being a Mental health advocate, foster care advocate, adoption advocate, to being a former member of the children's home board of directors, Richard has a long history of being involved in the communities of which he has lived. His continued commitment to children in the foster care system is unwavering. He has adopted children domestically from Indiana, Ohio, and Florida as well as internationally, from Russia. He now resides in Florida.

## Barbara Ginn

Senator Marco Rubio | Senator Rick Scott

151 Skipping Stone Lane  
Naples, Florida, 341199742

Barbara is an adoption attorney, but foster care and adoption is not just a professional interest for her and her family, but also a personal interest. Barbara and her husband provided kinship care to a child from April 2006-April 2007, which led to them ultimately becoming licensed foster parents from November 2013 through November 2018. Barbara's family has had the joy of providing temporary care for numerous children during that time and has adopted two of their foster children. Some of Barbara's favorite memories involve listening to her children explain the need for more foster families and why her family fosters to classmates and neighborhood children, as well as watching her children embrace every child that is placed in their family, temporarily or permanently. Barbara and her husband are approved caregivers through Better Together in Naples, Florida, and continue to enjoy providing a home for vulnerable children.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



In the professional world, Barbara is a dedicated adoption attorney and has experience representing private adoption agencies, birth parents, and adoptive parents. Additionally, she has been involved in intrastate and interstate adoptions, independent adoptions (including custodial adoptions), private agency adoptions, contested adoptions, re-finalization of international adoptions, step-parent adoptions, and adult adoptions. Barbara is a Fellow of the prestigious Academy of Adoption and Assisted-Reproduction Attorneys as well as a member of the Ohio Roundtable of Adoption Attorneys and the Collier County Bar Association.

## **Felix and Angela Gonzalez**

Senator Marco Rubio | Senator Rick Scott

507 Macchi Ave  
Oakland, Florida, 34787

Felix and Angela Gonzalez have been adoptive parents since 2012. Shortly after adopting their daughter, they felt a strong desire to serve their community by pioneering a unique model of care for adoptive and foster families. Additionally, they felt a passion to advocate and speak out about adoption and foster care in their community.

Felix, established an adoption fund, as he dreamt of helping families fund their adoptions. Since then this adoption grant program has helped over 20 Central Florida families adopt children from all over the globe. Angela is a Trauma-Informed Practitioner and has been teaching about the importance of becoming a trauma-informed community since 2017. Angela co-founded a WRAP-Around program to serve foster and adoptive families with practical resources such as mental health and attachment disorder support, meal delivery, trauma-informed training as well as tangible needs such as diapers, clothing, respite care, and a mom's support group that still meets to this date. Through their leadership and efforts, locally, they have partnered with Embrace Families in Florida and Devereaux Behavioral Health to serve foster youth in Central Florida. They have also been partnered with The Art Gallery of Central Florida for the last three years. Through this partnership, they host over 100 teens in foster care at a Winter Wonderland Christmas party. Under Felix and Angela's influence and leadership they've recruited hundreds of volunteers to serve children, whether by training parents to step into fostering or adopting, or training volunteers to engage locally by serving foster and adoptive families, or by being a part of the programs the licensing agencies in Central Florida offer.

## **The Nurture Place**

Senator Marco Rubio | Senator Rick Scott

1001 West Plant Street  
Winter Garden, Florida, 34787

The two founding members of Nurture Place have worked tirelessly and often without any compensation to provide services to an underserved population. Angela Gonzalez and Summer Darnell have both not only recognized a need in their town but have made great effort to meet that need.

Angela understands the needs of adoptive children and their families. She has adopted a child herself and that journey has provided her first-hand experience with the lack of support and resources for adoptive families in

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



her local area. Angela became trained in TBRI (Trust -Based Relational Intervention) and used this training to provide support to both parents and children. This model trains caregivers to provide effective support and treatment for at risk children. She runs a support group monthly for parents of adoptive children. This space provides an environment that parents are able to both receive support as well as give support to other parents who may be in another place of the adoptive journey. Angela also recruits and trains volunteers to work with children in the community to provide groups, addressing attachment and trauma related concerns to assist children who have been part of the child welfare system or adopted.

Summer has been working to provide evidence based-treatment for an individual, group, and familial groups in the community. It has been critically important to her to make sure that services are available for women who are pregnant, new parents, foster parents who have a child that has experienced a traumatic event or has been in the child welfare system, and adopted parents. Summer has attended numerous trainings to ensure that she is providing evidence-based treatment for families. Summer is certified as an Adoption Competent trained therapist in the State of Florida. Summer also provides group services in schools, offices, and even homes.

Angela and Summer have worked together to share their vision of providing evidence-based quality services to all families in their community and have worked diligently to ensure that all have access to services. They have partnered with local churches, community health centers, schools, and businesses in an effort to reach more children and families. They have also been successful in asking the local community to sponsor a child in need of services. They work to ensure that services are provided in English and Spanish to address the diversity of their community.

## **The Scheiderer Family**

**Senator Marco Rubio | Senator Rick Scott**

12231 Lacey Dr.  
New Port Richey, Florida, 34654

Kristen and David Scheiderer have changed lives through their selfless adoption of 4 children who needed families. They initially adopted a sibling group of 3 young boys with many unknowns. At this point Kristen and David had no other children, but had an open heart and home to share. Since then, their wonderful sons were discovered to have some unique needs and abilities, and they made it their mission to not only advocate heavily in the school system with the IEP process but also to help other families struggling to get their children's needs met. They powered through mental health systems on all levels, and gained access to therapeutic milieu on a daily basis for their sons to live their most full and thriving lives. In 2020 their lives changed when they received a call from an adoption agency after the adoption of a sibling group they had hoped to adopt fell through. The little girl was born extremely prematurely and drug-exposed with multiple needs. She was likely to be totally blind. When receiving the call, Kristen said "I have the biggest smile on my face! Yes! Please present us". The babies birth mother selected them as the family for her precious daughter and the newest Scheiderer, Emma Rose joined the family. The family has embraced their new daughter and, just like with their sons, fiercely advocate for her needs.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



Emma has a nearly full time therapeutic schedule and the family coordinates this with the many school activities and appointments of her brothers, Marcus, Ryan and Elijah. This family never hesitates to say yes and provides unconditional love, advocacy, support, and hands-on parenting to every child they welcome into their home.

## **Christina Spudeas**

Senator Marco Rubio | Senator Rick Scott

1401 N University Drive Suite 408

Coral Springs, Florida, 33071

Christina has dedicated her life to being a public servant, however her best career move came when she became the CEO of Florida's Children First. Through that work she was able to help Florida Youth Shine, a group of current and former foster youth, grow to be a youth-led organization. She has touched the lives of many Florida Foster Care youth through this work by being an advocate of children's issue related to youth in care. She has testified before the capital in Florida and also has done the same on Capitol Hill. She has truly been a rock for Florida's Foster Care system always striving to make a difference. She recently retired as the CEO after 20 plus years of services to the youth of Florida's foster care system.

## **Lloyd and Dianne Weed**

Senator Marco Rubio | Senator Rick Scott

826 Pinebrook Rd

Venice, Florida, 34285

In 2016, Lloyd and Dianne Weed launched The Twig Cares, Inc - an organization dedicated to encouraging and inspiring children in foster care. They created an upscale boutique where children in foster care can shop, for free, every month they are in care. The items in the boutique are either new or like new, and everything is hung, tagged, and placed in departments. The Twig even has dressing rooms where children can try on their selected items.

One's experience at The Twig is one filled with dignity, hope, and encouragement. The Twig served 810 children in 2020, with approximately 300 children visiting every month. The Twig is a place where children and youth feel they belong and where they know they matter. The Twig has become an influential voice in the community on behalf of children in foster care, raising awareness about the needs of the foster care community.

Lloyd and Dianne have worked tirelessly behind the scenes to make the organization a success. Dianne serves as Executive Director and volunteers 50-60 hours/week to the organization. Lloyd has spent countless hours working on whatever is needed from financial support to building shelves. This couple adopted their daughter Ashlyn from foster care in 1998 and have since dedicated their lives to improving the lives of children in care.





# GEORGIA



## **Rhonda Fishbein**

Senator Jon Ossoff | Senator Raphael Warnock

6420 Colewood Court  
Atlanta, Georgia, 30328

Rhonda Fishbein is a Georgia attorney who practices exclusively in the area of adoption law. As an adoptive mother herself, she is passionate about the services she provides and sensitive to the issues her clients face. Families who retain Ronnie receive the benefit of highly personalized and responsive legal service. She is recognized locally and nationally for her knowledge of adoption laws. Some of her credentials include: more than 35 years of legal experience, a law practice devoted exclusively to adoption law, experience representing more than 3,000 adoption clients, a masters degree in counseling from New York University, former Executive Director of Adoption Planning, Inc., a Georgia licensed child-placing agency, the first Georgia Attorney admitted to the Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys, a fellow in the Georgia Council of Adoption Attorneys, and AV\* rated by Martindale-Hubbell, the highest level of peer review rating.

## **Sherriann H. Hicks**

Senator Jon Ossoff | Senator Raphael Warnock

7145 Palisades Point  
Suwanee, Georgia, 30024

Attorney Sherriann H. Hicks focuses her legal career on adoption, assisted reproduction, and surrogacy. Since 1995, she has been working to place children in loving adoptive families. She views adoption as a gift for all parties involved: giving children an opportunity to grow in a healthy environment, adoptive parents a chance to raise children, and birth mothers peace of mind. Known for her experience in adoption and surrogacy related matters, she spends a lot of time working to get children out of foster care. Sherriann is a Trustee of the Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys, a member of the Gwinnett County Bar Association, and former President of the Gwinnett County Bar Association. She is also former President of the Georgia Council of Adoption Lawyers and has presented numerous seminars on adoption for the State Bar of Georgia. She recently set up a community-wide committee to develop an Adoption Day celebration in her county to celebrate National Adoption Month annually.

## **Hope 1312 Collective**

Senator Jon Ossoff | Senator Raphael Warnock

1115 Sycamore Ave  
Brunswick, Georgia, 31520

Hope 1312 Collective is rewriting the story of child welfare in Glynn County. The past few years, they have made strides in this work and they are truly changing the lives of children who will be the next generation.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)





Partnering with 10 local churches, Hope 1312 Collective is connecting the needs of vulnerable children with resources who can help. They launched enabling technology 2 years ago that helps to not only prevent children from coming into care by meeting material needs, but they also support foster and kinship families by meeting their needs.

Hope 1312 Collective also launched a therapeutic summer camp, Royal Family kids Camp, for children aged 6-12 who are in foster care. The relationships made during camp are carried on all year through mentorship programs and other touch points. The goal is to create long lasting relationships that teach children their value and worth. In addition to these programs, Hope 1312 Collective actively encourages DFCS workers to continue to protect the children in their community. They also support foster and kinship families through Care Communities and they even support birth families with simple things like meals.

Hope 1312 Collective uses evidence-based tools such as Trust Based Relational Intervention models throughout their work, which is trauma-informed and transformational in the lives of children who have experienced trauma.

## **Barbara Katz**

Senator Jon Ossoff | Senator Raphael Warnock

3136 Clairmont Road N.E  
Brookhaven, Georgia, 30329

Barbara Katz's professional expertise and depth of knowledge in the adoption and family creation space is extraordinary. She was selected as a Fellow of the Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys and a charter Fellow in the Georgia Council of Adoption Lawyers ("GCAL") where she has served on the board as Treasurer for almost a decade.

The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning/queer (LGBTQ) community is often underserved in the adoption space, but Barbara Katz has been instrumental in the advocacy of LGBTQ adoption rights, as well as maintaining membership in the Stonewall Bar Association of Georgia and the National LGBT Bar Association's Family Law Institute.

Barbara Katz was also featured in the mini-documentary, "Getting to Baby: Creating a Family in the 21st Century", featured at the "Out of Film" Festival in Atlanta in 2013.

## **Judy Sartain**

Senator Jon Ossoff | Senator Raphael Warnock

3544 Lake Ridge Dr  
Gainesville, Georgia, 30506

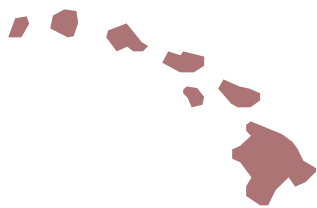
Judy Sartain has been practicing law for a little over 25 years and during that time, she has finalized around 800 adoptions. She has worked with newborn adoptions, domestication of foreign adoptions, relative, stepparent, adult, and child protective services adoptions. She is passionate about protecting children and placing children in a safe and stable home where they will be nurtured and have the opportunity to grow, mature, and become healthy productive citizens in our society. She believes that every child deserves a home, no matter their age. She is especially concerned about the placement of teens and pre-teens in suitable homes where they can receive the encouragement they need to stay in school, learn a trade, or attend college or vocational school. [Click to go back to the first page](#)



Judy understands that when children age out of foster care, they are more likely to be high school dropouts, have children who enter the foster care system themselves, experience chronic unemployment or are underemployed, become addicted to drugs and/or alcohol, become victims of domestic violence, and thus not productive members of their communities. She is a valued public speaker in her community, volunteers with her local CASA organization, frequently speaks at adoption seminars for attorneys, spoke at the annual Child Welfare Summit for caseworkers and judges in the State of Georgia, and is a published author on the subject of adoption law in Georgia. Judy is a mother of five, two of whom were adopted from Russia and has also been a foster parent. Judy is a Fellow with the Georgia Council of Adoption Lawyers, as well as a Fellow with the Academy of Adoption & Assisted Reproductive Attorneys, both well-respected organizations who seek to provide quality representation and education to the public and to the judicial community as well as lobby for adoption-friendly legislation both in Georgia and nationwide.







# HAWAII



Your state did not receive any community recommendations this year, but that does not mean there are not people in your state going above and beyond to support children and families in extraordinary ways.

To find an individual, couple, family, or organization to recommend, connect with CCAI Programs Coordinator, Sara Schleicher, at [sara@ccainstitute.org](mailto:sara@ccainstitute.org) for a list of governmental and non-governmental foster care and adoption-related organizations. These agencies have connections with those doing exceptional things in your state. Additional options for identifying a recommendee include (1) calling foster care and adoption-related agencies in your state and/or (2) asking constituents for input on potential candidates.





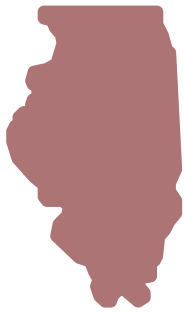
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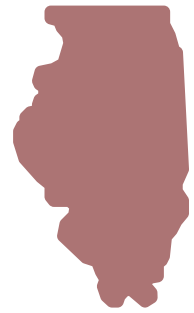
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# ILLINOIS



## **Shelley Ballard**

Senator Richard Durbin | Senator Tammy Duckworth

833 East Glenwood Road  
Glenview, Illinois, 60025

Shelley Ballard has practiced adoption law since 1988, shortly after becoming a parent by adoption herself. She has handled hundreds of adoptions of every category as both a solo practitioner and as a partner in a small law firm. In addition to representing clients in adoption matters, Shelley has been actively involved in legislative efforts to improve adoption since the early 1990s. She has helped draft and lobby for many pieces of legislation affecting adoption in Illinois: including the "Baby Richard Law" enacted in 1994 that created the Illinois Putative Father Registry and the addition of several safeguards to the Illinois Adoption Act to reduce contested adoptions. She was recognized by the Illinois House of Representatives in a formal House resolution for this effort. Shelley authored the Illinois Bar Journal's lead article in its December 1994 issue, entitled The Baby Richard Law: Changes to the Adoption Act, an article that was instrumental in upholding the constitutionality of the law when it was challenged in the courts. In addition, she contributed the chapter on adoption for the ISBA Family Law Handbook, published by the Illinois State Bar Association and has for many years written the chapters on Interstate and Adult Adoption for the Illinois Adoption Law Practice Handbook, published by the Illinois Institute for Continuing Legal Education. Shelley also regularly addresses adoptive parent groups and legal professionals on various legal issues affecting adoption.

Shelley relocated to North Carolina in 1998 and operated a solo practice focused on adoption and reproductive technology law until 2002, when she returned to Chicago. While in North Carolina, Shelley was involved in the successful 2001 legislative effort to revise North Carolina adoption law to shorten the revocation period for adoption consents, allow openness in agency adoptions and permit advertising by approved adoptive families searching for a child to adopt. She also taught an introductory adoption seminar for Central Piedmont Community College and authored several adoption articles that appeared in the Charlotte Parent, Carolina Parent, and Carolina Youth Alliance magazines.

Shelley graduated magna cum laude from Vanderbilt University School of Engineering in 1979, and cum laude from Northwestern University School of Law in 1987, where she was elected to the Order of the Coif (top 10% of her class). Since 1990, she has been a Fellow of the Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys (formerly the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys), a national organization of attorneys devoted to the ethical and competent representation of parties in adoption and collaborative reproduction matters.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



From 2004 to 2015, Shelley was a member of the Board of Directors of the On Your Feet Foundation, a nonprofit organization that provides assistance to birth parents who have placed children for adoption; she served as President of the Board from 2009 to 2011. She is an active member of the Chicago Bar Association Adoption Law Committee, and served as its Chair during 1993-94 and 2005-06. Shelley served as one of the regular Guardians and Litem for the children being adopted in the Cook County Adoption Court from 2012 to 2017. In 2014, she became an Adjunct Professor at the Loyola University Law School teaching a bi-annual seminar on adoption law. In 2015, Shelley joined the Board of Directors of the Midwest Adoption Center, a nonprofit organization that provides services to persons touched by foster care and adoption, including search and confidential intermediary services, and she now serves as its Secretary/Treasurer. Finally, Shelley has been recognized as a top lawyer in adoption by the Leading Lawyers Network, Lead Counsel and Super Lawyers.

Shelley's firm, SHELLEY B. BALLARD P.C.. was founded to meet the need for comprehensive, high-quality legal services for adoption. Shelley takes pride in providing responsive, empathetic, and responsible legal services to her clients. The firm maintains offices in downtown Chicago and Evanston to allow convenient access for suburban clients while also being close to the Cook County adoption court. The firm accepts clients without regard to race, religion, national origin, marital status, age, disability or sexual orientation.

## Anita Deyneka

Senator Richard Durbin | Senator Tammy Duckworth

P.O. Box 496  
Wheaton, Illinois, 60187

For more than 50 years, Anita Deyneka has been a global champion for orphans and vulnerable children and has impacted thousands of children and families around the world. Anita is the proud mother of two children adopted from Colombia. It was through their own adoption, and the extensive networking Anita and her husband, Peter, did in the former Soviet Union that she was burdened by the plight of orphans. To respond to the vast needs of vulnerable children in the former Soviet Union, Anita, then president of Russian Ministries (now Mission Eurasia), initiated a project called Home for Every Orphan. This expanded into a new organization and then beyond Russia and Ukraine, to other countries. Today, A Family For Every Orphan (AFFEO), with which Anita works, raises awareness about the plight of neglected and abandoned children in nine countries, develops new strategies and resources for the care of orphans and vulnerable children, and mobilizes people to open hearts and homes to foster and adopt across the nation. For more than 13 years, Anita has served in Ukraine and has a dozen Ukrainian partners on the ground working tirelessly to ensure the safety of orphans and vulnerable children and families in the midst of war. Anita has pursued operating with best practices and has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to support local communities solving the orphan crisis in their own region. As a result, Anita has been very instrumental in the formation, launch and growth of the World Without Orphans movement, which is engaging thousands of churches in more than 60 countries with a shared vision that every child will grow up in a safe, stable, and nurturing permanent family. Her other home is in Washington State.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



## Denise Patton

Senator Richard Durbin | Senator Tammy Duckworth

4760 Fairfax Avenue  
Palatine, Illinois, 60067

Denise J. Patton is an adoptive parent and adoption attorney who, for over 23 years, has devoted her law practice to adoption and infertility law issues. Denise is a member and past Chair of the Chicago Bar Association's Adoption Law Committee and she is a fellow of the Academy of Adoption & Assisted Reproduction Attorneys. As an adoption attorney, Denise has successfully completed over two thousand adoptions and represented hundreds of children as their court appointed Guardian ad Litem. She has presented at numerous adoption conferences over the years and conducted seminars educating prospective adoptive parents on the different types of adoptions, the adoption process, how to get started and resources available to overcome the financial barrier to adoption. Prior to receiving her law degree from DePaul University, Denise was employed as an Attorney and an Adoption Specialist for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. She also worked for several years as a Child Welfare Specialist and Child Protection Investigator for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

Additionally, Denis has been a member of the American Academy of Assisted Reproductive Technology Attorneys since 2009. She was named one of the Ten Best Law Firms by the American Institute of Family Law Attorneys for exceptional and outstanding client service 2019-2020 and was named in Leading Lawyers as being one of the top lawyers in the state in the area of Adoption Law 2012 -2020. She is also the author of a chapter of IICLE Adoption Law (Illinois) 2006, 2011, and 2015 Editions.

## Jill and Rodney Winslow

Senator Richard Durbin | Senator Tammy Duckworth

100 Stonebriar  
Troy, Illinois, 62294

Dr. Rodney and Mrs. Jill Winslow are residents of Troy, Illinois. In 2012, the Winslows, who have four biological children and an adopted a young girl with special needs. Since completing their adoption journey, the Winslows have advocated for children in crisis and shared their story of adoption with several community groups and churches. As a result of the Winslow's efforts, other children have been adopted by their forever families. During the past several years, not only have the Winslows advocated for children in foster care, but they also opened their own home to two foster children. Jill, who mentors teen moms, has also provided counsel for one of her foster child's biological mothers to navigate an abusive relationship with the child's biological father.

In addition to opening their home to foster children, the Winslows provided a homeless teenager, who had no other resources, or ability to care for himself, with a temporary place to live within their residence. Jill and Rodney mentored this young man and provided him with the support to overcome his homelessness.

The Winslows offer support both financially and by volunteering their time to other organizations within their community who assist foster families. The Winslows participate in Safe Families for Children, an organization whose goal is to keep families together and to keep children safe.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



Jill has also volunteered her time with Equipping the Called NFP, an organization dedicated to assisting foster families and children.

The Winslows have contributed greatly to the care of foster children and children in crisis by opening their home and hearts to those in need as well as by providing their time and financial support to local organizations in their community dedicated to assisting children.





# INDIANA



## **Becky McClure**

Senator Mike Braun | Senator Todd Young

129 Tripps Ave  
Lebanon, Indiana, 46052

Becky is an amazing resource to the foster and adoption community! Becky is the head of CASA in our county and is 100% dedicated to helping foster children find their way back home or into new families. She is a voice for children in their darkest times and always makes sure they are represented properly.

## **Jennie Sullivan**

Senator Mike Braun | Senator Todd Young

7054 Lesta Court  
Indianapolis, Indiana, 46217

Jennie Sullivan has been working in the area of adoption for nearly 30 years. First, in the adoption law firm of Kirsh & Kirsh and now in her role as the Executive Director for the Academy of Adoption & Assisted Reproduction Attorneys (AAAA). In addition to her work for AAAA, Ms. Sullivan handles the administrative duties for the Family Formation Charitable Trust, a non-profit foundation started by AAAA and dedicated to providing education, support and financial assistance to those seeking to build their families through adoption or assisted reproductive technology. Jennie is truly the life blood of AAAA. AAAA is a credentialed organization of adoption and A.R.T attorneys with over 400 active members . Jennie is the glue that keeps AAAA running smoothly. She puts 110-percent of her energy into ensuring that AAAA continues to be the amazing organization it is. She supports and advocates for adoption and A.R.T. for all of the Fellows of AAAA but more importantly in her interactions with the public. Jennie has an amazing amount of energy and has done so much to ensure AAAA is able to continue to do all of the good work it does. As the Executive Director of AAAA, Jennie has continued to learn and grow into her job so she can fully support the organization. She has incredible patience and a vast knowledge of the adoption and A.R.T. world.





# IOWA



## Janessa Senter

Senator Chuck Grassley | Senator Joni Ernst

2258 Bison Street Unit A

Marion, Iowa, 52302

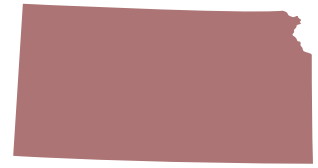
Janessa is a foster alum, who has become an incredible community activist and foster/adoptive mother. She has been doing foster care advocacy since she was 14 years old. She was a FosterClub AllStar and involved with Iowa Youth Connections Council and Elevate, a foster youth advocacy group. She didn't receive a lot of the supports kids do when they age out, nor did she get any support from her adoptive family once she turned 18, so she has been so successful only because of her own determination and ability to network. Janessa earned her bachelors degree in Criminology from the University of Northern Iowa and her graduate degree in Criminal Justice from Mount Mercy University. She is a dropout/prevention specialist at Linn Mar High School, and brings groups of her students to talk about cultural diversity. In 2019 Janessa adopted a sibling group of three. She began fostering around 2015. She has done free and low cost senior and family portraits for foster youth and alumni. She does a lot with cultural equity now, which indirectly benefits foster kids because Iowa has some of the worst disproportional minority involvement in the country. Janessa is a co-founder of Marion Alliance for Racial Equity, an advocacy group.







# KANSAS



## **Emily Wheeler**

Senator Roger Marshall | Senator Jerry Moran

2004 E Taylor Dr  
Olathe, Kansas, 66062

Emily Wheeler has taught 20 TIPS-MAPP classes with at least three families each. Wheeler also advocates for trust based relationships and trauma centered care with a focus on mental health and wellness. Wheeler is on the state board for NTDC Guidance and found volunteers to provide services to foster and adoptive families. Wheeler worked at the pride parade to share knowledge on who can foster and adopt. Emily Wheeler's daughter is adopted from foster care. Emily Wheeler aims to promote the system and pass on knowledge.





# KENTUCKY



## **Karen and Larry Elliott**

Senator Mitch McConnell | Senator Rand Paul

4986 Greensburg Rd.  
Buffalo, Kentucky, 42716

Five miles from Abraham Lincoln's birthplace, Karen and Larry Elliott's home is a safe haven to the children of LaRue County. Karen and Larry's foster care story began in 1990 with leading youth ministry at Mt. Moriah Baptist Church. They quickly built relationships with local children, especially youth from rough homes. The Elliotts committed themselves to helping uprooted children feel grounded and safe.

Since 2014, Karen and Larry have fostered 17 children. They work to fulfill each child's permanency goal, and consistently accept older children who are harder to place, especially in rural areas like LaRue. In 2019, the Elliotts adopted Jaylen (13), who grew up in a home with domestic violence, drug abuse, and a step-dad who forced and taught him to steal. Today, Jaylen takes pride working on the Elliotts' hay farm. Like other youth the Elliotts have fostered, he finds peace and purpose working the natural land. The Elliotts teach children practical skills, like how to build a wagon, to help them build a sense of accomplishment, confidence, and control within their environment.

LaRue would not be the same without the Elliotts. Rural areas often see a gap in mental health and social services and a lack of foster homes. Because of the Elliotts, LaRue children can stay in-county for school and close to their friends. Karen and Larry take time to develop relationships with children's biological families, linking arms to create a greater sense of support for each child. Karen and Larry are a significant part of children's web of support, even after the children leave foster care. This critical continuity in their lives prevents attachment trauma and protects their sense of belonging. Simply, the Elliotts help children flourish while strengthening their family and community roots.

The Elliotts currently care for one adoptive son and three foster children.

## **Stephanie Perlow**

Senator Mitch McConnell | Senator Rand Paul

312 N. Fourth Street  
Murray, Kentucky, 42071

Stephanie Perlow has seen first hand the importance of permanency in a child's life through her work first as a family law attorney and now as a family court judge. Since taking her position on the bench, Stephanie has made it a priority to finalize cases that are ready for adoption even during COVID-19 times, thanks to technology. She advocates for parents to maintain custody of their children and take advantage of local parenting classes when possible, but she also recognizes there are times when adoption is a good solution to hard circumstances.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



She has ideas to create more of an adoption network in western Kentucky so state social workers, private social workers, adoption advocates and agencies, family ministries, and the general community can all have a better understanding of how to support local families build through foster care and adoption.

## **Dana Radford**

Senator Mitch McConnell | Senator Rand Paul

275 E Main St. 3C-E  
Frankfort, Kentucky, 40621

Every adoption professional in Kentucky has been touched by Dana Radford. Her professionalism, energy, and willingness to assist is the reason so many adoptions move along smoothly. Dana is always willing to take a call or answer an email quickly and always in a very friendly manner. She is the person many go to for advice and guidance. She has in depth knowledge of adoption law and is always willing to answer questions and provide support when necessary. She has demonstrated time and again her care for the children and families by ensuring things move along in an ethical manner.

Most families have no idea how much she has helped them adopt and don't even know her name. Not only does she provide support – she is admired and respected by those of us that benefit from her position with the Cabinet for Families and Children. Her attention to detail and ability to guide others in a low key way are inspirational





# LOUISIANA



## Robert Brown

Senator Bill Cassidy | Senator John Kennedy

3020 Grassy Lake Drive  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 70816

Robert Brown and his wife Claudia stepped up to take in their three grandsons after a tragic event that led to the murder of their daughter. Notable poet, Langston Hughes wrote "Life for me ain't been no crystal stair." This metaphor resonates with Robert Brown's journey as a parent but, most of all, a grandparent. Robert and his wife rose to the challenge of raising their grandsons with perseverance and strength.

Robert is active at the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Information Center of Louisiana. Through the center, Robert found the lawyer who helped with the adoption process of his grandchildren. Robert was inspired to dedicate himself to participating in workshops and conferences at the center while sharing tips and moral support to grandfamilies. He has shared his family's story with local, state, and national audiences to help other grandfamilies get the supports and services they need.

Robert is a valued member of Generations United's GRAND Voices Network of kinship caregiver advocates who have a range of expertise and personal experience as relatives who have raised children when their parents have been unable to raise them—also called grandfamilies. He is an agent for change in kinship.





# MAINE



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# MARYLAND



## Jennifer Fairfax

Senator Benjamin Cardin | Senator Chris Van Hollen

827 Woodside Parkway  
Silver Spring, Maryland, 20910

Jennifer Fairfax is a very highly respected and accomplished adoption attorney. She has tirelessly advocated for her clients, including biological parents making adoption placement plans, adoptive parents welcoming children into their families, and, critically, the children involved. Indeed, at the core of every adoption is the gold standard principle of Best Interest of the Child, a keystone and a legal imperative in every adoption. Jennifer's dedicated focus on the child has been instructive, inspiring and at its core, protective of these most vulnerable clients. To that point, she was accepted and served as a Court Appointed Special Advocate.

Jennifer is the consummate professional: informed, prepared and collegial. Beyond that, though, she displays exceptional kindness and understanding in what are difficult and emotional matters. Jennifer also generously gives her time to educate other professionals and members of the adoption community. She is a published author and a sought-after speaker, served as a Trustee and the Vice President of the Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys, worked extensively on adoption-related legislative initiatives, and has taught at the Maryland Judicial Institute for several years. Jennifer has served as a law school guest lecturer and has consistently been recognized as a "Top Lawyer" in Maryland and in the District of Columbia. Additionally, Jennifer has served as a trustee or appointed contributor for several community organizations and adoption-related institutions.

Jennifer's legal skills, knowledge, and ability to handle any complex adoption matter with confidence, while maintaining respect and empathy for her clients, and her dedication to the field of adoption are extraordinary and truly set her apart. Her contributions have bettered the legal practice of adoption and benefitted all members of the adoption triad.

## Virginia McLaurin (*posthumous*)

Senator Benjamin Cardin | Senator Chris Van Hollen

Maryland

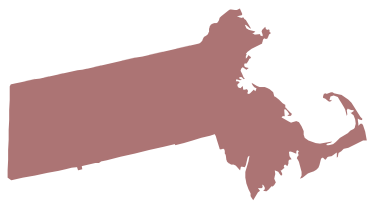
Virginia McLaurin, known for dancing with the Obamas when she visited the White House in 2016, was an adoptive mother and an advocate for children in foster care. While raising two young children and moving from North Carolina to DC, McLaurin began raising Felipe Cordoso at the age of 3 and adopted him at age 14. Starting in 1994, McLaurin became a foster grandparent to children with special needs at C. Melvin Sharpe Health School and later Roots Public Charter School.

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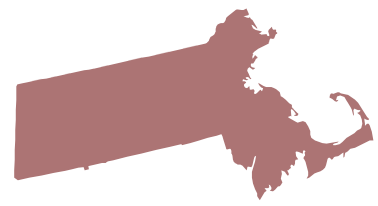


She spent 24 years, until age 106, volunteering 40 hours a week as a foster grandparent where she fed children, read to them, and encouraged them in their schoolwork. She was best known for her “unconditional love no matter what” said Cheryl Christmas, director of the Foster Grandparent Program. McLaurin “had a whole long life of doing good” , said Deborah Menkart, a friend McLaurin made while volunteering.





# MASSACHUSETTS



## Vivian Cone

Senator Elizabeth Warren | Senator Edward Markey

292 Reservoir St.  
Needham, Massachusetts, 2494

Vivian Cone has worked in the field of adoption for over 30 years. She has placed well over 100 children in their forever homes. These children have been born in both the US and foreign countries. Vivian's biggest contribution to the adoption field are the many children she has helped to place from Vietnam. This country has been recovering for war for most of history. The people of Vietnam are resilient, strong and family oriented but for many another mouth to feed is just not possible. Vivian has helped these young children and babies be united with loving and caring families in the U.S. Not only has she assisted orphans from Vietnam but has also been the driving force in a humanitarian project in Hue, Vietnam for the past 14 years. This project helps to support disabled children and their families, providing an education to the children, respite for the parents, food supplements for all and chance for the children to become valuable, productive members of their community. During some challenging financial times, Vivian has worked hard to continue to fund this program and assure these children are well taken care of. Vivian has also built her own family through adoption. She and her husband adopted many children from around the world. Vivian Cone has spent a lifetime working in the field of adoption and making dreams come true for children and families. She is dedicated to the field.

## Stephanie Garde

Senator Elizabeth Warren | Senator Edward Markey

9 Hill Road  
Westminster, Massachusetts, 1473

Stephanie Garde is an adoptive mother, who when faced with a son whose trauma and attachment needs were significant, retired her law career to care and advocate for him. She then began supporting and educating other parents through Adoption Journeys in MA and the Attachment & Trauma Network on a national level. For nearly a decade, Stephanie has been active in both organizations, providing trauma- informed education and support to parents of children impacted by trauma, most who are adoptive, foster or kinship parents, as well as speaking at other adoption and foster care organizations in the NE and across the US. She also leads ATN's Creating Trauma-Sensitive Schools Conference as the conference organizer of this event, which is attended by over 1500 educators each year, for the last five years.

Stephanie's approach to supporting other parents on their journey to being more trauma-informed and attachment-focused is an incredible balance of holding space for the parents to vent about how hard life is and truly be seen and heard, while also nudging them toward learning more and being more accountable for their own emotional health and purposeful parenting strategies.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)





Stephanie is frequently called on to moderate support groups and teach others about effective peer moderation.

Stephanie is currently the Operations Manager at the Attachment & Trauma Network and supervises the administration of this 26-year old nonprofit that promotes healing of children impacted by trauma through their families, schools and communities.

## **Joyce Kauffman**

Senator Elizabeth Warren | Senator Edward Markey

67 Clarendon Park  
Rosindale, Massachusetts, 2131

Attorney Kauffman has practiced family law for the past twenty-five years in the areas of divorce, guardianship, adoption, mediation, and reproductive technology. Throughout her career she has maintained a special focus on issues impacting the LGBTQ community in the areas of LGBT adoption, relationship recognition, and parentage. Shortly after graduating from law school in 1992, she was working in Adoption of Tammy, the case that secured the right for same-sex couples to adopt in Massachusetts. In addition to several hundred co-parent adoptions in the intervening years, Attorney Kauffman has successfully obtained three-parent adoptions for a number of LGBT families. She also represented the first lesbian couple in Massachusetts to obtain a birth certificate upon the birth of a child who had been conceived through IVF, using the eggs of one and born to the other. Attorney Kauffman is a frequent presenter at continuing legal education seminars, conferences, community organizations, and universities. She has published a number of articles concerning the legal rights of LGBT families. Joyce is also a Fellow of the Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys.



# MICHIGAN



## Kristen Hamilton

Senator Debbie Stabenow | Senator Gary Peters

3050 Jamesway Ave.  
Holland, Michigan, 49424

Along with adopting two children with special needs, Kristen has worked on a coalition of adoption parents to seek for policy reform and works for NCFA to spread awareness on adoption-related issues.

## Lisa Hoeve

Senator Debbie Stabenow | Senator Gary Peters

P.O. Box 1263  
Holland, Michigan, 49422

Lisa Hoeve is a foster parent. She devotes her heart and soul to helping these precious children. She is also a realtor selling homes along the Lakeshore. In 2015 she became the Founder of Hope Pkgs. She started this non-profit to provide foster children with overnight bags so that children did not have to go to a foster home with a garbage bag or nothing at all. She has recruited people, businesses, churches, etc. to donate age appropriate items such as PJ's, underwear, sets of clothes, a book, stuffed animal or blanket. She packs these items in a backpack and gives them to county DHHS offices in Allegan, Ottawa, Kent, Muskegon, and more counties. She is a huge advocate for children in care and ensures children have a voice. She also encourages people to get involved in foster care.

## Redefining Normal

Senator Debbie Stabenow | Senator Gary Peters

1420 Trimble Ave  
Kalamazoo, Michigan, 49048

Like many other foster care alumni, Justin and Alexis Black's journey through the foster care system internalizes the abuse and neglect they experienced with their biological family. Both have been able to analyze how trauma has been normalized in families and in their upbringing, the foundational piece that children need growing up; patient adults, supportive community members, and a healthy and reasonable standard of expectations. With the work of the Redefining Normal company, we assist advocates and potential parents as they begin to understand the role they play in the foster care system and ways in which they must be self-reflective in order to serve as a complementary component to the success of the youth themselves. With a change in perspective and approach to building relationships, their work challenges foster care alumni, parents, and advocates to be aware and intentional about redefining the "normal" and how each person is a puzzle piece to the growth of their community. Their goal is to help advocates understand that fostering is a collaborative process for both the youth and the parent. They highlight the components of that relationship as well as the aspect of the community that needs to be formed in a healthy and loving environment.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



## Marisa Van Zile

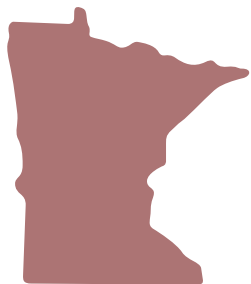
Senator Debbie Stabenow | Senator Gary Peters

PO Box 653  
Watersmeet, Massachusetts, 49969

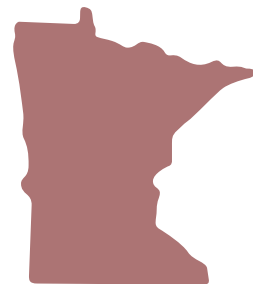
Marisa Van Zile is a member of the Sokaogon Chippewa Band of Lake Superior Indians and lives in Watersmeet, Michigan. She is a former tribal foster parent and has adopted one child. Marisa has two biological children, a daughter, Mona, and a son, Creighton. Marisa and her children planned on opening their home to children in foster care several years ago. They made the decision to start the process after Marisa graduated from college in 2014. In 2015, Marisa took placement of a newborn, Aidono, who is a relative and enrolled in the Lac Vieux Desert Tribe.

Marisa learned Aidono would likely have Duchenne muscular dystrophy and that the child's birth mother was using drugs and alcohol during the pregnancy. Aidono has been with Marisa since his birth and in September of 2017, she adopted him.

Marisa often felt she was the only one fighting for her son. She now serves as a GRAND Voice with Generations United, which is a network of select kinship caregiver advocates from across the country who have a range of expertise and personal experience. They serve as strategic partners to inform policies and practices affecting grandfamilies. Marisa is a valued member who demonstrates a strong commitment to grandfamilies through her membership in this group.



# MINNESOTA



## Fraser

Senator Amy Klobuchar | Senator Tina Smith

3333 University Ave SE  
Minneapolis, Minnesota, 55414

Fraser is a leader in adoption and foster care behavioral health services and supports for children and their families in the Twin Cities Metro Area. Fraser has developed a team of behavioral health providers with specialized training and skills to meet the unique needs of those involved with child welfare or on their adoption and foster care journey. A majority of Fraser's Foster and Adoptive Family Support team member have completed the Permanency and Adoption Competency Certificate Program from the University of Minnesota in addition to advanced training in "gold standard" early childhood mental health evidence based practices. Finally and most importantly, Fraser always aims to deliver these services and supports based on ongoing input from the children and families we serve. The program is grounded in cultural humility and operates from a person-centered vantage point.

In addition to Fraser's dedication to clinical quality, the program has established impactful partnerships throughout the Twin Cities Community to provide high quality coordinated care and rapid access to these needed services. These partnerships include, but are not limited, the University of Minnesota Adoption Medicine Clinic, Hennepin County's Caring Connection 4 Kids and Proof Alliance. These partnerships have allowed children and families involved with child welfare, in foster or adoptive care to receive services and supports in a timely fashion. Fraser's Foster and Adoptive Family Support program knows that time is of the essence when care is needed. Despite the huge mental health needs in the community, Fraser has dedicated availability for these services so that children and families can access care within weeks of reaching out. Fraser is committed to continuing to make life changing impacts on the lives of children and families on their child welfare, foster care and adoption journeys.

## Tori Petersen

Senator Amy Klobuchar | Senator Tina Smith

1709 Frank hall dr  
Albert Lea, Minnesota, 56007

My mom is Tori because she adopted me as an adult she is a former foster youth and advocates for foster children a lot. She mentors girls in our community and she speaks at churches and she is a foster mom to three little kids. She's very loving and I've always wanted a family like this one so it's pretty nice. I think my mom should win this because she's a special person. She always says because she knows how it all feels that's the reason to love us more.

Please note: this bio was submitted and written by [Click to go back to the first page](#)  
one of her children. If chosen, CCAI would obtain a professional bio



## **Cameron Lee Small**

Senator Amy Klobuchar | Senator Tina Smith

9156 Vincent Ave S  
Bloomington, Minnesota 55431

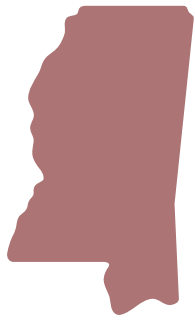
Cameron Small Lee is a mental health professional and transracial adoptee using his unique platform to educate and build empathy for those impacted by adoption. His social media influence has helped many reflect on the hard, messy, and beautiful nuances of adoption through adoptee-centered videos, groups, parent workshops, and more. He has the unique ability to challenge adoptive parents and social work systems to hold space for adoptee voices and consider how they can bring reform from a non-judgmental approach. Cameron has been working to raise consciousness about faith, child welfare, and mental health since 2012, after meeting his biological mother in Korea. Transracially adopted and founder of Therapy Redeemed, he is a licensed professional clinical counselor and certified via the Permanency and Adoption Competency Certificate program. In 2012, Cam located and met his Korean mother in Seoul after a five-year search. The critical support from adoptee community during that season spurred his decision to walk with others while they too explore and process their intersecting identities. Cameron went on to direct Holt International's summer camp in 2014 and throughout the past decade has been involved with organizations around the world. He has presented trainings and workshops in a variety of professional and clinical settings.

## **Together for Good**

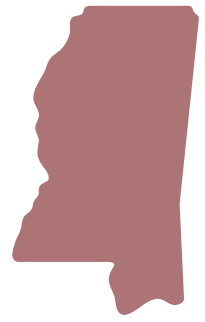
Senator Amy Klobuchar | Senator Tina Smith

1407 Cleveland Ave N  
St Paul, Minnesota, 55108

Together for Good is an organization, headquartered in Minnesota, with the mission to create pathways for the local church to come alongside vulnerable children and families in Christ-centered ministry and ensure that no parent or child ever walks alone. To do this, Together for Good volunteers can provide support in several ways: temporary hosting of children to give parents a safe option during crisis (crisis hosting), care for children once a week or once a month (respite care), supporting mothers via hospitality meals, parenting classes, and more (relational support), or becoming part of a wrap-around team which offers supplies and resources to families. Together for Good helps communities in Minnesota, Iowa, and Texas. In 2021, 576 individuals hosted vulnerable children and families, 155 total children were supported, and there were 81 total church partners. At its core, Together for Good is building relationships with the church and vulnerable families to keep children with their family and out of foster care.



# MISSISSIPPI



## Elijah's Closet

Senator Roger Wicker | Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith

14120 John Clark Road  
Gulfport, Mississippi, 39503

Elijah's Closet mission is to assist families with children in foster care and families that have children who are susceptible of going into foster care.

Elijah's Closet began in 2015 by providing free tangible items, such as clothing and car seats, to foster families for their new placements. In 2017, a group of like-minded individuals came together and formed Elijah's Closets Board of Members. The organization began growing at a rapid pace and became a 501(c)(3) in February of 2018. Elijah Closet began its operations out of a single storage unit to now utilizing three units, each one funded by a community sponsor.

In addition to assisting foster families, the organization has expanded its services to aid the Mississippi Department of Child Protective Services with reunification and prevention cases and recently began partnering with the local school districts to assist students in need. It's amazing what can happen when people who share the same passion and common goals join forces. There is a great need on the MS Gulf Coast for the services that Elijah's Closet offers.

Elijah's Closet believes that the more its community becomes involved, the more Elijah's Closet will grow, and the more children Elijah's Closet can help. Elijah's Closet believes when people come together to take on big issues, change WILL happen.

## Jodie Felton

Senator Roger Wicker | Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith

923 Parkview Street  
Cleveland, Mississippi, 38732

Jodie Felton has been serving as a foster parent in the Mississippi Delta for over 28 years. She has fostered more than 200 children. She became a foster parent while working in the Bolivar County Youth Court. She saw that children were experiencing brokenness and needed someone to love and nurture them. She recognized that she had the capacity to do something about that and that is exactly what she has been doing ever since.

When the average foster home closes after only a few years she has chosen to continue to pursue children in Mississippi's foster care system for almost three decades. Many of the children that she has cared for have been teenagers who are statistically harder to find homes for.

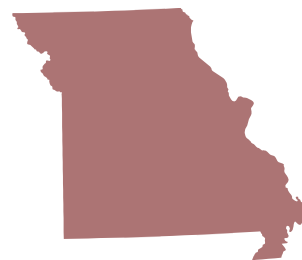
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Throughout her journey as a foster parent there have been difficult times where she wanted to quit, but that's just not who Jodie Felton is. Along with being a foster parent she is also an advocate for children and families in her community as well as across the state. Her impact to the children that have come in and out of her home is impossible to measure. She is a tremendous asset to the children of Mississippi.



# MISSOURI



## Ian Forber Pratt

Senator Josh Hawley | Senator Eric Schmitt

12 Springlake Ct.  
Ballwin, Missouri, 63011

Ian Forber Pratt, MSW works in the field of child protection and child care system reform in Guatemala, India, Moldova, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the United States and at the global level. Ian is the Director of Global Advocacy & Growth at Children's Emergency Relief International (CERI). He completed his Masters in Social Work from Washington University's George Warren Brown School of Social Work [Brown School]. He is also an adjunct professor at the Brown School teaching in the Masters of Social Work and Masters of Social Policy programs.

Ian is passionate about bridging gaps between policy and practice in the fields of child welfare and protection at global, state and local levels. He was a drafting committee member for the first national legislation on foster care in India and is instrumental in sponsorship, family strengthening, aftercare and foster care legislation at state, union territory and national levels in India. He currently sits on the drafting committee for Sponsorship and Family Support Guidelines for India, the first formulated of their kind in the country. He is a consultant for international organizations on strategic planning and theory-of-change development in the field of family-based alternative care.

He also specializes in the United States child welfare system as an expert on scaling child welfare programs and implementing large scale change. As an expansion of this work, he also offers training and consultation around mindset change, social change and offers seminars on power, proximity and reflective competence.

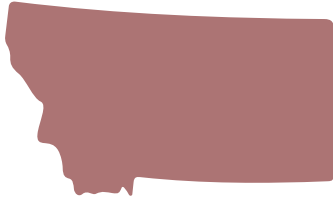
His training specializations include: theories of social change in child welfare care reform; scaling, replication and evidence-based practice of social programs; social program franchising; de-institutionalization; policy to practice bridging; reintegration and reunification of children to families; rapid reintegration of children from orphanages to communities (due to COVID-19) or government mandates; alternative care approaches for children who have been sexually exploited or trafficked and; implementation framework and strategic planning for governments to bridge policy to practice gaps.

Personally, Ian is an international adoptee, discovered a human trafficking racket surrounding his origin story and specializes in therapy with adoptive families both international and domestic in identity, root search and cultural competence. Ian lives with his partner Nargis and their children Zane and Inaya in St Louis, Missouri, USA.

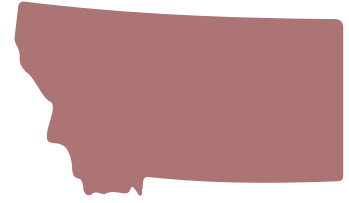
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# MONTANA



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# NEBRASKA



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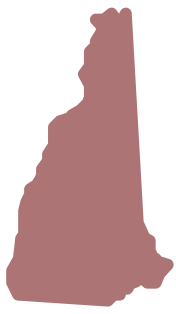
# NEVADA



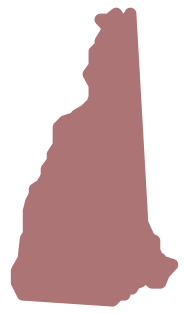
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# NEW HAMPSHIRE



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# NEW JERSEY



## Cynthia Lapidus

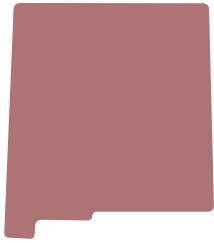
Senator Robert Menendez | Senator Cory Booker

5 Gaycroft Drive  
Scotch Plains, New Jersey, 07076

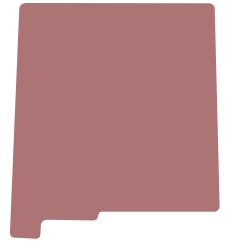
As an adoptive parent, professional and advocate, Cynthia Lapidus is a passionate leader both personally and professionally. After receiving her Bachelor's Degree in Social work from Elizabethtown College, Ms. Lapidus launched her career focusing on adoption, and working with NJ agencies including Holt International Children's Services, Lutheran Social Ministries, Homestudies and Adoption Placement Services and Wide Horizons for Children.

As a Certified Social Worker, Ms. Lapidus focuses on educating prospective adoptive parents through pre-adoptive home studies, and family interviews, as well as performing post-placement visits and reports. Through her 30 years in the adoption field, Ms. Lapidus has helped hundreds of children find loving families. Her passion for adoption extended into her family life: after having two biological children she and her husband decided to complete their family by adopting an infant from Korea in 2004. Ms. Lapidus joined the NJ Adoption Resource Clearing House (NJ ARCH), a Program of Children's Aid and Family Services, in 2017 as the Warm Line and Training Specialist. Ms. Lapidus shares her extensive knowledge of adoption information and resources with a listening ear and empathy to all who contact the program. In addition, Ms. Lapidus teaches numerous adoption-focused parent workshops through NJ ARCH as well as through the "Tuning into Teens" (TINT) parenting program. This evidence-based psycho-educational parent program teaches adoptive and kinship parents techniques of an emotional coaching parenting style.





# NEW MEXICO



## Hal Atencio

Senator Ben Ray Lujan | Senator Martin Heinrich

6312 Montañño Rd NW #A  
Albuquerque, New Mexico, 87120

Hal Atencio is a Trustee of the Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys. His law practice focuses on family formation through adoption and representing foster parents. He has taught many classes to his peers on adoption and is dedicated to the ethical practice of adoption law in New Mexico. He works with the Adoption and Foster Care Alliance of N.M. and chairs the AFCANM Legislative Committee. His dedication to children extends to his volunteer work at the Duranes Elementary School Education Encouragement Project, working to promote education for low income minority children.





# NEW YORK



## Lori Kling

Senator Charles Schumer | Senator Kirsten Gillibrand

31 West 11th St #2B  
New York, New York, 10011

Lori Kling, LMSW, has had an inspiring 40 year career as one of the preeminent Adoption Social Workers in NY State. Quietly working behind the scenes, she has helped hundreds of new adoptive parents create successful families of their own. Like teachers, adoption social workers are mostly underpaid and underappreciated, yet are the unsung heroes of the adoption process, and they deserve praise.

Lori began her career in 1980 when, as a second year graduate student at Columbia University, she was awarded a Federal Child Welfare Training Fellowship to help New York City foster children find permanent adoptive homes. After earning her MSW degree in 1981, she worked for one of New York City's voluntary foster care/adoption agencies. Her clients were children who were considered "hard-to-place" due to their age, racial background or special needs. During her tenure with this and other agencies, she helped many children find loving, adoptive families, including older children, sibling groups and children with special needs ranging from emotional and behavioral difficulties to Down Syndrome and HIV.

In 1988, she started Adoption Options, a private practice facilitating the adoption process by networking with a wide range of adoption professionals, including domestic and international adoption agencies, adoption attorneys, social workers and adoptive parent support groups in the New York Metropolitan area. She regularly conducted home studies, post-placement services and counseling for families who adopted children from all across the United States and around the world. Over the years, Lori developed a sub-specialty working with non-traditional adoptive families (single parents, gay and lesbian, step-parent adoptions). She frequently attends and has been a featured speaker at many area adoption conferences.

## Liz Northcutt

Senator Charles Schumer | Senator Kirsten Gillibrand

1741 73rd Street  
Brooklyn, New York, 11204

After working in social work for many years, and as a Court Appointed Special Advocate, Liz saw the need to help youth aging out of the foster care system. Those who were lucky enough to have shelter often had an empty home, without basic needs like dishes, lighting, bedding etc. She left her full time position and started a non-profit organization called City Living NY which provides such items to youth aging out of the foster care system. The non-profit also provides mentorship, educational, and emotional support to youth aging out foster care. In 2017, Liz was honored as a Presidential Leadership Scholar for her work.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



## Carla Riccobono

Senator Charles Schumer | Senator Kirsten Gillibrand

37 West 26th St., 6th Floor  
New York, New York, 10010

Carla Riccobono, LSW, is the Senior Director of New Alternatives for Children's (NAC) Foster Care and Adoption Program. Ms. Riccobono has worked for NAC since 2001 and has been in her director role for six years. Her program serves children who have been removed from their parent's care and have a significant medical diagnosis, developmental disability and/or a psychiatric diagnosis. Truly the most vulnerable children, within the already vulnerable population of youth in foster care. Ms. Riccobono and her team work tirelessly to stabilize the children and place them in the care of a certified resource parent or kinship resource. The work immediately starts to mitigate the concerns that brought the child into care and to safely return them to their parent's care, and if that's not possible, they look to discharge the child to an open adoption or guardianship with their foster parent. This is all done with an understanding that entering foster care and being removed from your family is traumatizing for all parties.

Ms. Riccobono's team achieved 350% of their KINGAP goal, far exceeding NYC's expectations for children leaving foster care through guardianship to a kinship resource. NYC has recently acknowledged NAC's foster care program's excellence by increasing their contract by 50%. Additionally, the COVID pandemic has not slowed the program's ability to maintain safety, connect families and to work toward permanency. Under Ms. Riccobono's management, her team of social workers continued to make home visits and monitor family visits, even at personal risk to their own health. NYC's foster care population and specifically NAC's clients are far better off due to Ms. Riccobono's incisive and compassionate leadership and vision.

## Victory Christian Church

Senator Charles Schumer | Senator Kirsten Gillibrand

PO Box 6818,  
Albany, New York 12206

Going through the foster care system, creates memories both positive and negative. Pastor "Charlie", Victory Christian Church in Albany, NY is a product of the foster care system and has not forgotten his young experiences, needs and hopes. Over the past three years his church has opened "Our Store" in Albany to supply without cost clothes, shoes and merchandise to foster families.

Pastor Charlie comments that, "Often kids in the foster system get "hand-me-down" clothes or simply get by with very few possessions of their own. I feel that really affects them in a negative way.

"In July 2021, his church cut a ribbon to open the mini-department store, Our Store", offering brand new items for free to foster care families in need. The store has shoes, clothes, bedding and luggage for children moving from one home to another, many times with only a garbage bag to carry all their possessions. With donations from the community, the Pastor states, "we want to change their negative reactions to used clothes and to make sure that foster care kids feel important.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)

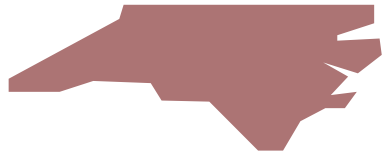




Our Store operates in the Westgate Shopping Plaza for three years. This Christmas they served any child or teen in the foster system with name brand sneakers, jackets, luggage, and personal items. During the holiday season, 52 foster families that needed help were served by the store. In addition, store volunteers prepared gift bags for foster children in group homes.

Victory Christian Church is a multi-site, non-denominational church, operating for 20 years, to serve the community, the less fortunate and widows and orphans.





# NORTH CAROLINA



## Congregations for Kids

Senator Ted Budd | Senator Thomas Tillis

5835 Executive Center Drive, Suite 101-J

Charlotte, North Carolina, 28212

Congregations for Kids (CFK) equips and empowers the Charlotte community to be champions for children, families and social workers in the foster care system through four pathways; Foster, Mentor, Serve and Give. Aside from recruiting and training foster parents, CFK also hosts a mentorship program, serves aged out youth and meets tangible needs. CFK also launched a program that has made a markable difference in social worker retention. In 2018, Mecklenburg County DSS met with CFK to talk about their biggest challenges. At the top of the list was social worker turnover. Shortly after, CFK launched the 'Socialight' Program that asks community members to be a 'light' to a child welfare social worker. The program allows community members to sign up to be 'Socialights' and asks social workers to enroll to gain encouragement in the front line work they perform daily. The social worker is asked a few questions and then paired with a 'Socialight'. CFK then supports the relationship and provides the 'Socialight' with creative ways in which they can encourage their social worker. CFK has seen some incredible relationships form from this program but even more impressive, the turnover rate in North Carolina's largest county went from 69% in 2018, to 27% in 2019, to 19% in 2020. This is incredibly important because foster children with one social worker achieves permanency, on average, 74.5% of the time and only 17.5% of the time when there is social worker turnover (National Center on Crime and Delinquency). Ultimately the 'Socialight' program has the probability of helping children in foster care achieve permanency more often. CFK is excited to share this program (at no cost) to other organizations throughout the country to help them achieve the same type of success when it comes to the high rate of social worker turnover.

## Kelly Dempsey

Senator Ted Budd | Senator Thomas Tillis

4506 Inlet Pointe Court

Charlotte, North Carolina, 28216

Founder and principal attorney Kelly Dempsey is recognized both domestically and internationally for her commitment to defending the interests of children in the U.S. and around the world. She is currently the Deputy Adoption Director for the Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys (AAAA) where she focuses on International Adoption advocacy. Kelly is also the proud mother of four children, one adopted domestically and one adopted internationally. She knows how difficult the process can be and has used her experience to promote positive change to U.S. and international adoption laws. Her work was featured in the 2013 documentary "Stuck," which follows the lives of four children from three countries as they complete their individual journeys from orphanages in their native countries to new homes and families in the United States. She has also testified before Congress regarding international adoption issues and submitted reports to the Congressional Record.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



## **Kelsey Vander Vliet Ranyarda**

Senator Ted Budd | Senator Thom Tillis

7710 Ferry Launch Way, Apt 5207

Raleigh, North Carolina, 27617

Kelsey Vander Vliet Ranyard has spent the past several years working in the adoption field throughout the country - both as a paralegal for adoption lawyers and as a case manager for adoption agencies. Kelsey is also a birth mother in an open adoption and a strong advocate for safe, ethical, child-centered adoptions. Kelsey's range of experience within the adoption community has given her a unique understanding of some of the most pressing challenges in domestic adoption. She is a passionate voice for birth moms and is committed to bettering the process and outcomes for all involved in infant adoption. She is the Director of Advocacy and Policy at AdoptMatch & AdoptChange on important public policy issues impacting all members of the adoption triad. She is the Policy Advisor at Family to Family Support Network, a healthcare education nonprofit that serves moms, babies, and adoptive families. As the Policy Advisor, she coordinates meetings to collaborate with state and federal offices to work on better healthcare outcomes for all families. Having worked in multiple states across the country, she is uniquely qualified to speak and advocate for national change in defining and crafting best practice before, during and after an adoption placement. She is the co-host of the Twisted Sisterhood Podcast, the first podcast by birth moms, for birth moms. Kelsey is the Co-Producer on a documentary currently in production: "Love, Your Birth Mom" that sets to de-stigmatize a mother's journey to choose adoption. Kelsey currently resides in North Carolina with her husband and daughter.

## **Jodi Jackson Tucker**

Senator Ted Budd | Senator Thom Tillis

6 Gasper Court

Durham, North Carolina, 27713

Jody Jackson Tucker is the founder of Second Mothers, a community of women worldwide who are united to support children without parental care through promoting prevention, crisis intervention, and restoration for children and families. Jody served twelve years as the Global Director of Orphan Sunday for the Christian Alliance for Orphans where she led the global expansion to more than 90 countries. Orphan Sunday occurs each year as an opportunity for local churches and communities to rally together for children in care. The observance also honors the tens of thousands of caregivers who assist with the care of these children. Jody is the author of "Second Mother: A Bible Study Experience for Foster and Adoptive Moms" and "Fasten Your Sweet Belt: 10 Things You Need to Know About Older Child Adoption." Jody and her husband, Jerry, are parents to 9 children, six through adoption. Jody is an alumnus of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and a Certified Chaplain.





# NORTH DAKOTA



Your state did not receive any community recommendations this year, but that does not mean there are not people in your state going above and beyond to support children and families in extraordinary ways.

To find an individual, couple, family, or organization to recommend, connect with CCAI Programs Coordinator, Sara Schleicher, at [sara@ccainstitute.org](mailto:sara@ccainstitute.org) for a list of governmental and non-governmental foster care and adoption-related organizations. These agencies have connections with those doing exceptional things in your state. Additional options for identifying a recommendee include (1) calling foster care and adoption-related agencies in your state and/or (2) asking constituents for input on potential candidates.





# OHIO



## **National Down syndrome Adoption Network**

4623 Wesley Avenue, Suite A  
Cincinnati, Ohio, 45212

Senator Sherrod Brown | Senator J. D. Vance

The National Down Syndrome Adoption Network works alongside families in their decision to parent or create an adoption plan for children with Down syndrome. They also partner with potential adoptive families in housing a registry to foster adoptions of children with Down syndrome throughout the United States.

## **Rosemary Ebner Pomeroy**

Senator Sherrod Brown | Senator J. D. Vance

233 Parkgate Court  
Delaware, Ohio, 43015

Rosemary is an adoption attorney of the highest dedication. She maintains a private practice in family formation. She represents prospective adoptive parents, birth parents, and surrogates, providing expertise to assist with contracts and navigate clients through the complex legal process of adoption. She also assisted former Franklin County Probate Judge Robert G. Montgomery in creating an adoption attorney steering committee at Franklin County Probate Court. While maintaining her practice, Rosemary also worked as a Staff Attorney at Nat'l Center for Adoption Law and Policy at Capital University Law School from 2012-2015. Here she was responsible for response inquiries to the AdoptUSKids and Ohio Adoption Photolisting websites, management of speakers for Nationwide Children's Hospital Adoption Academy, adoption initiatives at the Center, fundraising for Autumn Wine Celebration, and assistance with National Moot Court Competition in Adoption and Child Welfare, including judge recruitment and supervision of law students in Foster Youth Advocacy Center Clinic. Rosemary also served as an informal mentor to law students interested in adoption and family law. Rosemary has been a Fellow of the Academy of Adoption & Assisted Reproduction Attorneys since 2004.





# OKLAHOMA



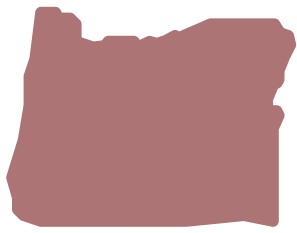
## **Dr. Deborah Shropshire**

Senator James Lankford | Senator Markwayne Mullin

2400 N Lincoln Blvd.  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 73105

Dr. Deborah Shropshire is a dedicated, passionate, and innovative leader currently serving as the Director of Child Welfare for the state of Oklahoma. Dr. Shropshire is a certified pediatrician who found her calling in the field of social work, specifically working with children from hard places and those who care for them. She is the founder of Foster Hope Clinic a program located in Tulsa and Oklahoma City and designed specifically to meet the needs of our most vulnerable children who have experienced significant abuse in their lives. Dr. Shropshire has worked diligently during her time as the Director of Child Welfare to make necessary system changes by rallying frontline workers, foster and adoptive parents, state leaders, and community stakeholders to break down barriers of service and to ensure each individual child's needs are met and pathways developed so that they may overcome their past and eventually thrive. Focusing on utilizing the theory of Hope and being "with" Dr. Shropshire has changed the face of child welfare in Oklahoma resulting in long lasting changes that will undoubtedly change outcomes for families for generations to come.





# OREGON



## **Christina Nelson**

Senator Ron Wyden | Senator Jeff Merkley

2920 SW 3rd Street  
Corvallis, Oregon, 97330

Christina Nelson, an unrelenting advocate for kids and families involved in foster care and adoption, is the mother of six children. After their biological son was born in 1994, the Nelsons adopted two toddlers from foster care and one infant through private adoption. In 2017, the Nelsons were contacted because 2 girls, age 4 and 6, were in immediate need of a resource family. The these girls were the Nelson's daughter half siblings. The Nelsons stepped up. Following the unexpected death of the girls' mother later that year, they adopted their now youngest daughters.

In the late 90s, Christina also stepped forward as a foster parent to “Meg”. Christina maintained contact Meg in the years following reunification with her her biological family. When she became a young mother, Meg found herself at risk of losing her son to foster care. Christina stepped up informally to provide extensive respite, support and mentoring to Meg and her partner. They remained united and are thriving.

Christina also helped bring Every Child Oregon to Benton County to meet immediate needs of children in care, resource families, child welfare workers and biological families. Her devotion of countless hours and personal resources helped this organization flourish in our community. Christina’s 2021 novel, “The Way It Should Be” won critical acclaim for its exploration of foster care, adoption, addiction and the complicated relationships that result. It inspires conversations about the challenging and emotionally complex issues in child welfare.

Through her personal life, Christina does volunteer work and writing; she’s made it her mission to highlight kids’ need to know their biological parents love them and have value, even in the moments they struggled most.





# PENNSYLVANIA



## **Marcía Hopkins**

Senator Robert Casey Jr. | Senator John Fetterman

5145 Pine Street Apt. 1A  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 19143

Marcía Hopkins is the Senior Manager of Youth Advocacy and Policy at Juvenile Law Center (JLC). Marcía leads the Youth Advocacy Programs, bringing in young people from Philadelphia with foster care experience to advocate for changes in policy. She works with the youth to identify the ways that difficulties that they have experienced through the system can be addressed with policy, and then works with them to build presentations that are given to lawmakers and other advocates throughout the state of Pennsylvania. Marcía is also an expert on policy nationwide, revamping the child welfare system policy work at JLC to have more of a rightful focus on racial equity. Additionally, she assists with developing similar programs to the Youth Advocacy Program around the country, always remembering that those closest to problems are closest to the solutions, working to integrate more youth into policy making. At JLC, Marcía is available for one-on-one support for the young people almost around the clock, constantly helping them with issues that arise for them (such as with housing, education, or legal issues). Many young people remain involved with the Youth Advocacy Programs for years, and stay in touch with Marcía long after their involvement with JLC has formally ended. Marcía brings a genuine understanding and indescribable warmth to her work with young people-- coupled with an encyclopedic knowledge of policy and a heart for justice. Even more impressive, Marcía herself experienced the foster care system as a young person in Philadelphia and beat the statistics to attain not only her Bachelor's but her Master's in Social Work. She is extraordinary not only because of the work that she does but HOW she does the work: with unending love, thoughtfulness, and authenticity. The ripples that come from the work that she has done are infinite.

## **Constance and Brian Lannetta**

Senator Robert Casey Jr. | Senator John Fetterman

356 Tennis Ave.  
Glenside, Pennsylvania, 19038

Constance and Brian are the "dynamic duo" parents of the Lannetta family. Together they opened their hearts and home as kinship providers to three children, two of whom they eventually adopted. The third child, they worked alongside the biological parent to support his successful reunification. In December 2019, the Lannetta's also welcomed a biological child into their family. The Lannetta's story began decades prior to becoming parents. Constance herself aged out of foster care in 2002 at the age of 18. Having experienced her own challenges both while in care and upon exiting, she connected herself with peer groups which opened the pathway for her to become a passionate advocate for the rights of youth in the substitute care system.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)





Her advocacy work extended to local, state, and national levels. Initially as a member of the Bucks County and Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Boards, she engaged in public speaking aimed to educate caseworkers, administrators, foster parents, lawyers, magistrates, legislatures and others charged with developing policy for children and youth in substitute care. Constance met Brian in 2003 initially as friends before becoming a couple in 2007. Brian from the start, jumped in alongside Constance's mission, and together, they have continued to advocate tirelessly on behalf of children, youth and caretakers in the foster care and adoption community. The Lannettas founded an awareness movement and platform to inspire kindness and healing. They aim to elevate community awareness of the need for resources for the foster care community on matters such as higher education, mental health, domestic violence and the importance of self-care. Together they have led car washes, bake sales, national awareness walks, support programs and alumni reunions all while managing their own home, family, and careers, exemplifying commitment to advocacy in the foster care and adoption communities.





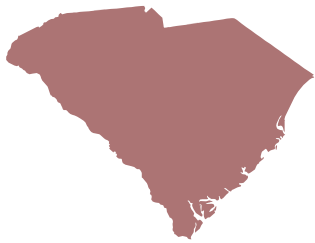
## RHODE ISLAND



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# SOUTH CAROLINA



## **Sharon Cole**

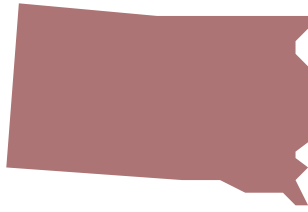
Senator Tim Scott | Senator Lindsey Graham

460 India Hook Road, Suite 201-A  
Rock Hill, South Carolina, 29732

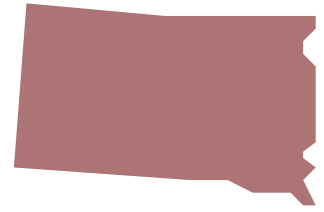
Sharon trained the staff at the Crisis Pregnancy Center (now Palmetto Women's Center) about SC Adoption laws and how to lovingly speak with our pregnant clients who were or might be considering making an adoption plan in their unexpected pregnancy among other aspects of the client/advocate relationship.

Sharon also belonged to the "The South Carolina Association of Pregnancy Care Centers" where she would attend their annual meetings and retreats that provide training and fellowship. Sharon is often one of the presenters, specifically on adoption training to the many pregnancy centers and their staff, board members and volunteers from across the state.





# SOUTH DAKOTA



Your state did not receive any community recommendations this year, but that does not mean there are not people in your state going above and beyond to support children and families in extraordinary ways.

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# TENNESSEE



## Emily Chapman Richards

Senator Marsha Blackburn | Senator Bill Hagerty

111 Foxwood Lane  
Franklin, Tennessee, 37069

Since age 11, Emily Chapman Richards has been a passionate advocate for adoption and orphan care efforts. Following a mission trip to Haiti, she had the idea of adoption in her family—an idea that would ultimately result not only in the adoption of three daughters from China, but the creation of Show Hope, a nationally recognized voice for adoption advocacy and orphan care support that has helped thousands of children come to know the love of a family, both in the United States and globally. With more than 15 years of service at Show Hope, she most recently served as Executive Director, where she led the expansion of the organization's adoption assistance, medical care grants, pre- and post-adoption supports, and student leadership initiatives. She is trained in and promotes Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) methods developed at Texas Christian University which exist to promote trust and connection between caregivers and children by addressing physical and emotional needs. At Show Hope, she led the establishment and growth of the Pre- and Post Adoption Support program, to provide practical teaching and resources to equip parents, caregivers, church leaders, and professionals to help restore hope to children and families on the healing journey. To date, more than 110,000 families and individuals have been served. She holds a bachelor's degree in International Studies and Religion from Baylor University and a master's degree in Theology from Queen's University in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)





# TEXAS



## **The Attic Foster Network**

Senator Ted Cruz | Senator John Cornyn

P.O. Box 8022  
Midland, Texas, 79708

The Attic Foster Network works to support foster families by providing tangible needs and a community of like-minded people while engaging the church. Their mission is to empower churches and their people to engage in the prevention, intervention, and emancipation of the local orphan. Their vision is to eliminate the orphan crisis in Midland, Odessa, and the surrounding area. The current issue of fostering in the Permian Basin is overwhelming, as nearly 90 percent of kids who are fostered have to move away from their hometown, and around 60 percent of those kids move more than 100 miles away. The Attic Foster Network wants these children to have prepared foster families that don't require them to move far away. What started as a Facebook group swapping resources among foster families, the Attic Foster Network provides resources, clean gently used items that have been donated, to foster families in need. These items include diapers, strollers, clothes, and more. They also offer welcome wagons to families celebrating new arrivals. To prepare families expecting foster children they offer trainings to give them the tools they need. They also engage the church to create communities of like-minded individuals offering support and encouragement. By engaging the church and providing resources to families, they are attempting to lessen the Permian Basin foster crisis.

## **David Cross**

Senator Ted Cruz | Senator John Cornyn

TCU Box 298921  
Fort Worth, Texas, 76129

The late Dr. Karyn Purvis and the director of Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development, Dr. David Cross, created the Trust-Based Relational Intervention®. The Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development, or KPICD strives to help children suffering from the effects of early trauma, abuse and/or neglect. The Karyn Purvis conducts research to deepen understanding about the complex needs of these children and how to help them overcome social, behavioral, and emotional challenges. Through various outreach initiatives, The Karyn Purvis Institute trains professionals in Trust-Based Relational Intervention®, a research-based, holistic model developed by Dr. Karyn Purvis and Dr. David Cross. Together they have written the books the "Connected Child" and the "Connected Parent." In 2021, the KPICD held 10 TBRI practitioner trainings conducted in 5 languages all over the world. KPICD under the leadership of Dr. Cross has trained people in 50 states and 57 countries.



## Tracy Harting

Senator Ted Cruz | Senator John Cornyn

PO Box 1519  
Pflugerville, Texas, 78691

Tracy is one of the leaders in child welfare and adoption in Travis and Williamson Counties. She has represented dozens, if not hundreds of children as an attorney ad litem, and dozens of indigent parents attempting to reunify their families. She always fights for her client, and for the best interest of the child. She has mentored numerous attorneys in child welfare and adoption practices.

## Legacy Adoption Services

Senator Ted Cruz | Senator John Cornyn

7952 Davis Blvd  
North Richland Hills, Texas, 76182

Legacy Adoption Services goes above and beyond to ensure that both mothers and families receive the best quality informative care and attention. They are a treasure trove of helpful resources for those in need of a pathway to ensure a safe and healthy future for their child, and for those who are ready to join the mother on this journey of giving her child a wonderful life. Thorough background checks and detailed home studies allow Legacy Adoption Services to guarantee any children they are entrusted with will be placed with a loving family. Additionally, Legacy Adoption Services take special care of each mother, ensuring that their needs such as bills paid, maternity clothing, and proper medical care are met as they navigate an unplanned chapter of their lives. North Texas is blessed to be home to this amazing organization.

## Michele Nigliazzo

Senator Ted Cruz | Senator John Cornyn

220 Lake Powell  
Laredo, Texas, 78041

Michele Nigliazzo is an attorney, advocate, and adoptive mother who has devoted the last two decades of her life to advocating for children and families, especially those impacted by trauma. She works in special education advocacy, teaches parents to be advocates, serves as a CASA, and advocates for trauma-informed education and awareness for judges, attorneys, CASAs, and child welfare court professionals. Michele's work has been in her former state of Missouri and her current state of Texas. She is now working on the national level as the Courts Advocacy Director of the Attachment & Trauma Network where she's leading advocates and liaisons from across the country and working on a Trauma-Focused Courts summit. Michele has used her experiences of advocating for her own children's needs for resources to truly find and create resources for adoptive and foster children across the country.

## Katy Padilla-Stout

Senator Ted Cruz | Senator John Cornyn

24919 Shuman Creek  
San Antonio, Texas, 78255

Katy Padilla Stout is the 225th District Court Judge and Administrative Judge for the Bexar County Children 's Court. Katy has proven to be a tireless advocate for children who are being adopted and providing legal representation to the children in our foster care system. Katy shares her experience in the child welfare system and brings perseverance, tenacity, and enthusiasm to the many cases for which she represents children and families.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



Katy has spoken out and voiced the great needs for more loving homes for foster children. More importantly, Katy and her husband have stepped up as adoptive parents of two lovely children from the foster care system. Katy, truly, understands the needs and the obstacles that foster children face in the child welfare system. For example, Katy, upon her persistence, had a local foster child in Bexar County, San Antonio, Texas get enrolled in a specialized school in Boston, Massachusetts for blind and deaf children. Another child welfare case, she insisted and succeeded in getting a kidney transplant for a foster child. Katy did these extraordinary acts of legal representation while carrying a full load of CPS cases where she is court appointed to represent children and in addition, serve as an educational surrogate for foster children in our public school system.

Katy is really a change agent in the world we live in. She lives and breathes advocacy for children and families in the child welfare system.

## Rachel Russo

Senator Ted Cruz | Senator John Cornyn

139 W Hosack St.  
Boerne, Texas, 78006

Rachel Russo is a single young woman who felt burdened to stand in the gap for children in our community who needed a safe home. In the past 9 years, Rachel has cared for 14 foster children. She works tirelessly to provide a safe, loving, stable home for some of the most vulnerable children in South Texas. Rachel has not let being single stop her, and has become a vital voice in the fight to change the children's welfare system. Rachel noticed a glaring need for a way to connect foster and kinship families with critically needed supplies, such as car seats, beds, clothing, and strollers during the first days children come into care. Out of her small garage, Rachel began gathering gently used children's clothing, shoes, bedding, furniture, and car seats to redistribute to families who had a new kinship or foster placement. Over the past 9 years, that simple "community closet" has grown into the Vault Fostering Community, a thriving nonprofit organization known throughout the South Texas region for its resources and support of the fostering community. Through it all, Rachel has continued to foster. She has gone on to adopt two beautiful boys, and is now fostering their infant brother. These boys have two other brothers who were adopted by another local family, and Rachel works diligently to maintain those critical sibling relationships. Rachel also builds strong bonds with the biological families of the children in her care, and continues to support those families who have been reunified. Rachel works alongside advocacy groups such as the South Texas Alliance for Orphans, the Blue Ribbon Task Force, and the Bexar County Children's Welfare Board to raise awareness and bring about systemic change.

## Jen and Matt Waller

Senator Ted Cruz | Senator John Cornyn

P.O. Box 8022  
Midland, Texas, 79705

Jen and Matt Waller have been a part of the fostering community in the Permian Basin, Texas since 2015. A teaching position at Midland Classics Academy opened up for Matt and drew the Waller family to West Texas. Prior to moving to West Texas, Jen and Matt had been foster parents for four years. However, it was not until they moved to Midland that they found their stride in serving the foster community.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)





Jen and Matt saw a need for a support network of foster parents and families in Midland and started a Facebook group. This Facebook group was so popular that it led Jen and Matt to founding The Attic Foster Network. The Attic Foster Network is a nonprofit that is devoted to empowering "churches and their people to engage in the prevention, intervention, and emancipation of the local orphan." The Attic Foster Network provides tangible needs, such as gently used children's clothing, toys, furniture, and other items, to foster families, foster parent training, and a support network of like-minded individuals. Jen and Matt have engaged the community through the Permian Basin's body of believers to create a supportive and more engaged culture for foster parents and families to thrive in. They envision a world where children in care can stay in Midland, Odessa, and the surrounding area with the hope of keeping families together.





# UTAH



## Ashley Mitchell

Senator Mike Lee | Senator Mitt Romney

1091 W 200 South  
Springville, Utah, 84663

Ashley Mitchell is the Founder and Executive Director of Lifetime Healing Foundation, a nonprofit organization that fosters innovative programming to support mental health initiatives for women who have experienced trauma through adoption, trafficking, sexual abuse, or any other form of exploitation. For over a decade, Ashley has been one of the most consistent and sought after birth mother voices in the nation. Ashley has been a birth mother for 16 years, and advocates for safe, ethical adoption practices. She created the Back to Basics adoption education program which is the first and only adoption education platform for prospective adoptive parents that brings in the birth parent perspective. Ashley has set out to seek increased care, understanding, and resources for birth mothers and adoptive families.. Ashley writes curriculum for effective and life-changing birth mom support groups nationwide and advocates for openness, honesty, and education within adoption. Her program, Knee to Knee, under the Lifetime Healing Foundation, trains licensed adoption agencies and law firms in eleven states to provide effective post-placement support for birth parents who have placed a child for adoption. Ashley is also the owner of Big Tough Girl, an advocacy platform focused on the power of sharing stories, educating others on the issues, and providing resources so that women can feel empowered and successful in their journey. She is the co-host of the Twisted Sisterhood Podcast, a support podcast for birth mothers in their post-placement life. Ashley Mitchell's main message, "adoption is for life," is crucial for both adoptive and birth families to know and understand, in order to better serve their children and give them not only permanency, but a loving and thriving environment.

## Donna Pope

Senator Mike Lee | Senator Mitt Romney

9699 South 700 East  
Sandy, Utah, 84070

Donna Pope established a domestic adoption agency in 1999 because she felt that birth mothers deserved to be treated with dignity and respect and not merely as a commodity. For the past 22 years she has consistently provided a program that cares for birth mothers in a way that values them as individuals and provides comprehensive support as they carry out their adoption plan. Donna has worked with thousands of birth mothers over the years and has therefore been instrumental in placing thousands of newborns throughout the country.

Donna has been active in developing and advocating for legislation that reduces barriers to adoption. She is a leader in the adoption community and serves on Utah's adoption council.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



Her voice and influence is widely respected because of her long experience in the field. She is known as the birth father whisperer because of her ability to work with birth fathers who are often angry but are not in a position to raise their child. She counsels with them and provides them with the opportunity to see the child's needs as paramount and to preserve their relationship with the child and the adoptive family.

Donna is an adoptive mother herself of three boys who are now young men. Even though raising these boys as a single mother has been challenging, Donna continues to be a strong advocate for her children. She stays by their side and supports them through thick and thin. Donna also took in a young man who was homeless. Despite the fact that she did not officially adopt him, he has nevertheless been embraced as another son in her family. Her contributions in the lives of birth families and adoptive families have been and will continue to be countless!

## **Lance Rich**

Senator Mike Lee | Senator Mitt Romney

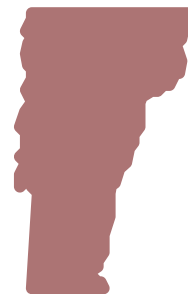
620 North 325 West  
Bountiful, Utah, 84010

Lance has represented adoptive parents, birth parents, and adoption agencies in all kinds of adoption cases. Having adopted three children, Lance has a personal as well as a professional perspective on the adoption process. He is an active proponent of adoption and serves on the boards of directors for the Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys, United for Adoption, Utah Foster Care, and the Utah Adoption Council. Lance has been a frequent presenter on a variety of adoption topics for conferences and seminars sponsored by organizations such as the Utah State Bar, the Utah Adoption Council, the National Business Institute, the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys, and the International Society of Family Law. Lance started his career representing children in the Michigan child welfare system. In law school he was a Bergstrom Fellow and received special training in child welfare law. He is a very strong advocate for ethical adoption practices both in Utah and as a Trustee of the Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys.





# VERMONT



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# VIRGINIA



## **Susan Branco**

Senator Tim Kaine | Senator Mark Warner

5091 7th Road #101  
Arlington, Virginia, 22204

Dr. Susan Branco, she/her/ella, is a licensed professional counselor and a transracial and transnational adoptee from Colombia, South America. She is a long-standing advocate for increased adoption-related research and training within counselor education and is passionate about improving mental health outcomes for transracially adopted persons. For over 14 years she maintained an independent practice collaborating with adoptee children, adolescents, families, and birth parents. She applies her lived, clinical, and research experience to increase awareness about adoption counseling practice in a variety of ways. In 2015, Dr. Branco graduated from Virginia Tech with a doctorate in counselor education and supervision. During her doctoral studies until present day, Dr. Branco has published extensively in peer reviewed journals and book chapters on the topic of adoption, adoption counseling, and transracial adoption. Her work has been cited over 100 times by other scholars and the Netherlands' government in their 2021 report on international adoption practices. She has presented over 100 workshops, lectures, and trainings on the topic of adoption related counseling practices to high school, undergraduate and graduate students, teachers, families, mental health practitioners, adoption professionals, and her fellow adoptee community. Dr. Branco's advocacy work illuminates the need for culturally responsive and adoption fluent mental health services for adoptees and their families. Currently, she is a practicing counselor, serves as a tenure track Assistant Professor in the Counselor Education program at St. Bonaventure University, and is an instructor with the Post Adoption Certificate program at Rutgers University. In addition, Dr. Branco is a steering member of the Society for Adoptee Professionals of Color in Adoption. She is a mentor, dissertation and thesis advisor to other adoptees researching adoption related topics. Her recent research on Colombian adoptee international search and reunion is featured on a genealogy service, Myheritage, in their biweekly podcast.

## **McLane Layton**

Senator Tim Kaine | Senator Mark Warner

6404 Woodridge Road  
Alexandria, Virginia, 22312

J. McLane Layton, Founder and President of Equality for Adoption Children, knew as a young adult she would be an adoptive parent. As she was going through the adoption process, she discovered that her children would not be automatic U.S. citizens even though both she and her husband were U.S. citizens. It was then she began her quest for equal citizenship rights for internationally adopted children. She knew change in the law was needed so foreign adopted children of American citizens would be granted automatic U.S. citizenship.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



As Legislative Counsel to U.S. Senator Don Nickles, McLane was instrumental in drafting legislation for several initiatives that are important for adoptive children and families, including the Child Citizenship Act, which became law in 2000. McLane has advocated for many families facing obstacles in the adoption process. She has been successful in expediting the sometimes very lengthy process of uniting adopted children with their families in the United States. Among her many acts of service, she obtained Humanitarian Parole for a Kosovo refugee who was adopted by an American military family in Germany and helped draft a private relief bill to provide her citizenship status. She helped two American families complete their adoptions after Romania shut down adoptions of Romanian children to Americans; worked with Citizens and Immigration Services and families adopting HIV positive children to dramatically reduce the waiting time for receiving a waiver for their children to enter the U.S.; and she traveled with the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute to China, Romania and Russia to promote adoption and ethical adoption practices. Additionally, McLane served as a longtime member of the CCAI Advisory Council.

## **Johnston and Terri Moore**

Senator Tim Kaine | Senator Mark Warner

5554 Marsh Light Lane  
Moseley, Virginia, 23120

John and Terri Moore are the proud and happy parents of seven children that they adopted from Los Angeles County Foster Care: Ashley, Chris, Anthony, Brandy, Aruna, Hallie and Emme. John and Terri were very active in the L.A. County foster care/adoption community for 16 years, before relocating their family to the Richmond, Virginia area in 2016. They brought their passion and concern for vulnerable children with them.

In addition to promoting foster care and adoption in area churches, they feel a strong call to advocate for the children and families involved. Terri previously served as a CASA and John is a writer and consultant, as well as a regular speaker at foster care and adoption events. He has also spent countless hours and miles on the road in Virginia, traveling anywhere he had an audience to share with people, specifically churches, how they could better support children and families involved in foster care and adoption. John's networking and communication skills have helped establish networks of support around the state of Virginia, making it possible for children to find homes and families to care of children. John includes his children in his travels and proudly introduces them to everyone he knows.

## **Christina & Larry Nickerson**

Senator Tim Kaine | Senator Mark Warner

2 Puritan Place  
Stafford, Virginia, 22554

Christina and Larry Nickerson of Stafford, VA have been opening up their home to hard to place teenage boys that nobody else would want or give a chance to for the past 14 years. Christina and Larry, not having any children of their own, saw an ad from a local private foster agency. They decided that it was time to give parenthood a try. After going through all the trainings and background checks, is when the Nickerson's decided that the older teenage boys needed a good and safe home, where they could feel stability and love. Over the years, the Nickerson's have had 6 older teenage boys. Each young man has stayed with them for at least 4 years or longer.

[Click to go back to the first page](#)



Even when the boys had reached the age to be able to move out on their own, the young men continue to stay in touch with Christina and Larry to this day. It is not unusual to see a couple of them visiting or spending a night with them. Being a stay-at-home mom, Christina is able to spend a lot of quality time with the boys, and giving them the much needed structure and help that they need. She makes sure that they are at all of their medical and school appointments. Many times driving long distances to get them to their appointments on time. When asked why they continue to provide a safe and loving home to these kids, the response is a simple one: "helping these kids; they learn get to learn from them, and in turn, the kids get to learn from us". Christina also added, "that it keeps things lively". Along with her keeping up on the constant training that foster care requires, Christina also found time to serve on the board of NewFound Families of Virginia as the Secretary.





# WASHINGTON



## **Stacy Ziegler**

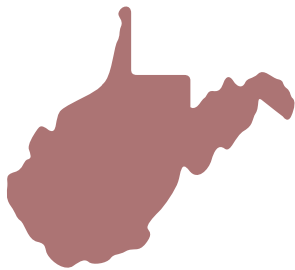
Senator Maria Cantwell | Senator Patty Murray

1115 S. 2nd Street  
Mount Vernon, Washington, 98229

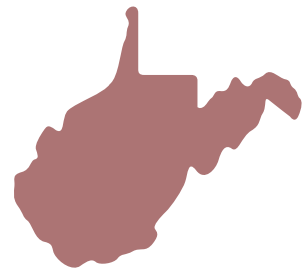
Stacy is the owner and supervisor of Pacific Northwest Guardian ad Litem. Stacy started as a volunteer GAL, then known as a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) in Whatcom county in 2012. She has her BS in Social Sciences and a minor in Law and Justice. Stacy took over as the owner of PNWGAL in 2014, serving children in Whatcom County. PNWGAL has been contracted to provide GAL services since 2015 in Skagit County. Though certified as a Title 26 (Family Law) GAL in 2016, her devotion is to abused and neglected children. In 2017, she started the first volunteer advocate program (VGAL) for Skagit County and now focuses her time on supporting, supervising, and training her dedicated group. Through this work, Stacy has had a positive impact on permanency outcomes for hundreds of local children.







## WEST VIRGINIA



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# WISCONSIN



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# WYOMING



## **Deborah and David Birge**

Senator Cynthia Lummis | Senator John Barrasso

1008 Arlene Pointe  
Cheyenne, Wyoming, 82009

Deborah and David Birge have been wonderful role models and leaders in the adoption community for decades in Cheyenne, Wyoming. They have three biological children and six children adopted from China.

They recently took up the fight in Wyoming to help international adoptees have easier access to state birth certificates. Their efforts required them to take their fight all the way to the Wyoming Supreme Court so that their son could be legally and equally granted a Wyoming birth certificate after being re-adopted in Wyoming. They are stellar parents and leaders in the community. They give their time and knowledge to anyone who needs guidance or help in the international adoption community. Debbie is a wonderful advocate for adoption and also honest about the challenges. Deborah and Dave both continue to be advocates for adoption in the community through their work and volunteering.

