
III. FOURTEEN STATE SURVEY: OVERVIEW OF CURRENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES FOR LGBT YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REFORM

A. Purposes and Methodology

We have surveyed the current lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth policies and practices related to the public child welfare agencies of fourteen states. These states — **Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Montana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Washington** — were selected to provide a diverse picture of policies and practices nationwide.

This survey:

- **assesses current policies and practices** toward LGBT youth in foster care,
- **offers state and private welfare agencies a launching point** to conduct their own assessments and to improve services for their LGBT youth,
- **identifies and recommends areas for reform**, and
- **identifies positive developments** in states and locales that can be expanded and used as models and resources elsewhere.

As part of this survey, state child welfare agencies were asked to respond to detailed questionnaires about policies and practices concerning non-discrimination provisions, training of foster care staff and parents on sexual orientation issues, and programs and services for LGBT youth. The agencies were also asked to provide excerpts of relevant policies, training manuals, and other materials on LGBT issues. In addition, we conducted telephone interviews with agency representatives and contract service providers to obtain further information and clarification. We also researched agency websites and state laws and regulations.

On the basis of this information, we have (1) assessed the states' current LGBT policies and practices, and (2) offered specific recommendations for improvement consistent with the basic reforms proposed in the preceding section of the Report.

This Report reflects that LGBT foster youth continue to fall in the margins of foster care systems nationwide. Nonetheless, the picture is not all bleak. Some states and locales have taken the initiative with important first steps to address the problems of LGBT adolescents. We are also heartened by the interest already roused at state agencies through our work on this Report. Child welfare agencies now need to engage in long overdue soul-searching. They must evaluate their practices — and prejudices — toward the LGBT youth in their care, and acknowledge that these youth are needlessly neglected and suffering. By responding with sensitivity, commitment, and concrete measures to fulfill their obligations to these adolescents, child welfare agencies can give LGBT foster youth the safe, supportive homes they deserve.