



PRESS RELEASE

Founded in 1991, Equality Illinois is the state's oldest, largest and most effective organization advocating for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Illinoisans.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Equality Illinois Blasts Sen. Dillard for Proposal Hurting Children

CHICAGO – A politically ambitious state senator on Friday introduced a bill to deny children the right to enter the most favorable foster or adoptive home possible by undermining the "best interests of the child" standard.

Bernard Cherkasov, CEO of Equality Illinois, the state's oldest, largest and most effective organization advocating for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Illinoisans, denounced the bill as "a cynical move by a politician at the expense of the best welfare of the state's children."

Senate Bill 2369 was introduced Friday by Sen. Kirk Dillard. His bill would exempt religiously-affiliated adoption and foster agencies from child-protection standards built over 70 years if the prospective parents are in a civil union. Dillard, a Republican, lost a GOP primary for governor to a more conservative candidate in 2010. News reports say he is preparing for another run in 2014.

Cherkasov pointed out that the bill seeks to overturn a seven-decade-old standard of adoption law. "Illinois law since the 1940s has maintained that the best interest of the child is the gold standard when it comes to making foster care and adoption decisions," Cherkasov said. The best-interest-of-the-child standard has remained in state law and has been upheld in numerous court decisions since then.

"Sen. Dillard is seeking to deviate from sound public policy, for the prospective parents who want to accept foster children and adoptive children, and especially for the children who need loving homes," Cherkasov said.

There have been several attempts to undermine the best interests of the child standard through legislative amendment and lawsuits by blaming the state's civil union law for the state withdrawing public funding from foster care and adoption agencies if they refused to

recognize civil unions. In fact, the civil union law made absolutely no change in child welfare policy. The state withheld public funding from some agencies because they refused to follow the "best interest of the child" standard.

"The established standard of making placements for foster care or adoption in the best interest of the child was not changed by the civil union law, so now Sen. Dillard is trying to do that," Cherkasov said. "We will not allow him to establish a precedent that could be applied later when the freedom to marry becomes the law of the land in Illinois."

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For media assistance, please contact:

Mitchell Locin

Media Liaison for Equality Illinois

[773-477-7173](tel:773-477-7173) (o); info@eqil.org