

We are writing to comment on the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking at 83 Fed. Reg. 11449 proposing to streamline the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) [RIN 0970-AC72]. We urge HHS to retain the voluntary sexual orientation questions for foster youth and foster and adoptive parents and guardians, as well as the data element on the reason for removal of a child from a home due to “family conflict related to child's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.” Studies show that approximately 19% of foster youth identify as LGBTQ, and they experience worse safety, well-being and permanency outcomes than non-LGBTQ youth. For states and tribes to improve these outcomes and identify best practices for doing so, data collection on the state and national level is urgently needed. Same-sex couples foster at six times the rate of their opposite-sex counterparts, and can provide loving, supportive homes for America’s 400,000+ foster youth.

We also urge HHS to retain the data elements related to the Indian Child Welfare Act, as American Indian and Native Alaskan foster youth are another vulnerable population overrepresented in foster care with worse safety, well-being, and permanency outcomes than non-Native youth.

Further, we ask HHS to add voluntary gender identity questions for foster youth over the age of 14 and foster and adoptive parents and guardians to AFCARS. Collecting gender identity data as well as sexual orientation data will help states and tribes develop streamlined, comprehensive services.

**Data collection will help us determine our programatic priorities with an eye toward prevention and increasing protective factors for LGBTQ youth development.**