



**NATIONAL
FOSTER CARE
AWARENESS MONTH**



Dear Fellow State Employee,

Together with the state Department of Children and Families (DCF), I am pleased to announce that November is National Adoption Month.

This year, we celebrate people across Connecticut who have taken on the responsibility – and joy – of fostering and then adopting a child from within their own family. Whenever possible, DCF strives to ensure that children stay and thrive within their family circles as it serves the child's best interests.

If you are considering adopting through the DCF, requirements for licensure – which can take four to six months to complete – include:

- Pre-licensing training equal to 30 hours – which can take about 10 weeks;
- Home visits by licensing staff and a home study, which comes at no cost; and
- Background checks for criminal or child abuse history that could prevent licensure.

PLEASE CALL 888-KID-HERO OR GO TO CTFOSTERADOPT.COM, AND YOU WILL BE CONNECTED TO A KNOWLEDGEABLE PROFESSIONAL WHO CAN ANSWER QUESTIONS AND GUIDE YOU THROUGH EACH STEP ALONG THE WAY.

In the meantime, I want to share an article (below) that I submitted to *Connecticut Voice* that was published this month:



By KEVIN LEMBO

Just a few years ago I found myself at the kitchen sink. A sweet four-month old – we'll call her "baby girl" – was babbling and bouncing away in her Boppy chair.

The phone rang.

It was a call from the state Department of Children and Families (DCF) asking us if we were interested in adopting this sweet baby girl who was temporarily staying with us through the foster care program. A lifetime flashed in my mind. I was 54. We could do this, right? But by the time I put down the phone, I was looking at baby girl with a lump in my throat. She had no idea, but it was a terribly difficult moment. We could not be her forever family. Fast forward to today: Baby girl is exactly where she should be, and she's still in our lives too. For special occasions, for apple picking, or for no reason at all we get to be together. Whatever our parallel paths, she is forever in our hearts, because she gifted us with just a moment of her life.

While we didn't adopt baby girl, our family knows firsthand the joy of what it's like to build your forever family through adoption.

My goal, my hope in sharing this story is to get members of the LGBTQ community to consider becoming foster or adoptive parents. Might I also suggest that if you're not ready for that level of commitment, there are kids in our community who could use some support and direction as a mentor.

As the state comptroller – and Connecticut's first openly gay person elected to statewide office here – I am grateful to live and serve in a state with comprehensive anti-discrimination laws. I'm proud that our state laws prohibit denying a petition to

adopt based on sexual orientation, and that our courts have found that a foster child can and should remain in the stable, loving placement of same-sex couples.

More than simply following the law, Connecticut's DCF has made it part of its mission to reach out to LGBTQ families, so we know that we are welcome and needed.

The world wasn't always this kind, as our family understands – from the time that my spouse, Charles, and I first embarked on our adoption journey in the State of New York in the early 1990s.

We are now the proud parents of three children. Our youngest, who we adopted as a newborn, is now breezing through college and running track, and our two oldest – now independent working adults – were adopted more than 20 years ago from the foster care system when we lived and worked in New York.

On adoption finalization day for our two oldest sons (in 1993), all of us dressed up and ready to celebrate our new life together, we headed to court. What should have been a simple proceeding ended with a denial and gavel.

The reason: Our family was deemed by the judge to be not just untraditional, but unfit. My spouse and I, simply because of our marital status and sexual orientation, were considered not good enough to parent these amazing children who had been through so much hardship.

In the end, our family was one of the lucky ones. Charles and I had the hearts and means to fight for our family all the way to the New York State Supreme Court, Appellate Division, establishing a precedent-setting case, "*In the matter of Byron K.*" (1994). That final decision ultimately made our family whole, and hopefully helped other families that followed – but only after unnecessary disappointment, heartache and rejection.

By the time we adopted our youngest son, the landscape had changed dramatically, allowing us to grow our family without the same obstacles.

With our three sons grown or growing, we became licensed foster parents in recent years. Our family thought long and hard about this. As state comptroller, so much of what I do in that capacity is 30,000 feet high, broad fiscal and health care policy work. It's important work that I truly enjoy, but foster parenting gave our family an entirely new and different opportunity to do something more direct, immediate and necessary – literally down on the floor with little ones.

That experience was a whole new adventure!

Following comprehensive training and support from DCF, our family quickly welcomed respite placements – short-term foster care.

It has been some time since we've had a placement, but our home has, at times, been a beautiful and emotional whirlwind of pots-and-pans playtime, cheerios turning up here and there, little voices, book reading, intermittent tears, squeals and laughter – and a whole lot of emotions, including the excitement, fear and joy with each arrival and a quiet sadness with each departure.