

Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and distinguished members of Congress—

Good morning. My name is Lee Marshall. I am the Founder and CEO of the Kids to Love Foundation, headquartered in Huntsville, Alabama. I hold a Master of Social Work and am a Certified Trauma Therapist. For more than 20 years, I have worked on the front lines of child welfare—serving children in foster care and adoption. This work is not just my profession; it is my life's calling. I also understand personally what it means to have a forever family through adoption.

I am here today to speak to a crisis in our country—one where our youngest and most vulnerable citizens are too often unseen, unheard, and unprotected: children in the child welfare system.

The system is broken.

And while we all agree it must be fixed, we must also be honest about why it is failing.

Historically, the government has carried this responsibility because no one else stepped forward. But the federal government was never meant to raise children. Caring for vulnerable children should be a shared responsibility—one embraced by families, communities, and yes, our faith-based organizations. It is both a moral obligation and, for many, a spiritual calling.

Until that broader support system fully rises to meet the need, we must act decisively and with urgency.

Today, I am calling on Congress to establish a national task force—a coalition charged with evaluating and auditing our current foster care and adoption systems. Federal dollars must come

with federal accountability. Right now, federal funding is flowing into state systems that are failing children.

We are seeing systems where children are dying.

Systems where children sleep on office floors because there are no placements.

Systems where children are warehoused in juvenile detention centers—not because they've committed crimes, but because there is nowhere else for them to go.

And behind it all is a level of bureaucracy that is suffocating the very people trying to help—The case managers and social workers on the front lines are facing burnout, high turnover rate leading to constant disruption in the lives of children who have already experienced profound loss.

But there is hope. And there are solutions that work, and Kids to Love is leading the way!

In Alabama, Kids to Love has spent more than two decades serving children in foster care and adoption. We have implemented a privatized foster care model—operating outside the traditional state-run system—and the results are clear: children spend less time in foster care, and permanency is achieved faster.

Because for us, permanency is not just a goal—it is the plan.

Our model is built on four key pillars, with the child always at the center.

The first pillar starts in the court system. With judges who will stand in the gap for our kids. We must have a judiciary that is both informed and courageous. Judges must be empowered and willing to advocate boldly for children—to challenge the status quo and prioritize moving children out of the system and into permanent homes. We have judges who place children with us directly because their expectation is high and they trust we have the kids best interest.

Whether it is a sibling group that we are able to keep together, a teen mom placed in foster home with her baby, or a child who has been victimized by the very system sworn to protect them.

Secondly, our model supports not just the child but the foster families we train and license who step up to care for our kids. By deeply investing in our foster families. We don't just place children—we build relationships. Our families have 24/7 access to case managers and trauma therapists, ensuring they are never alone in the journey. Support is not occasional—it is constant. The benefit of this level of support. Stability in placements for children and families. Stability allows healing to happen through our trauma focused therapy and care model.

Our third pillar is critical piece in our model of care for our kids and families. We take a trauma-focused approach to foster care and adoption. One in four youth in foster care will experience PTSD, and they are twice as likely as war veterans to suffer from its effects. We don't just treat trauma—we work to heal it. That means supporting not only the child, but also the birth family when possible, the foster family, and the entire care team. And critically, we ensure that trauma support continues through the transition into adoption, reducing the risk of disrupted foster and adoptive placements.

Fourth, we address the crisis of aging out. Too often, foster care becomes a pipeline to prison. Studies show that 75 to 80 percent of individuals in the juvenile or prison system have experienced foster care. We are changing that trajectory.

Through our workforce development program, KTECH, we equip young people with high-demand skills—mechatronics, robotics, soldering, virtual reality, and technical training with industry-grade tools. These are not just skills; they are pathways to stable, meaningful careers. Combined with our Cottage Community—tiny homes that provide safe housing and independent living support—we are helping young adults transition successfully into adulthood. We are keeping these young people off the streets, reducing homelessness and trafficking that many children aging out of foster care face.

Let me tell you about Willie.

Willie grew up in foster care and lived in 25 different homes. When we met, he had aged out and was living in a homeless shelter. He entered our KTECH program, gained job skills, secured employment, and began to rebuild his life. Today, Willie holds both a bachelor's and a master's degree. He is a homeowner. He has a career. He has broken the cycle of poverty.

He is not just a success story—he is a cycle breaker.

And there are thousands more like him, waiting for the same opportunity.

Every child in foster care deserves a forever family.

Every child in foster care deserves an advocate.

Every child deserves stability, dignity, and hope.

My passion is a personal. This is a calling and mission to me. As a child who was born into foster care and adopted at the age of two. But for the grace of God I could have been any of the kids that come in our doors every day. Adoption and stability matters.

No child should spend a lifetime navigating a system that was meant to protect them.

We have the knowledge.

We have the models that work.

Now, we need the will to act.

Thank you.