



MEET THE PLAINTIFFS – ACLU Foster Care Lawsuit
To speak with these clients or the attorneys in this case, please contact Tyler Richard, ACLU of Nebraska, 402-476-8091 or trichard@aclunebraska.org



Joel Busch and Todd Vesely

Both Todd and Joel, who have been in a committed relationship for over nine years, come from close-knit Nebraska families and still live close to many of their family members. They regularly babysit for their nieces and nephews, who range in age from infants to teenagers, as well as for their friends’ children.

They bought their current home with extra bedrooms with the plan to foster and adopt children. They would welcome sibling groups into their family because they think it is important for brothers and sisters to be able to remain together. Since Todd is retired from the U.S. Marine Corps, he is able to be a full-time stay-at-home parent.

Todd and Joel began the process of applying to become foster parents in July of 2008. They followed the licensing procedures established by HHS: they completed training, underwent a home study, and submitted to and passed the required background checks. But they were later told that they could not be licensed because of the HHS policy.

Despite Todd and Joel’s ability and desire to serve as foster parents and their qualifications to do so, under HHS policy they are categorically barred from even being considered as foster parents because they are gay men and because they reside together and are not permitted to marry under Nebraska law.



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Lisa Blakey and Janet Rodriguez

Lisa and Janet have always wanted to raise children together, ever since their relationship began eight years ago, and they have a passionate desire to serve as foster parents.

They are eager to serve as foster parents for older children, such as middle school- and high school-aged children, because

they know that these children are often harder to place. They are also willing and able and have sufficient space to foster sibling groups, who are not always able to be placed together.

Lisa knows the hardships that children may endure in the foster care system, as she herself spent time in foster care during middle school. Having suffered difficult foster home experiences as a youth, Lisa is all the more committed to protecting children and becoming a caring foster parent who can provide a safe and loving home to children in need.

Despite Lisa and Janet’s ability and desire to serve as foster parents and their qualifications to do so, under HHS policy they are categorically barred from even being considered as foster parents because they are lesbian women and because they reside together and are not permitted to marry under Nebraska law.



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Stillman Stewart and Greg Stewart

pictured with children Javonte, David and Dionte

Greg and Stillman have been in a committed relationship for over thirty years. They were married in 2008 in California. They have five children, all of whom they adopted out of foster care in California, where the family previously resided.

Greg is a minister at First-Plymouth Congregational Church, United Church of Christ (“UCC”), a calling that brought the family to Nebraska in 2011. Stillman, who previously worked as a social worker and has been a stay-at-home parent for the past fourteen years, recently began working with at-risk, developmentally delayed and behaviorally challenged children at Park Middle School in Lincoln.

Greg and Stillman have demonstrated the capacity to care for and heal children who have endured difficult early life experiences. Most of their children, who now range in age

from 13 to 20, were placed with the family after years of abuse and multiple foster placements.

Some of the children came into Greg and Stillman’s home with severe medical, cognitive, and behavioral issues. In fact, Greg and Stillman were told that some of the children they adopted would never be able to live independently. Despite these challenges, Greg and Stillman’s children have exceeded expectations and have thrived in the stable, nurturing, and loving environment that their parents have provided.

One of their children, who came into the family at the age of five still in diapers, had not learned to use eating utensils and suffered from severe speech impediments. By the age of seventeen, he brought home a report card with all A’s and one B. Their eldest child, who had been through seventeen foster homes and three failed adoptions in three different states, is now a college sophomore.

Now that some of Greg and Stillman’s children are grown, they feel they can open their hearts, family, and home to additional children. They are particularly interested in caring for hard-to-place children. Their desire to welcome more children into the family was all the more strengthened after they read billboards advertising the need for more qualified foster parents in Nebraska.

Greg and Stillman contacted HHS to apply to become foster parents but were told they were not eligible because they are a same-sex couple.