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July 21, 2008

The Honorable Barack Obama
United States Senator
713 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Obama:

In light of recent events, I want to be certain that our presidential candidates truly understand the great diversity of American families and how best to meet their needs.

As a lesbian mother and the executive director of Family Equality Council, the national organization working to ensure equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender families by building community, changing hearts and minds and advancing social justice for all families, I know how hard parents work to raise happy, healthy children. Regardless of their sexual orientations and gender identities, regardless of how many parents or caregivers are present in a family, all parents begin each day with their children at the forefront of their thoughts. On behalf of diverse families, I present you with the following information on the variety of family types that exist in this country and ask for your plan to recognize, respect, protect and celebrate *all* of the loving families you seek to represent.

Policymakers, researchers, child welfare professionals and advocates agree that strong families build strong societies. The problems we face are due to the lack of recognition of the many types of families and relationships that exist and the eroding support systems that protect all people in this country. We need a president who understands the complexity of American families and has real, workable solutions to the challenges we face.

Despite the images we may see in the media, in our schools and in our daily lives, American families are not all comprised of married moms and dads raising their biological children. In fact, this is what American families look like:

- Thirty-seven percent of parent households with children in the home are *not* headed by married, heterosexual couples.
- Since 1940, grandparents have been the primary caregivers (without biological parents in the home) for approximately 2 percent of all children in this country, some 1.6 million children today.
- Forty percent of all children will likely be raised by unmarried partners living together for a portion of their lives.
- Lesbian and gay parents are raising four percent of all adopted children in the United States, as well as three percent of all children in foster care.

These are just a few of the many statistics outlining the complexity and diversity of American family life.

American families have real and immediate needs which require policies that recognize and protect them, not ignore and penalize them. Families will continue to exist in this country that are not married moms and dads and their biological children. These families, whether they are headed by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender parents, grandparents, single parents, unmarried parents or others, will continue to share in the joys and challenges all families face. They will do their jobs as well as they always have, but they would certainly benefit from a president who encourages social support for them and government recognition.

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For all families in this country to thrive, we envision economic opportunities and living wages for all; quality, affordable and accessible healthcare; quality and affordable childcare for all children; public schools that lift our students up; safe and affordable housing.

In addition, we need these provisions to apply to all people and especially to all family types that are currently under-recognized in the law.

Until grandmothers and grandfathers can easily access the government benefits intended to keep their grandchildren healthy and safe; until lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender parents can have their relationships universally and unquestionably recognized; until unmarried parents can access benefits without penalty or derision, we will not be doing justice by the millions of American families that do not fit a small minority's notion of what a "real" family is.

These families want to know how your administration will address their needs. What policies and positions will you take to make sure that all loving families are recognized, respected, protected and celebrated? How will you lead *all* families to a brighter future?

We look forward to hearing your response, and hope that you will take seriously your responsibility to be a leader for us all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jennifer Chrisler".

Jennifer Chrisler
Executive Director