

Foster Kids from Poor Families—Exploring the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997**Brendan McFeely****Publication Date**

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Brendan McFeely

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A Safe Place to Learn and Study: How the Hesburgh Library Helped me Research the
Adoption and Safe Families Act

When students were allowed back onto campus this fall, I was not sure how much I would make use of the library. I was significantly worried about the risks of the coronavirus and was not sure if that would outweigh the academic benefits the library had provided me in my first year. I couldn't resist, however—I've always loved libraries and missed the Hesburgh Library when I was stuck at home. I was not disappointed. The library had ample resources, both in-person and remote, which made it a major boon in my research this semester. I used the library's electronic resources and subscriptions, the catalogs of books available for checkout and examination, and its safe physical spaces to craft the best policy memo discussing the impacts and assumptions of the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act.

Before I picked a policy for my memo, I wanted to research some of the current policy landscape. Discussions with professors told me which articles to look for, but it was the Hesburgh Library OneSearch catalog that enabled me to quickly find and access these articles. With just a few clicks, I was able to access the exact readings that I had been recommended, which allowed me to get an easy background from which to delve into one particular policy. I chose the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, which tried to prevent foster children from returning to unsafe parental homes by expediting adoption timetables and building up state foster systems. Through my research, I was able to learn that this program resulted in more children in foster care, but the same amount adopted. Notre Dame's access to the HeinOnline Law Journal Library was invaluable in this research, as it allowed me access to in-depth descriptions of the foster care system like Professor Deleith Gossett's 2018 article in the Memphis Law Review entitled "*The Client*: How States Are Profiting from the Child's Right to Protection." It also

allowed me access to an important article from Professor Dorothy Roberts in the UCLA Law Review about foster care's disproportionate impact on Black families. It is not an understatement to say that without these articles, my policy memo would have been a waste of time. They provided a perfect mixture of heart-wrenching stories, analytical data, and political explanations of how the system came to be. With the help of the Hesburgh Library's online search tools and subscriptions, I was ready to knock the impact section of my paper out of the park.

When I was researching for the section of my paper about assumptions of my paper, I wanted to dig into some of the literature around the US welfare system, its changes during the 1990s, and the assumptions that motivated these changes. Luckily, the Hesburgh Library catalog of books made this an easy task. I began with reserving the book *Golden Gulag* by Ruth Wilson Gilmore. This insightful book describes the political and economic conditions that spurred the expansion of the California prison system, and discusses the assumptions therein. Without the library, I never would have been able to read it! Through parsing Gilmore's book and discussing with professors, I was also led to the book *Prisons of Poverty* by French sociologist Loic Wacquant. Although this book was not in the Hesburgh Library catalog, it was available in a partner library—the Kresge Law Library (which I only knew because OneSearch said so!). After I made an account there, I was able to check out the book and use it as part of my literature on the assumptions in my policy memo. Although I did not cite either of these books directly in my memo, they provided me necessary information to contextualize the other literature I read. Professor Roberts, for example, expanded on the dichotomies that Wacquant argues exist in the welfare system. When I first read her article on foster care, I lacked that necessary context, so my analysis was not engaging properly with it. With the physical literature provided by the Hesburgh and Kresge libraries, I had all of the sourcing I needed to write an effective policy memo.

I also benefited from reserving and using the physical resources in the Hesburgh Library for effective communication and workflow. When meeting with my professors, the pandemic posed a significant challenge. Luckily, I was able to use the Hesburgh Library study spaces as a quiet room where I could join into Zoom meetings with my advisors, check in with how my writing was going, and search for more instruction. This was invaluable for keeping me on track in my assignment. On many occasions, I would reserve one of the Basement Group Study Spaces for my brief meetings, so I could talk to my professors without interfering with any other students' workflow. Once I had met with my professors, I simply needed to spend time and space researching, drafting, and editing. Luckily, the Hesburgh Library's ample seating provided me the perfect place to do so. The 6th-13th tower seats (fondly called "the stacks" by many students) provided the perfect atmosphere required for my writing process, with the right silence, gorgeous views of the Notre Dame campus, and the smell of books that I missed when I was home in the spring and summer. I found I was far more productive there than I was in my dorm room, and I completed my memo there one late night in March.

Thanks to the digital resources, in-person catalog, and ample space in the Hesburgh Library, I was able to craft an effective policy memo discussing the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. Every step of my research journey had help from the library, from searching up articles to checking out books to finding a quiet desk to write and rewrite. I am so grateful for the extensive resources provided by the Hesburgh Library, and the tireless staff and faculty who help maintain it. I am glad I was able to use it, even in the midst of a pandemic, and cannot wait to use it again next year.