Harvard and Boston College faculty members have written a letter encouraging Congress to pass the Children in Families First Act, which aims to reform the adoption system in the United States.

34 faculty members from Harvard Law School and 24 from Boston Law School signed and sent the letter last week, according to a Law School press release.

The act—which was introduced by Senator Mary L. Landrieu of Louisiana last October and has since progressed to committee—seeks to streamline the adoption process and place children with families faster. The language of the bill highlights the fundamental human right of every child to a permanent family.

While drafting the bill, Landrieu solicited advice and recommendations from two academics—Elizabeth Bartholet '62, a professor of public interest law at Harvard Law School, and Paulo Barrozo, an assistant professor of law at Boston College.

“[Bartholet and Barrozo] have been heavily involved in CHIFF since its inception,” said a Senator Landrieu staffer, who requested anonymity due to an internal office policy. “Their wisdom and thought process have helped bring [the bill] to fruition.”

Bartholet and Barrozo eventually decided to approach their colleagues to solicit support for the legislation.

“The core human rights principles of the legislation were so important that we thought our colleagues would also agree to support these principles,” Barrozo said.

The legislation is particularly timely, Bartholet said, given that the number of adoptions has dropped dramatically since 2004—a decrease that Bartholet attributes to the slow bureaucratic procedures surrounding adoptions. Bartholet added that the federal government has proved hesitant to permit international adoptions.

“This is a human rights tragedy of enormous proportions,” Bartholet said in the press release. “This legislation is truly the light at the end of a long tunnel of despair.”
Bartholet, who serves as the faculty director for the child advocacy program at Harvard Law School, began working with Barrozo on human rights issues and pro bono work while Barrozo was a student at Harvard Law School.

They now hope that the letter will ensure that Congress keeps the most important aspects of the legislation in the final bill.

“The importance of the letter is to identify those principles that are very important and to prevent those principles from dropping,” said Bartholet, who said she feared that Congress might remove some crucial portions of the bill.

Despite this concern, Barrozo and Bartholet remain optimistic that Congress will pass the Act.

“There’s a great level of support—it’s growing—and there is momentum,” Barrozo said.

She noted that the bill has attracted a wide range of supporters, including both Democratic and Republican co-sponsors in the House and the Senate.

“It definitely has bipartisan support,” Bartholet said. “I’m hopeful it will be passed.”

The Landrieu staffer praised the efforts of the Harvard and Boston College faculties.

“They are one persuasive and influential voice among many that are now joining the choir,” the staffer said. “I think members of Congress will respond.”