

Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. My name is David Bennett, and I want to thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.

In 1996 my daughter's birth mother and I separated, and the court ordered that I was the physical custodian of both my daughters who were 2 & 7 years old at the time.

During our 2-year separation while waiting for final divorce proceedings, their birthmother was absent in their lives. She neglected to show up and visit them at the prearranged court ordered times.

At the final divorce 2 years later, I was awarded physical custody again by the court. This remained in effect until they were adults when the order expired. My daughters continued to live with my current wife of 20 years until they eventually moved out on their own.

Other than this testimony this year and the testimony from last year, I have never spoken publicly about the mental abuse that my daughter's birthmother caused them. It is rare for their birthmother to take responsibility for her inactions or wrongdoing, and it is always someone else's fault. Many times, she made my daughters feel guilty and that it was their fault. She also refused to help financially in any way throughout their lives and always had an excuse as to why she couldn't help.

Once my daughters were in their teens, the time that they spent with their birthmother was further reduced at both my daughters' requests. The environment at their birthmother's location was not healthy and was mentally abusive towards them. Neither of my daughter's homework or after school activities were ever a priority.

This left my daughters with feelings of guilt about things that had nothing to do with them and has caused them some very difficult and almost tragic emotional problems through their younger lives. Currently, neither one of them has had any contact with her, and for one of my daughters, it has been years.

Thankfully my wife Barbara Bennett came into our lives 23 years ago. She chooses to step into my daughter's lives and help them as any great mother figure would. She has been perfect for them, given them the motherly love and guidance that any great mother would do. She still fulfills that roll today even as both my daughters are married and with families of their own.

Rachael made the decision a few years ago as an adult in her late 20's that she would like Barb to adopt her. Rachael's reasoning was that Barb has always been her mother, and she wants to make it official.

We found out that Maryland law, as currently written, does not allow this without the consent of the birthmother. Rachael's birthmother will not consent to the adoption.

The courts saw fit on two separate occasions to award custody of my daughters to me and not their birthmother.

When a person reaches the age of being a responsible adult, they should be allowed to make the decision about who is legally their parent.

Rachael, my 30-year-old adult daughter, college graduate, successful in her profession, married, homeowner, and all-around great person, is not able to make the sole decision on who is legally her mother.

Instead, the law as currently written allows the abusive parent to still have one last bit of control over an otherwise grownup, successful, well-adjusted adult.

Thank you,

David Bennett