

Testimony of Kelley Ray

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BILL NO: HB 243

TITLE: Family Law – Adoption of an Adult

COMMITTEE: Judiciary

HEARING DATE: January 30, 2025

POSITION: FAV

Good afternoon, Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Kelley Ray, and I am here to share my story for the third time. I came to Delegate Boyce three years ago to change the adult adoption laws. I am hoping the idiom, “three times the charm,” prevails this year. Changing the law to remove parental consent is the right thing to do and will bring Maryland in line with most other states.

My son and I did not talk seriously about adoption until he was 26 because we were waiting for him to become a U.S. citizen. The other reason for the delay was he did not want his birth mother to know our plans. And he was right. She had no need, no right, and had not earned the privilege to know his business. The entire process took an emotional toll on my son. He had moved on from that time in his life, but our laws made him revisit his past.

I adopted my son on November 29, 2022. He was 27. The judge finalized the adoption via Zoom in less than 10 minutes, yet it took us 5 months and a few thousand dollars to get to that day. Our journey included:

- hiring a lawyer who understood adult adoptions
- serving the birth mother, who beat him and kicked him out of the house at age 14
- advertising in a foreign country as part of the adoption search for the father
- having my doctor verify I was good health and current on my immunizations
- completing a home study and criminal background check

Because my son’s birth certificate had no father listed, we had to run an adoption search ad in Cameroon. Fortunately, through my network, I found someone who could help. I would have calls with the newspaper and their translator at 4 am in order to place the ad, get all documents notarized, and have everything shipped to me.

Adult adoptees should have the right to decide without birth parent notification. We must eliminate unnecessary obstacles for both adoptees and adoptive parents. For many adult adoptees, involving individuals who never provided for them or abused them is unjust.

I am asking you to return a favorable report on House Bill 243.