

# Testimony of Kelley Ray

**BILL NO:** HB 1117

**TITLE:** Family Law – Adoption of an Adult

**COMMITTEE:** Judiciary

**HEARING DATE:** March 8, 2023

**POSITION:** Favorable

Mr. Chairman, Vice Chairman, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Kelley Ray and I am here to share my story. I adopted my former foster son, Carmelo, last November. He was 27. It was finalized, by zoom, with a judge, in less than 10 minutes. It took us nearly five months and me about \$3,500 to get to that day because of the current laws and regulations. I thought it was absurd that an able bodied adult could not make this decision on this own. I didn't care about the money. There is no cost to high to adopt my son, and I can afford it, others cannot. So, I started researching how other states handle adult adoptions. Most have their own adult adoption statutes. It is time to change Maryland law and I thank Delegate Boyce for helping me bring this bill to you.

My son was kicked out of his house at the age of 14. He couched surfed, lived on the tennis courts at his high school, and at 17 rented a converted shed with a space heater and hot plate. He worked full-time, graduated on time, and played on the soccer team. We met at his work when he was 16 and he started calling me mom about seven months later.

Carmelo entered the foster care system just 24 days before his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, was with another family until I was cleared to be a resource parent, when he came to live with me about a month later. He moved into his own place at 19½ with continued help from the state and bought his home at 20. He is a survivor.

We did not talk seriously about adoption until he was 26 because he was also an immigrant and we had to wait until he became a U.S. citizen. The other reason for the delay was because he didn't want his birth person to know his business. And he is right, she has no need and no right or privilege to know his business. And the emotions it brought up for my son just thinking of his past was traumatizing.

Some asked me, "why and why now?" Carmelo and I never needed a piece of paper to know we were mother and son. He plans to enter law enforcement and even with power of attorney, his birth person could make things difficult if decisions have to be made if something bad happens. Now she has no say.

Because adoptions are confidential and there is no research on adult adoptions, not for lack of trying to find it, I can't sit here and share statistics, I wish I could – facts often win over emotion when it comes to changing laws. That said, my plea to you today, for the sake of the privacy of adult adoptees who just want to be part of a loving family, is to return a favorable report on HB1117.