

# **HB 214 Jennifer Fairfax - Adult Adoption.pdf**

Uploaded by: Jennifer Fairfax

Position: FAV



## **Family Law – Adoption of an Adult**

Testimony of Judge Jennifer Fairfax  
in Support of  
Adoption of an Adult – House Bill 214

Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer my written testimony in support of HB214, the legislation known as Family Law – Adoption of an Adult.

My name is Jennifer Fairfax. I am a Judge for the Circuit Court of Montgomery County, Maryland. I was appointed to the bench by Governor Wes Moore on September 8, 2023, after owning my own Family Formation Law Firm for the prior 16 years. Throughout my career, I focused in the areas of adoption and ART law. I am licensed in District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. During my career as a private attorney, I had the honor of representing adoptive parents, adoptees and expecting parents who are making adoption plans (often referred to as birth parents) albeit never in the same case. As a Judge, I will be honored and humbled to hear and rule on adoption cases in the coming years.

The Judiciary supports this Bill and I am testifying on behalf of the Judiciary bringing over two decades of experience as a former private adoption attorney to the conversation. I handled hundreds of adult adoptions across the region and want to note that in Virginia and the District of Columbia there are specific statutory provisions for adult adoptions that do not require notice or consent of the prospective adoptees legal (birth or adoptive) parents consistent with this proposed legislation. In addition, it was my experience as a practitioner that adult adoptions in Maryland were often three times as expensive due to the notice requirement and often took almost a year to complete compared to a few months in other jurisdictions. In a significant number of cases the legal parent was not known, had been abusive, or could not be located. Many times I would have to explain to adult adoptees or their prospective adoptive parents (often step-parents, foster parents, guardians or other adults who served as the adoptees parent figure for most of their life) the “notice” and “consent” requirement in Maryland and it would dissuade them from proceeding despite having strong emotional bonds with the

prospective adoptive parent and pursuing the adoption for reasons related to those emotional relationships as well as inheritance and estate planning. There are so many positive and sound reasons adults seek to have their parental figures adopt them and it was often disheartening when they did not proceed because of the financial burden and/or the trauma it would cause them in engaging with or finding their legal parent.

As a member of the bench, I believe each Judge would review any adoption carefully and would, if there were concerns related to motivation or any other issue, order an investigation or inquire of the Parties or adoptee at a hearing on the matter before ruling on the Petition. I know from experience as a practitioner and member of the bench that each Judge views adoptions as incredibly special hearings. I believe every Judge who felt there was good cause to order an investigation would do so and when that is not the case, grant adoptions that give adult adoptees the closure and hope they need to have the best life possible.

Respectfully,

/s/

Jennifer Fairfax

# **HB0214, Bennett\_Rachael, Favorable Written Testimo**

Uploaded by: Rachael Bennett

Position: FAV

Rachael Bennett – Favorable Witness Testimony  
HB0214 Family Law – Adoption of an Adult  
Delegates Boyce & Grammer

Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

My name is Rachael Bennett and I testify in favor of House Bill # 214

For the first 22 years of my life, I was subjected to verbal abuse and emotional manipulation from my biological mother. Because of these years of abuse, I formed an eating disorder, I used alcohol as a coping mechanism, and I considered suicide. I've spent the last 7 years in counseling trying to make peace with my biological mother's abuse, to learn healthy tools to live with the effects from the abuse, and to grow a new appreciation for my stepmom, who stepped into the role of mom when I was 8.

For any abuse victim, a major part of their recovery is taking back their control. For me, that was asking my stepmom to adopt me to ensure that my abuser no longer had her parental rights to make major life decisions for me on my behalf. You can imagine the punch to my gut when I learned I couldn't do this without my abuser's permission. Let that sink in. I've spent 7 years in counseling to recover from 22 years of abuse and now the last piece of the puzzle to my recovery is in the hands of my abuser.

Now, let me be abundantly clear. The decision to call another person "mom" and make it official by law is not made lightly. It's a devastating reminder that the person who was supposed to love me unconditionally was the same person who chipped away at my psyche and made me believe I wasn't worth a dime on this earth.

So today, as a 29-year-old, I am asking you to take that piece of the puzzle out of her hands and put it back in mine. Take the control that parental abusers have over their victims and give it back to the victims so they can have a shot at a fulfilled life with full autonomy.

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**HB0214 - FAV - DHS.pdf**

Uploaded by: Rachel Sledge Government Affairs

Position: FAV

March 26, 2024

The Honorable Will Smith  
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: TESTIMONY ON HB0214 - Family Law – Adoption of an Adult - POSITION:  
FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Smith and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide written testimony in favor of House Bill 214 (HB0214).

With offices in every one of Maryland's jurisdictions, DHS serves to empower Marylanders to reach their full potential by helping with preventive and supportive services, economic assistance, and meaningful connections to workforce development and career opportunities. The Social Services Administration (SSA) within DHS implements the Child Welfare and Adult Services programs which serve individuals whose lives would be positively impacted by the passage of HB0214. The bill supports the Department's efforts to improve services, and family connections for older youth beyond their time in foster care.

Reversing Maryland's previous trends of older youth aging out of foster care is a priority, with building connections to family and kin, by blood or by choice, a key strategy. Youth who exit care without permanent connections to adults are more likely to struggle in their early adulthood, with 1 out of 5 youth experiencing homelessness, 50% struggling with employment, and over 50% becoming connected to juvenile justice.<sup>1</sup> House Bill 214 would support older youth in finding permanent family connections by allowing those over 18 years old the decision-making authority to consent to their own adoption. Currently, the Department has 95 youth, age 18 or older who have been with the same foster family or kin family for the last 18 months. Given our commitment to reduce how and why youth age out of care, HB0214 will reduce barriers to adult adoption and empower young adults and their families to decide if adoption is right for them.

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<sup>1</sup> Fowler PJ, Marcal KE, Zhang J, Day O, Landsverk J. Homelessness and Aging Out of Foster Care: A National Comparison of Child Welfare-Involved Adolescents. *Child Youth Serv Rev*. 2017 Jun;77:27-33. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.03.017. Epub 2017 Mar 30. PMID: 29056803; PMCID: PMC5644395.



Youth who emancipate from foster care, even if connected to an adult emotionally, do not have the same rights as a child who is adopted. House Bill 214 will allow a family to choose adoption with less administrative burden, allowing additional benefits for the adoptee, including the ability to receive Social Security benefits of the parent(s) and inheritance through intestate succession laws. Further, in the event of medical emergencies, it is important for adults to have trusted individuals who can help make life or death medical decisions and receive medical records. We must do all we can to empower former foster youth to make choices that respect their life and dignity. This bill will help fortify chosen families to make those medical decisions and protect them from potential harm during times of distress.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony and recommend a favorable position to the Committee for consideration during your deliberations. We look forward to the decision of the Committee and welcome continued collaboration on HB0214.

If you require additional information, please contact Rachel Sledge, Director of Government Affairs, at [rachel.sledge@maryland.gov](mailto:rachel.sledge@maryland.gov).

In service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rafael Lopez', written in a cursive style.

Rafael López  
Secretary



# **HB214 - Boyce Testimony (Senate).pdf**

Uploaded by: Regina T. Boyce

Position: FAV

REGINA T. BOYCE  
Legislative District 43A  
Baltimore City

—  
Vice Chair  
Environment and  
Transportation Committee

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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 26, 2024

Good afternoon, Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee.

For the record, I am Delegate Regina T. Boyce here to present **HB0214: Family Law – Adoption of an Adult**.

HB214 alters the provisions of law for adopting an adult (18 years or older) to include the termination of parental rights (TPR), investigations of the parent, and a home study, where necessary.

Adult adoption is common and occurs for a myriad of reasons. Some of those reasons include inheritance, medical decision-making, death of parents and/or relatives, stepchildren, or moving from a long-term foster relationship.

In the case of my constituent, she met the general parameters to adopt her son under the adoption laws, those under 18: abandonment, abuse, and lack of financial support, for instance. The adoptee was also international, with one parent in the United States and the other in another country. However, given the adoptee's age, 18 and over, the process required a host of steps deemed unnecessary for someone considered by law to be an adult.

After years of going through the process, time, and money, my constituent, through a court appointment by Zoom, officially adopted her son in the winter of 2022.

My constituent seeks to change the law to ensure no one goes through such an arduous ordeal and at times an unnecessary process.

Thank you for your time and consideration of HB214 and ask for your favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Regina T. Boyce".

Regina T. Boyce