

Testimony of Kelley Ray

BILL NO: HB214

TITLE: Family Law – Adoption of an Adult

COMMITTEE: Senate Judicial Proceedings

HEARING DATE: March 26, 2023

POSITION: Favorable

Mr. Chairman, Vice Chairman, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

My name is Kelley Ray and I am here to share my story. I adopted my former foster son, Carmelo, in November 2022. 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 too high to adopt my son, and I can afford it, others cannot. Because of this, 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 a few months later.

Carmelo entered the foster care system just 24 days before his 18th birthday. 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, no right, or privilege to know his business. And the emotions it brought up for my son just thinking of his past was traumatizing. His mental health is key to my role as his mom – I wanted to protect him from any more trauma but I had no control. Let's make sure other adult adoptees don't go through that same trauma.

Some asked me, "why and why now?" (when he was so much older). Of course, his naturalization had most to do with the delay. Other factors include inheritance and medical decision-making. Even with the proper Power of Attorneys and other legal documents, his birth person could intervene and she has not earned that right.

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 HB214.