

HB214 Testimony of Kelley Ray.pdf

Uploaded by: Kelley Ray

Position: FAV

Testimony of Kelley Ray

7419 Forrest Avenue | Baltimore, MD 21234 | kelleyray2014@gmail.com

BILL NO: HB 214

TITLE: Family Law – Adoption of an Adult

COMMITTEE: Judiciary

HEARING DATE: January 25, 2024

POSITION: FAV

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 son on November 29, 2022. He was 27. It was finalized, by zoom, in less than 10 minutes, yet it took us nearly five months and \$3,500 to get to that day because of the current laws and regulations. Our journey included hiring a lawyer, having the birth mother served, and searching for the birth father. All so that a 27-year-old, who never met his father, and whose birth mother beat him and kicked him out at 14, could be adopted.

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 because he didn't want his birth mother to know anything about this life. And he is right, she has no need, no right, and has not earned the privilege to know his business. The emotional toll it took on my son was significant. He had moved on from that time in his life, but our laws made him revisit his past.

Because my son's birth certificate had no father listed, and because of the current laws, the next step took me to Cameroon, a country in which my lawyer had no contacts. Fortunately, I found someone through my network, but calls with a translator at 4 am, and over \$700 to 1) run a small ad for one day, 2) get a notarized affidavit of publication, and 3) ship first class the required documents, not to mention the 90-day wait, seemed ridiculous.

This bill is about the rights of an adult adoptee to make their own decision without birth parent notification. And if time and cost is reduced, that too removes obstacles to an adult adoption.

I spent a lot of time researching adult adoption laws in other states and Maryland is far behind in addressing adult adoption. Last year, I brought this concern to Delegate Boyce; that bill did not get out of committee. This bill, thanks to Delegates Boyce and Grammer, and the Department of Human Services, offers a clear change to the adoption law to remove parental consent. I am asking you to return a favorable report on House Bill 214.

HB0214, Bennett_Rachael, Written & In Person Testi

Uploaded by: Rachael Bennett

Position: FAV

Rachael Bennett – Favorable Witness Testimony
HB0214 Family Law – Adoption of an Adult
Delegate Boyce

Written Testimony Submitted: 1/23/24
To be orally presented in person: 1/25/24 @ 1:00 pm

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, learning healthy tools to live with the effects from the abuse, and growing 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 I sit here today, as a 29-year-old adult, 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.

###

HB0214_DHS_FAV (2).pdf

Uploaded by: Rachel Sledge Government Affairs

Position: FAV

January 25, 2024

The Honorable Luke Clippinger
Chair, Judiciary Committee
House Office Building, Room 101
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

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

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and members of the Judiciary 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.¹ 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.

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

¹ 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.



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.

In service,

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

Rafael López
Secretary

HB214 - Boyce Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Regina T. Boyce

Position: FAV

REGINA T. BOYCE
Legislative District 43A
Baltimore City

—
Vice Chair
Environment and
Transportation Committee

Subcommittees
Housing and Real Property

Chair
Natural Resources, Agriculture
and Open Space



Annapolis Office
The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 251
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3476 · 301-858-3476
800-492-7122 Ext. 3476
Fax 410-841-3295 · 301-858-3295
Regina.Boyce@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

January 25, 2024

RE: Testimony for **HB0214: Family Law – Adoption of an Adult**

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

For the record, I am Delegate Regina T. Boyce here to present **HB0214: Family Law – Adoption of an Adult**. For historical reference, this bill was introduced in 2023 as HB1117 but no action was taken.

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