

## Testimony of Kelley Ray

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**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.