

Sheri A. Mullikin

3165 Caveat Court, Mt. Airy, Maryland 21771 | (410) 591-1300 | smullikin@mullikinlegal.com

April 1, 2026

TO: The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

RE: HB 1258 – Child Placement Services – Advertising by Unlicensed Persons

Position: Support with Amendments

Dear Chair and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I am writing to you as a Maryland adoptive parent to share my family's personal adoption journey and concerns about HB 1258. I understand and respect the intent behind HB 1258 to ensure ethical practices and protect vulnerable individuals in the adoption process; however, as currently drafted, the bill would significantly impact the ability of hopeful adoptive parents to pursue the adoption pathway best suited to their circumstances.

I respectfully suggest that the bill be amended to expressly allow advertising by:

- **Birth parents and prospective adoptive parents to independently match themselves**
- **Licensed attorneys**
- **Out-of-state child placement agencies**
- **National photolisting services and similar platforms that connect waiting children with prospective adoptive families**
- **Lawful organizations, including child welfare organizations, providing educational information**

These amendments would preserve ethical safeguards while ensuring that Maryland families retain access to lawful adoption pathways.

My Adoption Journey and HB 1258's Impact on Independent Adoption

Seventeen years ago, our son joined our family through an independent adoption. We matched directly with his birth parents through a mutual connection, without the use of an adoption agency. That experience allowed us to build a direct relationship based on openness, trust, and mutual respect—something that has resulted in lasting benefits for our son. More recently, the same adoption pathway brought my niece who was born in Maryland to my extended family. The parties connected after the birth parents received a card linking to a website, which allowed the adoptive parents to share who they are, photos, their values, their community, and their hopes for a child. Through that website, her birth parents were able to get to know them and envision what life would be like for their daughter growing up in that family.

One of the reasons we each chose to pursue independent adoption was affordability. Our total costs were roughly one-fourth of the cost of adopting through a private adoption agency. Our primary expense was attorney fees, which was essential to ensuring that the adoption was completed ethically and with appropriate legal protections for all parties.

Private, independent adoption, including self-matching, is a long-standing and lawful pathway in Maryland. Without it, my son and niece might not be part of my life today; yet, HB 1258 could significantly impact the ability of other Marylanders to pursue it because HB 1258's existing language would prevent birth and adoptive parents from advertising efforts to independently match through social media, websites, and listings where hopeful adoptive parents post their profiles (i.e. <https://profiles.adoption.com/>).

Similarly, HB 1258 is concerning in that it that it may prevent lawful entities, including attorneys and child welfare organizations, from communicating about adoption services. At the time I adopted in 2009, I did not practice adoption law as I do today. Like many prospective adoptive parents, I spent significant time researching my options, the costs involved, and the professionals who could guide me through the process. Restrictions on access to this type of information would make it much more difficult for families today to navigate their adoption journey.

HB 1258's Impact on Adoptions Through Out-of-State Child Placement Agencies

I am also concerned that the bill may unintentionally prevent out-of-state licensed adoption agencies from advertising in Maryland. Before ultimately pursuing a private adoption, I explored international adoption through a private agency. In international adoption, agencies typically offer “programs” in specific countries. Not all Maryland-licensed agencies offer programs in every country. Federal regulations require that prospective adoptive parents work with a qualified “primary adoption provider.” See 22 C.F.R. § 96.14 (“[I]n each intercountry adoption case, an accredited agency or an approved person will be identified and act as the primary provider.”). If advertising is limited only to Maryland-licensed agencies, Maryland families may have no practical way to identify agencies that offer programs in the country they hope to adopt from or that can serve as the required primary adoption provider. As a result, families could be unintentionally cut off from viable, lawful international adoption options.

HB 1258's Impact on Children in Foster Care Outside of Maryland Waiting to be Adopted

Before deciding upon a private adoption, I also reviewed multiple state and national photolistings of children waiting to be adopted, including those available through AdoptUSKids. These types of national photolisting services play an important role in connecting waiting children with families. Under the current language of HB 1258, these platforms may be unable to advertise or be accessed in Maryland, which would significantly limit the ability of families to learn about and pursue adoption opportunities for children who are already legally free for adoption. This would reduce, rather than expand, opportunities for permanency for waiting children.

Preserving the ability for individuals, attorneys, all licensed adoption agencies, and child welfare organizations to share information and connect, while maintaining appropriate legal safeguards, strikes the right balance between protection and access.

Thank you for your consideration and for your work on behalf of Maryland families.

Respectfully,



Sheri A. Mullikin