

## **Testimony given on 12/9/14 Re; Ohio Adoption Reform Bills SB250**

Please note this is the original written version and what was spoken verbatim will be slightly altered.

I am coming before you today to speak about the Adoption Reform Bills SB250. While the intent to improve adoption legislation in Ohio is both much needed and to be commended in my opinion, I respectfully submit that what is proposed as written does not take into consideration the reality of how adoption is practiced in the state of Ohio nor if such changes would actually benefit the citizens whose lives are sequentially touched by adoption whether they be the adoptive parents, the birth families or the actual children that become the adoptees. Based on the reality of adoption practices, it is of my firm belief that the changes proposed will actually hurt the very people you believe it shall benefit.

I am one of those people. My name is Carri Stearns and I live in Dublin. I am the mother of 6 children, five of whom I have been parenting successfully, often as a single mother, and my youngest, who is 8 months old, who I was forced to relinquish to adoption. Before experiencing this myself, I doubt I would have given any adoption bill a second thought and most like would have agreed with what you have proposed on paper as an improvement. However, I am living in the trenches of what the reality of what the adoption process really demands of people. I have seen the inside and I can tell you that it is very different of what you have carefully put to paper.

There is a saying in adoption: Adoption, like communism, looks good on paper, but neither one of them take into consideration human nature. While the desire to either improve the adoption process for people like myself or for a mechanism of meeting other goals such as reducing the rate of abortions in Ohio as ORTL would like SB250 to do; the means of getting to that goal is fatally flawed and will NOT do what you would like and in fact, could very well cause an opposite effect.

For example; I consider myself to be Pro-life. SO when I became pregnant last year, even when pressured to terminate my pregnancy, I refused and my intention was

always to parent this new baby like I have for all my others. Adoption did not even cross my mind until I was, weeks before birth, placed into a crisis situation where the wellbeing of my other five children was pit against the parenting of my yet unborn son Camden. It was at that point that I called a local Columbus adoption agency and had them lead me through the process. That process did fail both me and my family. The current law on Ohio actually has failed me as a mere few days after signing the relinquishment consent I realized the error of the placement and requested my child returned to me. However, Ohio does not have a revocation period for either party after signing a post birth consent, and to this day I am still fighting for my son to be reunited to me. May I repeat, I am Pro-life and yet, this process has been so horrible, so incredibly painful, so life altering awful that there are many days that I wish I would have given in and just had an abortion. An abortion would have been a million times easier than the last 8 months of this. And going forward now, even still being Pro-life, I could never recommend that any parent look to adoption as it is allowed to be practiced in Ohio now or with the changes proposed. Never.

For one, I respectfully doubt that any of the legislative body understands how the putative father's registry is actually used. While again, on paper, it is supposed to "protect" a father's right to know about his child's possible adoption court proceedings, it just does NOT happen that way. The greater majority of the population, much less the potential fathers, have no idea that such a registry even exists so they certainly will not be registering after every sexual encounter as they would need to do. The reality is that if a man and woman are not a couple to begin with or they break up, it is all too easy for a woman to keep him uninformed about her pregnancy. Our culture has created an atmosphere where a woman's choice is all her own and for others to "support" her decision, whatever it might be, even if it means she doesn't want a father involved. For a man to have a legal right to parent a child born to a woman he is not married to we are asking him to basically force himself into her life against her wishes. He is supposed to go to doctor's appointments with her and pay for things, yet how can he do that if she refuses to speak to him, blocks his calls, etc? Now enter adoption into the equation. If a man does not know of a pregnancy or doesn't insist on that level of "support", again, how is he going to know to register to retain his rights? He doesn't even know there is a possible child, much less a possible adoption.

And what do the agency's do? I can tell you what just happened to me in March. I was told to list my child's father as "unknown" on the birth certificate. I knew who he was. My agency knew who he was, but because he did not know to sign up for the PFR, he didn't matter during the adoption process and he had no choice. And when I told my agency social worker that I had told him about the PFR after my son's birth, she yelled at me and hung up the phone. The PFR is used as a tool to ignore fathers in adoption. If a man is not on the registry, and again, no one knows about it, then he just doesn't matter. He won't get involved because he just won't know until it is too late.

And he will NOT know. Over the weekend at my kids sporting events, and with five kids, there are many events in one weekend, I asked men, normal everyday fathers right here in Columbus if they knew about the PFR. [I asked 57 men and not ONE knew what the heck I was talking about.](#) They didn't know for themselves to protect their rights, nor did they know to inform their own sons to protect their son's rights.

I am not a singular example. I caution every single legislator here supporting a reduction of the PFR timeframe to look into the many cases in Utah where fathers were denied any information about their children's possible adoptions and legally thwarted by both the mothers and adoption professionals involved. Not only are these fathers having their rights restored but the class action suit against the state of Utah now has over 30 father's involved. Utah, which is known by some "adoption friendly" is actually seen as an easy state to cheat father's out of their rights. Agencies are known to import pregnant women from other states to get around father's rights. The proposed changes in law here in Ohio put's our state on par with Utah and that is not a good thing. The current law which gives a father 30 days post the birth of his child to sign the registry really doesn't even protect his rights as it is, but a reduction to 7 days is a true injustice.

The concept of allowing a father to consent to an adoption pre-birth is also just another mechanism to get a father out of the way earlier and to allow the adoption agency in question to promoted the adoption of the unborn child to the hopeful adoptive parents as a sure thing. It does not benefit him, nor even the mother, nor the child, nor, in truth, the hopeful adoptive parents. The idea of a new baby - even when unintended or fraught with concerns and conflict - is vastly different than the reality of the emotions felt when holding one's newborn. It is now a long held

standard of best practice in adoption that birthparents must "say hello before they can say goodbye" and that the true decision of relinquishing a child by a mother cannot happen before the reality of the child's birth, yet we expect that father's should be denied the same feelings and emotions? Logic might make it seem that a parents desires are to not parent their own child, but the natural instincts and biologically connections that occur post birth defy that logic and make us, as a species, bond with our offspring and defy any past logical conclusions. To allow a rebirth consent of a father to be irrevocable is cruel, inhumane and falsely attempting to allow law to override millions of years of evolution.

You will not have "easier" adoptions, but more father, like me, fighting in court for their God given right to parent their own children. The results of that will be more emotional distress to the potential adoptive families, a greater financial burden on all the families and the agencies, and most importantly damage to the children as they will be, like my own son, in a legal limbo as the courts try to rule on who has a right to be their legal parents based on falsely signed papers.

The acceptance of adoption advertising as proposed in SB250 is likewise a horrible mistake. It's bad enough when we allow hopeful adoptive parents to be "proactive" and advertise in order to find an expectant mother who might consider allowing them to adopt her baby, but to allow mothers to advertise that they have a child to relinquish is just opening up the state to be a Mecca for child trafficking. For one, it will openly state that Ohio supports "re-homing". There is not enough time to go into the issues of adoption re-homing, but if you have not read the wonderful Reuters' report on it, I beg you to do so. Then I am sure you will agree that no one wants Ohio known for that. Legal adoption advisement also means that parties in adoption can locate each other and make arrangements to transfer child without any legal oversight and also does allow them to state what financial arrangements they require or are willing to make. Basically, you are allowing baby selling.

Now, again on paper, we say that this is not baby selling or baby buying, but if we ignore the role of money in adoption then we are all being willfully ignorant. Adoption is a 13 billion dollar industry in the USA. Adoption is always very much about money and that is why much of the proposed bills both talk much about the funding and accounting of the various expenditures and expenses. Hopeful adoptive parents must put out huge amounts of their money as "fees" and the great majority

of woman who look to relinquish do so based on a lack of resources and often much of that stems from the financial ability. I ask you to spend some time and look at Ohio adoption websites to see what services they "offer" mothers considering adoption and a great proportion of those services have a monetary value. In my own case, I did not require any monetary assistance at all, but my agency offered me the \$3,000 maximum "payment" repeatedly. Now I can only assume that the adoptive family that had wanted to adopt my son had paid out \$3,000 for these possible expenses that I did not require? I know that there is amount in the thousands that change hands before any potential child gets placed with an adoptive family, so I will say that yes, there needs to be careful account of such funds for the sake of all involved. I am happy to see that SB250 at least notes that hopeful adoptive parents be given notice and credited for paying expenses in a failed placement. If not for that, then not only are we setting up Ohio families to be taken advantage of but we are putting them in a place where they will be both emotional and financially drained by the long adoption process. How could we ask that of people? Or perhaps the bigger question is why?

These proposed changes as I see them only serve to benefit the adoption industry. I ask you to look to see who has asked you for these changes and who supports them. I can tell you that it is not the average citizen of Ohio who knows nothing about the reality of adoption practices nor the people who go into adoption form with side trusting the in the professionals and expertise of the professionals. HB307 should not be hastily approved and pushed into law. If I can ask anything of you today, it is for you to pause and just stop. I admire your intentions to improve the process, but say again, you just do not know. Please wait until next years and after careful research, look again into how to make adoption better in Ohio for our children. This is too important to get wrong. It affects people on the most primal and fundamental level. Yes, we need to improve adoption laws in the state, but we need to get it right. And SB250 is good enough yet. Not by far.