

**Proponent Testimony on House Bill 307
House Health and Aging Committee
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Lucie Blumenthal, MA LPC
Director of Adoption Services
Adoption Circle
400 South Fifth Street, Suite 304
Columbus, Ohio 43215
Office: 614-237-7222
Mobile: 614-348-7356
lucie@adoptioncircle.org

Good morning Chairman Watchmann, Vice Chair Gonzales, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the House Health and Aging Committee.

My name is Lucie Blumenthal. I am a Licensed Professional Counselor, a State Certified Adoption Assessor and the Director of Adoption Services of Adoption Circle. I would like to thank Mike Gonadakis and his staff at Ohio Right to Life for all their hard work in this much needed adoption reform legislation. I am grateful for this opportunity and consider it a privilege to present my proponent testimony for H.B. 307. To support my testimony please consider my professional experiences that follow:

- 1985 – Began consulting with a private non-profit adoption agency and working with adoptive parents.
- 1985-Present – Supervised social workers working with adoptive families, providing education and training while completing their home studies.
- 1991-Present – Co-founder of Adoption Circle and Director of Adoption Services, a state licensed private child placement agency, (PCPA)
- 1996-Present – Member of OAPG (Ohio Adoption Planning Group), assisting in legislative change in public and private agencies

As an experienced advocate for adoption reform, I encourage you to pass H.B. 307 because it addresses important issues involving birthmothers, birthfathers, adoptive parents and children. The children, Ohio children, are the number one concern for everyone here and this is why I stand before you today with my testimony. The adoption reform outlined in H.B. 307 will allow for a much smoother, safeguarded adoption process on all levels.

One way H.B. 307 will assure more Ohio families have the opportunity to adopt is by relieving some of the financial burden placed upon prospective parents. The bill proposes that the adoption tax credit offered to Ohio adoptive families be increased from \$1,500 to \$10,000, with

the flexibility to roll over unused portions of the credit for four years. This tax incentive will provide the gift of adoption for middle income families who otherwise could not afford the process. As a Director of Adoption Services for over twenty years at Adoption Circle, I have seen too many families shy away from moving forward with an adoption because of the monetary commitment needed for each step. Adoption should be available to all regardless of income.

Secondly, I am a proponent of H.B. 307 because allows for the adoption decree to be challenged for up to 60 days post finalization, rather than the current provision of 12 months. This relieves the unnecessary emotional distress that we see parents go through after placement. During my 28 years working at an adoption agency, I have not witnessed one birthparent come forward after the final decree. So why have these new adoptive families worry for an entire year that their child might not remain part of their family? The proposed 60 day time period would still give more than enough time to address last minute issues if they arise from any party involved in the adoption process.

Another part of the legislation's provisions will concentrate on the birthfather's opportunity to claim or assert his parental rights in the pre-birth period. H.B. 307 proposes a pre-birth notice may be given to the birthfather with clear direction on how to obtain his parental rights or become involved with the adoption plan from the beginning, if desired, rather than waiting until the baby is born. It protects the rights of the birthfather, allowing for early opportunity to be involved in the parental decision making for the child. In my experience working with birthfathers, this legislation would help prevent possible litigation and complications after the baby is born in addition expediting the finalization of adoption. This type of proactive language in the Ohio law will help to smooth out any potential issues in the adoption process before the child enters the world and will help protect all parties involved in the adoption. I think it is always good practice for agencies and attorneys working on the birthmother's behalf to cover all options for child placement to assure the best possible environment is in place when baby is born.

If adoption is the birthmother's choice for the child, this bill will help to ensure the infant's smooth legal transition into the world by reducing the number of days the putative father may register from 30 days after birth of the child to 7 days. Ohio law has always been that the birthfather was "on notice of the potential of fathering a child from the point of time of conception." Therefore, a birthfather has nine months to step forward to claim his parental rights prior to the initiation of a putative father registry. This legislation is only reducing the post birth period for a birthfather to come forward from 30 days to 7 days. A birthmother cannot sign permanent placement papers (relinquishing her parental rights) until 3 days after birth. Therefore, a birthfather would have 4 more days to register. It reduces the "risk" of the

placement significantly and permits additional security for the child. As a result, the provision of the pre-birth notice in my opinion would in practice be a more secure process for all involved as it balances the 23 day reduction in post birth notice while providing early notice.

Lastly, HB 307 clarifies Ohio law in how the legal living expenses up to \$3000.00 shall be provided to a birthmother. Current law is vague that it gives little or no direction on how these monies can be legally provided. Adoption Circle has historically managed the distribution of funds to birthmothers in a similar manner as outlined in HB 307. I believe it provides the much needed support to birthmothers while attempting to limit the abuse of these funds that are generally provided by the prospective adoptive parents.

Thank you for your time this morning. As you can see, H.B. 307 will allow for a clearer path for all adoption professionals helping adoptive parents become permanent families. Not only will it help adoptive families financially, H.B. 307 opens doors to those who could not adopt at present. Lastly, H.B. 307 clearly spells out birthfather rights and responsibilities in a timely manner and ensures the safeguard of the adoption process for the children involved which is our first concern in this adoption reform. Please consider all of these options to improve Ohio legislation for future adoptive families.