

Proponent Testimony for H.B. 61
Sara Blubaugh

March 13, 2013

Good afternoon Chairman Butler, Vice Chairwoman Pelanda, Ranking Member Stinziano, and members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for this privilege in speaking before you today.

My name is Sara Blubaugh. I have a Master's of Science in Social Administration from Case Western Reserve University. I am a married, stay-at-home mother to four young children and a birthmother to one. In 1988, at the age of 17, I surrendered my first-born son to adoption through Lutheran Social Services in Columbus, OH.

After learning of my pregnancy, my life seemed to swirl out of my control. It was inevitable that my parents would come into the equation, telling my boyfriend and I that we were not to see each other again. I was told to keep my pregnancy a secret from other extended family members, and to this day, there are some who do not know. My parents strongly believed that at 17, I was in no position to raise a child and that adoption was in my baby's best interest; thus, they were averse to providing the level of support that would be needed for me to successfully raise my son while completing my education. I cannot recall a single authority figure, whether family, clergy, teacher, or the agency's counselor, working with me to formulate a viable parenting plan.

In 1988, my choices and participation in the adoption process were very limited. In this closed adoption, I was restricted from selecting, meeting, learning the names of, or even seeing a picture of the parents who would be entrusted to love and protect my son. If openness and identifying information had been offered to me, I certainly would have embraced them. I did not want anonymity from my son or his family. In fact, when my son was born, I purposely had his birth announcement listed in The Columbus Dispatch with the hope that if he wanted to look for me someday, he could find the announcement and learn my name. Not a year has gone by that I didn't give birthday cards, Christmas gifts and letters to the agency to send on to his family in the hopes that my son would know that I have always loved him, missed him, and wanted to know him.

To further support my testimony, I have attached a copy of my surrender documentⁱ (*not included in the online version of this testimony*). It very clearly states that I am giving up all my rights to my son. It states that I severed all my parental rights and connections to my child and that I will abide by agency rules and not attempt to communicate with my child outside of the agency. These papers gave me nothing and promised me nothing, including anonymity. On the contrary, I was told that my son would not want to search for me, that I would never be able to find him, and that I should not try.

The agency was incorrect about my son not wanting to contact me. Three years ago, he wrote a letter seeking to remove the agency from the equation and communicate

directly. Slowly, we began getting to know each other. This past fall, we reunited in person and discussed many things, including questions he had about his heritage and his birthfather. We have looked through pictures and talked about personality traits as well as many innocuous things such as food preferences. I watched him recognize physical features and piece together more parts of himself.

Much has been said about the role social media and technology plays in the issue of adoption reunion. However, it should be noted that many birthparents and their children unknowingly reside in the same communities, invisible to each other. For nearly his entire life, my son and I have lived within 18 miles of each other, hidden in broad daylight. Remarkably, we learned that I had actually seen him on an unseasonably warm March day, months before our reunion, at the local batting cages where both he and one of my younger sons coincidentally practice.

This past Christmas season was the most joyful I have ever experienced. Wearing Santa hats and arms overflowing with packages, my son and his fiancée arrived at my home, to meet my husband and our four children. We all had such a wonderful time that my younger children are always looking for opportunities to spend time with their big brother. While I am painfully aware of all that I lost by not having the privilege of being my son's everyday mother, I am grateful for the time I can be with him now. I also look forward to the future of getting to know his family - the family that has loved and nurtured him all these years.

I hope that my testimony today has provided you with a clear indication of the limited options of a 17 year old birthparent in 1988. Furthermore, I'm hopeful that my testimony illustrates how Ohio's sealed records law imposed secrecy on me, and more importantly my son, and I never wanted that.

As a birthparent, I ask you for your support of H.B. 61. Through this bill's "contact preference form", birthparents would have a voice in this process that we were never given before. Please give my son, as well as the other adults who were adopted in this great state from 1964 to 1996, the right to access their original birth certificates. Thank you for your consideration.

ⁱ Due to the widespread availability of information in this Internet age, and in preparation for this testimony, I have partially covered my and my parents' signatures from the 1988 document.