

Proponent Testimony for H.B. 61

Stephanie A. Olson

My name is Stephanie Olson, I currently reside in Canal Winchester, Ohio. I have raised 3 beautiful children with my husband of 35 years. I have worked in Health Care for the last 20 years.

At the age of 15 in 1974, in small town Mingo Junction, Ohio - my pregnancy was viewed as a disgrace to my family, the Catholic church and society. Hiding on the backseat floor of the car was my directive, the confessional was my first stop, then to pack my things and get taken away, dropped off at a home for unwed mothers, to serve out my sentence. The 'story' was created that I was helping a family member out of town – no one could know the truth. On December 31 my son was born, he was also beautiful. He was taken away and I was told to move on with my life and the subject was closed. At Catholic Charities I was told to sign papers that were not explained to me. I have no idea what statements were made on them or what rights I was denying myself or my son as I signed his precious life away. I had no choice – or voice. I was not given options, I was not permitted to freely choose, speak out, ask questions or be part of any decisions made on my behalf or that of my son. Because of the societal 'climate' and Ohio's sealed record laws, secrecy was demanded of me, suppression of the truth was the expectation.

Anonymity was not my choice.

Fast forward to present day, through a chance encounter, I was put in contact with an amazing group of people who are helping me with my healing which has brought me here today. You see, it has only been in the last 5 months that I have had the strength, courage and support to break the silence about my son, although my love for him has haunted me for 38 years. As I contemplate whether search and reunion is part of my journey, I know I could face challenges and obstacles. I do not want that for my son in *his* decisions, his *right* to know and discover any information that will complete his 'whole self', fill a need or even answer a basic question. I wholeheartedly support his right and that of all adoptees to have open access to the choice of obtaining their original birth certificate.

Through H.B. 61's contact preference form, I would also have a voice in this process that I was never given before.

I no longer want to be anonymous, I choose to no longer live with the secret. I do not want to suppress my truth and I thank you for this opportunity to speak to the pain in my heart and soul. Please consider my voice in the outcome of the passage of House Bill 61. I want my son to have the choice. Please pass House Bill 61.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Olson