



Kayla Smith
Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 23
Senate Medicaid, Health, and Human Services Committee
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Good afternoon Chairwoman Jones, Vice Chair Burke, Ranking Member Cafaro, and members of the committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today in favor of Senate Bill 23.

As Director of Legislative Affairs for Ohio Right to Life, I speak on behalf of our Board, our affiliated chapters, and members of our organization. I am here today to express the support of Ohio Right to Life for this measure, and explain how our position on the issue of opening adoption records has evolved.

Some of you may know that for decades, Ohio Right to Life opposed opening adoption records to adoptees adopted between 1964 and 1996. The concerns of privacy and the repercussions for adoptive families, however, are fading with time as cultural perceptions about adoption have changed. Historically, arguments to keep the records closed were based on the idea that it would protect adoptees from potential embarrassment about the circumstances of their birth, or to protect adoptees from unwanted contact from birth parents. Frankly, these are outdated concerns, but it is this rationale that keeps 1964 – 1996 adoptees from being able to access their original birth certificate. Ohio law keeps these records closed, yet when the laws were revisited in 1996, it was decided that all adoptions finalized after that point are open unless parents choose to close their records. Even so, most of the younger adoptees (born in 1996 and after) will have the ability to obtain their original birth certificate from the Office of Vital Statistics when they are 21 years old. Those born in the previous window do not have this option, creating a disparity based simply on the year they happened to be born.

It is our belief that supporting Senate Bill 23, which regards adult adoptees accessing their original birth certificates, would not be a disservice to birth mothers who have placed their child

for adoption. Legal guarantees could never have been made to these mothers to ensure their children would never have access to their original birth certificate. Again, this was not the intent of the law even in 1964 when it was enacted, but the law always provided that adoptees, at age 18, could petition the probate court that sealed their records to release them if the court found good cause. Senate Bill 23 allows for the completion of a “Contact Preference Form,” to be completed by the birth mother and included in the record, stating whether and how the mother would want to be contacted. This creates a safety net for mothers who may be concerned about their own privacy. It is significant to note that in a study of the other eight states where this measure has been implemented, on average **one in 2,000** birth parents preferred to not be contacted.

Though it has been said before, I would like to echo Representative Pelanda’s comments that allowing this bill to become law would fill a missing puzzle piece in adoptees lives. For so many of us, knowing information on our birth certificate is a basic part of our life – knowing our ethnicity, or what time of day we were born. Regardless of how important (or unimportant) these tidbits of information are, these are vital pieces of information shared with friends and families throughout our lives. For adoptees born between 1964 and 1996 this information is not available to them. Imagine the years of wondering and searching. How lost some of these adoptees may feel. We are human. It is only *natural* to wonder these things and only fair to let these adult adoptees stop wondering.

At Ohio Right to Life, our mission is to promote and defend the dignity of human life from conception until natural death. One avenue we pursue to promote this mission is to encourage adoption instead of abortion for women who find themselves in the situation of an unwanted pregnancy. Our President’s has adopted two children, and he sees no reason to be concerned. If we had any reservations about this bill and the effect it would have on chances of women choosing abortion over adoption, I would not be standing before you in support of the measure today. Additionally, the companion bill in the House passed with flying colors, with a favorable vote of 96-1. Ohio Right to Life is proud to be a part of a measure that brought Democrats and Republicans together. Chairwoman Jones, Vice Chair Burke, Ranking Member Cafaro, and members of the Committee, I encourage you to favorable vote for this bill. Thank you and I welcome any questions you may have.