

Chairman Butler and the members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is David Matia, Jr and I am here today in support of H.B. 61. I currently serve as a General Division Common Pleas judge in Cuyahoga County. I am named after my father, a former judge and member of the Ohio General Assembly.

I was born David John Kupras in Lackawanna, NY on October 25, 1964. My birth mother, Noel Kupras Bauer, who is present with me today, gave birth in a facility associated with Our Lady of Victory and the Father Baker Home in Lackawanna. By January of 1965, I was a resident of Ohio, having been adopted by my parents, David and Joan Matia.

My parents were very open about where I came from. I recall visiting Our Lady of Victory when I was very young. My parents also adopted my sister from there. I also recall several offers made by my parents over the years to help if I wished to find my birth parents. I had a happy upbringing and was not interested.

It was not until my wife, Monica, and I married in 1992 and started to consider beginning our own family that a curiosity to meet my birth parents awoke. For reasons I cannot explain, my father had a copy of my original New York birth certificate among his records. I knew my given name at birth - David John Kupras.

In 1994 I was a young lawyer with access to Lexis/Nexis. You may recall that the internet was still in its infancy at that time. I used Nexis to search for individuals with the last name of Kupras. I found fourteen. I remain grateful that my birth name was rather uncommon. None of these individuals lived in New York State. In fact, the majority of the addresses were in California.

One Monday in June of 1994, I sent out 14 generic letters seeking information about my birth parents. I have nothing but compliments for the U.S. Postal Service as I received a phone call from my birth mother, Noel Kupras Bauer, then of Columbus, Ohio on the following Friday. Her mother, my biological grandmother, had received one of my letters in San Diego, CA earlier that Friday.

My wife and I met both of my birthparents, their spouses, my three half brothers and three half sisters over the next few months. Monica and I have three children with two extra sets of grandparents. My life has been enriched in countless ways by the relationships I have with my birth parents and their families. We have traveled together. We have attended weddings and births. We have celebrated many good times and we have also helped each other through the more trying times that life delivers.

I am in my fifteenth year as a judge. Both my mother, Joan, and my father died before my election in 1998. It meant a great deal to me to have my birth mother Noel and her husband Larry along with my birthfather, Tom and his wife, Margy as witnesses to my swearing in in 1999.

As a judge, I consider myself in the "fairness" business. This bill is needed to correct an unfair and unequitable quirk in our state's adoption laws. As you are aware, Ohio has a three tiered adoption system for access to birth records. Those born subsequent to 1964 and prior to 1996 have virtually no opportunity to access their original birth certificate to begin a process similar to the one began by me in 1994.

All Ohioan adoptees need to be treated equally under the law. I urge you to pass this bill in order to give all other Ohio adoptees a chance to enjoy the same good fortune that I have been given through chance.

Ironically, in my preparation for my testimony today, I learned that in 1963 a young member of the Ohio House named David T. Matia voted for the bill that closed the doors to access for those born after 1964. His vote was cast long before he brought me home from Lackawanna. My father was a thoughtful man, one who learned from experience. He knew how to recognize and right a wrong. I am sure that his thoughts and his vote would be quite different today.