

Chairman Butler, Vice Chair Pelanda, Ranking Member Stinziano, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 61.

My name is Julia Derry and I was adopted on September 13th, 1968 from the United Methodist Children's Home in Worthington. One of the things that makes me unique is specifically that date, or rather, the year in which I was adopted. You see, because I was adopted between the dates of January 1, 1964 and September 18, 1996, absolutely everything about me began on that date. Unlike biological parents who share memories of ancestors and important events that are a part of who that family is, my adoptive parents' memory of me began on the day they received me from the adoption agency. Because I was adopted in 1968, the state of Ohio has sealed all known information of my history.

I could not have asked for a better adoptive family. My parents were loving, kind and generous to me and my 3 brothers. All of my brothers were my parents' biological children, but nobody would have ever known that I was "different" than my siblings; I was treated with the same care and love as anyone in my family. In fact I would not have known during my childhood that I was adopted if it were not for my parents openly sharing that with me. Of course, in time, I would have figured out that something was different and that I wasn't "biological". Natural science would have made that clear.

Today I'm speaking to you from the perspective of an adoptee and why it is important to other Ohio adoptees between 1964 and 1996 for House Bill 61 to be passed.

It seems that the human race has an innate need to know their origins. As children we ask our parents and grandparents about when they were little girls and boys and what their parents were like. In grade school we are encouraged to know our heritage and all the children sit in a circle and share with one another what they know about "where they came from". The teacher says the name of one student "Joey Latella, did you know you have Italian heritage?" and explains to the class how she knows, then she goes on to a few other students, "Sally McAllister, - probably Irish...Emanuel Rodriguez...Latin American..." Most people in the US need only the last name of their mother or father to give them a huge amount of insight into their past because the name immediately reveals their "nationality"...their "heritage". Other names are not so obvious and require further investigation to discover more about the origins of a family. Yet they begin that search with a single name. I am denied that basic right, because the adoption law in Ohio in 1968 was closed by default, my biological mother and I both need to research what is required to open those records and follow those procedures before I will find out anything about my heritage.

It took me a long time to even know what those procedures were. And now that I know everything that my mother and I both have to do, I'm even more discouraged that even if we both desire to know information about one another, it may never happen. This is why it is imperative House Bill 61 is passed.

Not knowing my past also prevents me from passing my heritage to my children. Not only am I denied that right but my children and grandchildren will share the same injustice. My children are grown now - they have always been inquisitive about "I wonder what my "real" grandmother and grandfather are like; I wonder if they are still living. It is always amazing to see people that look so much alike and you just know that they are related. They may have the same eyes, a smile or laugh but there is no denying it. I have enjoyed seeing that with my children because, believe me, there is no doubt we are related, you can 'see yourself in them'. But growing up I didn't have anyone that I looked like. I couldn't 'see myself' in anyone else. We have all resolved that we will probably never know - not out of the lack of trying; but purely out of fate. Because I'm one of the adoptees in the state of Ohio between 1964 and 1996, it is my fate to not have the same rights as children born and adopted today.

According to my doctor, had I the opportunity to know my biological parents' medical history, I could possibly have averted an invasive surgery I had a couple of years ago requiring me to be on medication for the rest of my life. And I can only wonder what other fate awaits me because the state of Ohio hasn't done everything they can to provide me with my basic right to know as much about myself as I can possibly discover.

I come before you today as a very blessed individual who was given the gift of life. I am so incredibly grateful for that gift. I have had amazing opportunities with the support of a wonderful family in my life's journey, that I know my birth parents, Mom...Dad...you would be really proud of the life that you gave and of the person I am.

We all have an innate desire to know our heritage, I am asking you to please pass Ohio House Bill 61.

Thank you Chairman Butler, Vice Chair Pelanda, Representative Stinziano, and Committee for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions from the committee.