

Curb Unlawful Adoption Practices

Desired Outcomes

We seek to amend Ohio law to strengthen safeguards against unlicensed adoption intermediaries and to implement penalties for violations. Adoption services should only be provided by licensed, regulated, nonprofit adoption agencies and attorneys. Additionally, only these entities should be allowed to use paid advertising for adoption services in Ohio.

Current Situation

Incidents of illegal adoption-related activity are occurring in Ohio, wherein unregulated, unlicensed entities are advertising and providing adoption-related services to hopeful adoptive parents and pregnant women in exchange for money in Ohio. There are examples where unlicensed adoption brokers charge prospective adoptive parents a nonrefundable “match” fee of up to \$30,000 in exchange for arranging an introduction between the prospective parents and a pregnant woman or the biological mother of a child. These fees are charged in addition to the actual cost of conducting a legal adoption by a licensed agency and/or attorney. These activities take advantage of vulnerable Ohioans, inviting the potential for child trafficking and blurring the line between the provision of legitimate adoption services and gray market adoptions.

These unlicensed adoption providers target individuals at stressful points of life, including women facing an unintended pregnancy, children in need of an adoptive home, and couples often desperate to adopt a child. Ohio is one of 33 states that have enacted laws prohibiting unlicensed adoption providers from advertising or providing adoption services; however, these laws are not being enforced.

Proposed Changes to Ohio Law

by HB 713, Joint Sponsors Representative Somani and Representative Hoops:

1. Provides clearer and stronger language around what is allowed under current law to reduce ambiguity and prevent unlawful practices.
2. Defines both criminal and civil penalties for entities engaging in unlawful adoption-related practices to ensure accountability and deterrence
3. Outlines a specific process for reporting entities suspected of illegally facilitating or advertising adoptions in Ohio, and expands who can make such reports, allowing both interested persons and interested parties to report unlawful practices (e.g., individuals, professionals, agencies).
4. Permits only Ohio licensed adoption agencies and attorneys to engage in paid advertising in Ohio for adoption services, and to offer, or seek, adoption matches for prospective adoptive or birth parents.
5. Bans Ohio adoption providers from referring clients to out-of-state service providers who offer services beyond what would be allowed under Ohio law, ensuring consistent protections across jurisdictions.
6. Ensures all adoption agencies licensed to operate in Ohio be structured as nonprofit organizations, aligning with the state’s interest in protecting children and families, providing greater transparency, and limiting the commodification of children.



For More Information

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