

SENATE FEDERAL & STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

March 20, 2018

Bill Number SB 401

Julie Samaniego, Licensed Clinical Marriage and Family Therapist – Founder, Circle of Love, Inc.

In support

For the past 30 years I have been working with women in crisis pregnancy, who have chosen to place their baby for adoption. I also work with couples and families who build their families through adoption. I do not work for an agency or attorney, but instead, work independently, alongside these adoption professionals as an advocate and case work manager for the birth mother. Many times, I am also an adoption “coach” to the adoptive couple.

My testimony today is to present information about how I meet the needs of my clients, and how adoption has changed this over the past 3 decades. My perspective is formed through years of experience, as well as through my academic training and private practice as a Marriage and Family Therapist, licensed to diagnose and treat mental and emotional illness.

When I first began assisting women with their adoption plans, most adoptions were either “closed” or “semi open”, in terms of information shared between the birth mother and the adoptive couple. Therefore, the known needs of the birth mother were very limited to her immediate care, such as maternity clothes, financing medical needs and some assistance with living expenses.

Although this continues to be common, over the years, adoption plans have become more and more “open”. Not only is more information being shared about the birth mothers’ circumstances and decision to choose an adoption plan for her baby, but also an interest from people outside the adoption triad willing to help with birth mother’s and adoptive couple’s needs.

This has opened up an entirely new and energized resource for helping professionals like me. Organizations like Catholic Charities, agencies like Christian Family Services and St. Nick’s Adoption Agency, Embrace and other Pregnancy Care Centers, have all developed volunteer bases that assists with the needs of not only the birth mother, but also her family and her non-pregnancy related issues. Services for adoptive couples in the process of adoption and years after placement have also increased.

For example, many of the women who choose adoption now, as opposed to 20-30 years ago, already have 2-5 children they are either parenting or who are in foster care. These woman have complicated cases. To truly help these women, assessing all of the circumstances that have led her to an adoption plan should be considered. Many of the birth mothers that I have advocated for over the last 3 years have children in foster care that they are trying to regain custody of. Helping her meet her court orders to achieve this becomes part of my work with her. Perhaps she needs help moving into a new place. This might require help with a deposit or getting utilities turned on. Donations of furnishings, clothes for the kids, help with exploring educational and training opportunities and job search skills, bus passes or rides to appointments, all might be included in meeting her needs. Sometimes respite care is needed for the children at home.

As I function as a case work manager for these women and their family, I am forever chasing down these services and donations. The organizations and agencies mentioned above are who I turn to. These birth mothers and their families receive many donations of material goods, financial assistance, and social services at no charge to them, through the faith-based organizations and their supporters. I can not serve these women and meet their needs without the help of these organizations.

I am speaking today to in support of SB 401 because what I have found is that faith-based organizations have the resources through their supporters to meet the needs of these families with unconditional love, showing respect to these women and helping them find or retain their dignity through this difficult time.

I also work with adoptive couples. Couples who adopt have also expanded to include families who, because of their faith, open their homes and grow their families through adoption and foster care. No longer is adoption just for couples who are infertile or helping out a family member who finds themselves in need of a kinship adoption. Currently, there is an exciting movement throughout churches and their congregations to get involved in foster care and adoption, as they feel compelled to do when following the examples and commands of the Holy Bible. They do this from the love that they choose to extend to others, not out of a sense of weary compliance or financial incentives. I have been amazed by how many families have actively sought out an "opportunity" for them to accept these "little ones" into their hearts and homes. Especially heartwarming to witness is the openness these families have to include into their family a child with special needs. More and more, children born to substance abusing birth moms require more time in the NICU, ongoing medical treatments and concerns, and special classes in school. More of these children are being put into foster care at birth. The families of faith are stepping up and claiming these children as their own.

In conclusion, I support SB 401 because to limit the resources of any one faith-based organization, church, agency or service provider, in what they do best, would be failing these women, their children, families of faith, our communities and in a broader respect, the taxpayers of Kansas.

Julie Samaniego

530 N Bay Country St

Wichita, KS 67235

316-706-4763