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Re: HB2333

Dear Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

My name is Kathleen Irish and I am an attorney with a solo private practice in Kansas City, Missouri. I have been licensed to practice law in the state of Missouri since 2009, and the state of Kansas since 2010.

I am presenting this testimony for you today in support of house bill 2333.

My legal practice involves primarily family-based immigration with an emphasis on juvenile immigration matters, including adoptions. In my career, I have assisted many families with adoptions and guardianships in the states of Kansas and Missouri, as well as in many countries abroad. Many of the adoptions that I have handled have involved adoptions of family members. For many reasons, intrafamily adoptions are often in the best interests of the child and the larger family as a whole. I have also assisted with and consulted on adoptions of children placed in state foster care, many of whom are older youth in search of permanent and loving homes.

The process of and decision to adopt a child involves much more than the filing of a petition with the local District Court. It involves taking a child that is not of your womb into your home and accepting them as yours and yours alone. It is a process that takes time, patience, and love. It is so much more than a court filing of legal paperwork. For many families, the act of accepting a child into your home transcends the legal process of formally adopting them. For them, the filing of a petition in a court to formalize an adoption is the final procedural step in a complex process that may have begun many years earlier. For them, that child has already been a part of their lives and their home for many years leading up to that final day in court. For children in state foster care, the timeline that dictates their adoption process is completely beyond their control and affected by numerous external factors that can cause significant delays.

For most adoptions, the final hearing in court where the adoption decree is signed by the judge is the day when the adoption becomes legally final. And for most families this is sufficient. But for some families, there are collateral considerations outside of that final hearing affecting whether or not the newly minted 'family' can remain together. Sometimes equity and justice require acknowledging that this family has existed far longer than what would be reflected on that final adoption decree. That is what this bill is about. Ensuring that all families created through adoption from love in our great state are able to remain intact, regardless of when they were able to finalize and formalize their adoption. No child should be separated from her family because she was deemed 'too old' to have been adopted when the ink on her final adoption decree was dry. This bill is not about changing facts or rewriting history. This bill is about acknowledging that families are made and created in many different ways, and on many different

timelines, but that regardless of how or when they were made, they are all still families, and they all deserve the right and ability to be together, forever.

For these reasons and others, I am here today to ask for your support of HB2333.

Thank you for your time and consideration and for allowing me to testify on this important matter.

Kathleen Irish