

Chairman Ginter, Vice Chair LaTourette, Ranking Member Boyd, and committee members, thank you for hearing my testimony for House Bill 420.

I would like to take this time to share a brief history of Adoption Circle. Adoption Circle was first licensed in 1991. The first Adoption occurred in 1992. Since that time, Adoption Circle has had over 1300 Placements. Adoption Circle works with birth mothers all over that State of Ohio. Adoption Awareness Month is such a need, because unlike in the past when adoption was taboo, examples being pregnant homes, send women away, closed adoptions, or plan B for family growth, adoption is now being celebrated and talked about on television and in social media and adoption forums. Adoption Professionals educate and see the benefit of having openness in adoption. Adoptees want to know about their biological connections. This is part of their identity. Having a month to celebrate adoption is a month that celebrates adoptees, adoptive families and birth families. It enhances all adoption triad members' self-esteem and the realization that being adopted into a family is just another normal way of building a family. Adoption Circle has seen the need of adoptees as the agency routinely gets calls from adult adoptees searching for and wanting to know more information about their adoption. Adoption is always a part of life for an adoptee, and Ohio Adoption Awareness Month would be a month to celebrate adoptees.

I can speak with you on a personal basis as well. Prior to joining Adoption Circle as their legal counsel, my husband and I were waiting parents with Adoption Circle. Our bundle of joy was born in June, 2010. She is African American and amazing. Since our adoption occurred almost eight years ago, we have a closed adoption. Not only was adoption seen as taboo in the past, an even greater taboo was a transracial adoption. Only until recently has my daughter started to see other families that looked like hers. Now with the popular TV show "This is Us", a new beautiful light is being shown onto transracial adoption.

Another area of adoption that is being exposed is adoption of older children. Hearts and homes are being opened to older children. Society is understanding that it does not matter your age, everyone wants a family. This is true for our oldest daughter. Five years ago we found ourselves again at the doors of Adoption Circle to complete our home study so we could adopt our oldest daughter. At the time she was fourteen years old and lived in an orphanage in Ukraine. In years past she would have been seen as undesirable due to her age or, but not to us. She had given up hope of having a family. She watched the younger children come into the orphanage after her and leave it before her. But like any child, any age, she wanted a family, she wanted love.

Like previously stated, Ohio Adoption Awareness month is a time to celebrate adoptions. Ohio Adoption Awareness Month would have such a positive benefit to adoptees. Ohio schools should use this opportunity to have an open discussion about adoption in classrooms. In the past I have had to have meetings with my children's teachers to ask them to not do a "family tree" project or a timeline project of their life. This project is one of the hardest and emotionally troubling for elementary adoptees. If they use their adoptive family's information, it's not their true heritage but yet, if they have a closed adoption, the child may not have any biological information or for the timeline project, the sharing the first picture with your parents was when you were 3 days old and you do not have any pictures from the day you were born. My youngest

daughter cannot tell you who's nose she has, or where she gets the shape of her eyes. Imagine for one minute, at this moment, looking in the mirror and not being able to know who's eyes you are looking in to. Now imagine you're seven and you do not have these answers.

Celebrating Ohio Adoption Awareness Month would allow all children to be educated on adoption and how it is just another way to build a family. My children could finally share their story proudly, rather than wait for the classmates never failing question, "why are your parents white or why don't your parents have an accent?" It also will help normalize adoptee sibling relationships. This month would help support adoptive families with biological siblings adopted either together or in different homes. Support families to give biological siblings a chance to build relationships and encouragement for families to nurture those relationships and watch how they grow organically.

Adoption Circle asks, on behalf of our adoptive families, our adoptees, on behalf of my family, please approve the HB 420. Adoption truly is an amazing and beautiful living and breathing journey. Personally, adoption was our plan A and it celebrated every day in our home and at Adoption Circle. We are asking for Ohio to celebrate it one month each year.

Thank you for your time.