



**Testimony of Molly Rampe Thomas
Founder and CEO of Choice Network
Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee
House Bill 258
December 5, 2018**

Good morning Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Tavares, and members of the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee. My name is Molly Rampe Thomas and I am the founder of Choice Network, an adoption agency headquartered in Columbus, Ohio.

There are an estimated 3,000 public and private adoption agencies in the United States, and my agency is recognized by national leaders as one of only 6 that are pro-choice. I truly believe that without access to all options, women have no options for their unplanned pregnancy.

House Bill 258 is going to have unintended consequences. Removing options will increase the number of children in foster care, and therefore increase the cost to the state. Do you know the Public Children Services Association of Ohio states that in the last 15 months, Ohio has seen a 15% increase in foster care rates? In 2016, there were 13,769 kids in the system. Today there are over 15,500.

Stats like these are hard to swallow, especially backed by research such as 80% of death row inmates are former foster youth, and foster children experience PTSD at a rate double that of veterans as stated by the Trauma Center. As for cost, The National Council on Adoption states the total maintenance costs and administrative costs per foster child per year is \$25,782. I partner daily with women's centers to keep these kids out of the system, so this bill is in direct opposition of the work I am trying to do.

I met my daughter's birth mother at a women's center. She was struggling with addiction, fleeing abuse, and in poverty, trying to raise her 2 year old daughter. She was desperate for an abortion, but due to being too far along by one week, she was unable to do so. She sobbed as I held her hand, confident that she was going to have to deliver her baby only for the baby to enter the system. It was in that moment that I asked her if she would consider an adoption plan with me –

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and that is exactly what we did. It was our adoption plan that ended up being the foundation for my agency. The spark for the work I do.

I believe that open adoption is family preservation as much as I believe abortion is family preservation. I am not standing here in opposition of House Bill 258 for myself, because the truth is, I was raised in a loving family with access and opportunity. I am standing here for my daughter's birth mom and for every woman I have ever worked for – and I am standing here for their children, for their families. Their beating hearts matter to me.

The truth I fear is that it is way easier for us to fight for the unborn, than to throw our minds into fighting for the born. My hope is today you begin to realize that the over 15,500 kids in Ohio's foster care system deserve us to turn our attention from this agenda to their agenda. 70% of people support Roe v. Wade, which means this isn't what our community wants us fighting over anyhow.

I want to thank the committee for hearing my testimony and am available if you have any further questions.

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