

House Bill 309

Sponsor Testimony

Good morning Chairman Bacon, Vice Chair Dolan, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of Senate Judiciary Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to House Bill 309, that will prohibit an individual's blindness as a basis for denial of visitation or custody, his or her participation in public or private adoption, and his or her participation in foster care or guardianship.

This bill is important in battling the preconceived and unnecessary societal biases surrounding the ability of blind parents to successfully parent their children. Because of these biases and attitudes, children of blind parents are removed from their parent's care unnecessarily or are restricted from enjoying meaningful time with their parents. The need for this legislation was brought to our attention by the fourteen other states that have passed bills with similar content. It is necessary that the Legislature adhere to the Americans with Disabilities Act and respect the due process and equal protection of blind parents and prospective blind parents in child welfare, foster care, family law, and adoption.

Allegations against the blind parent should contain clear and convincing evidence as to how the blindness-connected behavior endangers the health, safety, or welfare of the child. The blind parent or prospective parent then shall have the opportunity to demonstrate how the implementation of supportive parenting services can alleviate any concerns raised. We see it is important that blind parents are protected under the Americans with Disability Act and that they are allowed the opportunity to effectively parent their children.

There was not a single opponent to this legislation and passed unanimously out of the House Community and Family Advancement Committee and The House of Representatives. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, we ask for your favorable consideration of this legislation. We thank you for your time and would be happy to address any questions you may have at this time.