

Chairman Manning, Vice-Chair McColley, and Ranking Member Thomas

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of SB 202. I am blind from birth, and now, I am well beyond the years of having minor children. In fact, my oldest son John, is now 26, and his brother Lucas will soon be 23. John served four years in the United States Marine Corps, and both boys are doing well. But there was a time when I wondered if I would ever have children at all. I wasn't sure just how I would care for children as a blind father. But that was when I was in high school. Later I learned that blind people are successfully raising happy families, and I believed I could too. I did not question my ability to care for my children anymore than any other new parent once I brought John home from the hospital. But as he was about to be born I wondered what questions his blind mother and I would face from hospital staff including social workers. We were fortunate. We did not have challenges when either of our boys were born. But that isn't always the case even now. This year I have worked with a blind couple who had their newborn taken away before leaving the hospital. This is why SB 202 must pass. I have worked with blind parents whose ability to care for children is not questioned until a couple divorces and the sighted spouse maintains that the blind parent can't possibly care for the child (children) without supervision. This is why SB 202 must pass.

I raised my boys mostly as a single parent. There were times when people reported me to Children's Services simply because they were upset with me and not because they were really concerned about my children. Each time the case was closed quickly, but it was frightening for me and my children. I did not know how the case worker would view my blindness. Blindness must never be used as a reason to deprive a parent the opportunity to provide a loving and nurturing home for a child, and once again, that is why SB 202 must pass!

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation, and I urge you to pass it as quickly as possible.