



Rachel Baker
State Representative

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on behalf of House Bill 5, the Adoption Modernization Act, with my joint sponsor Representative Ray.

As my colleague stated, there are over 3,000 children in Ohio waiting to be adopted. Of the number of children in Ohio in foster care, 35% are there as a result of reported abuse and neglect, two examples of adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs.¹ ACEs often result in long-term negative effects on children, including higher risk for chronic diseases, mental illnesses, learning disorders, substance abuse, and juvenile and adult delinquency.² By helping children find safe, permanent, and loving homes, we can decrease the likelihood and long-term impacts of ACEs, ultimately improving the health and well-being of Ohio's children. House Bill 5 aims to do just that.

In addition to three key provisions described by Representative Ray, I'd also like to highlight a few more provisions of this bill:

First, the bill allows the adult adoption of a person with a developmental disability, whereas current law solely allows adult adoption of a person with an intellectual disability. The definition of developmental disability includes intellectual disability but is a broader term which also includes any severe, chronic disability that meets specific criteria.

Second, the bill requires that the court notify any guardian ad litem working with the person to be adopted of an adoption petition filing and a scheduled adoption hearing. It is critical that a guardian ad litem is aware of an upcoming adoption petition and hearing so that they are able to attend and advocate for the person to be adopted.

Third, the bill allows a court to revisit an adoption decree of a child who was a victim of trafficking.

¹ [Statistics of Foster Care in Ohio | Pathway Caring for Children \(pathwaycfc.org\)](https://www.pathwaycfc.org/resources/statistics-of-foster-care-in-ohio)

² [About the CDC-Kaiser ACE Study | Violence Prevention | Injury Center | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/infancy/aces/about-the-cdc-kaiser-ace-study.html)

Finally, current Ohio law allows parents to petition the court for finalization of a foreign adoption. This can be a lengthy and costly bureaucratic process. This bill allows for foreign adoption decrees to be automatically accepted and finalized as long as certain conditions are met.

As Representative Ray stated, I have firsthand experience with adoption. I am a mother to three amazing children who came into my family through adoption. As a social worker and pediatric nurse, I knew that having safe, nurturing, and permanent homes is foundational for children to develop and grow into happy, healthy, and productive members of society. And while I knew this intellectually, it wasn't until I had personal experiences with adoption that I truly understood the influential impact that a safe, permanent home has on a child. I know these changes will improve the experience of adoption for children, birth parents, and adoptive parents.

To support Ohio's children, we as a society, and as policy makers, must do the work to help facilitate children's opportunities to land in safe, permanent homes. By refining Ohio's current adoption law and eliminating resource barriers for families, this bill will propel our state forward by ensuring that all Ohio children have the accessibility to safe and nurturing homes.

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to address you today. House Bill 5 is a critical step forward for Ohio's children – the future of our state. We are happy to answer any questions from the committee at this time.