

House Judiciary Committee
Adoption Reform Testimony
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I've been invited today to offer testimony regarding House Bill's 1533 and 1838.

I would first like to commend the House on their understanding the need to visit the issues related to the proposed Bill's.

Regarding **HB 1533** – It is certainly agreed that a specified shortened time frame to revoke consents is needed. The current ability to revoke often lingers until finalization of the adoption, keeping uncertain, the child's connection to a family. **HB 1533** as it is proposed, will benefit the children involved by providing them with the stability they are in need of, in the expeditious manner they deserve.

I am sure that many of us can site at least one case where a birth parent made the decision to revoke their consent after their child has been placed for several months with their adoptive family. While this action is undoubtedly difficult for all adults involved, we must look at the impact such a decision has on the child. For a child who has begun to bond with their family and has had their role in the family defined, this disruption can have a long-lasting effect. The turmoil and confusion created because of not knowing where and/or to whom they belong ultimately decreases the child's sense of self.

I would note that the **Termination Sub-committee** is recommending the time to revoke be reduced even further to 10 days versus the 30 days being proposed. Consideration of this will bring a more timely resolution to the adoption process. Prompt closure will allow for an earlier sense of permanency for the child and the adoptive family.

With regards to **HB 1838**. Enacting legislation to mandate the offering of counseling services to birth parents is a positive step. The decision to relinquish parental rights is undoubtedly a painstaking one. Offering counseling prior to the consent being signed is vital to ensure birth parents understanding of all options, including relinquishment of rights and adoption.

However, the wording of section 2502 (a) (2) wherein it states **..if the parent requested adoption-related counseling services....**, would much better serve birth parents if the Bill stated: If parent accepted adoption-related counseling. This terminology would assist in ensuring counseling services being offered to all birth parents contemplating the decision to relinquish parental rights.

Of concern is the terminology in S2533 (3.2), wherein it seems to indicated that adoptive parents will be asked to pay for adoption-related counseling received by birth parents. Adoptive parents should neither be asked or required to pay for such services received by birth parents. Doing so (particularly without regard to their income) can/will pose a significant hardship to foster families (counseling services can cost over \$100.00 per session. It would be suggested that if birth parents do not have access to third party insurance (including Medical Assistance), to offset the cost of counseling services, procedures must be implemented with the service provider and the county for reimbursement for services from the segregated fund.

Taking this step could/would hinder the adoption process as well as, prohibit many individuals from adopting. With the many children needing permanent homes, we can not afford to alienate families by placing this requirement in this Bill.

Thank you for your time in this matter.