



# Adoptions From The Heart®

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## **PA HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE Task Force on Adoption**

**August 25, 2000 Testimony  
Philadelphia Community College**

### **Dear Members:**

Good morning. Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I am Maxine Chalker, the founder and current Executive Director of Adoptions From The Heart. The Agency is a non-profit corporation licensed in 7 states. We have 4 offices in Pennsylvania. The Agency was founded on the belief that Open Adoption placement benefits all parties involved in adoption. Birth parents select the family for their baby, they meet as often as they choose to and they can either exchange letters and pictures through the agency or exchange names and addresses and have personal meetings after the placement. We have been practicing this way since 1984. In 1999 the agency placed 291 infants from the US and international countries, with 94 of the infant placements being from the United States. This year through June 2000 there were 44 infants placed domestically.

I am also an adoptee that was placed at birth by a private attorney. I never knew much about my birth family and, in fact, I received my pre-adoptive birth certificate, before the law eliminated this option, and the information had been falsified. However, I was fortunate to find a very compassionate judge in Philadelphia who assisted me with information that allowed me to find my birth family 17 years ago immediately before I began the agency. Prior to this I worked for Delaware County Children & Youth Services (a public agency) for 9 years in the adoption department.

**In regard to House Bill 1838:**

This bill should be commended with addressing the issue of how to access the funds that have been established for counseling and have been accumulating. There was nothing in the law that clearly stated how to access these funds prior to this bill and women should be able to have their counseling paid for. However, the Bill states that DPW will compile a list of counselors but does not state the criterion for this selection. I recommend that it should stipulate that "**ONLY** licensed adoption agencies, social workers with a minimum of an MSW degree or psychologists or psychiatrists with prior adoption counseling experience be on this list and that they show proof of education before they are placed on it." Otherwise, there will be no assurance that non-professionals will not be added.

Every piece of legislation must be viewed with the idea of protecting the children, who cannot speak for themselves. They are an anonymous party to this adoption agreement and must be protected.

**In regard to House Bill 1553:**

This bill focuses on allowing a birth parents only 30 days to change their mind after signing a Consent to Adopt. However, many times birth parents do not sign their consent in 72 hours. They may sign it 5 days after birth rather than three. 30 days is too long a period of time. This should be shortened to no more than 7 days. In NJ, as you all may already know, the seventy-two hour surrender is binding, if it is done by a licensed agency. This is because they can be assured that there has been mandated counseling.

In addition, there are several other things that should be changed in the adoption law. One major one is **WHO MAY PLACE A CHILD FOR ADOPTION**. Several times in 1533 it states that a revocation must be served "upon the agency or adult". This is a serious problem because just recently there was an article in the paper about a woman in Lansdowne, PA who was letting pregnant women stay in her home and then finding

adoptive parents for their babies. A woman in SouthWest Phila was arrested for taking money from prospective adoptive families for babies that didn't exist. This bill should state clearly that **ONLY A LICENSED AGENCY OR ATTORNEY** can place a child for adoption.

There is currently no "statute of limitations" on birth parents. A birth father, who claims he did not know about the birth, can come forward **AT ANY TIME**, even after the adoption is finalized, and reclaim the child. Once again, in NJ they passed a law setting up a birth father registry so that birth fathers have to come forward and register with the Bureau of Vital Statistics and state that they are the Father of Baby xxx so that they can maintain their parental rights. I believe that they should have no more than 90 days (3 months) to do this. This is a very important issue for the permanence of children. The Final Adoption decree should be just that – final – with no change of disruption.

Thank you for your kind attention to the above.

Maxine Chalker, MSW/LSW

## MAXINE CHALKER

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### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

**Adoptions From The Heart, Wynnewood, PA. March 1984 - present**  
**Founder and Executive Director**

Created and directed the first open adoption' agency in the tri-state area. Adoptions From The Heart is now licensed in PA, DE, NJ, NY, WV, CN and VA.

#### Selected accomplishments

- Appeared on many, many TV and Radio shows since 1985 discussing various aspects of domestic and international Adoption.
- Traveled extensively to establish adoption programs in such countries as: Vietnam, Guatemala, Columbia, Dominican Republic, Thailand, Venezuela
- Authored many published articles and a chapter in a book on adoption entitled The Adoption Option by Christine Adamac
- Facilitated more than 1850 Adoptions
- Established service programs to assist attorneys with private adoptions and adjunct programs which provide counseling for adoptive families who have independently identified an adoption.
- Instrumental in writing new policies on adoption and gaining the support of the Delaware State Legislature to enact open adoption into legislation
- Pioneered Open Adoption in the tri-state area
- Elected Chairwoman of the Delaware Valley Adoption council for two consecutive terms
- Testified in legislative hearing in order to implement new laws in the states where the agency is licensed
- Woman of Vision Award in October 1999 Montgomery County Women's Conference

**Children and Youth Services of Delaware County, Media, PA. June 1977-  
Social Worker I and II October 1985**

Social Worker handling all adoption duties for the public Children and Youth Agency in Delaware County. This included preparing children and families for adoption placement, counseling birth parents, court room preparation and testifying, etc.

**Northern Home for Children, Phila., PA.  
Social Worker**

**May 1976-May 1977**

Social worker in a residential home for boys ages 5-18 providing all casework services.

**Main Line Night School, Radnor, PA.  
Teacher**

**1988 - present**

### **NON-PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

Office Manager, typist and secretarial experience

1960-1970

### **EDUCATION**

Licensed Social Worker in the Commonwealth of PA, 1988-present

Licensed Social Worker in the Commonwealth of NJ, 1996 - present

MSW - Temple University in Service Delivery 1976

BSW - Temple University "Summa cum Laude", Award as a Presidential Scholar, 1975

### **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

Delaware Valley Adoption Council - 1984-1985 Chairwoman, current membership

NASW Member - 1985 - present

Delaware Valley Group Psychotherapy Society - 1980