

January 20, 2021

Testimony regarding HB 1317

Greetings to you, Chairman Weisz and members of the House Human Services Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to speak regarding HB 1317. I am Rev. Grace Murray, pastor and teacher of People's United Church of Christ in Fargo. We are a small congregation whose purpose is to extend the welcome of Jesus to all God's people.

As a pastor and teacher, I am aware of the many difficult choices that women are confronted with when faced with an unintended pregnancy. I am also aware of the deep hurt that families face when they desire to grow their families, but are unable to biologically. Offering financial assistance to biological mothers and potential adopters is an important step in ensuring a good quality of life for children and families.

While I support that, I feel that this bill in its present form is failing children and potential adoptive families by limiting those who may receive the assistance to married heterosexual couples. Single parents, unmarried couples, and LGBTQ persons have been providing loving, nurturing and healthy environments to children and should be afforded the same opportunities to adopt.

In the congregation I serve, we welcome all forms of family. It is a part of our calling.

But I am also here as a grandmother to two children that I love dearly. My daughter and her son live with me. Her daughter is adopted, and we have an open adoption so that my granddaughter, who I will refer to as V, will always know her family of origin. I remember when my daughter was pregnant for the second time. She had made a difficult decision to become a single parent to her first born. She is a competent, loving mother. However, it has been a struggle for her. We have been able to make things work as a three-generation household. When she became pregnant with V, she considered all her options and made the decision to place V for adoption.

That decision was probably one of the most difficult she has ever made. She looked at the best interest of both her children, and herself. It was important to her to find a family that shared the values she had been raised with. I learned that a woman I know, who I will refer to as K, was considering adoption. A single, queer woman, who is also a marriage and family therapist, K seemed to be a person that would offer her daughter the love and acceptance we would want for this precious child.

I introduced them. My daughter met her and did a thorough interrogation. As I listened to their conversation, it was apparent that K would provide the environment for a child to flourish and grow. It was also evident that we would remain a part of V's life, not just a footnote in her history.

But it was not easy. Both K and my daughter did have financial hardships. Adoption is expensive, for the adopters and the birth mother. Financial assistance as that which is proposed would help many families make this loving decision.

It is the right thing to do. It is the right thing to do for all types of families. For married couples, whether the partners be opposite sex or same sex. For single people who can give so much to a child.

When my daughter made the decision to place V for adoption, her intent was to find the parent or parents who would raise her in a way that was as close to the way she would want to raise her if she could. It is unimaginable to think that V might have been deprived of a parent who, in our eyes, is the parent chosen for her. One who loves her unconditionally. One who will provide opportunities for her that we can only imagine.

On the day of her adoption, the judge was shocked as he entered the courtroom. In that hearing, there were around 30 people there to witness the birth of this new family. Each person had to be identified by name and relationship. K's pastor was there. Another clergyperson, V's godfather, was there. Numerous people from their church. The last two names called were biological mother and biological grandmother. The judge was delighted to sign the judgment sealing K and V as family, a family loved and nurtured by their community. We have been delighted to have grown our family, with K and V an integral part of us.

Please do not limit the opportunity for children to be raised by the best family for them. I respectfully ask that you return this bill to the sponsors so they can complete the work that they have begun. Recommend that this bill not be passed until the exclusionary language is removed. If lines 13-15 are removed, I would heartily recommend that this bill be passed.

Thank you for your attention. Thank you for your care for all North Dakota families.

Respectfully,

Rev. Grace Murray