

DATE: March 21, 2018

BILL NUMBER: SB 401

TESTIMONY BY: Mark Desetti; Representing myself and my wife, Judy, as adoptive parents

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 401, the "Adoption Protection Act."

You know me as a lobbyist for the Kansas National Education Association but my testimony on this bill is not related to the KNEA. The KNEA has not taken a position on this bill. I submit testimony instead as a private citizen and a father of four children, two of whom my wife and I adopted.

In my case, my wife and I began the adoption process by interviewing with several adoption agencies including a state-operated agency and a Catholic Agency. At the time there were restrictions on the placement of children across racial lines and we were repeatedly told that the potential wait for a healthy Caucasian baby would likely be several years. Arbitrary restrictions on adoption were tremendous disappointments to white parents who wanted desperately to open their homes and hearts to a child. And while I am certain that some of those parents would have restricted themselves in the race of a child to adopt, many others would not.

Eventually, we pursued private adoption. We were introduced first to a young woman – a teenager – who was pregnant and wished to put her child up for adoption. We were delighted to get this child and no one ever needed to ask us about religion or "lifestyle." We met the birth mother and were "evaluated" by her; we were evaluated by the state. Home visits were conducted and it was agreed that our home was a good home for a child.

Several years later, we were contacted by the attorney who represented us in the first adoption. A teen and her mother had come to her seeking help. This girl wanted to place her baby for adoption. We met them and they chose us. Again, our lifestyle, religious or otherwise, was not part of the discussion. We went through the same process with the state and were approved as a good home for this, our second son. Today my sons are 34 and 30 years old. They are happy and healthy. They love my wife and me and we love them right back. They love our other two genetic children as brothers love siblings.

My point is that religion and compliance with some other person's religious beliefs is not what makes a loving home for a child. Parenting and loving are not determined by what religion I follow or who I marry or even if I am married. What matters is whether this prospective parent will love this child and provide for this child. We even had to swear to that before a judge.

I remember the disappointment on the faces of so many prospective parents when they were told they would have to wait years for a child and the frustration expressed by agency personnel that there were not enough minority couples looking for children. There are children that can't get adopted; that wait years for a parent. Why would we want to allow any agency to keep a child out of a loving family home because of religious discrimination?

Adoption protection should be for the adoptee. That is who must be protected so that he or she can be placed in a good home as soon as possible. This bill protects the personal lifestyle choices of the adults at the agency, not the children in need of loving parents. Please do not allow adoption agencies in Kansas to refuse to place a child in a good home because they disagree with the religion of a prospective family. Every child deserves a good home.