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WASHOE COUNTY

"Dedicated to Excellence in Public Service"

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SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE HEARING ON SB267

March 28, 2003

My name is Hayley Jarolimek. I am a licensed social worker and the Program Specialist for Washoe County Department of Social Services.

In its current form, we do not support Senate Bill 267. To simply state that adoptees are entitled and have the right to their birth information is an over-simplification of an exceptionally complicated issue.

We do not believe that openness in adoption has a negative effect on those willing to participate. In fact for years social workers in Washoe County have counseled birth and adoptive parents as to the benefits of openness in adoption. The national trend has been to provide ongoing contact between members of the triad throughout the child's minority.

For most, lifting the "shroud of secrecy" alleviates a significant amount of stress and can have positive effects. However, people that participate in open adoptions have done so by choice. Others have chosen to forgo contact. While traditional adoptions, which maintain secrecy may seem antiquated to some, they are still recognized and used by some members of the adoption triad (the birth parents, adoptive parents and the adoptee) either as a result of socialization, family pressure or a desire to maintain personal privacy. Agencies in Nevada recognize the importance of that choice and offer varying types of adoptions thereby allowing both birth and adoptive parents the opportunity to willingly participate in a process that is comfortable to each and adheres to the respective beliefs of each.

Historically, birth and adoptive parents were under the belief that their personal information would be kept confidential by the agencies and the court unless the court ordered otherwise. With that being said, we believe that every member of the triad should be respected. We could support this bill with following recommendations:

1. Place an effective date on the legislation allowing release of information only on adoptions finalized after October 2003. This would provide agencies an opportunity to inform and educate birth and adoptive parents about the new law and adoptee rights. This would also provide some form of protection to those who relinquished parental rights and adopted under previous legislation. Those whose adoptions finalized prior to October 2003 date could seek information through the registry or by court order as outlined in Section 1, Subsection 2(b) of the bill.
2. Add language in Section 1, Subsection 2 that would prohibit an 18-year-old adoptee from obtaining identifying information in the event that he or she has biological siblings in the adoptive home that have yet to reach the age of majority.

3. Clarify Section 1, Subsection 2 to specifically outline the types of records and files accessible by the adoptee by court order.
4. Maintain the State Register for Adoptions. The registry serves as an avenue to mutually connect extended family members such as siblings and grandparents. Senate Bill 267 addresses only the adoptee. Dissolution of the registry removes opportunities for other members of the family to connect. The registry also serves as a means for providing non-identifying social and medical information to the adoptee and the birth parents throughout the adoptee's life. This purpose would also be thwarted by dissolution of the registry.

Thank you for your time and consideration.