



Testimony of Kenneth L Williams
Proponent: HB 2687
House Federal and State Affairs Committee
March 20, 2018

My name is Kenneth L Williams. I am the President and Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas (CCNEK). We are a licensed Child Placing Agency through the Kansas Department of Children and Families.

CCNEK was established in 1956 to serve families in need across Northeast Kansas. Although CCNEK may be more widely known for its care for the poor, its founding ministry was Adoption Services. "Since the founding of this nation, the Catholic Church has been an active partner with state authorities in placing children conceived into difficult situations into loving homes with a mother and a father," said Archbishop Naumann in a recent letter to Kansas pastors.

It's been my personal privilege and pleasure to watch our social workers place infants with their forever families. Observing an adoptive mother and father see their infant child for the first time is a joyful scene that those fortunate enough to see, will never forget. That said, there is an incredible amount of work, counseling, hand holding, and prayers that go on for months and even years before this scene ever takes place. While it's tempting to focus solely on this incredible scene of the adoptive family holding their new infant, what about the birth mother and father? Unlike most private adoption agencies operating today, CCNEK Adoption Services serve the birth and adoptive parents equally. Our licensed social workers provide a continuum of care to the birth parents as well as the adoptive family throughout the entire adoption process, including counseling for months after the adoption is finalized. Unfortunately, care and concern for the birth parents is uncommon in the world of private adoptions today.

Up to now, faith based agencies such as ours have been able to provide adoption services to the community in a manner consistent with our deeply held religious belief for the inherent rights of a child to have both a mother and father. Sadly, sister agencies in San Francisco, Boston, Illinois and Washington D.C. have been forced to either suspend operations or deny their religious beliefs. Why? Were these faith based agencies the only adoption services option in their respective area? A quick survey of adoption service providers in these areas demonstrates the options are plentiful. Rather,

political and activist groups put their dislike of these agencies' religious beliefs over what is best for the infants or birth and adoptive parents.

Accordingly, I strongly encourage the House Federal and State Affairs Committee to pass HB 2687. This important piece of legislation does not constrain or deny the rights of anyone. Instead, it protects the rights of faith based adoption agencies like CCNEK to continue to operate in a manner consistent with Church teachings and beliefs. Please protect the rights of faith based agencies to provide adoption services in a manner consistent with their religious beliefs and thereby ultimately protecting the rights of birth and adoptive parents to choose a faith based adoption agency.