

March 20, 2018

TO: Federal and State Affairs Committee

RE: In-Person proponent of HB 2687 and SB 401

FROM: Melissa Penny

"Should I just get a vasectomy so that adoption will be a no-brainer?" the man across the table from me asked as we pondered adoption as college friends. Less than a year later he became my husband and I knew our future would likely involve further discussions on the topic.

Shortly after our marriage we began medical school together and had two surprise pregnancies prior to completing our training. Our intention had been to table discussions on adoption and family planning until I was out of the Air Force but we started our military commitment with a 3 and 5 year old and so the discussions began. To be honest, my heart just was not ready at that point and I was quite fearful - "what if I can't love another mother's baby like I love my own?" "...What if the adopted child feels like they are not as loved?" - I had so many fears surrounding my ability to love well.

When I was deployed, I had a lot of time to think, pray and reflect. My heart was really softened, and I began feeling that calling from Christ to "love the least of these" and to "care for orphans and widows in their distress" and just noticing what a special place orphans and widows seem to have in Christ's heart. My relationship with Christ deepened and it seemed that right along with this, a desire to obey that calling grew. My husband always seemed to be on that page, but there I was, nine years into our marriage finally seeing the beauty of adoption as this illustration of who we are in God's family and an act of obedience to care for the orphans.

After deployment, I found myself pregnant again but still felt this desire to pursue adoption. My husband, suspiciously, seemed to already have a list of potential agencies and home study information. We knew we wanted to find an agency that saw adoption as a ministry, not just baby placement. We had plenty of kids - we wanted to either provide an option for a mother in a difficult situation, or to help minister to the mother, even if she ultimately chose to parent the child herself. This was a key difference for us, we felt it was critical that we find someone to work with that saw working with the moms as a ministry - a way to love someone the way Christ loves us.

We were living in Florida at that time but were still introduced to Julie with Circle of Love in the Wichita area. She shared this heart and we shared a friend who was so excited to introduce us when we discussed our desire to find someone who saw adoption as a ministry. We loved working with Julie. It has been inspiring to see someone willing to literally lay down their life and their plans for someone else. The amount of urgent phone calls Julie receives is mind boggling - and never at convenient times. She works with women struggling with addiction and helps to find them resources and life skills. She loves them.

We adopted twins through Julie's ministry 1.5 years ago and watched first hand as Julie took meals and supplies to our birth mom and worked with various connections to get her set up with job opportunities and training and even rehab. She would even help our birth mom with her other kids so that she could get to her various appointments. This was clearly more than placing a baby, more than growing a family. This is a ministry.

Since our adoption, I have met countless people that are interested in pursuing adoption in order to obey the calling to love the marginalized and I love sharing with them about Julie's ministry. I always see the "that's what I'm talking about!" look in their face as I share how Julie ministers to these moms.

I would plead for making a path for more "faith based adoption agencies" to spring up but realize this is more than politics - this is God's work. I would plead that we not hinder His work, but I'm not sure man's best attempts could hinder Him. I just plead that we step out of the way and let Him move in the hearts of women like Julie to love the "least of the these" here in Kansas.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melissa Penny". The signature is stylized with large, sweeping loops and a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.