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Adoptees' Birthrights Committee
P.O. Box 7213
Metairie, Louisiana 70010.

FORUM

SPECIAL ISSUE

MAY 1980

Report on Pending Legislation

BILLS - Below is a brief description of bills that are of specific interest to our organization.

HB 578 - sponsored by Rep Dimos (Monroe, LA)
This proposed act is relative to excluding adoptees from being forced heirs of their blood parents. This would essentially do away with an adoptee's right of inheritance from the biological parents or blood family.

COMMENT: WE OPPOSE THIS BILL.

HB 1018- sponsored by Reps. Fernandez, Cusimano, Dastugue, and Landrieu

This act would delete the requirements of a showing of compelling reasons and of limiting disclosure to the extent necessary to satisfy such reasons, and repeal the authority to appoint a curator ad hoc to assist in complying with these requirements. The proposed law retains the requirement that adoption records be sealed, kept confidential and opened only upon written authorization or order of the court.

COMMENT: WE ENDORSE THIS BILL.

There are a couple of other bills related to adoption - one dealing with adoption of abandoned children and the other dealing with adoption by other family members. We are taking no public position on these two bills.

SYNOPSIS OF THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS - The two bills of interest will be sent to the House Civil Law and Procedures Committee. The Committee conducts a hearing and receives testimony from the public, considers the bill and makes its recommendation. If the Committee's recommendation is negative, a bill usually dies and goes no further. If the Committee's report is favorable the bill goes on to the full House to be voted on. So the Committee is extremely important. If a bill passes the House it is then sent to the Senate where it goes through an identical process. If it is amended in any way by the Senate it must return to the House for concurrence. If they object, it then goes to a conference committee (composed of 3 members of each chamber). Failure to adopt a conference committee report by either chamber also kills a bill. No additional

amendments can be made to a conference committee report. Of course if a bill passes both chambers it is then sent to the Governor for signature.

When the committee hearings are held, we must be prepared to attend and to testify orally and in writing. Hearings will likely be held soon. We do not know the dates yet and will probably not get more than one or two days advanced notice of the hearings. So we must be ready and we must start getting ready now.

Each committee member must be contacted and asked for his/her support of HB 1018 and opposition to HB 578. Right now you should write a letter to at least one member of the Committee. Have your letter(s) ready for mailing and make copies of it. If you plan to attend the hearing, bring your letters with you at that time also.

Later we will each have to write to our own state representative and senator to request favorable consideration for our point of view when the bill(s) get to the full House and also the Senate. This could happen quickly if the first committee reports favorably. Visit your local state representative and senator. Talk to them. Tell them of the need for adoption reform and ask for a favorable vote of HB 1018 and an unfavorable vote on HB 578. Also, write letters informing them of these bills and asking them for their support of our position. Have these letters ready to mail also.

CIVIL LAW AND PROCEDURES COMMITTEE. All members may be written to in Baton Rouge at: House of Representatives
P. O. Box 44062
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

REP E. Clark Gaudin, Chairman (E. Baton Rouge)
REP Jimmy Dimos*, Vice-chairman (Ouachita)
REP Diana Bajoie (Orleans)
REP Lane Carson (Orleans)
REP Manuel A. Fernandez (St. Bernard)**
REP Louis "Woody" Jenkins (E. Baton Rouge)
REP Robert P. Waddell (Caddo)
REP Charles Jones (Ouachita)
REP Charles V. Cusimano (Jefferson)**
REP Huntington B. Downer, Jr. (Terrebonne)
REP Charles D. Lancaster, JR. (Jefferson)
REP Edward j. "Joe" Bleich (Lincoln)
REP Benjamin F. O'Neal, Jr. (Caddo)
REP Thomas H. McVea (E.-W. Feliciana-EBR)
REP Leo Watermeier (Orleans)

*sponsor of HB 578

**sponsor of HB 1018

We do not know which committee in the Senate will be assigned these bills. Based on previous legislation it appears that it will probably be Judiciary Committee B. This will not be known until the bills clear the House.

Senators can be reached at P. O. Box 44183, Capitol Station,
Baton Rouge, LA 70804.

LETTER WRITING SUGGESTIONS. In writing to any legislator, always mention the bills by number (eg - HB 578). State your reason(s) for supporting or opposing a bill. Be personal, but brief and businesslike. In writing to your state Representative and state Senator, ask the they vote favorably for HB 1018 and against HB 578 and briefly state your reasons. If possible type your letter on plain white paper. If you do not let them know your feelings you can't blame them for not voting like you wanted them to.

You can contact Les Waguespack at (504) 885-7210 if you need additional information or need any help.

HOW TO GET INFORMATION DURING THE SESSION OF THE LEGISLATURE.

The Public Update Legislative System (PULS) can be reached during regular sessions by calling during normal working hours. The toll-free number is 1-800-272-8186.

There is also a toll-free Public Assistance Line (PAL) operated through the Governor's Office. During sessions PAL will deliver messages to Legislators on the floor. The toll-free number is 1-800-272 9868.

Messages for legislators may also be left at the legislative switchboard. The number is (504) 387-3777.

+++++ P O U R I +++++

Reminder - If you have not paid your dues, please do so. It does take money for us to operate. Dues are \$25.00/year.

ABC is sponsoring a GARAGE SALE on Saturday, May 31, 1980 at 311 IONA ST. in old METAIRIE. Donations and contributions are being accepted.

We are continuing to expand. On May 3, 1980 we had the inaugural meeting of the newly formed Baton Rouge Chapter of ABC.

Bring A Friend - Our next regularly scheduled meeting will be held on June 4, 1980 at 8:00 at the Central Savings and Loan Assoc. building located at 4517 W. Esplanade Avenue in Metairie, Louisiana. We invite all to attend and to invite a friend. Our guest will be Mr. Terry Zenner, Director of Catholic Social Services of Lafayette, Louisiana. Staff of the Sellers Baptist Home and Adoption Center (New Orleans) have also been invited to attend. Both agencies are highly supportive of our efforts. Lets try to set a new attendance record.

SUCCESS - Since the beginning of April we have had four matches between adoptees and their biological families.

"It's not where we are that counts, it's where we are headed."

-Oliver Wendell Holmes



FORUM

S U M M E R

1 9 8 0

No. 3

Legislative Report

Several representatives of the Adoptees' Birthrights Committee appeared in Baton Rouge for about four (4) weeks for the scheduled hearings of the House Civil Law and Procedure Committee Meetings. Each time HB 1018 and HB 578 were on the agenda but were not heard. Finally on June 23 Mr. Dimos, sponsor of HB 578, decided not to pursue his bill any further. On June 24 HB 1018 was finally debated. The bill was presented to the Committee by REP Cusimano of Metairie. An amendment was passed which essentially replaced the original bill. This left only guidance and a time limit for the curator-ad-hoc in the amended bill.

Because of the large turnout for both sides, the chairman of the committee (REP Gaudin of Baton Rouge) placed a time limit of 15 minutes each for both sides (those for the bill and those against it). The number of bills scheduled for that day also contributed to the time limitation.

Our presentation was made by the president of ABC (Les Waguespack) followed by an adoptee, a birth parent and an adoptive parent. It generally hit most of the major high points we had prepared but by no means did it cover everything we had prepared.

The opponents of the bill then made their presentation. About 8 or 9 people gathered around the table. They essentially represented their arguments as adoptive parents, right to lifers, and anti-abortionists. The information they presented was confusing.

The committee decided that it would be best to defer action on this bill. This essentially means that there isn't time to work out a solution this year. The bill was not defeated as reported by the news wire services.

The committee chairman informed us that a resolution will be passed establishing a legislative study committee. This committee will gather information in the next year and make recommendations for changes in the laws. It is my understanding that they will conduct hearings and everyone will get an opportunity to be heard. We will keep you posted on this. Everyone associated with ABC will be asked to provide testimony to this committee when the time comes. This is about the only way we can ever expect legitimate changes to come about.

A representative group from ABC also went and spoke to the LT Governor while in Baton Rouge. He stressed how important it was for every one of us to talk to our legislators and make them aware of our concerns. He also suggested that we provide as much input as possible to the study committee that will be set up.

From the feedback on the Model Adoption Act and Procedures it does appear that changes will be made but we'll have to wait to see just how drastic they will be. Comments were mixed and I'm sure it will take HHS (formerly HEW) quite a while to revise their proposal.

GOOD NEWS - On the national level, Senator Carl Levin of Michigan has proposed a bill to amend the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment and Adoption Reform Act of 1978 to provide for a national computerized

adoption identification center, and for other purposes. The bill is S. 2561 and has been referred to the Committee on Labor and Human Resources.

We urge each and every one of you to contact the congressional delegation asking for their support. Although Senators Long and Johnston are not on this committee they should be contacted by everyone in Louisiana with an interest in this matter. These people are influenced by the number of letters and inquiries they get from their constituents. It is up to you. Their addresses are as follows:

Honorable Russell Long
217 Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510
ph (202) 224-4623
(Baton Rouge ofc -
348-0181 ext. 445)

Honorable J. Bennett Johnston
432 Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510
ph (202) 224-5825
(New Orleans ofc -
(504) 589-2427)

The following comprise the Committee on Labor and Human Resources.

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|---|------------------------------|------|-----|--------------------------------|
| 1 | SEN Harrison Williams (D-NJ) | 352 | SOB | |
| | SEN Jennings Randolph (D-WV) | 3203 | SOB | 1 - chairman of full committee |
| | SEN Claiborne Pell (D-RI) | 325 | SOB | 2 - chairman of subcommittee |
| | SEN Edward Kennedy (D-MA) | 2241 | SOB | on Child and Human |
| * | SEN Gaylord Nelson (D-WI) | 221 | SOB | Development |
| | SEN Thomas Eagleton (D-MO) | 1209 | SOB | * - member of subcommittee |
| 2 | SEN Alan Cranston (D-CA) | 229 | SOB | |
| * | SEN Donald Riegle (D-MI) | 1207 | SOB | |
| | SEN Howard Metzenbaum (D-OH) | 347 | SOB | All members of the committee |
| | SEN Richard Schweiker (R-PA) | 253 | SOB | can be written to simply by |
| | SEN Jacob Javits (R-NY) | 321 | SOB | using the number following |
| | SEN Robert Stafford (R-VT) | 5219 | SOB | the name as their Senate Off- |
| | SEN Orin Hatch (R-UT) | 411 | SOB | ice Bldg. number. The zip |
| * | SEN William Armstrong (R-CO) | 140 | SOB | is the same as shown above. |
| * | SEN Gordon Humphrey (R-NH) | 4203 | SOB | |

The first GARAGE SALE sponsored by ABC in Metairie netted us about \$280. We thank all who donated and all who assisted in this endeavor. There will be another garage sale in about one month - contributions and volunteers will be needed.

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The STATE TIMES (Baton Rouge) had an excellent 5-part series of articles on the adoption triangle in its editions of June 23 thru June 27. It is very well done and worth reading.

The June meeting with guest Mr. Terry Zenner, Director of Catholic Social Services of Lafayette, Louisiana, was very informative and interesting. It is comforting to see some agencies trying to be responsive to the needs and concerns of our membership and all parties in the adoption triangle. The New Orleans Metro chapter looks forward to having Terry return to a future meeting.

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The Baton Rouge Chapter also had a very interesting and informative meeting. Guests for the meeting were Ms Helen Weinstein, Adoption Specialist with the Louisiana Health and Human Resources Department and Mrs. Janice Sapp of Catholic Social Services of Baton Rouge. Many areas of common concern were discussed. It appears that our restrictive laws seem to be a problem for everyone.

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The organizational meeting of the Lafayette Chapter will take place at the end of June.

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We've come a long long way since our start less than a year ago. We are beginning to accomplish things and help our members. Remember, it does take money to operate (postage, printing, etc.) Your dues help pay for that.

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Like the tiny stream that twists and turns,
Seeking to become a part of the mother sea.
It flows undaunted, adding volume and speed,
Until it reaches its destiny.
So shall we grow, gaining knowledge and peace.

*Lee & Claudia
Wagners*

