

Good Afternoon,

I want to thank you for allowing me to speak with you today concerning adoption in Pennsylvania, a topic that is very dear to me and which has been part of my entire adult life. My name is Andrea Totaro and I am the Director of ANA Adoptions, a PA licensed adoption agency. I am also the mother of two precious children (now grown and married) who entered our hearts and family through the miracle of adoption.

My first connection to adoption came forty years ago when I was asked to assist a young attorney with an adoption placement. I accompanied him to Roxborough Hospital in Philadelphia where I met a young woman about my own age, who had decided to place her child for adoption. As her father watched, she signed the necessary papers and tears flowed from her eyes. I comforted her as best I could and realized the immense sacrifice she was making, one that she said was because she wanted more than she was able to give to this baby girl. From the hospital, I held that baby until we met the adoptive couple and their family, waiting at their nearby church. In minutes, we went from a heart-wrenching time at the hospital to a celebration of joy in a parking lot, made possible because of a birthmother's sacrifice. That young attorney is now my husband Sam Totaro. From that day in Roxborough, adoption has impacted our lives on a daily basis and is a reason I feel compelled to share with you my concerns about our PA adoption laws.

Through ANA Adoptions, I have been involved in hundreds of situations with Birthmothers and Adoptive Parents since 1999. Our agency website as well as newspaper advertisements appear all over the country so I am familiar with not just PA Adoption laws and restrictions but also regulations and laws in most other states. When a birthmother in PA calls us, we are unable to offer any help to her other than counseling and medical coverage if she is not covered by personal insurance or through Medicare.

At the current time, I am assisting five PA birthmothers who have chosen couples through ANA Adoptions to adopt their child. One of these birthmothers is currently pregnant with twins. She is also experiencing medical complications due to past drug use as well as pre-eclampsia. This mother is due in three weeks. She continues to work at Burger King, walking several blocks daily and then standing all day, even though her OB has told her she needs to get off her feet! If this birthmother lived in neighboring New Jersey or even in Ohio, we would be able to provide assistance to her in the form of paying her rent directly to her landlord, or providing for her utility and cell phone needs. If the couple she had chosen was from almost any state other than PA, we again would have been able to provide help to her. In PA, we cannot offer maternity clothing, a half gallon of milk or cell phone coverage so she can have a connection to help should she need it in the middle of the night.

Another PA Birthmother currently due in May did not have enough funds to pay for her cell phone coverage and rent. She calls only when a friend allows her to use their cell line but I am not able to contact her directly which has posed major problems. Our counselor is not able to reach her either to schedule appointments.

Last month, a birthmother from the Poconos who had chosen one of the ANA families to adopt her child, was living in a cabin in the middle of the woods, miles from healthcare. She too had no phone and depended on a friend's line when that friend stopped by to visit. I located a clinic approximately seven miles from her home but she had no transportation and therefore had no prenatal care. In other states, when there is no transportation available, I have been able to arrange for cabs to take the mother to her OB appointments. In this case, the mother went into labor and suffered complications. The baby was stillborn, arriving weeks early.

In yet another situation, we are working with a mother who is due in July. About a month ago, I received a call from her caseworker. This birthmother suffers from bipolar depression and after an episode, she was admitted to a hospital in Lower Bucks County. Subsequently, upon learning of the pregnancy, she was transferred to a behavioral facility to help regulate the medications she needs during her pregnancy. Once the meds were regulated, she was able to go "home." Unfortunately, the home she was used to was either on the couch of a friend or sometimes at her mother's home. According to the caseworker, her mother's home is not acceptable as her mother has her own issues and that home is not a safe environment for this birthmother. The caseworker asked if our agency could provide housing. In most other states, I would have replied "absolutely." Because of our laws in Pennsylvania, I had to explain that we are not permitted to provide housing or any other help. She was surprised. Last weekend, this mother was transferred to an "in-patient drug/alcohol treatment center" once a bed became available. She had a drug issue years ago but has been drug free for quite some time. Is she in need of treatment now? Absolutely not. But because we cannot help and there is no other place to go, this is the only bed available to her. We don't know how long she can stay but hope it is long enough to see her through the pregnancy and for a few weeks thereafter. Hopefully, at this center, she may learn new skills or find a track to future employment so she can sustain herself in the future.

These are just some of the examples of situations where help with living expenses would have made a huge difference in the lives of these women choosing adoption and in the lives and health of their unborn child. Unfortunately, our hands are tied. Financial help, even if for a few months prior to delivery and for 4-6 weeks post delivery, would make all the difference in the world. Payment for living expenses for a set period of time, paid directly to the providers and not to the birthmother, is not an incentive to make an adoption placement – it is an act of human decency. Until you understand the circumstances that many birthmothers face during their pregnancies, can you fully appreciate the hardships they endure. I have seen it on a daily basis for many years and allowing financial help to these women for a set period of time (or a set cap with regard to the amount allowable) would be an act of human kindness, compassion and decency, something that every adoptive couple would be most willing to provide.