

LYNN, LYNN & BLACKMAN, P.C.

Senate Health and Welfare Committee
Testimony of Jennifer Dennis, February 28, 2014
S.28 (Gender Neutral Nomenclature on Birth Certificates)

My name is Jennifer Dennis. I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 28. My partner of five years, Tamika Anderson, is also here with me today.

Here is our story: in 2012, Tamika and I had our daughter, Kianna, via anonymous sperm donation. While were in the hospital in Burlington after Kianna's birth, we filled out a packet to put Tamika's name on the birth certificate along with mine. We were told by the attending nurses that this packet would fit our situation and that there would be no problem.

But when I received Kianna's birth certificate in the mail, there was no second parent listed. When I called the hospital, the woman in charge told me that Tamika was not allowed on the certificate because she is not Kianna's biological father, and we were not married. Under the current law, an unmarried man can sign a parental acknowledgment form and have his name included on his child's birth certificate. However, there is no DNA testing to ensure that men are being truthful when they acknowledge parentage. It is not fair that any unmarried heterosexual couple can sign a parental acknowledgement form without question, while we are denied this right. Kianna was a product of both of us, but currently Tamika is unable to legally claim her as her own. We are both equal parents, and deserve to have that recognized.

Our daughter, Kianna, also deserves to have two parents on her birth certificate. If Tamika had an unforeseen illness or accident and passed away, Kianna would not be entitled to survivor benefits. If I died an untimely death, Kianna would be placed in foster care. Tamika would have to fight to get her own child out of state custody. If Tamika and I were to end our relationship, I would have no ability to obtain child support. If I were not home, and Kianna got injured or needed medical attention, Tamika could not consent for her own daughter.

Our experience has made us feel like second-class citizens. When we filed a complaint in the Human Rights Commission, it was dismissed. They told us that although the current law is wrong, they do not have the power to help us. We can pursue our rights in court, but that is a burden that is not placed on heterosexual couples. Please approve this bill so that other parents will not go through what we have gone through.

We also urge you to make the bill apply retroactively. We are currently expecting our second child and have been discussing marriage. Although we love each other very much, we do not feel that marriage is something we want to do. Even if we do get married, just to ensure that our second child has the same rights as any heterosexual's child, this step would not help Kianna. She would still have only one legal parent. If this bill passes and is retroactive, we can give both of our children the same equal status.

Tamika and I love our daughter equally. All we ask is the same treatment heterosexual couples already receive. Please approve Senate Bill 28.