

Thank you to the members of the DC council for letting me address you today on the Surrogacy Parenting Act of 2013.

My name is Jessica Kern. I am a product of a traditional surrogacy. (This is where a surrogate is hired to both donate her egg and carry the child to term.) I am here today to urge you to not change DC's current stance on surrogacy.

As a product of surrogacy I can tell you firsthand what we children of donor conception go through. Children of surrogacy, just like children of a traditional adoption, deal with all the traumas that go along with adoption. We want to know where we come from. We want to know who our biological mothers are. We want to know who gave birth to us and what they are like. We are curious about their family and other siblings we may have. I spent the first 17 years of my life being lied to by my biological father and adopted mother. Only when I read in my medical records, did I discover I was a product of a traditional surrogacy. Imagine the trust issues that this creates when your family lies to you your whole life, about information that is your right to know. I am one of the fortunate children of donor conception because it only took me nine years to find my birth mom, however those of us who are conceived through surrogacy do not have the right to have this information. Often we are lied to, and never are even told our stories of origin. When we are conceived it comes across to me that only the adults involved have their interests looked after. The intended parents might be threatened that their child won't view them as parents if they know who their biological parents are, or the surrogate possibly did the surrogacy for financial reasons and does not want to be tracked down. From where I sit this is a painful thing. When I was blessed to find my birth mom I subsequently developed relationships with my extended family. At 26, for the first time in my life, I saw where I got my sense of humor from, my physical traits etc. Even though I hadn't grown up around these people, the genes from this side of my family are what is dominate in me. I finally made sense to myself in ways that I didn't understand was possible. When we have children in this world who already need homes, why are we intentionally creating children to go through adoption traumas? I am one of the lucky ones who were able to heal some of my pain when I found my birth mother. However, I still deal with the other adoption issues of what makes me different in my biological mom's eyes. How can she consider the children that she intended to have her children, and the children she had through surrogacy not equals. When you know that a huge part of the reason that you came into the world is due solely to a paycheck, and that after being paid you are disposable, given away and never thought of again, it impacts how you view yourself. As a product of surrogacy, when I express this viewpoint to others, I am told, look how much your

parents wanted you, they planned and saved to have you. You should be grateful and thankful for them. But at the end of the day, the adults were looking out for themselves, and what they needed and wanted

The next point I would like to speak to is a psychological effect, called the “Cinderella Effect”. This is a real concern for me that I experienced personally. The “Cinderella Effect” describes the risk of abuse to children being raised by who aren’t biologically related to the child they are raising. The odds of being abused increase for the child. I experienced this first hand. Growing up in a household where I was biologically related to my father, but not to my adopted mother, I was physically abused until I was 13. I reported my adoptive mother to social services. The physical abuse for the most part stopped at that point, but the verbal abuse increased until my therapist removed me out of their home four years later. I would like to think, that yes my story is the exception to the rule and that the majority of third party conception births go smoothly. From where I’m sitting, sadly that’s not the case. I feel that there is a good reason for this though. Parents who go through surrogacy to start their family are not by law required to go through psychological testing like parents who are starting their families through adoption. I really wish that at the very least that when the doctors, lawyers made their contracts with intended families and surrogate moms, while they were nailing down the financial details, this psychological testing is required. That somewhere in the mix of the profit, I really wish that there would have been a thought to make sure the child being created was going to be going into a safe home.

For myself, being born via surrogacy has left me feeling like I don’t have any immediate family. I choose not to have a relationship with my biological father and adopted mother because of the abuse. Whenever I’m around them it impacts my mental health negatively, so in order to protect myself I can’t be around them. Unfortunately my biological mother and I aren’t speaking now, and I’m afraid that since I’ve decided to speak out against surrogacy we may never have a relationship again. (But this is too important to not speak out about. We now have information that 30 years ago wasn’t available.) Out of the people who I consider to be immediate family I have one brother who will speak to me. From where I’m sitting, surrogacy is not the magic answer to creating families; more often it’s a source of cause for lifelong pain for everyone involved. I know I’ve really been hurt through this process, but I can see where my intended parents, birth mother, and I have all been hurt in our own ways. I strongly urge the Council to please consider the needs of the children born via surrogacy and uphold the previous law that penalized surrogacy. This is what’s in the best interest of children, and families.

Thank you