



**Bastard Nation: the Adoptee Rights Organization**

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**TO:** Members: Tennessee House Civic Justice Committee  
**FROM:** Marley Greiner, Executive Chair  
**RE:** **H2067:—Mandated and state funded Safe Haven Baby Box (newborn safety device) in every county – Letter of Opposition**  
**DATE:** February 24 2024

Bastard Nation: the Adoptee Rights Organization is the largest adoptee civil rights organization in the United States. We support only full unrestricted access for all adopted persons to their original birth certificates (OBC) and related documents.

In addition to being the Executive Chair and co-founder of Bastard Nation I operate the Stop Safe Haven Baby Boxes Now website (<https://stopshbbnow.org>) that contains over 100 pages of Safe Haven Baby Box information including up-to-date legislative tracking, individual state updates, statistics, policy statements from organizations that oppose boxes, critical readings and reports, pictorials, videos, and a frequently published blog.

Since Tennessee has legalized box use in the state we will discuss salient and related points to the fiscal note attached to SHB2067 as well as it's companion in the Senate 1671.

**Most Salient Objection to the Fiscal Note: SB1697 is a vendor bill**

To the best of our knowledge, there is no other manufacturer or seller of baby boxes in the United States than Safe Haven Baby Boxes Inc located in Woodburn, Indiana. As a *de facto* monopoly, the baby box corporation also maintains the benefit of a vertical market over the devices. Not only does it manufacture the boxes, but it also leases them, promotes them, (including elaborate box blessings and press conferences that celebrate abandonment and often feature children who have been left in drop boxes), works to change state laws to install them, controls their installation and use, places limitations on local communications, and further promotes its own free "hotline" as a way to refer people to abandon babies in the

boxes. That referral process is obviously a financial conflict of interest that, to my knowledge, is never disclosed to women or others in crisis.

The corporation is also, as of 2022, a \$1.1 million profitable operation that pays corporation founder and CEO Monica Kelsey and her husband (listed on the payroll) at least \$170,000 each year (though these figures are likely even more today). The company also employs Mrs. Kelsey's son. The Kelseys and the corporation obviously have vested financial interests in expanding the baby box empire to every state, and they have specifically stated this as a goal. It has no "competition" for that mission other than traditional safe haven laws and safe haven organizations, which generally do not support installation of boxes and require safe and reasonable face-to-face relinquishments in hospitals or fire stations. The company considers traditional safe haven advocates who voice strong legitimate objections to their agenda, as their enemy. It recently filed suit in federal court claiming slander, defamation, and "tortious interference with contract or business" against the highly respected A Safe Haven for Newborns advocacy organization in Florida along with a fire department, and their dedicated staff/volunteers, simply because the organization opposes the company's legislative efforts to legalize boxes in that state.

Importantly, Safe Haven Baby Box Inc markets the adoption of baby boxes to the public and lawmakers as "free;" that is, they claim funding is generated only by voluntary contributions from organizations that oppose abortion, churches, various ministries, fraternal organizations, non-profits, local foundations, and individuals. It assists local supporters in setting up fundraisers, and portrays each local project as a voluntary community building/ownership project free of taxpayer funds. While a substantial number of baby boxes are voluntarily funded, the ministry remains silent on its successes to collect local and state public money. At least once a week on social media and public events, it claims it takes no taxpayer money; thus harvesting more private voluntary donations.

## **Other Comments**

(1) We agree with Dr. Martin, who testified recently before Children and Family Affairs Subcommittee, that the use of Safe Haven Baby Boxes promotes diminished outcomes for birth mothers and their children. They ignore the lifelong impact—the downstream effects of consequences to the mothers" who use the box "option" and their babies as they grow into adulthood. They are a quick permanent life-changing fix for a temporary problem.

As adoptee civil rights advocates, Bastard Nation believes that the State of Tennessee should not be in the business of funding the commodification of children; and that is exactly what this fiscal note, if passed, will do. Baby abandonment boxes normalize "legal" abandonment as a consumer choice without acknowledging the lifetime psychological consequences for the baby and the mother. These include but are not limited to abandonment issues, shame, guilt, substance abuse, depression, low self-esteem and suicidal ideation. These outcomes are real, not something we, as opponents of anonymous relinquishment and anonymous adaption

have dreamed up. Numerous studies, the living experience, and public and private discussions of adopted people and birthparents substantiate these outcomes.

(2) Baby Boxes replace professional best practice standards with unprofessional and unethical “relinquishment” procedures. Baby boxes instead give vulnerable parents a right to abandon an infant out of convenience or ignorance, with no counseling, documentation, or discussion of established alternatives, such as adequate medical care, financial and material family preservation assistance, or crisis nurseries. A personal hand-to hand turnover at a traditional safe haven location can make all the difference in the world for baby and Mom. While no one is pressured, confidential counseling can be offered (and immediate in hospitals ) which not only offers options to legalized abandonment but breathing space to reconsider the probable rashness of the decision—unlike baby box finality.

(3) We agree with Dr Martin and traditional safe have advocates, who also spoke before the subcommittee, that fiscal note funds (and more) could be used to increase support for state and local initiatives to improve physical and psychological outcomes for “families in crisis,” facilitate family preservation, and promote family values.

(4) As the traditional safe witnesses pointed out, Tennessee already has 1,500 drop off locations available. Mandating boxes in each county funded by public money is a duplication of services.

## **Conclusion**

No evidence exists that baby boxes reduce the illegal abandonment of infants. Rather, the installation of baby boxes, along with the savvy promotion of them (which mirrors the promotions of babies practiced by the notorious Georgia Tann and the Tennessee Children's Home )—such as public celebration of legal abandonment—does one thing: increases the abandonment of infants. *Of note:* a substantial number of babies left in boxes, according to press reports and SHBB Inc press conferences arrive wrapped in blankets, dressed in diapers, onesies, caps, with toys, and notes from their mothers. SHBB Inc reports that they have regular conversations with some of the moms and one even volunteers for the organization. No studies have ever been made on boxes, their use, outcomes, and efficacy. We have only the word of the entrepreneurial Safe Haven Baby Box Inc that the program does what it says it does.

The promotion of boxes diminishes if not overtakes legitimate priorities to provide adequate health care, mental health services, and other community-based supportive services for people in crisis.

Please reject this fiscal note. Look instead to funding community based programs to preserve families, not erase them. Please vote Do Not Pass on HB2067. Thank you.

