

Sibling Adoption Bill Now on Baker's Desk

The Legislature sent Gov. Charlie Baker a bill Monday that allows adults to adopt their younger siblings, a policy change supporters say would create a wider range of permanent living arrangements for children.

The bill, co-sponsored by Sen. Joan Lovely (D-Salem) and Rep. Jack Patrick Lewis (D-Framingham), removes a section of state law that critics say prevents adults from adopting their younger siblings, aunts, or uncles, and updates current language to ensure an adoptee's right to inheritance from their natural parents or kin.

The state allows adults to enter into a guardianship status with their younger siblings, aunts, or uncles, but advocates say adoption provides adoptees with a stronger feeling of permanency. Children's League of Massachusetts Executive Director Rachel Gwaltney said children do best when they can stay within their extended families.

"Keeping those biological connections is really important for mental and emotional health," Gwaltney said. "We want to make sure that kids can be in a place that feels like their home and so the more we can keep families together, keep children with kin, we see more positive outcomes in those adoptions."

Lewis asks people to imagine a 30-year-old with a well-paying job and stable housing whose mother had them when they were in high school. The 30-year-old also has a 10-year-old sibling who can no longer live with their mother. In this situation, Lewis said the 30-year-old may be the best person to take care of the younger sibling.

"It happens, it's very feasible," Lewis said.

Lovely said the pandemic prompted lawmakers to push the bill (S 2616) all the way to Baker's desk.

"I think the last two years that we've been through have been extraordinary and we've seen family members die, parents [without] this type of protection available," Lovely said. "I think that's really what has changed, is a major global pandemic and the impact we've seen here right in Massachusetts." - Chris Van Buskirk/SHNS | 4/4/22 3:21 PM

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