When God closes one door, he opens a window. Ever since they were first married, my parents planned on having many children. They were well on their way, and within a few short years they welcomed three healthy children. Due to health reasons, future family members would come to their home through an open adoption arrangement. This is where the miracle began. On Thanksgiving Day – November 26, 1998 – when most were sitting down stuffing themselves with turkey, my mom and dad watched with teary eyes, the birth of their fourth of sixth children – my brother Collin. I remember visiting the hospital to see my new little brother and holding him for the first time. Ever since that first visit, my other siblings and I fought over who got to hold, feed, and sit by Collin.

With my mother's first three children, she was granted a paid leave of up to eight weeks. My mom used this time not only recovering herself, but also caring, nurturing, and bonding with her children. When the fourth through sixth children were born, it was a different story.

My mom's employer stated that paid leave following the birth of a child was solely for the purpose of recovering from childbirth. My mother had to take leave under the Family Medical Leave Act. She did not have the same benefits that biological parents possess, and this caused a great financial burden for my family.

However, the time following the birth of a child is not only a crucial time for the mother's recover but also a crucial time for bonding. The most important property of mankind is the capacity to form and maintain relationships. Relationships are necessary for anyone to survive, learn, work and love. Within our circles of relationships, we are bonded to each other with "emotional glue" – bonded with love.

Bonding is the process of forming an attachment. Bonds begin to form as soon as a child is born. The most important bond in a child's life is the attachment to his or her primary caregiver – the mother. Infants who have a deep bond with their mothers become independent at an early age. This bond boosts their self esteem and it also allows them to be self reliant and enjoy relationships with their peers. The emotional and physiological attachment between a mother and her child provides a foundation that allows the child to thrive in the world.

The lack of bonding in infants can have a life-lasting effect on a child. Infants who don't bond are more likely to become anxious and insecure. Children who do not possess a concrete bond with their mother will still seek her out when they are hurt or frightened, however she will not be of great comfort or assurance. This leaves a definite void in the lives of the children. Those children lacking a secure bond are

also more likely to be antisocial, withdrawn, hostile, and aggressive. This shows that bonding is a crucial element in a growing child's life.

Why are maternity benefits only for biological mothers? Biology is the least of what makes someone a mother. Adoptive parents are obligated to provide the exact same things that biological parents provide – provisions such as education, health care, and the ability to raise their child in the religion of their choice. Adopted children are treated exactly the same as biological children. There is only one distinction between a biological and adopted child, and that is the distinction made when only parents of biological children receive the benefit of paid leave. Any time spent at home with an adopted child means the loss of salary for an adoptive parent. For adoptive parents, this time spent at home is important enough to undergo this financial burden.

One might think God closed the door by not providing paid time off to care for my brothers, but I have the opportunity today not to open the door for my family, but to potentially open the door for adoptive families in the future.

So I ask you – do you believe adopted children deserve the same rights and opportunities as biological children? My three adopted brothers, Collin, Connor, and Colby may not have been born from my mother's body, but they were born from my mother's heart. If your answer is yes, you will be giving all adopted children a chance to the same life and opportunities as biological children. No mother, whether biological or adoptive, should have to make a choice about caring for her family based on finances. There should be no distinction made between biological children and adopted children. I am my mother's child, just as my brothers are. Children may only be one third of our population, but they are all of our future. It is our responsibility to ensure that all children are treated equally, regardless of where they came from. ~~Children are our most precious assets. Children are our world.~~

All children deserve the right to a healthy and secure life.