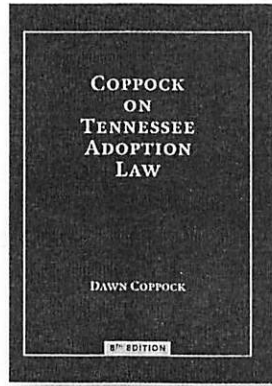


Coppock on Tennessee Adoption Law

[8th ed.]

by Dawn Coppock

Review by Jason Long



accurate to say that Dawn “wrote the book” on Tennessee adoption law. She has been at the forefront of the practice for her entire career. She counsels attorneys and judges, teaches countless seminars, participates in local and national groups advocating for adoption, and drafts and advocates for legislative changes. She has been immersed in the topic and that level of knowledge and expertise bleeds through in every page of this book.

It is well-written. Anyone who knows Dawn knows that she has always stayed true to her East Tennessee roots. She speaks candidly and directly. She does not pull punches or obfuscate issues. That style comes through in her book as she lays out very plain and simple explanations of the legal principles at issue and walks the reader through her analysis and resolution. As an added bonus, Dawn’s sense of humor is also present throughout the book.

It is practical. This is a guide that is user-friendly and will make an attorney practice-ready from the start. Dawn explains reasoning and rationale behind our adoption laws and then takes the reader step-by-step through the adoption process. In addition to the necessary statutory references, the book is replete with citations to the primary and secondary case law governing in Tennessee. Purchase of the book includes electronic access to her adoption library catalog, including dozens of practice forms developed by the author and a library of state forms commonly used. All of the forms one needs to prepare and pursue adoption are at the user’s fingertips. The library catalog alone would justify the investment in this book.

It is relevant. For those who have purchased prior iterations of this book, you know its value. However, it is worth noting that there have been several changes in the law since the 7th edition was published, including the Forever Homes Act, signed into law by Gov. Bill Lee just last year. The comprehensive

In 1997, I was in my first year of practice, working with a small domestic relations firm in Knoxville. Our senior partner mentioned in passing one day that there had been an overhaul of the adoption code in recent years and we needed someone in the firm who understood the new law and could be our adoption resource. She sent me to a seminar taught by Dawn Coppock and we purchased what I believe to have been the first edition of *Coppock on Tennessee Adoption Law*. In short order, I had an adoption practice and an area of the law in which I felt competent, even proficient, to represent my clients. For a new lawyer, that was a feeling of relief.

Dawn Coppock has been a driving force in the development, codification and application of the law of adoption in the state of Tennessee for over 30 years. She is a tireless advocate for the safety and welfare of children and the creation of families within our state. In that work, she is a constant and unflinching mentor on adoption law and its many nuances. It should really come as no surprise that her recent publication *Coppock on Tennessee Adoption Law* (8th ed.), is masterfully done and adds another brick, an essential cornerstone, to the understanding and

application of adoption law in this state.

To say that the volume is gospel to anyone endeavoring to practice adoption law in Tennessee would be an understatement. Seasoned practitioners and newly minted attorneys alike will gain valuable insights from the publication. It is well worth the read for both the occasional adoption practitioner and the attorney who strives to make adoption their full-time practice. I cannot say enough about the value of this book to anyone looking to practice adoption law.

It is comprehensive. The book provides step-by-step guidance in all areas, from identifying parties to an adoption, the various forms of adoption, securing termination of parental rights, independent and agency adoptions, foreign adoptions, post-adoption agreements, grandparent visitation, access to adoption records, and much more. Coppock’s book leaves no stone unturned as she explains the nuances of the practice ranging from unique service of process issues to financial considerations and tax implications. The book takes the reader through application of legislative considerations such as the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, the Indian Child Welfare Act, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act. In short, if it has to do with, or even touches remotely upon, an aspect of adoption law, this book covers it.

It is reliable. For 28 years, it has been

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reforms by the legislature have altered the landscape of Tennessee adoption law and this book addresses those changes, from the point of view of an insider who was on the front line advocating for change and improvement. As Dawn notes in her preface to the book, the volume is current through the end of the 2023 legislative session. (Changes after the 2023 legislative session can be found at Dawn's blog at DawnCoppock.com.)

Dawn Coppock has been an

extraordinary and valuable resource for more than 30 years for attorneys practicing adoption law in Tennessee. *Coppock on Tennessee Adoption Law* (8th ed.) is the next vital step in providing support to those attorneys. I could go on and on with adjectives to describe the publication: user-friendly, informative, concise, utilitarian, engaging, well-reasoned, cumulative. Perhaps, most importantly, the book is passionate (an odd adjective to describe

a legal treatise). As Dawn herself notes in the preface:

You [the reader] are helping these children and you keep telling me this book is useful. So, I've kept writing and hoping to amplify what I've learned to shorten your learning curve and to create more efficient advocates.

The best thing I can say is simply that, if you practice adoption law in the state of Tennessee, I don't think you can afford not to own this book. |||

The Legacy of East Tennessee's 'Angel in Adoption'

Back in 1995, the Tennessee adoption code was rewritten in its entirety and signed into law by then-Gov. Don Sundquist, with an effective date of Jan. 1, 1996. For Tennessee adoption law practitioners, thus commenced a successive series of legislative enactments that have both fine-tuned and added complexity to our adoption code, more than doubling its length. At the same time, given the availability of court-appointed counsel for indigent parents and the importance of the fundamental issues in play in contested parental rights terminations, the number of recorded appellate decisions in our state have increased dramatically. That, coupled with the Tennessee Supreme Court's 2016 determination that all grounds in all appellate cases in this area must be addressed in every appeal, has significantly increased the complexity of the reported adoption cases in our state.

Just when Tennessee practitioners most needed help in this area, Dawn Coppock authored the first edition of *Coppock on Tennessee Adoption Law* in 1996, writing in the evenings after her young children were put to bed. Now with the 8th edition published earlier this year, Dawn continues to provide both practical and academic advice for Tennessee judges and practitioners. There are few areas of the law in Tennessee that have a bench book as helpful and comprehensive as Dawn's book is in the area of Tennessee adoption law. No doubt, if you are a practitioner in this area, you know who Dawn Coppock is and the service she has provided to the Tennessee Bar in the area of adoption law.

In actions not quite as visible as her book, Dawn has been helpful behind the scenes in identifying areas of improvement to our adoption code and in suggesting legislation to codify



Dawn Coppock

those improvements. Dawn was the singularly most important voice behind the formation of the TBA Adoption Section in 2018, and she continues to serve as a member of the Executive Committee of our section. For over 30 years, Dawn served as a fellow in the American Academy of Adoptions and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys. Others have noted her important contributions in this area, as the U.S. Congressional Coalition on Adoption named her an "Angel in Adoption" in 2004, and in 2010, Dawn received the Bill Williams Service Award for service to Tennessee children in state custody who are awaiting adoption.

Dawn has proven herself to be a fearless and tireless advocate for children in our state. Despite her busy schedule, she always seems to have time for judges and practitioners who have sought her out for input and direction on difficult cases. I have finalized over 4,000 adoptions in the last 40 years, but I too find myself reaching out to Dawn on difficult and thorny questions. She is the founder of Good Law, a seminar company that produces adoption law seminars where she patiently teaches practitioners the ins and outs of her craft in a folksy, down to earth manner that reflects her Strawberry Plains lifestyle but belies her extraordinarily sharp intellect.

Dawn says she plans to slow down after the completion of the 8th edition of her book to spend more time with her family, especially her grandchildren. Here's hoping her love for children and her expertise in her craft keep her engaged yet for many years to come. If you are an adoption practitioner in the great State of Tennessee, you too have been a beneficiary of Dawn's fine work in this area! |||

NOTE

1. In *re Carrington H.* 483 S.W. 3d 507

Thanks to **Michael S. Jennings** for writing this profile of Dawn! He is a member of the TBA Adoption Law Section Executive Council and former chair of the section, and is a founding member of Samples Jennings Clem and Fields in Chattanooga.