

SB 296 Testimony

March 6, 2012

My name is Eileen McQuade, and I am a birthmother from South Windsor. I am also the immediate past President of the American Adoption Congress. The AAC firmly believes that every adult, including those adopted, have a right to know who they are, who they come from and where they were born. It really is that simple.

Simple, and profoundly important. Having an accurate medical history can be a matter of life and death. For example, health insurance companies will pay for testing for the Brac1 and Brac2 genetic mutation if a woman has two first degree relatives that developed ovarian or breast cancer before the age of 50. Adopted women without a medical history can't qualify. This is just one instance of how a lack of a medical history can impact the detection and treatment of disease.

Under new Homeland Security rules, one needs to present a "valid" birth certificate to get a passport. A "valid" birth certificate, as defined by Homeland Security, is one registered within one year of the date of birth. Adoptees who lingered in foster care before adoption may not meet this criterion. Homeland Security needs the original birth certificate, but that cannot be obtained in Connecticut.

We all relish our family stories....how we came to Connecticut, family traditions, tribulations, and successes. Interest in genealogy continues to grow as more records are accessible online. It is not the same for the adopted person. Yes, they love their parents, but they have a family of origin that contributed to their identity as well. Understanding where you have been can be a valuable tool in seeing all that you can be.

Opponents to access legislation claim that birthmothers were promised confidentiality. In reality, birth certificates of adopted persons were not sealed until 1974 -75 in Connecticut, and that was done without a public hearing. Since 1983 the form used by relinquishing parents clearly states that confidentiality is NOT promised.

Six other states that have passed original birth certificate access have implemented a contact preference. I can tell you what happened in these states:

- One in 2000 birthmothers have requested no contact.
- Surveys by reputable adoption research institutes validate that birthparents welcome contact
- States that do provide adult adoptees with access to their identity have lower abortion rates and higher adoption rates than surrounding states.

Historically, adoption has not been about changing and hiding identities. The practice of sealing birth certificates started in the 1930s to circumvent labeling children as bastards, and did not become law in CT until the mid 1970s. CT does not stamp birth certificates with the bastard stamp anymore. Connecticut should seize the opportunity to undo the bad legislation that sealed birth certificates, and bring the statute in line with our social values today.

Thank you for your time.

Eileen McQuade

103 Garden Circle, South Windsor, CT 06074

Eileen2155@gmail.com

561.279.7714