

Testimony
Government Administration and Elections Committee
House Bill 5421 – An Act Exempting Death Certificates of Minors from Public Disclosure
Friday, February 20, 2013

I am Dr. Robert L. Rafford and I have been a professional genealogist for over 39 years. As a professional genealogist, Municipal Historian and president of the Middlebury Historical Society, and former mental health practitioner, I oppose enacting proposed **HB 5421**.

Enacting this proposal (and its counterparts, HB 5733 and HB 6157) would severely restrict access to vital records, an unprecedented measure, for the first time in the nearly 400 years of Connecticut's existence, and this is unacceptable. As Americans, I believe we should all take very seriously threats to hide our governmental records from public scrutiny. Centuries of having vital records open has proved to be beneficial in so many ways. Writers, investigators, attorneys, historians, reporters, legislators, genealogists, family historians, governmental agencies and others all access these records on a daily basis throughout our state and country.

I have thousands of professional colleagues in Connecticut and across this nation whose livelihoods would be unduly harmed by enacting this proposal; I work for clients across the world; I work for television producers, attorneys, town governments, corporations, writers, teachers, scholars, and many others, and they, too, depend upon access to all vital records for their livelihoods.

Everyone I know is heartbroken because of the unprecedented tragedy in Newtown; we are sensitive to the fact that it has placed special burdens upon public officials in Newtown and elsewhere. As a minister, as a professional mental health practitioner, and as a citizen, if I thought for one solitary moment that enacting this unprecedented legislation would be of help to the families in our state, I would unhesitatingly support it. But there is no benefit to be gained by depriving our citizens of a right they have exercised for four centuries, none whatsoever.

- Enacting this measure will severely restrict access to *all* records, because they are sometimes inseparable in town books. Attempting to isolate some records out of all would be a strategic nightmare and would render all records virtually closed.
- Death records presently, and over the centuries, do not disclose technical medical or any sensitive information, nor have I ever seen in the thousands I have inspected the potential to "cause undue hardship".
- Closing vital records that are presently available would deprive millions of individuals across our nation from the benefit they have derived from these records for centuries.

I respectfully call upon you all to turn away from this well-meant but ultimately harmful proposal.

Most sincerely,

The Rev. Robert L. Rafford, D.Min, M.Div., B.A.
57 Clear View Knoll
Middlebury, Connecticut 06762
Certified Marriage and Family Therapist (ret)
Diplomate, American Association of Pastoral Counselors (ret)
Board Certified, Association of Professional Chaplains (ret)
Official Municipal Historian, Town of Middlebury, Connecticut
President, Middlebury Historical Society, Inc.
Past president, Connecticut Professional Genealogists Council, Inc.