

**Statement of the Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information on Proposed House Bill 5733, An Act Concerning Access to a Child's Death Certificate.**

**Wednesday, February 20, 2013**

Members of the Public Health Committee: I am Claude Albert, legislative chair of the Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information.

While we certainly sympathize with the sentiment expressed in this legislation's purpose, we would urge the legislature to be reluctant to seal death certificates. These most fundamental of official records have always been available to the public.

Death certificates specify the time, place and cause of death. They do not, however, include detailed or graphic medical information, such as that contained in a medical examiner's autopsy report. Current law provides sweeping exemptions to public disclosure of these medical examiner findings. Other personal information on death certificates, such as Social Security number, race and educational level, is also already protected from disclosure. We believe the limited information now available on death certificates should remain public.

A number of other issues also suggest themselves in connection with this proposal. The bill creates a vague standard for when a death certificate may be withheld, and makes a myriad of public officials responsible for individually determining when that standard has been met. The bill also gives no time frame for expiration of the restriction on access, and it makes no provision for the cases of children who die in state custody, which must be subject to close public scrutiny. The bill also fails to consider whether different family members might have different privacy interests in some cases.