



State of Connecticut

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Testimony in Support of HB 6157- AN ACT CONCERNING PERSONALLY IDENTIFYING INFORMATION ON CERTIFICATIONS OF MARRIAGE AND DEATH

Public Health Committee

February 27, 2013

My thanks to the Honorable Co-Chairs Senator Terry Gerratana and Representative Susan Johnson, Vice Chairs Senator Gayle Slossberg and Representative Philip Miller, Ranking Members Senator Jason Welch and Representative Prasad Srinivasan, as well as the entire Public Health Committee for their time and consideration today, addressing this important issue.

I am here to testify in support of HB 6157- An act concerning personal identifying information on Certifications of Marriage and Death, which is the second of two bills before the committee that relates to the release of vital information. The first bill you heard last week, HB 5733 An Act Concerning Access To A Child's Death Certificate, was intended to restrict the release of specific information contained in the death certificates of minors. Today's bill is intended to broaden the concept to limit the release of personal information provided on all Death Certificates and Marriage Certificates.

HB 5733 generated controversy due to the perception that death certificates would be restricted in their entirety. I wish to make it clear that the reason I support HB 5733 and introduced HB 6157 is to ensure we protect information that is personal and can be used to establish a new identity, or used to sensationalize a news story at the family's expense. My hope is that we can create language that allows the town clerks to release a short form of these vital records that omits information that can for nefarious purposes, yet provide the public with information for lawful uses, such as legitimate research and investigative journalism. I also fully support the concept of releasing records to genealogists, as we do currently.

I understand that we must ensure transparency in all our public dealings, but we must also be guarded about how we protect our citizens. When government at any level requires citizens to fill out forms that require personal information, why should the personal information now be public just because it is on a government form? When the government must collect personal information to conduct business, the information should not automatically become public just because it is the possession of a government

agency. Just as we recognize the need to protect medical information, I believe we have a duty to only release information in vital records when there is a lawful reason and the information is necessary.

I leave it to the members of the Public Health Committee to determine which items to protect on these forms, based on the testimony received. I would suggest that we standardize a form to be released. Also, in the matter of death certificates, the circumstances of the death, including the cause and manner of death, must be included as these are vital to watch dog and public health organizations.

I appreciate the attention of the committee on this important issue. I hope the members see the opportunity that lies before us to protect against identity theft and protect families from the media circus that might ensue after any tragedy.