



State of Connecticut

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February 20, 2013

Testimony in Support of HB 5733- AN ACT CONCERNING ACCESS TO A CHILD'S DEATH CERTIFICATE

I would like to thank the Honorable Co-Chairs Senator Terry Gerratana and Representative Susan Johnson, the Honorable Vice Chairs Senator Gayle Slossberg and Representative Philip Miller, and the Ranking Members Senator Jason Welch and Representative Prasad Srinivasan, and the entire membership of the Public Health Committee for their time today addressing this deeply personal and emotional issue.

On the heels of the terrible tragedy in Newtown we are faced with many issues. While we as a legislature have focused our efforts on finding answers and crafting a legislative response to protect our children in the future, the town clerks in Newtown have focused their efforts on protecting the victims' families of the shooting by protecting the release of information contained in the death certificates that will be used to fuel the media circus in Newtown.

It makes good sense to me that we protect at least some of the information contained on death certificates, especially for minors. We already protect birth certificates from release, which arguably reduces the threat of identity theft. Why shouldn't we protect against those who would take advantage of a death to create a new identity? And why shouldn't we protect families of the deceased from having the media seek out the grave of a loved one because it makes great footage?

I am aware of significant concerns regarding the protection of death certificates. There are those in various agencies and the media who believe they have a duty to uncover situations where deaths have occurred under questionable circumstances. This is even more of an issue for children, who are not as likely to die from natural causes. This does beg the question if there is a middle ground regarding what is releasable to the public.

While I leave this question to my colleagues on the Public Health Committee to decide, I have two possible suggestions. I know from discussions with Town clerks that have used approved "short forms" to provide information to the public. Another option could be for the media to contact the medical examiner's office for the copy of the death certificate before it has the sensitive information added. I would caution, however, that we ensure this would not create an undue burden on the Medical Examiner's office.

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 the memories of those who perished in Newtown. I urge the members of the committee to support the bill, and make the bill effective upon passage.

Regards,