

Testimony before the Joint Committee on Public Health
Proposed House Bill 6157
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I am a self-employed professional genealogist and president of the Connecticut Professional Genealogists Council, Inc. I make my living by researching the history of Connecticut families in the state's rich record collections.

Three organizations have asked me to represent them with my testimony: the CT Professional Genealogists Council, CT Ancestry Society and the CT Society of Genealogists. I unofficially represent the other 13 genealogy societies that are also incorporated or authorized to do business in Connecticut. Members of these sixteen organizations have special rights regarding access to Connecticut vital records as granted in Chapter 93, Section 7-51 of the General Statutes. We have legal standing in discussions of access to vital records in the state. In addition, I represent the CT Association of Licensed Private Investigators. Overall, I am testifying on behalf of more than 5,000 genealogists and private investigators, people who every day make peaceful and honest use of Connecticut's records. We are opposed to this bill. We are in favor of fully open vital records.

The main purpose of my testimony is to ensure continuation of our access to vital records in Connecticut as laid out in the statutes. I would also like to address the issue of open vital records, which has been Connecticut's legal tradition for nearly 400 years.

We have great respect for the state's town clerks and the significant contributions they make to the historical and legal landscape of the state. We certainly have sympathy for the staff at the Town Clerk office in Newtown for the difficult job they had in the wake of the event of December 14, 2012. However, because no death certificates had been released by their office as of February 22, 2013,¹ there is no cause-and-effect relationship shown between issuance of the records to the public and any harassment or invasion of the privacy of the victims' families that has already occurred.

In addition, this bill suggests that fully public death and marriage records introduce the risk of identity theft. I submit that there is no basis for this claim whatsoever. Identity theft perpetrated by strangers (i.e., the public) through the use of open vital records is virtually non-existent and there are statistics to prove this.

The attack of December 14, though horrible, was a single event that occurred in but one of our 169 Connecticut towns. The proposed law would overturn nearly 4 centuries of legal precedent in Connecticut and chip away at our proud tradition of open records. It seems to us that this is an extreme response to a single event. Since the circumstance is not general, but rather is isolated, the need for such a broadly applied law is obviated.

¹ Haigh, Susan, "Conn. Mulls Death Certificate Limits after Newtown," *The Big Story*, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/conn-mulls-death-certificate-limits-after-newtown> , accessed February 26, 2013.

In closing, marriage and death records have been public since the founding of the Colony. It would be a mistake to exempt these records from public disclosure because of a single event. The organizations that I represent oppose this bill. We do not see the necessity for it, and we do not like the precedent that it would set. We are in favor of keeping Connecticut's marriage and death records fully open to the public. Above all, we assert our rights to maintain access to vital records.

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