

Raised Bill No. 5144 An Act Concerning Access to Birth Certificates and Parental health Information for Adopted Persons.

I am writing to support passage of this important bill. I am an adoptive parent and an attorney with 37 years of experience with adoption related issues. Additionally I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents (CAFAP) and Lutheran Social Services of New England, the agency we adopted both of our children through. (Please note both of these organizations are in support of this bill.)

My children have been fortunate in that we have always had the information denied to adult adoptees in Connecticut. Our son, who is 31, was born in Massachusetts which has opened up its adoption records. In his case that has not been as significant as in many cases as we have been able to maintain a connection with his birth mother through our agency, Lutheran Social Services of New England. Our daughter, 27, was born in Chile--we have her entire court file and her original birth certificate. As our children were growing up we were able to answer their questions about their birth families because we had access to that information. Our children have grown up to be healthy, well balanced adults in part because there were never any "secrets" related to their being adopted. We have never met their birth parents, but when I have been asked what I would do if their birth parents came to our door my answer has always been--"I would hug them"--why?--because without their gift to us of their children we would never have been able to be parents.

As a professional I have worked with birth parents, adoptive parents and adoptees--both children and adults. It has been my experience that more knowledge rather than less knowledge that the parties in the adoption triangle have about each other is better. As an attorney who has been involved in many terminations of parental rights cases I have always found that children placed in adoption benefit from knowing who they are. Many of those children have returned to me as adults to learn about the circumstances that lead to them being placed in adoption. The birth mothers I have worked with have generally been more inclined to make an adoption plan knowing that when their children reached adulthood there were opportunities for both sides to search. Additionally more and more of the adoptions that are done in Connecticut are "open" in that the birth and adoptive parents have met or the birth and adoptive parents have agreed to maintain some level of contact through the agency that has worked with them. The connections are not only important for children emotionally but they can be critical for maintaining the ability to obtain family medical information. In the 37+ years I have been doing this work I have only had instances that come to mind where I was contacted by birth mothers who were afraid of being found--both women were in their 70s or 80s--they gave birth to children out of wedlock in a time when there was incredible shame attached to such births. That has changed.

I believe adult adoptees have a right to access their original birth records. I do not believe that opening up these records will impact birth mothers currently contemplating an adoption plan and I believe the safe guards built into this bill will provide older birth mothers who might have some reservations about being "found" a degree of comfort. The experience in states that have opened their records has been positive. We need to join those states.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I regret that I was unable to appear in person for the hearing on this bill today as I have a variety of business related scheduling conflicts. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me.

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