

February 28, 2014
Public Health Committee Public Hearing
Room 1D
In Support of HB 5144

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Chairman Gerratana, Chairman Johnson and members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today and ask your support for HB 5144; an important step to restore retroactively and prospectively, the right of adopted adults to access their original birth certificates and to create a pathway to obtain parental health information.

Despite all that is known about the incalculable value of interpersonal connection, family history and medical information, and the strides society has taken to dispel the stigmas surrounding adoption, the debate about access continues to be framed in the context of the promise of birth mother confidentiality.

Speaking as one of those mothers, I desperately hope to help change the dynamic of that conversation.

In the year 2014 I believe we must come to the realization that birth mothers still in psychological hiding are the exception not the rule. Data collected by other states with access legislation in place support this, proving that we can provide for both the needs of the many and the fears of the few. The Contact Preference Form that is part of 5144 will actually give birth mothers a voice they have never had before. Instead of being spoken for by others who, however well-intentioned, can't know what is in their hearts, they will have the means to say for themselves what they need for privacy.

Privacy...Today, an adoptee in their 20's, 30's 40's, 50's and older will sit across a desk from a stranger in an adoption agency who holds a file containing the record

of their life before they were adopted. The stranger will read the file and then tell the adoptee they don't have a right to the information. Maternity home workers, adoption agency staff, social workers, doctors, nurses, lawyers, judges, DCF and Vital Statistics Department personnel - how private were our adoptions anyway? If all these players can be trusted with our privacy, then trust our children with it as well. They are a part of us not APART FROM us.

Never underestimate the power of the mother-child bond even for the mothers who stay buried under the shame and guilt that was heaped on us. Our pregnancies were untimely but our children were not unwanted or unloved.

There is an irony to this situation that may be impossible for anyone but a birth mother to fully grasp but I would be grateful for the committee to hear me out. Before our babies were born, we were constantly reminded of how much an adoptive family could give them that we could not. Now, the only things we have to give them – the things that ONLY WE can give them - identity, heritage, family history and medical information are denied them...in the name of maintaining our privacy.

Please don't place that burden in our arms. Please don't lay their pain at our feet. Fulfill the real promise made to us all those years ago when we surrendered our dearest blood to adoption - that they would have everything they need for a happy healthy life. Without access, they do not.