

Holly Watson HB 5144

I am writing in support of HB5144. Although I am not a resident of Connecticut, I am an adult adoptee who was adopted in 1968 (reunited in 1991) and am very passionate about the absolute right of every person to their own personal birth information. I have spent the past 25 years of my life, advocating for adoption reform, adoptee and parental rights. From my experience and knowledge, more than 95% of the mothers are happy to be found and look forward to having their lost children back in their lives. There is simply no justifiable reason to keep adoptees' original birth certificates (OBCs) sealed.

But, ultimately this bill is not about search and reunion; it is about the absolute right of adoptees to be free of state-imposed discrimination and oppression by the sealing of their OBCs. What they choose to do with it is their personal business. The public and the State have no more right to intrude in their personal lives and question their motives for wanting their personal information than we do in anyone else's who was not adopted.

This is such an important piece of legislation that is way overdue for passage. Especially in this age of information technology and the generally-accepted acknowledgement of the importance of knowing one's family history, heritage and the identity of those to whom one is blood related, to force adopted persons - and only adopted persons - to live in the dark ages of secrets and lies is cruel and ludicrous. As a basic human right, adopted people deserve the opportunity enjoyed by every other citizen of saying "I know" instead of "I wonder."

To those who suggest that birth mothers were promised confidentiality, it bears noting that if a relinquished child is never adopted, they maintain the right to their original birth certificates; while it is only the adopted person who loses this right. There is no explicit right to privacy in the U.S. Constitution. The federal Sixth Circuit Court has ruled in the Tennessee Case of Doe v. Sundquist (Feb., 1997) that issuing original birth certificates to adult adoptees does not violate their birth parents' right to privacy, and the Oregon Court of Appeals concurred in a decision regarding that state's adoptee rights initiative which passed in November 1998.

The law denying adult adoptees access to their records is out dated and unnecessary. As an adults, adoptees are still regarded as children by the government and denied their civil right to access their original birth certificates. There is no reason why adult adoptees should not be treated the same as everyone else.

As long as the sealed records system continues to exist, an aura of shame will cling to adoption. Adoption is not and has never been a shameful process, and it's time to stop treating it as one.

Holly Watson
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"In all of us there is a hunger, marrow-deep, to know our heritage- to know who we are and where we have come from. Without this enriching knowledge, there is a hollow yearning. No matter what our attainments in life, there is still a vacuum, an emptiness, and the most disquieting loneliness."

— Alex Haley