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February 27, 2013

To Senator Terry Gerratana and Representative Susan Johnson, Co-chairs, and Members of the Public Health Committee:

On behalf of Access Connecticut, I would like to respectfully request your support of House Bill 5144, An Act Concerning Access to Birth Certificates and Parental Health Information for Adopted Persons.

This bill will end the discriminatory treatment of adoptees that denies us access to our true, original birth certificates, that insults our dignity as human beings and that creates an ongoing threat to our health.

When I was adopted in Connecticut in 1960, I had the same right as every other citizen to obtain my original birth certificate when I became an adult.

But in 1975 the state took my right away, retroactively, thereby turning me and all other adoptees into second class citizens. We are the *only* citizens to whom the state denies this right, and it is *based solely on the fact of our adoption*.

I want my right back. I want it back for every living, breathing adoptee born in the state of Connecticut.

When the Connecticut Commission on Health Equity was established in 2008, the General Assembly stated that, "equal enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is a human right and a priority of the state".

How healthy is it for adoptees to be discriminated against? How can we attain the "highest attainable standard of health" when the only medical information available to us is what *might* exist in an adoption file that ages with every year we age? How healthy is it for an adoptee to go to a doctor's office and be unable to complete a family medical history form?

I wish I could convey to those of you who are not adopted what it is like to be told, "We are sympathetic to you wanting to know where you came from, but there *might* be a few women who believe they could hide the secret of your birth forever, and we think they have the right to deprive you and your descendents of your ancestry."

How persuasive is this?

How persuasive was it to women seeking the right to vote, to hear that some men didn't want them to have it?

How persuasive was it for people of color seeking the right to be free, to hear that others asserted claims of ownership over them?

How persuasive was it for gay citizens seeking the right to marry, to hear that some people believe it threatened their marriages?

Not very persuasive.

Outdated attitudes of shame and stigma have led to adoption laws characterized by secrecy, sealed birth certificates and pretense.

It was, and continues to be, a mistake.

How do we know it is a mistake? Because today's adoption practices are increasingly open and transparent. Because the willingness that exists to enact prospective access legislation is a tacit admission that secrecy was, and is, a mistake.

We adoptees are not living in the past. We are living NOW. And this discriminatory law affects us NOW.

It will affect us for the rest of our lives. A one year old adoptee will live for eighty more years without this right. A 75 year old adoptee will go to his grave without this right.

Unless you give us the right back.

Give us our right back. Give us our health. Treat us like everyone else.

Thank-you for your consideration and support.

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