

Linde Aseltine

Committee: Public Health

Co-Chairs: Representative Terri Gerratana and Representative Susan Johnson

RE: In Support of Raised Bill 5144

Public Hearing Date: Friday, February 28, 2014

February 25, 2014

Dear Public Health Committee Members and Citizens,

In October of 2001, I booked a trip to Sweden with my employer and needed to obtain my first passport. I had a busy Manhattanite life so I figured completing the process by mail would be easy. On the website, I scrolled down the list of requirements and got my paperwork together. I noticed that it listed, "original birth certificate with signatures of attending physician and registrar of vital statistics." I looked at MY birth certificate. Those boxes were blank—because both Dr. John P Wheeler and Edward Tomkeil signed the document that was created at my birth on July 25, 1975. Not this one issued in 1977.

You see, I'm adopted.

A policy was made for me when I was six weeks old: If my adoptive parents had chosen not to tell me I wasn't their biological child, I would never have found out. My birth certificate does not mention my name at birth nor does it specify that it--and the names of the people in the boxes marked "mother" and "father"--were ever changed. My adoption papers are the single link between the person I was born and the person I am legally today. Put a flame to them and my original identity would cease to exist.

I called the State Department hotline and explained my situation. The man on the line told me I'd need to send them my adoption papers, my current birth certificate and my original one to complete the connection. "But I don't have my original birth certificate! By law, I'm not even allowed to see it!" The man said the Federal government couldn't verify my citizenship without a signed document.

I hung up the phone and panicked. I got on a train and threw myself on the Hall of Records desk in Manchester, CT, where I was born, begging the women for some other document. I needed something that proved that I was once Felicity Dyan Hagenow and a legal, natural-born citizen of the United States. The old woman chuckled and stated that she had known the men whose signatures I was missing. She believed I was genuine because she was familiar with the chop-shop form I was clutching. She processed my application and signed off on my documents in person.

I returned home, relieved but deeply disturbed. With the Twin Towers still burning down the street from my front door, it occurred to me that my country was suspicious of me because of a policy of secrecy. On paper, literally, Linde Margret Aseltine was nothing more than the fabrication of a criminal sitting in a basement with a printer and some scissors.

It is mind boggling to me that in an age of fingerprint scanners on cell phones and biometric identification systems for apartment buildings, a 38 year old law that deliberately defrauds an adult of his or her whole identity still exists. I cannot believe that Connecticut needs volunteers to crusade for me and hundreds of my peers. Radio shows, legislative meet and greets, Facebook pages—you mean to tell me all of this is necessary to give me back the RIGHT everyone else has to know who they were before they were six weeks old???

My “birth certificate” puts Deal and Kristine Aseltine at Manchester Hospital at 8:38 on the Friday night I was born when, in reality, they were on vacation in Vermont. There is no notation that decouples them from the event of my birth. An omission deliberately made to mislead ME. How is that not outright fraud? Find me another false document that is protected by law!

Go ahead. I'll wait. Might as well since we've already been waiting years now on this issue.

I have known my birthparents all my adult life. A simple match of information reconnected us. But for many adoptees, it's not so easy. My birthmother had the forethought and opportunity to give me her last name. For many other young women who surrendered babies, that was not an option. It angers me that all the Baby Girl Does out there must resort to illegal searchers or, worse, live with the gnawing feeling of not knowing who they are. We adoptees are a unique bunch with challenges only we understand. Yet this judgment upon us has been made by people who have all their baby pictures and don't know what it's like to feel left out of their families.

I know the argument against access to original birth certificates for adult adoptees is to protect the poor, ashamed birthmothers who were guaranteed secrecy so that they could lead normal lives. You will hear from my ferocious birthmama about the stupidity of that notion, so I'll spare you. But I will say this: I don't see how one person's emotions have any legal weight over the common rights and freedoms of someone else.

This country is all about elevating and evolving. Over history, we've changed direction and taken paths out of the shadows of the past. Plantation owners were legally guaranteed ownership of slaves...until they weren't. Women were legally banned from voting...until they challenged and changed the law. Perhaps those are hyperbolic comparisons. But even Netflix reserves the right to change the terms of my subscription contract!

I am proud of being from Connecticut. We are fair, rational, no-nonsense people who have built our wealth and esteem through hard work and strong values. One of those

values is truth. Another is justice. Withholding access to someone's personal, essential information because of a backward, archaic policy might be OK for a less sophisticated state. But Connecticut should hold its head higher and be a role model for the rest of the country.

So, on behalf of all of us with holes in our hearts where the stories of our first precious moments of life should be, I ask you to support raised bill 5144.

Sincerely,
Linde Aseltine