

As a genealogist for over twenty years, I feel compelled to speak with you as member of the Senate Health committee which is considering Senate Bill 414

The current statute states that genealogists have access to “all vital records in the custody of any registrar of vital statistics, including certificates, ledgers, record books, card files, indexes and database printouts, "during all normal business hours."

The new legislation, Bill 414, proposed by Commissioner of Public Health, Dr. Jewell Mullen, reads as follows: "A registrar of vital statistics may grant a genealogist immediate access to such records or may require a genealogist to schedule an appointment to access such records, at the registrar's discretion. A registrar requiring an appointment for access to such records shall schedule such appointment as soon as reasonably practicable."

This new legislation should be defeated for a variety of reasons that I will note below. **The primary reason**, however, is that it singles out only genealogists depriving them of their rights as a citizen to access records in a timely matter. No other citizen, private and professional, would have to wait to access information. Not one other citizen has to schedule an appointment at the discretion of a registrar. Not one other citizen has to try to reach a registrar by phone before making a request. Not one other citizen has to wait a “reasonably practicable” period which could be prolonged indefinitely at the registrar discretion. Not one other citizen will be deprived of his rights:

not! attorneys

not! adoption agencies

not! funeral directors

not! statisticians

not! title searchers

not! newspaper reporters

not! real estate agents

not! authors

not! heads of municipalities

not! biographers

not! veterans

not! police departments

not! medical researchers
and federal agencies

not! officials from state

not! any other citizen members of the public.

**ONLY CONNECTICUT GENEALOGISTS WILL LOSE THEIR
AMERICAN RIGHT TO IMMEDIATE ACCESS!**

Reason two: This bill also guts the original provision regarding “normal business hours access” which was emphasized in the revised 1996 legislation because registrars had been unfairly treating genealogists’ access as being frivolous and unnecessary in contrast to serious requests. That 1996 provision guaranteed the researchers’ access, not putting them ahead of others, but, rather treating their requests as equal to others. I might add that for twenty years I have been visiting registrar offices all over Connecticut. The majority of registrars have been courteous and helpful. Unfortunately, even with a provision on the books, a few went out of their way to make obtaining information as difficult as possible and to make sure that I knew how annoyed they were with my presence and my request. I can only imagine how allowing their discretion as to an appointment or as to a “reasonably practicable” amount of time would deny me the right to access.

Reason three: Right now, I belong to four Connecticut genealogical societies. In the last 12 years, I have attended as many conventions, large and small, that have brought researchers from all over the country. They traveled for two equally strong reasons. The first was to meet fellow researchers while benefitting from offered seminars. The second was to use records resources at town offices and research centers. These conventioners stayed at least 3 nights at Connecticut hotels. Most consumed 3 meals a day as did at least one of their traveling companions who spent their time shopping or using other Connecticut facilities. The proposed restrictions will definitely affect their ability to conduct research and well as affect their decision to attend the convention. Connecticut should want to keep tourists not discourage their visits.

Certainly, registrars are busy people who work hard often for meager pay. As I said above, in spite of this, the majority of them are lovely people who try to be congenial and helpful just as the majority of researchers try to be considerate in their requests and pleasant in nature. In my travels to registrar offices, I am usually

the only researcher there. On a rare occasion, another has come in to work. The majority of the clerks' time is spent at the windows to help citizens with birth, death, marriage records and other records. Barring genealogical researchers from immediate access will do little to alleviate their busy schedules. Frankly, it is hard to understand where and why this proposal originated.

As a Connecticut voter, I am asking you to consider my statement and to vote against this bill.

Thank you for listening,

Suzanne Welles