



Connecticut Department of Public Health

Testimony Presented Before the Public Health Committee

March 14, 2014

**Commissioner Jewel Mullen, MD, MPH, MPA
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Senate Bill 414: An Act Concerning The Department of Public Health's Recommendations Concerning Genealogists' Access to Vital Records

The Department of Public Health (DPH) supports Senate Bill 414 and would like to thank the committee for raising the Department's bill. The bill contains clarifying language regarding genealogists' access to vital records, and also gives vital records registrars the discretion to either allow a genealogist immediate access to the office area and the restricted vital records vaults, or to schedule an appointment within a reasonable period of time. The measures laid out in this bill aim to protect confidential vital records data, while continuing to allow genealogists broad access to these records.

The bill clarifies that genealogists are given access to vital records and certified copies of such records in order to conduct genealogical research, and are not given access to these records for any other purpose. This language will resolve any misunderstanding concerning whether genealogists are entitled to get any record for any purpose. Without clarification of this restriction, the confidentiality laws governing birth certificates and other vital records data may be circumvented and undermined.

The bill also allows a vital records registrar to consider the business needs of the vital records office when deciding to either grant a genealogist immediate entry into the office and the restricted vaults, or to schedule an appointment for the genealogist to conduct his or her research. It is essential for the larger vital records offices and the Department of Public Health to have some ability to manage genealogists' visits in order to minimize interruptions to their regular business operations. Appointments are necessary so that multiple genealogists are not present in the vaults at the same time – such a situation would impede the workflow of the vital records office. As well, scheduled appointments give staff time to carry out duties related to confidential matters that cannot be performed when visitors are present. Examples include matters related to gender change, surrogacy, adoption, and paternity actions. Often circumstances arise that require further discussions with the person(s) to whom such confidential matters pertain, as well as consultation between staff members. Since genealogists are not entitled to this information, discussions with customers and among staff must be curtailed when genealogists are present in the office. Additionally, there are other business related matters that cannot be freely discussed when genealogists are on site.

Thank you for your consideration of the Department's views on this bill.

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