

February 27, 2014

My name is Julie Sterner. I am a reunited adult adoptee. The purpose of my email today is to express my support for HB 5144 the adult adoptee equality in ALL states, and urge you to restore the right of adult adoptees to access their original birth certificates just like all other citizens.

I was born in Pennsylvania in 1979 to an unmarried couple who due to circumstances in their lives were unable to raise me. An adoption plan was made prior to my birth, and at two days old my adoptive parents brought me home from the hospital. Two months later, my natural parents signed relinquishment papers, and in fall of 1980 the adoption was finalized and my amended birth certificate issued. I had by all accounts a very normal childhood with a loving family in the suburbs outside Philadelphia. I subjected my parents to sleepless nights through infancy, skinned my knees as a child, survived middle school, and went to a good college. I am no less than my non-adopted peers and deserve to be treated equally under the law. In 2002, I met my natural family. My natural mother had passed away some years before, and my natural father had gone on to marry and have two more children who were 9 and 11 at the time I first met him. For the past 12 years I have had a close and supportive relationship with him and with all of my natural mother's relatives.

Unlike many adoptees you may hear from on this issue, I already have a copy of my original birth certificate, via court order. As satisfying as it is to finally have this factual record of my own entry into personhood, it is demeaning to have had to "beg" someone - two years AFTER my reunion - for a document that all other citizens can access with a simple form and small fee. I support legislation for equal access to birth records because I have felt an immense personal benefit from having my original birth certificate, and all adoptees deserve their documents without having to meet an ambiguous standard of "good cause" not applied to non-adopted citizens.

Legislation allowing equal access to birth records is important because adult adoptees deserve to be treated no better and no worse than any other segment of the population. Adult adoptees should be equal to our non-adopted counterparts in the eyes of the law. We hold jobs, we raise families, we vote.

Our adopted status should not be used to remove our rights, to brand us as perpetual children who need special permission or procedures to obtain our documents, or to make preemptive assumptions about our behavior or intentions. Our adoptive families are strong and vibrant, and do not need abnormal "protection" to maintain close and loving bonds. What harms adoptive families is being indirectly told that their child's birth information is so shameful or threatening to them that the government needs to lock it away. Our natural parents deserve the privacy of being able to know that if the child they relinquished wishes to contact them someday, they can contact them privately and directly without the interference of a third party or the need to enlist social media. There has been no crisis in the states who never sealed them or who have had the good sense to restore their adopted citizens' rights to access their original birth certificates. Preventing adult adoptees from accessing their original birth certificates did not lower the abortion rate or increase the adoption rate as some had hoped it would, and it is time for all of us to join the growing number of states who treat their adopted adults as fully equal citizens and have restored adult adoptee rights.

I respectfully urge you to restore adoptees' equal access to their original birth records, and I thank you for the opportunity to submit this email.

Sincerely,

Julie Sterner, "Baby Girl Stephens"
Pennsylvania adult adoptee