

Public Health Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5300

AN ACT REQUIRING A STUDY OF OPTIONAL ADMISSION INTO AN

Title: ADOPTION REGISTRY.

Vote Date: 3/26/2018

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/20/2018

File No.: 360

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Public Health Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill requires the Department of Public Health in consultation with the Department of Children and Families to conduct a study on the feasibility of establishing an adoption registry for the voluntary exchange of contact information and the voluntary and anonymous exchange of vital medical information between adopted persons, the birth parents of the adopted person or a family member of such birth parent if they are deceased.

There is also a requirement for the Department of Public Health to submit a report to the General Assembly by January 1, 2019.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Raul Pino, M.D., M.P.H, Commissioner, Department of Public Health

The Department of Public Health (DPH) does not support the bill as written. In particular: , the proposed bill requires the DPH to work with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to conduct a study on the feasibility of establishing an adoption registry that registrants could use to provide or prohibit the release of identifying information regarding their adoption. The bill also requires the DPH to report the findings to the General Assembly.

Current Statutes requires the DCF and other child placement agencies that are involved in the adoption of a child and the termination of parental rights to establish and maintain registries where a registrant may consent or refuse to consent to the release of their

identifying information. These registries also contain the medical information for the adopted children.

The DPH does not participate in the required adoption reunion process or medical information registries. DPH's only involvement is in the amendment of the birth certificate for adoptees born in Connecticut. For the reasons above, it is not appropriate for the DPH to take the lead on this study or for reporting its findings to the General Assembly.

Representative Noreen S. Kokoruda:

I support HB 5300, and my testimony is on behalf of the thousands of women that have remained silent on the issue of "open access to original birth certificate". These brave women made the decision to carry their babies to term and in return, they were promised that their identity would be protected. Understanding the desire of adoptees to reunite with their biological parent and to get medical information on their family, I believe HB 5300 is a starting point to address this issue.

There are currently 9 states with unrestricted access, 22 states with no access and 19 states including Connecticut with some access to original birth certificates. Passage of this legislation will establish an active registry where adoptees and biological parents will have access to original birth records. This legislation will have the most impact on original birth mothers that are between 60-80 years old and are not aware of this discussion.

Although there are a number of ways to find biological family members, there is still the barrier of requiring that both parties are participants. This legislation is intended to allow parents and children to connect with each other.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

None Submitted

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Kathy Flatherty, Newington, CT:

I write in opposition to the passage of HB 5300, which requires a study on the feasibility of establishing an adoption registry for optional registration. As an adoptee, I must say this is unnecessary since these registries already exist and they are useless. I have been registered with Catholic Charities for many decades and I have not received any health information regarding my family history, or anything else.

I would urge members of the Public Health to reject HB 5300 and support HB 5408, which will allow adult adoptees born between 1944 and 1983, such as myself, to access to our original birth certificates if our birth parents are alive.

Desiree Stephen, Member, Board of Directors, Access Connecticut Now, Inc.:

I am submitting testimony in opposition of HB 5300 because these registries have existed in Connecticut for over thirty years, and they have failed to provide protection for adoptees and their children.

I became a registrant when I was nineteen years old, and it took ten years for me to find out the cause of my birth mother's death although she had died six years prior to me registering. If I was able to access my original birth certificate I would have been able to determine that brain cancer and other health conditions that could potentially affected my family.

Passage of this legislation giving adoptees access to their original birth certificate with the birth parent contact preference form, is a more effective and less costly way to go.

Theresa Hixson, The Village/Adoption Assistance Program-UCONN:

There is already a voluntary reunion registry process in Connecticut. This system is not an effective way for reuniting adoptees with original birth parents or for allowing adoptees access to the medical history for their family.

The Village for Families and Children has maintained a reunion registry through a notarized form that is always kept with the original adoption record unless there is a request from the adult adoptee or the birth parent to remove it from the record. Current law allows us to process and keep the form in our records but it does not allow us to make contact with the other affected party.

Up until 1975 the law allowed adoptees and adoptive parents the ability to identify the birth parent through access to the adoptee's original birth certificate. However, but the birth parent had no right or option to learn the whereabouts or identity of the adoptee. This process is not effective.

In Connecticut, current law allows both adult adoptees and birth parents to conduct a search through our program. Recently we find that more birth parents are utilizing this process to locate the child they placed for adoption. In the more than twenty years working at the Village, only a small number of individuals have been reunited through the "reunion registry" process.

Reported by: Beverley Henry

Date: 04/17/2018