

Henry, Beverley

From: Hixson, Theresa <THixson@thevillage.org>
Sent: Wednesday, April 11, 2018 5:51 PM
To: PHTestimony
Cc: kdcaffrey@gmail.com; ksylvia@thevilage.org
Subject: Existance of Reunion Registry Response

Importance: High

I am writing in response to H.B. No. 5300 and to confirm that a voluntary reunion registry process exists within the private child placing agencies in CT as well as with the Department of Children and Families. Based on many years of experience, the reunion registry is not the most effective method for adoptees and birth parents/relatives to connect with each other, and for adoptee's to obtain current family medical history.

I have been working as an adoption social worker at The Village for Families and Children in Hartford, CT since 1998. The Village is the oldest child placing agency in the state of Connecticut, and we began as an orphanage over 200 years ago. Over the years, many parents sought out support from The Village to care for their children and/or place their children voluntarily for adoption due to their life circumstances and inability to care for them.

The Village has maintained a reunion registry as required by law for many years. Our reunion registry is a notarized form that is kept in the original adoption record indefinitely unless it is requested by the initiator (adult adoptee or birth parent/relative) that he/she would like it removed from the record. In essence, the registry is a statement verifying that the party submitting it (adult adoptee or birth parent/relative) would like contact with the other party. As existing law provides it is a passive registry in that, The Village does not reach out to the other party. The form simply remains in the record in the event that the other party contacts The Village.

Many birth parents were told when they relinquished their child for adoption that they would never be able to have contact with them again. Although the law until 1975 allowed the adoptee and the adoptive parent to learn the birth parent's identity by obtaining the adoptee's original birth certificate, the birth parent had no right or option to learn the adoptee's whereabouts or identity. Society has changed a great deal since the 1940's, 50's and 60's when many of these voluntary placements occurred.

Under the current CT law, adult adoptees and birth parents are able to initiate a "search" through our program. The search entails my colleague and I using identifying information from the original adoption record to locate an adult adoptee or birth parent/relative. It is only recently that more birth parents are reaching out to our program and trying to locate a child they placed for adoption. Many will say they did not realize they had the option to do so.

Over the course of the 20 years that I have worked in the adoption program at The Village, I have only had a handful of individuals be reunited through the reunion registry process. The majority of

adult adoptees/birth parents/ relatives are reunited because they initiate a full search for their biological relative. My colleague and I receive phone calls and emails from adult adoptees and birth parents several days a week throughout the year. All are seeking more information on their background, medical information, birth parents or adult child who was placed for adoption years ago. As a result, the reunion registry is not the most effective method for adoptees and birth parents/relatives, because it is not an "active" method in which individuals can be reunited.

Should you like any further information about the existing reunion registry process with The Village, please do not hesitate to contact me (860) 297-0580 or thixson@thevillage.org

Theresa Hixson, LCSW
The Village/Adoption Assistance Program-UCONN
331 Wethersfield Avenue
Hartford, CT 06114

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