

March 11, 2019

Planning & Development Committee

Connecticut Legislature

As a birthmother, I am writing in support of Senate Bill 972.

I was only sixteen when my parents shipped me from Southern California to Cleveland and then, when my pregnancy could no longer be concealed, to Akron's Florence Crittenton Home for Unwed Mothers. Like so many middle-class girls in the "baby scoop" era, I felt powerless to determine my fate and so "agreed" to all the arcane machinations that kept my pregnancy a secret and my identity under lock and key. I was coerced into believing I was unfit for motherhood, that I had no choice but to surrender forever the infant who I loved instantly with a ferocity that still surprises.

If I'm to write truthfully, I must acknowledge: real harm was done. The existing social system not only felt no compunction about taking babies from unwed mothers, it was also adamant about closed adoptions. At some psychological level, those credentialed to remove babies and those receiving babies must have sensed that there was something humanely wrong about relentlessly feeding the adoption system. Why else coerce girls into signing away their parental rights? Why insist that they disappear from their child's life, even to the point of erasing their names from birth certificates? Beyond all the glib rationalizations, they must have known, even then, that what they were condoning was deeply unjust.

Even though Ohio records were still closed in 2000, I told my secret and published a book that led to a joyful reunion with my daughter, thirty-five years after we were pitilessly separated. She was happy and grateful to be found. Our reunion healed many wounds but not all wrongs: Ohio law granting access to birth certificates did not change until 2013 and significant legal restrictions remain.

Which leads me to the birthmothers I know, women like me who were exiled to the homes of distant relatives or maternity homes and were told that adoption was our only option. We surrendered our babies in legally sanctioned secrecy. Then we lived for years with regret, uncertainty, shame, and sorrow. We dreamed of our children: their first teeth, their first steps, their first day of kindergarten, their first illness, their first love. We cringed when we let

ourselves imagine cruel, unloving adoptive parents and stinging slaps we could not prevent. We secretly acknowledged each birthday. We gazed surreptitiously at babies, children, teenagers, adults their age. We imagined their graduations and their weddings. We dreamed of the day they would somehow return to us. There would be a tentative knock on the door. We'd run to open it, and there they would stand with their shy, hopeful faces turned up to us. We waited.

For some of us, that day came. Secrecy was vanquished, records were unlocked, and we gazed lovingly into our children's beautiful faces. We were restored to one another. For others, unwarranted and debilitating secrecy, shame, and sorrow persist. SB 972 can change that.

Birthmothers do not need to be protected. We are heroic. We bravely, resolutely lead productive lives. We struggle to define ourselves against demeaning stereotypes. We know all too well the coercive forces at play when it comes to "choosing" adoption. We have experienced firsthand the dramatic economic and racial inequalities that continue to compromise adoption practices. We work for a day when young, "unprepared" girls will never have to surrender their babies. We argue for family preservation and support. We argue for open records. I urge those who are thinking critically about legal access to birth certificates to include birthmothers in their analysis: unpack the psychological and emotional wrongs that were done and that continue; confront the exploitation of birthmothers; acknowledge their pain and their resiliency. Attention must be paid.

Respectfully,

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