

Support for S.B. 972

Dear Members of the Planning and Development Committee,

My name is Steven Craig Elliott and I am writing to support Senate Bill 972, concerning original birth certificates for adoptees. While I am not a resident of Connecticut, I am an adoptee working for similar rights in Texas, and my friends and colleagues in Connecticut have asked me to submit my adoption story to help convey the problems we adoptees face as adults.

I was born and adopted in 1962 at the Methodist Mission Home in San Antonio. While I no longer live in Texas, my original birth certificate is still there under lock and key, under Texas laws.

I believe I should have access to my own original birth certificate. I have lived with an "amended" birth certificate for nearly 57 years, and frankly, it's not enough. While I dearly loved my adoptive parents, they died many years ago and cannot help me in my search for my genetic roots. There are many reasons I need to learn my own genetic background, including family health history and genealogy.

Over the years I have spent thousands of dollars and countless hours, just trying to unlock the truth of my own identity. I have hired researchers and confidential intermediaries, who don't come cheap. I have paid Methodist Mission Home to get a censored copy of my own records. I have bought old yearbooks and scoured property records and online forums. But none of that got me what I needed -- the names of my birthparents. Without knowing who they are, there is no way I could learn my own medical background and family history.

Finally I bought a DNA test. A list of genetic matches poured in, and while I did not have matches to my parents (because they haven't tested), I did get matches to many of their cousins and other relatives. And when those people saw me show up as an unknown first cousin or second cousin, they were curious to know who I am and started contacting me. Through these cousins, and searching through old birth and death certificates, I learned who my birthparents are.

But I had to do it by exposing family secrets to cousins and other relatives, instead of discretely and privately approaching my birthparents myself. I would have preferred to contact them directly, but the law does not allow me to know the names on my own birth certificate, even though I was born nearly 57 years ago.

After learning who my birthparents are, I also learned that my maternal family has a history of heart disease. My grandfather died of a heart attack in his 60s, and his brother died in his 50s. My mother has coronary disease. I already suspected this because three years ago I had three stents put in my heart. I was ready to drop dead and I had no idea. I found out about my predisposition to heart disease while lying on the table in a heart catheterization lab, when my cardiologist leaned over to tell me he'd just cleared a 99% blockage in my "widowmaker" artery. Since then I have gotten two more stents.

The point is, I didn't learn about my genetic predisposition to heart disease until I was 52. I wish I'd known it when I became an adult at 18, so I could have taken precautions. My doctors could have put me on preventative drugs decades earlier. To this day, on medical history forms I still have to write, "I don't know; I was adopted and my records are sealed."

It should not be this hard for adult adoptees to learn who we are and which health problems we can expect. I learned much too late that I am predisposed to heart disease. I should not have had to spend thousands of dollars to learn this. My wife and son should not be put through the (literal) heartache of almost losing a husband and father, simply because the state insists on keeping a 57-year-old secret that benefits no one.

Opponents to access for birth certificates often say that they do so to protect families. Well, they do so at the expense of my health and my family, by keeping valuable, life-and-death information secret. It should not be this hard, as an adult, to learn the facts of my own identity and health so that I can keep myself alive and pass this knowledge to my son and his future descendants.

Thank you for your time, and please support S.B. 972.

Sincerely,

Steven Craig Elliott
Hot Springs, Arkansas