

Support for S.B. 972

Dear Members of the Planning and Development Committee,

I am a late discovery adoptee, and I wanted to share my testimony with you in the hopes that it will be helpful. I learned at the age of 43 that I was adopted. Though I had suspected my entire life, my parents kept the information secret, referring me to the amended birth certificate issued by the State of Ohio, showing my adoptive parents' names. In March of 2015 the new law in Ohio went into effect, allowing adult adoptees to access their original birth certificates, and I learned the truth. Soon after, I also learned that my birth mother had passed away only a few years before my discovery.

I fully support access to birth records and original birth certificates. I believe it is a fundamental right that could, in fact, save lives. For most of my life, I have been unable to present an accurate family medical history to my doctors. For some of us, this can mean serious health risks for which we will not be tested.

Though much harder to quantify and present as evidence, there is also the question of personal dignity, of knowing who one is and where one comes from. That is something I can only attest through personal feeling and experience. My life, since learning, has not fallen apart. I have not been devastated by the news. Indeed I have been strengthened by it. I have a stronger clarity about who I am and a greater sense of self that is hard to describe. I know that not every adoptee feels as strongly as I do about the importance of this knowledge, but for me it has made an immense difference.

Through DNA testing and exhaustive research, I have also discovered half siblings with whom I am now beginning to form a relationship. Finding them has been an amazing gift. Imagine, though, how much more time we could have had to know each other if I had simply been given the information that, years later, would require so much time, money, and effort. That is time I will never get back.

I am encouraged, though, that a number of states and organizations are now changing their positions. Perhaps the issuing of amended birth certificates and the sealing of authentic documents may have originated with good intentions in an age when having an "illegitimate" child was a source of shame. But that stigma is thankfully changing. I personally know of no other legal document that is purposely designed to contain false information, and I believe very strongly that this practice must come to an end. My particular story may have turned out much differently if Ohio law had changed only a few years earlier, allowing me to meet my birth mother Judy.

On behalf of all those in your state still seeking this denied information about who they are, I respectfully implore you to work toward changing your adoption laws to allow full access to birth records and original birth certificates, so that we adult adoptees have the same rights to our own identifying information as non-adoptees have to theirs.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Kevin Gladish
Adult Adoptee