

Senate Bill 972

I am a reunited birthmother. I relinquished my son in 1967 when I was 18. Thirty years later, I hired a private investigator and found him. In the following year, I conducted research and wrote my Master's thesis on the traumatic effects of relinquishment on birthmothers. As a licensed mental health counselor, I provided individual post-adoption and reunion counseling to birthmothers. And for nine years, I facilitated a support group for birthmothers. My son and I have been reunited now for over 20 years.

I believe it is the birthright of ALL adopted sons and daughters to have legal access to their own birth information. Adoptees have suffered and continue to suffer discrimination and injustice as a result of the very system designed to dispense justice. They should be granted the same right to their own birth information that every other citizen has.

Some argue that permitting access will violate confidentiality allegedly promised to birthmothers. I attest that I never sought confidentiality as a birthmother. Anonymity was forced upon me. I never EVER desired that my son, David, be restricted access to his birth information. Even if some birthmothers were promised confidentiality, this would have been a promise, or a privilege, rather than a legal right protected by law. And sometimes, some rights must take precedence over other rights. The right of the adoptee to know his or her original legal identity must supersede any alleged promise of confidentiality.

The overwhelming majority of birthmothers I have encountered have longed for contact. And even among those who did not, contact often triggered a psychologically healing journey that promoted the resolution of what is known as disenfranchised grief—grief that is hidden from and unacknowledged by society. In my research, 95% of the birthmothers surveyed responded affirmatively to items measuring unresolved grief.

Today, we know that nearly all characteristics are influenced by both genetics and environment. Our identity is formed by both. And a birth certificate is a fundamental part of one's identity. Those of us who are not adopted may take for granted the knowledge of our roots, our cultural heritage, our genetic ancestry, knowledge of our family medical background. Just imagine for one moment, the void of not having any knowledge of what preceded you—in effect, being generation 0.

According to the Division of Vital Statistics of the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, in 2017, 39.8% of US births were to unmarried mothers. That represents 1,533,901 individuals. Imagine if we decided to deny them access to their birth certificates or alter their documents to hide the fact that their mothers were unmarried.

While sexual mores have become increasingly relaxed over the last 50 years, it appears that adoptees and their birthparents remain the product of the society that promulgated the ostracizing and stigmatizing of unwed mothers in previous decades. Fifty years hence, the issues surrounding adoption and closed records may be of mere historical interest. Today, however, we have an opportunity and an *imperative* to correct the unjust and punitive consequences that adoptees continue to suffer under these archaic laws.

Laws are not stagnant. They change to reflect changing mores. They change to eliminate discrimination. Laws prohibiting women from voting were changed. Laws prohibiting interracial marriages were changed. Laws were changed to ensure marriage equality. And now is the time to guarantee that ALL Connecticut adoptees have equality under the law.

I support the passage of Senate Bill 972.

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