

**I urge you to support and pass S.B. 972.**

I am an adult adoptee in Oregon. I am 47 years old, female, and a psychotherapist in Portland. I was adopted at birth by a loving family in a closed, private adoption in 1971, and I never had any information about my birthmother, my family history or my genetic and medical background. When I was 25, after finding a lump in my breast, I began to feel an urgent need to know my family medical history. Oregon's adoption records were still closed at that time (1996), and a judge denied my request to have my adoption records opened for medical purposes. After a long, difficult multiyear search, I was finally able to locate my birthfamily and I learned that my birthmother, Sandra, had died of a virulent form of breast cancer in 1984 at the age of 33.

I also learned that I have three full genetic brothers, a birthfather, a maternal grandmother, and many other extended family on both my birthmother's and birthfather's sides. All of these people welcomed contact with me, and I have had ongoing relationships with them for many years now. It turned out that nobody in my birthfamily had desired a closed adoption and there was no resistance whatsoever to openness and contact with me; it's just that a closed adoption was the only option given to my birthparents in 1971.

It's extremely fortunate that I was able to learn about my birthmother's cancer and death, as this medical information has potentially been lifesaving for me. Having a birthmother who died of virulent breast cancer at such a young age means that my own risk of developing aggressive breast cancer is high. In the years following my discovery of my birthmother's cancer, I have been able to take assertive protective and preventative measures based on this knowledge of my history and my risks. My doctors have prioritized preventative screenings and treatments for me, such as getting me into a same-day appointment for a breast exam or authorizing elective ultrasounds when concerns have arisen about my breast health – steps that my medical providers might not have been as willing to support had my medical history been unknown. When I found another lump in my breast a few years ago, my medical providers were able to respond with an appropriate urgency and thoroughness based on a more complete knowledge of my genetic risks.

As an adoptee, not having access to my family medical history has literally been an issue of life and death for me. I'm fortunate to have found my medical information when I did, but I should not have had to fight through a lengthy, costly, independent search against the resistance of a closed adoption system in order to learn basic facts about risks that exist within my own body. In addition, knowing that my birthfamily always welcomed contact with me, and sincerely wanted me to know my family medical history, makes the entire system of sealed adoptions records seem nonsensical and unnecessarily cruel.

I urge you to support and pass S.B. 972 in support of the welfare, wellbeing and wholeness of all adopted people in Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Colleen Odell, Adoptee

Portland, Oregon