

My name is Barbara Ruhe. I am an attorney in private practice with offices at 915 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield. I have been practicing law for 42 years primarily in the Family and Juvenile courts. I have extensive trial experience in child abuse/neglect cases and in termination of parental rights cases representing children, parents, grandparents and foster parents.

I am however not submitting this testimony because I am an attorney. I have cited my professional background to provide you with a sense of my prospective on the issue of adult adoptees having access to their original birth certificates as outlined in Senate Bill 977.

I am submitting this testimony as a parent by adoption of my two children. Our son came home to us at 42 hours, our daughter came home to us at 5 weeks. They are currently 36 and 32 and they have each blessed us with a grandson. Given what my professional background is I have always known how important it was and would be for my children to know and have access to knowledge of their heritage and medical background. I had the ability, perhaps more than most folks, to see that that information has been available for them.

I have sometimes been asked what would I do if my children's birth parents arrived at my door. My answer has always been simple--I would hug them. I respect and honor the mothers who entrusted my late husband and myself with their children. There has not been a day or time or family occasion that I have not remembered and given thanks for the gift of my children. I know from my personal and professional experience that birth mothers also carry daily remembrances of their children in their hearts.

The face and practices of adoption have changed. We have learned how important it is to children to know who they are. We have also learned that birth families but especially birth mothers have a need to know how the children they made an adoption plan for have fared. There has been a myth perpetuated that birth families were "promised" anonymity. That has never been the case and we have found that even where birth mother's expressed a hope that they would never be sought out those over time change their minds. My son's birth mother expressed to the placing social worker that she hoped she would never be sought out. Within a few years she changed her mind and left the door open for future contact.

Another significant change in our world has been the advent of readily accessible DNA testing. All one needs to do is go to Ancestry.com where for a modest sum one can have their DNA tested and compared to their large pool of data. My parents, who are retired, and were curious had their DNA testing done and not long after they got the results were "found" by some distant and interesting relatives in New York. The connection provided an interesting link to a piece of my family's history.

Adult adoptees who have been unable to access their original birth certificates have been using DNA testing to help them find their birth families. In light of this development the unreasonable legal restriction on access to original birth certificates is not logical or reasonable. In Connecticut you have opened up some original birth certificates depending when the adoption took place, but not all original birth certificates. This bill corrects that discrepancy.

A number of states have already opened the birth records to adult adoptees. Their experience has been very positive and the families on all sides of the adoption triad have been grateful. As a mom and a lawyer I urge you to pass Senate Bill 972 to AN ACT CONCERNING ACCESS TO ORIGINAL BIRTH RECORDS BY ADULT ADOPTED PERSONS . It is the right thing to do.

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