

March 13, 2019

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Cassano, Representative McCarthy Vahey, and Distinguished Members of the Connecticut General Assembly Planning & Development Committee:

My name is Desiree Stephens and I'm an adoptee. I support Senate Bill 972. **I believe it is a basic human and civil right for every person to know his or her biological origins and that both adoptees and non-adoptees deserve equal protection under the law.** The current law in Connecticut governing the administration of original birth certificate requests by adult adopted persons is discriminatory. I believe there needs to be one fair and consistent policy for everyone no matter their age or circumstances at birth. I urge the legislature to enact Senate Bill 972 because it makes all adult adoptees born before October 1, 1983 equal under the same law that governs all non-adoptees and adoptees born *after* October 1, 1983.

I feel strongly about this bill because I have personally experienced the indignation of a similarly discriminatory policy in place currently in the state where I was born, New York. At a time in my life when I desperately needed to know more about my identity and my birth family, I sought information that was rightfully mine, including my original birth certificate. Perhaps the most inhumane part of that process was how many outside people needed to know about my life and my story as I sought the information I needed. I endured a ton of unnecessary roadblocks along the way and I would have escaped years of self-doubt and shame had social workers and other authorities been able to give me my original birth certificate. Each time I received a letter signed and dated by another human being who could know information about my life that I was not allowed to know, **I felt dehumanized**. I felt less than. It robbed me of the self-empowerment non-adopted people are afforded just by nature of coming by their identities without this adversity.

On DNA

Even though it took me almost half my life to find my relatives, clearing roadblocks became easier as time went on and the concept of openness became more common. **Today, openness is the norm.** But the current law does not reflect this. I found my birth father using consumer DNA and he had not even taken the test himself. Did you know over 15 million people have taken a consumer DNA test?* That means, if someone tests right now, they will receive an average of 16,000 connections. With 16,000 connections, it's easier than ever to find relatives. In fact, the person one may be looking for doesn't even need to have tested themselves. While it's easy, it's not private when it comes to adoption. The private option is making adoptee's original birth certificates available to them, just like everyone else. **The private option is passing S.B. 972.**

On Birthmothers & Privacy

You may hear from opposition claiming they want to protect older birth mothers because they were promised privacy. Senators and Representatives, it's important you know the truth. When these women were relinquishing in the 1950's, 60's, 70's, the law was such that when their children reached the age of majority, they would be able to request and receive their original birth certificates. Because of this, **no birth mother from Connecticut during this time was promised confidentiality** and any agency or otherwise telling you so is misleading you. Many birth mothers from Connecticut during this time have submitted testimony confirming this and I encourage you to read them. Not only are they telling you they were never promised such privacy - that they in fact were correctly advised by agencies' attorney's that their names could be revealed to their adult children - but they are also telling you **they don't want or need "protection."** Some are even testifying that they are shocked the law was changed and they expected their relinquished children to be able to seek them out upon reaching adulthood. All of them seem to understand their information was private from the public, as every original birth certificate is already.

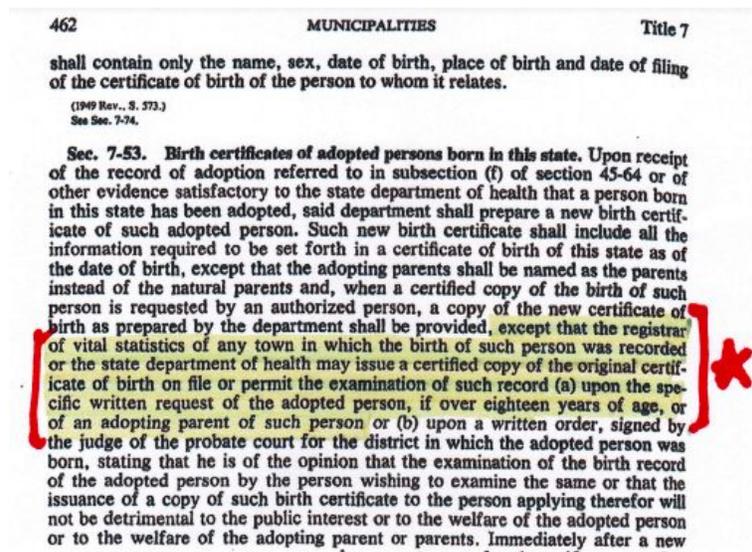


FACT CHECK



What was the law when older birth mothers were relinquishing?

At all times before 1975, every adult adoptee (and their adoptive parents) in Connecticut had the unrestricted right to obtain their original birth certificate. During the time when older birth mothers were relinquishing, no Connecticut adoption agency could have been promising her otherwise without misinforming her of the law.



Here is an image from the 1972 C.G.S. Sec. 7-53

On Health

I also want to share with you that my own truth came to me at the expense of time, time that Senate Bill 972 will restore to adult adoptees and their families. I was 30 years old when I found out my birth mother had passed away from a malignant brain tumor. She had presented at a doctor's office with 'just a migraine' only three weeks prior to her death. She was 47 years old. We never reunited. It's heartbreaking by itself to have never reunited because she died so young, but it's almost criminal that had I not gone to extraordinary lengths to find my family, I would have been deprived of this health history. Adoptees have a right to seek the best possible healthcare they can get for themselves and their children and that includes a complete and up to date health history. We are not exempt from human health conditions just because we've been separated from our genetic relatives. It is common knowledge doctors provided better and more complete care when they have patients' medical histories. This is why the Connecticut State Medical Society and the American Academy of Pediatrics support laws like Senate Bill 972. We do not deserve to be limited to sub-par medical care because of our circumstances at birth.

For all these reasons, implementing a more consistent government policy for adult adoptees regarding their birth records is the right thing to do. Please support S.B. 972, An Act Concerning Access To Original Birth Records By Adult Adopted Persons.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



Desiree Stephens

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*Technology Review: [2017 Was The Year DNA Testing Blew Up](#). Feb 2018