

13 March 2019

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 972, An Act Concerning Access to Original Birth Records by Adult Adopted Persons

To Members of the Planning and Development Committee:

I urge you to support Senate Bill 972, which will allow adults who were adopted as children to see their original birth certificates so they can learn the identities of their birth parents. The increasing popularity of DNA testing and online genealogy records, plus access to databases that will match people tested or listed with likely relatives who also were tested or listed, is rendering the sealing of original birth records moot, an anachronism related to societal and religious norms that no longer exist.

I know about this, not because I am an adoptee, which I am, but because, as a biologist I understand the power of DNA databases, and as someone whose family photos have been posted in online genealogy databases, I have been “found” by my relatives.

This bill will not affect me, as I was adopted in New York, which tried to erase the existence of my mother, who died when I was six years of age and my baby sister was two. It was the way things were done then. When I was 14, I was adopted by my father’s second wife and my birth records were sealed. On that day, my mother, an attorney, who strongly believed in the law, disappeared from all official records of my life and I became the “biological” daughter of a woman who didn’t meet me until I was 11. My birth certificate, an official government document, became a lie. At least I know who I am, even if I can’t prove it.

Connecticut, which does not allow adoptees born between Jan. 1, 1944 and Oct. 1, 1983, whose birth parents are still alive, to obtain their original birth certificates, not only discriminates against those adoptees, but it particularly discriminates against those who cannot afford DNA testing or have the time to pursue genealogy. It also prevents those adoptees from learning about their families and family histories, including medical and psychological information. This law needs to be changed so all adoptees in Connecticut can obtain their original birth certificates and, if possible, learn about their parents’ medical histories.

Think about what it’s like to not really be who you are, for your children not to be able to learn who their families are, how they got to this country and what their ethnicity is. Please listen to them. ESPN’s magazine recently published a compelling story about an adoptee searching for his birth parents (http://www.espn.com/espn/feature/story/_/id/24505521/the-jaw-dropping-story-nfl-coach-search-family). Please read it. The NFL coach in the story was able to access his original birth certificate and drew out the identity of his father from his newly found birth mother. Adoptees want the happy ending the coach had.

We said good-bye to the 1950s, when having a child out of wedlock was considered shameful. The testimony of birth mothers and fathers shows that reconnecting with children they gave up

for adoption enriches their and their children's lives. It's time to change the law so everyone adopted in Connecticut can obtain their original birth certificate.

Myrna E. Watanabe, Ph.D.
155 Woodchuck Lane
Harwinton, CT 06791
mewatanabephd@gmail.com