

Dear committee members,

My name is Tina Wood, and I write to you from your neighboring state of Rhode Island, which made original birth certificates available to all Rhode Island adoptees in 2012 (and where I have heard of no problems reported as a result.)

This is the third year that I have submitted written testimony to you about this legislation. The past two years, I briefly told the story of my adopted friend, Belle, who contacted me for help when Rhode Island finally gave her access to her original birth certificate. She finally had a name for her birth mother and had found family history information on a genealogy website but had no idea how to trace her family forward.

“At age 68, I’m running out of time,” she wrote to me. I was very moved by her words and fortunately was able to find the information for her that same night. Her birth mother had died years before, and the last of her aunts and uncles had passed about a year before the new law took effect. I was able to find several of Belle’s living siblings. The first time that Belle spoke with one of her sisters, her sister said, “Thank God you found us.”

I tell this story to you again this year with sadness in my heart because Belle passed away just a few months ago from cancer. I am grateful that she was able to have six great years knowing her birth family before she “ran out of time.”

After helping Belle with her search, I became an active volunteer “search angel” who helps adoptees and birth families who are searching in any state. Every search is different, and so very much depends upon the laws of the specific state. A number of states have made original birth certificates available to adoptees in the years since Rhode Island did, and in many cases, we have seen searches go from almost impossible to solve to quickly solvable as a result.

I would like to address a few other issues that come up in discussion.

One is that consumer DNA testing has made any supposed promises of “privacy” for birth parents moot. If an adoptee tests their DNA and gets a second cousin match or closer, researchers can almost always figure out who their birth parents are by building the family tree of the DNA match to figure out where the adoptee fits. Sometimes a third cousin match will even suffice. But what often ends up happening in such situations is that the birth mother ends up being “outed” to extended family members when the adoptee contacts the cousin(s) who tested their DNA. (I certainly do not know all of my second cousins and would have to ask around in my family if I were contacted by an an adoptee who matched my DNA, and I suspect that that would be the case for most people as well.) Thus, ironic as it may be, making original birth certificates available to adoptees is actually MORE respectful of a birth mother’s privacy because it means that the adoptee can contact her privately instead of involving other family members.

Of course not every situation in which an adoptee and birth parent make contact goes perfectly. But it makes no sense to use fear of some hypothetical bad outcome to prevent people who DO want to be found from being able to be found. Moreover, there are already laws against harassment and stalking which can be used in the very rare cases where adults do not behave like adults.

Some anti-abortion organizations have suggested that making original birth certificates available to adoptees will somehow lead to more abortions. The statistics in states that have made original birth certificates available do not support this idea, and I believe you will receive information about several

states demonstrating this. I checked the numbers for Rhode Island specifically, and the number and percentages of abortions in Rhode Island has steadily DECREASED in the years since the state made original birth certificates available to adoptees.

In loving memory of my friend Belle, and in solidarity with all adoptees, I humbly ask you to please pass this legislation as soon as possible so that no one else ends up running out of time.

Respectfully,
Tina Wood
Warwick, Rhode Island