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TESTIMONY OF KATHLEEN M. FLAHERTY
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 21, 2020

In support of: SB 113, An Act Concerning Access to Original Birth Certificates by Adult Adopted Persons

Senator Cassano, Representative McCarthy Vahey, Senator Champagne, Representative Zawistowski and distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee:

I am pleased to submit testimony again this year in support of a bill that would grant adult adoptees like me access to our original birth certificates, thus finally treating all of us equally with our non-adopted counterparts.

I have shared my story in excruciating detail in previous years when an access bill has been considered by the Connecticut legislature. My younger brother and I were both adopted. Our parents were always honest and open with us about the fact that we were adopted. My brother never had any interest in searching for his biological family. He died at 33 of a heart attack resulting from a congenital heart problem that no one knew about. I became interested in finding out more about my biological family after I experienced my own health challenges. The non-identifying information that was provided to me by Catholic Charities stated that my biological maternal grandmother was institutionalized for an unknown mental illness and my maternal grandfather had died of cirrhosis. My biological mother was a college student who returned to school after giving birth to me, and made the deans' list.

I paid Catholic Charities to search for my birthparents. They found my birth mother. They sent me a letter dated on my birthday that my birth mother did not want contact.

I filed a petition in Probate Court to try to get access to my original birth certificate. The Court clearly did not receive many of these petitions because no one really knew how to handle my case; instead of appointing a guardian ad litem to protect my birth parents' interests, one was appointed to represent mine – interests that I was fully capable of articulating to the court myself. Unfortunately, that effort was unsuccessful; since my birth mother failed to respond to a certified letter from the court, the judge denied my petition.

That left DNA testing as a final hope. I submitted samples to multiple companies, and had a friend assist me in contacting matches. I have been lucky enough to connect with a cousin on my biological father's side. Tiffany has shared pictures with me, and I look forward to meeting her and other relatives later this year. I have written a letter to a man who might be my father, but I have yet to receive a response.

I am 52 years old. I should have the right to get a government document that accurately reflects the information that it purports to contain. My amended birth certificate, issued 13 months after my birth (after my adoption was finalized), is a reflection of the family unit that I consider mine – the only family I have ever known. However, it does not contain the information related to my birth. That document is locked in a vault, and I cannot get it. That is unfair. Some people say that a promise was made to my birth mother and other women of her generation that their secret would be kept, and they could simply move on with their lives. I am delighted that my birth mother returned to school and continued to find success as a student. I seem to have inherited that ability from her. However, Catholic Charities had no right to promise secrecy to the young woman who gave birth to me – the law prior to 1975 provided for access to original birth certificates. This state should not enforce promises the church should never have made.

I urge you to pass this bill and provide for equal treatment of all adult adoptees in this state. Thank you for your consideration of this testimony as you make your decisions.