

Dear Assembly Members,

I am a late discovery adoptee, and I want to share my story with you in the hopes that it will help support the passage of SB 113.

I was born and adopted in Ohio, and I believe that I am a good example of the good you can do by ending the secrecy. I grew up not knowing that I was adopted, finally learning at the age of 43. Though I'd had my suspicions, my parents kept the information secret, referring me to the amended birth certificate issued by the state, listing my adoptive parents' names as my birth parents. Both adoptive parents have since passed, and we do not know why they made this choice.

In March of 2015, a new law in Ohio went into effect, allowing adult adoptees to access their original birth certificates, and in this way I finally learned the truth. Soon after, I also learned that my birth mother had passed away only a few years before my discovery. Had I learned sooner, there may have been an opportunity for us to connect, but we never had that chance.

Because of this experience, and those of the many adult adoptees I have come to know, I fully support access to birth records and original birth certificates. I believe it is a fundamental right that could, in fact, save lives. For most of my life, I had been unable to present an accurate family medical history to my doctors. In fact, physicians who looked at my health record had no idea that my genetic history contained glaucoma, alcoholism, and lupus. Instead, they were on high alert for diabetes, which ran in my adoptive family. It turns out that I do, in fact, have a genetic eye condition that often leads to glaucoma, for which I luckily received preventive surgery when it was discovered.

Though harder to quantify, there is also the issue of personal dignity, of knowing who one is and where one comes from. That is something I can only attest through personal feeling and experience. Learning the truth has not hurt me. In fact, I now have a stronger clarity about who I am and a greater sense of confidence in myself that I feel strongly comes from this knowledge. I know that not every adoptee feels as strongly as I do about the importance of knowing, but it has made a huge difference in my life.

Finally, through DNA testing and exhaustive research, I have also discovered half siblings with whom I now have a wonderful and growing relationship. We live in different states but see each other when we can. Finding them has been an amazing gift in my life, a gift that would never have been possible without a change in Ohio law ending the secrecy and giving me a reason to search for them.

I am encouraged that, like Ohio, a number of states and organizations are now changing their positions. Perhaps the issuing of amended birth certificates and the sealing of birth records began with good intentions during a time when having a so-called "illegitimate" child was a source of shame. But that stigma is thankfully changing. A legal document meant to represent one's birth and identity should never intentionally contain false information, and I believe very strongly that this practice must come to an end.

On behalf of all those in Connecticut and elsewhere still seeking this denied information about who they are, I respectfully implore you to work toward changing your adoption laws to allow full access to birth records and original birth certificates, so that adult adoptees like myself can have the same rights to our own identifying family information as non-adoptees have to theirs.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Kevin Gladish