

Testimony to Planning and Development Committee

Senator Cassano, Representative McCarthy-Vahey, and members of the Planning and Development Committee.. My name is Carolyn Goodridge.

I am testifying in support of in support of S.B.113, An Act Concerning Access to Original Birth Certificates By Adult Adopted Persons. I am a social worker who worked as an adoption professional for about fifty years. I am a member and past president of the CT Council on Adoption, which is a volunteer organization of professionals, judges, and parents who monitor adoption practices in the state.

I feel that it is a basic human right for every citizen to have access to their own identity. Adoption laws over the years have been made to protect the child and family, but once the adopted child reaches adulthood, they should have the rights of every other adult in our society. The amended birth certificate issued at the time of the adoption is not their identity. Today, adoption practice shows 95% of adoptions to have some type of openness, but our laws have not evolved at the same pace. Adoption has had a shroud of secrecy for many years. Secrets, by their nature, are usually about something bad. Studies about birth mothers have shown that mothers never forget the child, and they never wanted their child denied their genetic information. The adoptee had no choice in the matter unless they were over age twelve. In the 1950's the birth mothers had no choice but to choose adoption because society was harsh toward unwed mothers and their families; mothers often had to sign adoption papers while still medicated from birthing.

In those states where the access to birth certificates has been reopened, including Maine, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island, there have been no negative issues with birth parents. Two states, Alaska and Kansas never sealed their records. Abortions in those states went down, and adoptions went up. The amended birth certificates issued with the adoptive parents' names came about because the child's birth certificate had a red stamp of "Illegitimate" across it, and legislators did not want the child burdened with that certificate so they created the amended certificate.. Birth mothers were the first ones shut out of the access to original birth certificates, before the child and adoptive parents. And yet, the argument to prevent access is always that birth parents were made promises. Most mothers say that the fears of societal pressures were remembered, not any promises.

Since 1915, there have been over 63,000 adoptions in Connecticut. All of those citizens are presently being denied the right to learn their identity and to search their genealogy. The only other citizens denied that right to their original birth certificates are those in the witness protection program. In 2014, Adopted Persons, who were adopted after 10/1/1983, achieved the right to obtain their original birth certificate.

In 1999 the Judiciary Committee asked the CT Law Revision Commission to study and report on the Sealed Records issue. Their report, dated February 8, 1999 stated , “While, on its face, the sealed records laws appear to give a privacy assurance, any expectation of privacy is illusory...Even if an expectation of privacy were, in fact, created, such an expectation is not a ‘vested right’ protected from retroactive application of new statutes”. In their 20 page report, the commission recommended giving adult adoptees access to their birth information. Rather than putting the burden of proof on the adoptee to petition the court for their OBC, they proposed that birth parents who object to the release of identifying information must convince the Probate Court that good cause exists why the information should not be released. Adopted persons have no control over their own lives. They were not involved in the decision to be adopted (unless they were over age 12), and then as adults they need to get permission from an agency or court to have their own information. They feel a black hole in their lives.

It is a normal developmental process for a person to question their identity—who am I? When adopted individuals want their birth certificates, it does not mean that they disrespect their adoptive parents or that they necessarily want to search for their birth parents. We ask that a contact preference form and health information form to provide updated medical information, be included in the bill as a way for birth parents to get this imperative information to adoptees if the parent does not want contact. It has been said that adoptees can get genetic testing for diseases such as cancer, Alzheimer’s, etc., but to get those tests they need proof that two close relatives have had the disease, or they are charged extravagantly for the testing; another door closed to adoptees. Those who have done DNA tests to search have generally found no closer than a 2nd Cousin because the database only includes others who registered with that site. If a relative is matched, and they decide to contact, the birth mother may be “outed” to the whole family, while the birth certificate would be a more direct contact. I have been personally involved since my niece did a search, and she learned that she had a half-sibling through her father, my brother. I have been providing information to my new nephew, but I have also wondered if my parents had known about this as my parents are now deceased. DNA searches can have surprising results.

I have noticed over the years that adoptees always have the same unanswered questions. The truth seems to “set them free” and usually also frees their birth parent from the guilt and shame they have carried.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Goodridge, Retired Social worker/ Past President of the CT Council on Adoption

