

ADOPTEE RIGHTS COALITION



Written testimony **in support of Senate Bill 113**,
An Act Concerning Access to Original Birth Records by Adult Adopted Persons
Connecticut General Assembly - Joint Committee on Planning and Development
Date of Hearing: 21 February 2020

Submitted by the **Adoptee Rights Coalition**
Lynn Grubb, President
18 February 2020

To the Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Planning and Development:

Thank you for allowing the **Adoptee Rights Coalition** to submit this testimony in support of **Senate Bill 113**, which will restore the right of **all** adopted persons born in Connecticut, and their children and grandchildren, to obtain copies of their original birth certificates by extending that right to Connecticut adoptees adopted before the October 1, 1983 cutoff.

The **Adoptee Rights Coalition** is a nonprofit adoptee-led group advocating for restored access to original birth records for all US born adoptees. We educate and advocate through social media and through written testimony. Since 2008, we have been a presence at the National Conference of State Legislatures where our members engage with legislators and other interested parties regarding legislation affecting access to original birth records for US adoptees.

The History of Access to Adoptees' Original Birth Certificates

The history of sealed records is a long one. Starting in the 1930s, state registrars became concerned that the “stigma of illegitimacy” would follow someone throughout their lives even after they had become “legitimized” through the subsequent marriage of their biological parents or through adoption. In addition, a child adopted by a step parent would have a birth record that did not reflect their legal name nor the names of their legal parents. An amended

birth record, showing only the child's current name and parents, was the solution to this problem. The original would be sealed from public view but not from parties with a genuine interest, and especially not from the person whose birth it recorded.

Gradually, and generally without much notice, access to original birth certificates was eliminated for **all** persons unless they obtained a court order. Adoptees lost access in all states except Kansas and Alaska. In Connecticut, the year was 1975. Prior to that year, all Connecticut born adoptees had access to their original birth certificates.

In the late 1990s the tide reversed, with Tennessee and Oregon enacting laws to restore access. Other states followed, but not all states restored access equally and to all of that state's adoptees. For example, while New Hampshire (2004) and Maine (2007) restored access to all, Massachusetts changed its access law in 2007, but left adoptees born between 1974 and 2007 without access.

In 2014, Connecticut Law was amended to restore the right of **some** Connecticut adoptees to a copy of their own original birth certificates. Only those adoptees whose adoption was finalized on or after October 1, 1983 saw their access rights restored, while older adoptees were relegated to a subordinate class, requiring a court order unless the birthparents were deceased or had given consent.

In recent years, a number of states with tiered access (Ohio, Indiana, Colorado) have restored access to all years. Other states have avoided the inherent inequality of tiered access and have gone directly to access for all adoptees, most recently in New York where adoptees had not had access for over 80 years.

Why Connecticut Needs to Enact Senate Bill 113

Senate Bill 113, An Act Concerning Access to Original Birth Records By Adult Adopted Persons, would restore the right of **every** adopted adult in Connecticut to obtain a copy of his or her original birth certificate. Passing this bill would fully achieve the restoration of access that began in 2014, and which has proven to be the appropriate path in Connecticut and other states.

Sealed records are no longer an insurmountable barrier to identifying biological family. Between DNA testing, social media, and other widely available resources, most adoptees will

be able to learn the identities of **both** parents if they so desire. Vast numbers of adoptees **are** identifying their families (as well as the families of their adopted parents and grandparents), no matter what the laws and restrictions in their various states may be.

Restoring access to the original birth certificate will allow the adoptee to contact the birthparent directly in a discreet and sensitive manner rather than involving members of the birthparent's extended family. In addition, **Senate Bill 113** provides for private communications between a birth parent and an adoptee - via a contact preference form.

Please approve **Senate Bill 113** to restore access to original birth certificates for Connecticut's adult adoptees who were adopted before October 1, 1983, thereby completing the restoration process that was started in 2014.

Respectfully submitted,

Adoptee Rights Coalition

Lynn Grubb, President
Kettering, Ohio

Becky Conrad Drinnen, Vice President
Sidney, Ohio

Jackie Fallon, Secretary
Monticello, Minnesota

Gaye Sherman Tannenbaum, Treasurer
Piriápolis, Uruguay

Regina Zimberlin, Director
Warwick, Rhode Island

Jeff Hancock, Director
Avon, New York

Karen Florence Gills, Director
Antioch, Tennessee

Kara Albano, Director
Riverside, Rhode Island