

February 15, 2020

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Cassano, Representative McCarthy Vahey, and Distinguished Members of the Connecticut General Assembly Planning & Development Committee:

My name is Desiree Stephens and I'm an adoptee. I support Senate Bill 113: An Act Concerning Adult Adoptees' Access To Original Birth Records. **I believe it is a basic human and civil right for every person to know his or her biological origins and that both adoptees and non-adoptees deserve equal protection under the law.** The current law in Connecticut governing the administration of original birth certificate requests by adult adopted persons is discriminatory. I believe there needs to be one fair and consistent policy for everyone no matter their age or circumstances at birth. I urge the legislature to enact Senate Bill 113 because it makes all adult adoptees born before October 1, 1983 equal under the same law that governs all non-adoptees and adoptees born *after* October 1, 1983.

I feel strongly about this bill because I have personally experienced the indignation of a similarly discriminatory policy that was in place until only a few weeks ago in the state where I was born, New York. At a time in my life when I desperately needed to know more about my identity and my birth family, I sought information that was rightfully mine, including my original birth certificate. Perhaps the most inhumane part of that process was how many outside people needed to know about my life and my story as I sought the information I needed. I endured a ton of unnecessary roadblocks along the way and I would have escaped years of self-doubt and shame had social workers and other authorities been able to give me my original birth certificate. Each time I received a letter signed and dated by another human being who could know information about my life that I was not allowed to know, **I felt dehumanized.** I felt less than. It robbed me of the self-empowerment non-adopted people are afforded just by nature of coming by their identities without this adversity.

### **On DNA**

Even though it took me almost half my life to find my relatives, clearing roadblocks became easier as time went on and the concept of openness became more common. **Today, openness is the norm.** But the current Connecticut law does not reflect this. I have been working with fellow advocates for the past four years to get a fair and equal law passed in Connecticut. From this work, I believe legislators need more education about the reality of keeping the law in its current state and how technology is actually eroding the privacy sought by those on *both* sides of this issue. **In fact, it is actually more private to allow adult adoptees access to their own original birth certificates than it is to keep the current law in place.** The reason is because of the Internet and more specifically, the entire bio-based economy including the consumer-DNA

industry. Adoptees and birth parents are using consumer DNA to find each other, often having to disclose their stories to a few distant relatives along the way to finding the truth. This is not private. This is semi-public actually. I found my birth father using consumer DNA and he had not even taken the test himself. 92% of adoptees using consumer DNA will find a second cousin or closer when they test.\* With a second cousin or closer match, it's easier than ever to find close relatives. In fact, the person one may be looking for doesn't even need to have tested themselves. While it's easy, it's not private. The private option is making adoptee's original birth certificates available to them so they can initiate private and direct contact should they so choose. **The private option is passing S.B. 113.**

### **On Dignity**

Adult adopted persons deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. We've lived life in a dual reality, often no one else but other adoptees can truly understand. Our complex narratives are at best a nuisance and at worst, catastrophic to our lives. We are truly missing pieces of ourselves and on top of that, we are often expected to be grateful to have those pieces missing-- a message sent to us through microaggressions like people questioning why we want our original birth certificates. **No other class of citizen is on the whole expected to be grateful for having been separated from their families.** The most dignified thing Connecticut can do today is to acknowledge adult adoptees have been discriminated against and simply restore their rights to access their original birth certificates, just like every other person in the state.

### **On Birthmothers & Privacy**

You may hear from opposition claiming they want to protect older birth mothers because they were promised privacy. Senators and Representatives, it's important you know the truth. When these women were relinquishing in the 1950's, 60's, 70's, the law was such that when their children reached the age of majority, they would be able to request and receive their original birth certificates. Because of this, **no birth mother from Connecticut during this time was promised confidentiality** and any agency or otherwise telling you so is misleading you. Many birth mothers from Connecticut during this time have submitted testimony confirming this and I encourage you to read them. Not only are they telling you they were never promised such privacy - that they in fact were correctly advised by agencies' attorney's that their names could be revealed to their adult children - but they are also telling you **they don't want or need "protection."** Some are even testifying that they are shocked the law was changed and they expected their relinquished children to be able to seek them out upon reaching adulthood. All of them seem to understand their information was private from the public, as every original birth certificate is already.

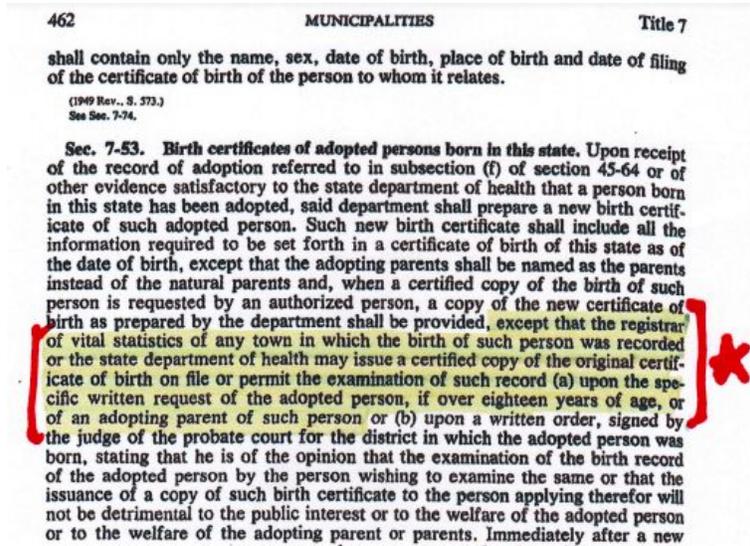


## FACT CHECK



### What was the law when older birth mothers were relinquishing?

At all times before 1975, every adult adoptee (and their adoptive parents) in Connecticut had the unrestricted right to obtain their original birth certificate. During the time when older birth mothers were relinquishing, no Connecticut adoption agency could have been promising her otherwise without misinforming her of the law.



Here is an image from the 1113 C.G.S. Sec. 7-53

### On Health

I also want to share with you that my own truth came to me at the expense of time, time that Senate Bill 113 will restore to adult adoptees and their families. I was 30 years old when I found out my birth mother had passed away from a malignant brain tumor. She had presented at a doctor's office with 'just a migraine' only three weeks prior to her death. She was 47 years old. We never reunited. It's heartbreaking by itself to have never reunited because she died so young, but it's almost criminal that had I not gone to extraordinary lengths to find my family, I would have been deprived of this health history. Adoptees have a right to seek the best possible healthcare they can get for themselves and their children and that includes a complete and up to date health history. We are not exempt from human health conditions just because we've been separated from our genetic relatives. It is common knowledge doctors provided better and more complete care when they have patients' medical histories. This is why the Connecticut State Medical Society supports Senate Bill 113. We do not deserve to be limited to sub-par medical care because of our circumstances at birth.

For all these reasons, implementing a more consistent government policy for adult adoptees regarding their birth records is the right thing to do. Please support S.B. 113, An Act Concerning Access To Original Birth Records By Adult Adopted Persons.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Desiree Stephens".

Desiree Stephens

Member, Board of Directors, Access Connecticut Now, Inc.

[desiree723@gmail.com](mailto:desiree723@gmail.com)

703-980-0224

\*[Adoptee Success Using DNA Testing: Mid-2019 Analysis](#), Blaine T. Bettinger, Ph.D., J.D.