

Testimony of the Reverend Denise Terry, 2309 Canyon Ridge Dr., Broad Brook, CT, 06016

February 20, 2020

Opposition to CT Senate Bill 113

Dear members of the Committee,

I am the Reverend Denise Terry. I live at 2309 Canyon Ridge Dr., in Broad Brook, CT. I am speaking today in opposition to CT Senate Bill 113, as it takes away the rights of the birth parents who may have been told at the time they offered their children for adoption, prior to October 1, 1983 that their information would remain sealed, and not released to ANYONE,. Their rights should not be violated.

Although, technically the law, prior to 1975, was that every adoptee had the unrestricted right to obtain their original birth certificate, the state has no legal proof that birth parents prior to 1983 were aware that their identities might one day be revealed to the children they placed for adoption. In fact, there is PLENTY of anecdotal evidence that birth parents were TOLD quite the opposite by adoption agencies – that their identities and information would be kept confidential. In fact, this was a convincing factor for many parents who chose adoption, over abortion.

Hence the reason for the Probate Court implementation of Affidavit Form JD-JM-60 on October 1, 1983. This Affidavit is now required in all voluntary termination of parental rights cases, post October 1st, 1983. It contains a notice provision that informs all biological parents that their identity, and the identity of other blood relatives, may be disclosed to adult adoptees when they reach the age of 18. Prior to October 1st of 1983, birth parents did not sign such an Affidavit, at the time they offered their children for adoption, and may not have been aware that one day those children would have access to their identifying information.

The legislature was aware of this issue of parents perhaps not having been aware that their identities could be released to the children they placed for adoption, prior to 1983, when, in 1987, they adopted the law that gave children adopted after October 1st of 1983 unrestricted access to their original birth certificates. They adopted this law, since parents who had placed their children for adoption after October 1st of 1983 were legally aware, via the Affidavit they had signed that their children might one day learn their identity.

The legislators in 1987 knew they could not LEGALLY open up unrestricted access to the original birth certificates of children placed for adoption prior to October of 1983, because the state could not prove that the birth parents had a reasonable expectation of being aware of the prior law that allowed adoptees unrestricted rights to their original birth certificates. In fact, legislators in 1987 knew that MANY birth parents prior to 1983 had been TOLD quite the

opposite, and they ruled it would be unfair to subject those birth parents to unwanted intrusions in their lives, by children they had placed for adoption prior to October 1st of 1983.

I can only imagine how disruptive it could be for a person who gave up a child 37+ years ago, to open their front door, and have that now-grown adult in front of them, without notice or consent.

No parent who placed a child for adoption, with the belief that their information would be kept confidential, 37 or more years ago, should not have to be concerned today, that their information could now be released, possibly upending their life, and their current family, which may not know ANYTHING about their having had a child that they put up for adoption more than 37 years ago. I know I would not want a grown adult, that I had given up for adoption more than 37 years ago, calling my home, or showing up at my door, unexpectedly. I doubt many of you would want that to happen to you, either.

There are already plenty of ways that adoptees placed for adoption prior to 1983 can legally get access to their original birth certificates, or their family health history, that also consider the rights of the birth parents. They are:

1. They can file a petition with the Probate Court to order the Dept. of Public Health to release the original birth certificate, and the Probate Court will order it, if either the birth parents consent to it, or both of the birth parents are deceased.
2. Birth parents, at any time, can file Contact Preference Forms and Updated Medical History Forms with the Dept. of Children and Families, if they want the child they placed for adoption to have access to this info, without knowing their identity. Adopted children can ask DCF, at any time, and repeatedly, if any info was placed on file for them.
3. Any adult adoptee has the right to "non-identifying info" from the agency that handled their adoption. Upon request, the agency can also search for the birth parents and seek to obtain consent for disclosure of their identity. And if the birth parents are deceased, the adoptee is entitled to receive identifying info on their birth parents, from the adoption agency, and can then petition the Probate Court for the Dept. of Public Health to release a copy of their original birth certificate.

If an adoptee doesn't know the agency they were adopted from, they can contact the Dept. of Children and Families, who keeps a searchable database of info for every child who has been placed for adoption.

It seems that this Bill seeks only to make it EASIER for adoptees to get access to information, without regard to the birth parents' privacy or confidentiality, and without their consent. I cannot support this. I hope the legislators don't either.

Also, there are plenty of volunteer, online registries that birth parents can register on, if they are interested in hearing from the children they gave up for adoption long ago, should they desire that.

Also, this Bill allows for not just the adoptee, but their adult children OR GRANDCHILDREN to access information identifying their parents or grandparents. This should not be allowed. The people who want to have access to these birth certificates want it, they say, because they should have the right to know their family health histories. I submit that just being able to talk with your birth parents or grandparents, and learn what they know about family medical history doesn't guarantee AT ALL that you will know ANYTHING about what illnesses you may or may not be predisposed to, or have inherited. Many people are carriers of genetic markers for illnesses they never get, but they can pass those genes onto their children.

My own parents and grandparents had NO signs or symptoms or test results EVER indicating ANY of the serious inherited illnesses that their five children have. Four of us inherited Polycystic Liver and Kidney Disease (with one faulty gene from each parent), and One of us inherited Fibromuscular Dysplasia of both carotid arteries, and the main vertebral artery (again, with one faulty gene from each parent). Neither of our parents, nor all four of our grandparents had these diseases. We know, because they would have shown up on the dozens of CT and MRI scans they had for other illnesses over their lifetimes. Also, many people have illnesses that were the result of both genetics and lifestyle choices that they made (eating poorly, not exercising, smoking, excessive drinking, etc.), that their children and grandchildren will NEVER get. So, knowing the medical history of one's birth parents doesn't justify violating the confidentiality of birth parents, either.

Part of the rationale for this bill is that it is meant to protect the confidential personal information of adoptees, which "might" be made public through consumer DNA testing, or social media. Where is the concern for the BIRTH PARENTS' confidential information? If an adoptee is concerned about their health history, they can have their Dr. prescribe confidential DNA testing. And they can pay for it. The expense of DNA testing should not be given more weight than the rights of the birth parents, who perhaps have every reason to believe that the state will protect their identity.

Please vote NO on SB 113

Very truly yours,

The Reverend Denise Terry