

Constance Vickers- Testimony in support of SB 113.

Representative McCarthy-Vahey, Senator Cassano and esteemed members of the Planning and Development Committee, it is my honor to provide testimony today in support of SB 113: An Act Concerning Access to Original Birth Certificates by Adult Adopted Persons. While this law will not give me access to my records, as I was born and adopted in the State of Pennsylvania, I come before you today with personal experience on the importance of this bill.

The only information I have about my birth mother was that she was a college student and made the brave decision to give me up for adoption because she could not provide a quality life for me. I was adopted at three days old by two loving individuals who were not able to conceive on their own. While my parents decided to make my adoption known to me and tried to explain what it meant, I naturally had many questions growing up about my origin. Unfortunately, those questions went unanswered and medical history forms at the doctor's office were left blank. I worried about genetic conditions and being predisposed to heart disease and certain cancers. While I try to live a healthy life that prevents these diseases, I wonder what genetic disorders I could potentially pass to my children and whether this could dictate if I wanted to conceive my own or to perhaps adopt myself.

Beyond the medical aspects, not knowing my origin also created a hole in my sense of self. I grew up not looking like anyone else in my family and I was intensely curious about my ethnic origin. This eventually led to me taking the 23andMe DNA test in 2014. In addition to the pretty map I received showing my roots in Italy, Ireland and Eastern Europe, I received a message that 22% of my DNA had been matched with another individual, later found out to be my half brother. The emotions I felt can only be understood by other adoptees who have no knowledge of their origin and no known blood connection to another individual. For the first time in my life, I felt grounded. There was another person in this world who shared a part of my DNA. I have since had the pleasure of building a relationship with my brother, including attending his wedding last spring and meeting his lovely family. This included a long chat between he and I about the family medical history on our paternal side. Unfortunately, our father is less than responsive, but that's okay. I have his name and half of my medical history and that's a start.

I still do not know the identity of my mother, but I hope that one day I will at least have a name. I would respect if she did not want to open the door to a life she left in the past. I have immense respect for the difficult decision she made thirty years ago.

In an ever changing world with modern technology making genetic testing readily available, the practices of disallowing original birth certificates to adoptees is incredibly archaic. Adult Adoptees should have the right to know where and who they come from. An original birth certificate should be the right of every person. I encourage you to support SB 113 and to finally enable adoptees to access these documents.