

Dear committee members,

My name is Tina Wood, and I write to you from your neighboring state of Rhode Island, which made original birth certificates available to all Rhode Island adoptees in 2012 (and where I have heard of no problems reported as a result.)

I had never thought much about the issues around adoption until Rhode Island's law took effect and an adopted friend, Belle, asked for my help once she finally had a name for her birth mother. "At age 68, I'm running out of time," she said. Fortunately, I was able to find her birth family, and she had six great years in reunion with her siblings before she passed away in 2018.

I am now an active volunteer "search angel" who helps adoptees and birth families who are searching in any state. The search process depends very much upon state laws. Anytime a Connecticut search comes up, I have to check what year the adoptee was born before I can advise them of what options are available to them.

Quite simply, I can see no justification for this unequal treatment of citizens based upon an arbitrary cutoff date. Why should some Connecticut adoptees be forced to take consumer DNA tests (which are not cheap), while other Connecticut adoptees can obtain their pre-adoption birth certificates so that they can contact their birth parents privately? It defies common sense and the concept of equal protection under the law.

I heard during floor debate last year that one birth mother had raised privacy objections to updating this law. I can tell you (and her) that any supposed promises of birth parent privacy are now completely moot due to consumer DNA testing. Several million people have now taken consumer DNA tests. If an adoptee has a second cousin or closer DNA match, researchers can almost always figure out who the adoptee's birth parents are by building a family tree for the match to figure out where the adoptee fits into the tree. Sometimes it can be done with an even more distant match. The upshot is that if an adoptee must go the DNA test route, they may well end up "outing" the birth mother to extended family members who may have had no idea that she gave up a child for adoption. In contrast, if an adoptee can get their original birth certificate, they can approach their birth mother privately instead of involving others in her family. Thus, making original birth certificates available to all adult adoptees is actually MORE respectful of birth parents' privacy than not making them available.

Of course not every situation in which an adoptee and birth parent make contact goes perfectly. But it makes no sense to use fear of some hypothetical bad outcome to prevent people who DO want to be found from being able to be found. Moreover, there are already laws against harassment and stalking which can be used in the very rare cases where adults do not behave like adults.

In the past couple of years, two adoptees that I helped find their families each lost their birth mothers. One of them was able to meet his birth mother and in fact was with her when she passed, just a year after they made contact. The other was not able to meet her birth mother because they both had health and financial issues that made traveling to meet each other impossible before her birth mother's unexpected death.

In memory of my friend Belle and of these birth mothers, I urge you to pass this legislation as soon as possible so that no one else "runs out of time" without knowing their truth.

Respectfully,

Tina Wood
Warwick, RI