

March 13, 2014

The Honorable Bob Mensch
Senate Box 203024
459 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3024

The Honorable LeAnna Washington
Senate Box 203004
457 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3004

Dear Chairman Mensch and Chairwoman Washington,

I am writing to you in regards to House Bill 162 which would allow adult adoptees to obtain their original birth record with the names and ages of their biological birthparents without the consent of their birthparents. I urge both of you to vote no on this bill.

I am the adoptive mother of a son in his twenties, and I worked for 20 years in several Pittsburgh-based adoption agencies. I am sympathetic to the desire of adopted children and many birthparents for open adoptions and free access to information. In fact, my son and his birthparent have enjoyed an open adoption relationship. However, this was my son and his birthmother's choice. This is not always the case for birthparents or adopted children. My experience as an adoption social worker showed me many instances when birthparents wanted anonymity. Many times this desire was the result of a birthmother's rape or being the victim of incest. Other times it stemmed from their desire to avoid a socially disastrous situation. In fact, I witnessed many adoptions that only took place because a birthparent could be guaranteed anonymity. In many cases, a parent might feel they had to choose parenting – with possible disastrous results for an unwanted child – if the birthparent could not have confidentiality about their identity. And, not all adopted children want or desire to know their birthparents. Many adopted children are not comfortable with this knowledge. In fact, my own son did not want contact with his birthparent during his high school and college years. He elected to wait until he was in his 20's.

My experience as an adoption worker taught me that the fairest process in adoption is one that respects the wishes of all parties. I learned that you could not force an open adoption relationship if one of the parties was not comfortable with it. I especially learned that "one size did not fit all" in the adoption world. Each placement and the degree of desired contact are unique because the needs and desires of birthparents, adopted children, and adopted parents are also unique.

Throughout the years, thousands of men and women have placed children for adoption and have relied on Pennsylvania law to ensure that their information would remain confidential. In fairness to these birthparents the law should be upheld. HB 162 would allow the Pennsylvania Department of Health to provide an adoptee's birth record without the consent of the birth parents. Adoptees could then release that information to others, even in closed adoptions. HB 162 would overturn any right to privacy and confidentiality of information on the part of biological parents.

It is already possible under Pennsylvania law for adoptees to petition the courts in order to request birth information. The courts can contact a birthparent after an adoptee's 18th birthday and learn if they would like to open the adoption. In my experience, this process works very well. Some birthparents are more comfortable years later in opening up an adoption; others continue to choose confidentiality. Pennsylvania law already requires that the non-identifying medical and social information be shared with the adoptees.

It is my firm belief that the adoption law in Pennsylvania is well grounded in its current configuration. Therefore, I urge you to vote now on House Bill 162. Thanks so much for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts with you.

Sincerely,

Victoria Ruscitto Sirockman
vesirockman@gmail.com
412-884-6252

The Adoptee Rights Bill (HB-162)

March 14, 2014

Brian L. Subich

Testimony in Support of House Bill-162: The Adoptee's Rights Bill

Dear Chairpersons Mensch and Washington and Members of the Senate Aging & Youth Committee:

My name is Brian Subich and I reside in Johnstown, PA. I have been employed as a Caseworker for Cambria County Children and Youth Services for the past five years. The purpose of my letter is to express my support for HB 162, a bill that would restore the equal right of Pennsylvania-born adult adoptees to access their original birth certificate.

As a Caseworker for Cambria County Children and Youth Services, I deal with children from all socioeconomic backgrounds and all races and creeds. One of the most basic things that children hold on to is their identity. I have in my duties as a Caseworker removed children from their parents due to unspeakable acts, but despite these acts perpetrated on them almost all of these children still identify themselves with their birth families even once they have become adults.

Now imagine being an adult and never having known where you come from, or who your parents are.

House Bill-162 will provide equality to adoptees by treating them the same way every other Pennsylvanian is treated, by being allowed to know where they came from and whom their parents are.

On a practical matter HB-162 is also a fiscally neutral bill that reduces government waste by eliminating the need for adult adoptees to tie up the court and registry systems in an attempt to obtain their Original Birth Certificate.

It is therefore my request that the Senate stand in support of HB-162.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,

Brian Subich
167 Frederick St.
Johnstown, PA 15902
814-242-1946

March 14, 2014

Adoptee Rights Bill (HB-162)

Dear Chairperson Mensch, and Washington, and Members of the Senate Aging and Youth Committee:

Please allow me to begin by introducing myself. My name is Theresa Subich and I currently reside in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. I am employed by the Conemaugh Valley School District as the Pennsylvania Information Management System Coordinator. However, I wasn't born in Johnstown and I had a different name when I was born in 1965 in Huntington, PA.

Sometime between 1968 and 1970 I remember my parents telling me that I was adopted. I didn't know what it meant and I didn't know what a remarkable thing it was. They told me that they couldn't have children of their own, so they went to the "baby store" and out of all the babies there, they chose the most beautiful and most special baby they saw....ME! They told me when I was older if I wanted to meet my birth parents, they would help me find them. However, I never had much interest in knowing anything about my birth parents; but then I had to apply for a birth certificate (which I never had before) for graduation purposes. When I applied I got my certificate from the Bureau of Vital Statistics which had my adopted name and no parents listed. That's when it hit me that I had no identifying information on my origins or history. I was busy with school and in the 1980's there was no internet to look up information. I wrote to the Cambria County Courthouse and after waiting sometime for a response I found out that I was "NOT ALLOWED" to have information on my birth. Not Allowed? Not allowed to have MY OWN information! I have no rights to know who I am or where I came from? Basic Rights?

I was told I could submit an application to find out "non-identifying" information. That is when I found out I was born in Huntington, PA at J.C. Blair Hospital and my initials were "M.A.S.". my mother was 16 and my father was 18 and was in the military. Wait...that's it? I have no more rights?

In 1985 the Commonwealth of PA **SEALED** all adoptee records and original birth certificates and there was nothing I could do. To this day, I am unsure why these records were sealed. My right to know MY personal information is SEALED. I see no legitimate reason why an individual living in the greatest country on earth could not have the RIGHT to access their own personal and privileged information.

Adult Adoptees should have the same basic right as every other citizen in PA and every other state in our great nation. The right to know! There are Right to Know Laws in every business, every school, even the government! Transparency is a term you hear a lot of today from our leaders in government and in business....why then have my personal information SEALED and kept from me and all other adult adoptees who have the RIGHT TO KNOW.

I implore you to please pass House Bill 162 and give back the rights to adult adoptees that were taken away in 1985 and restore OUR RIGHTS.

Respectfully,

Theresa Subich
"M.A.S."

The Adoptee Rights Bill (HB 162)
March, 18, 2014
Julie Stromberg

Testimony in support of House Bill 162:
In adoption, further providing for original birth record.

Dear Chairperson Mensch and members of the Senate Aging and Youth Committee,

My name is Julie Stromberg. I am a reunited adult adoptee (born and adopted in Connecticut) who has been a resident of Pennsylvania for eight years and is currently in possession of my original birth certificate. The purpose of my testimony today is affirm my support of HB162, a bill that would restore to adult adoptees born in Pennsylvania the legal right to access their original, factual and unaltered certificates of birth.

Non-adopted adults born Pennsylvania can access their factual birth certificates by making a simple request. Adult adoptees born in Pennsylvania cannot. The message provided to adult adoptees by the Commonwealth is that we are less deserving than non-adopted adult citizens. Adoptee rights is a matter of restoring equal treatment under law for all adult citizens born in Pennsylvania and ending the decades-long practice of considering adoption to be something shameful and secretive.

Adoptee rights is not about:

Search and reunion. Some individuals and organizations oppose restoring equal access to adult adoptees based on the notion that some natural parents might not wish to have contact with their relinquished sons or daughters. Contrary to what many in society have been led to believe, there is not one legal document involved in any adoption that legally guarantees a parent total anonymity from their own son or daughter. In most states, an adoptee's file and original birth certificate can be opened at a judge's discretion. As such, it is a legal impossibility that a natural parent could assume total anonymity from the adoptee. What an adult adoptee may choose to do, or not do, with the information contained on his or her original birth certificate is a personal matter and not one that requires the involvement of state governments. Adult citizens manage their personal engagements with other adults on their own every day. And there are many options available to any adult citizen who does not wish to engage with another adult citizen. The personal preferences of some (natural parents who do not desire contact with their sons or daughters) should not be given priority over the legal rights of all adults who were adopted as children.

Natural parent privacy. Birth certificates are not amended until an adoption is finalized. Children who are in foster care because the parental rights of their parents have been terminated, and who have not been legally adopted, use and have access to their factual

birth certificates. If the amending of birth certificates was contingent on the privacy of natural parents, the process of legal fiction would occur upon termination of parental rights. Instead, an adoptee's birth certificate is only amended upon the finalization of adoption. One could surmise, therefore, that the amending of birth certificates is for the adoptive parents' benefit and has nothing to do with natural parent privacy.

Abortion. Alaska and Kansas have never sealed the original birth certificates of adoptees. Both states have also been noted as having very low abortion rates according to data compiled in 2010 by the American Adoption Congress. The same data also revealed that in the states with more recent restored access, abortion rates lowered significantly following the passing of access legislation. Data shows that access legislation will not result in more abortions.

Our adoptive families. An adult adoptee who determines that it is in his or her best interest to obtain his or her original birth certificate has simply made a decision about his or her well-being as an adopted person. Desiring one's original birth certificate is not an indication of how an adult adoptee feels toward their adoptive family. We can love, cherish and respect our adoptive families and still need our original birth certificates. Adult adoptees existed, and had an identity, prior to being adopted. For many of us, it is important to acknowledge this fact regarding our personal histories. Adoptee rights legislation empowers adult adoptees and this is something that everyone connected to adoption should support.

Adoptee rights IS about restoring to all adult adoptees the right to access their own original birth certificates and treating adult adoptees as equal to non-adopted adults under law.

With this testimony in mind, I request that you recommend HB 162 to the Senate for vote. Send the message to adult adoptees born in Pennsylvania that they are deserving of equal treatment under law to non-adopted adults born in the state.

Sincerely,

Julie Stromberg
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March 18, 2014

The Honorable Bob Mensch
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging & Youth
North Office Building--Hearing Room 1

Senator Lisa Baker
20th District
172 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

When a child is adopted in the State of Pennsylvania, the adoptee's original factual birth certificate is altered or amended to make it appear as though the adoptive parents actually gave birth to the adoptee.

The original birth certificate is sealed away and not legally recognized. Currently, Pennsylvania-born adult adoptees (age 18+) are not allowed to access their original birth certificate.

Original birth records being sealed in this way send the message that adult adoptees and their families have something to be ashamed of. **THERE IS NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF.**

My story—as I know it --is the biggest kept secret in Luzerne County Pennsylvania

My name is Marirose (Pointon) Buckland. I think I was born on August 11, 1959 or possibly August 15, 1962 as Mary Pointon in the Nesbitt Memorial Hospital, Kingston, Pennsylvania.

I have not **one** but **two** birth certificates naming me as Mary Rose Pointon and the other as I know myself now- Marirose Pointon.

I realize adoption was created to protect children and place these children with parents who long to have children. Once an adoptee becomes of age, it should be their God-given right to know who they are if they so choose. The adoptee didn't enter into this world with any type of contract. The adoptee should not be bound by an agreement signed by others. There are many adoptees that die of diseases because they had no idea this disease ran in the family.

I, as an example, have had some strange illnesses over the last couple of years:

I developed a Macula hole in my right eye.

I have developed a large amount of arthritis.

I have been taking Thyroid medication for 20 years.

I recently came down with some infection that ate away my C4,5 and 6 of my spine. I was walked to the emergency room where I spent 10 days and had a hip bone put into my spine to prevent being paralyzed.

Please see to it that Pennsylvania changes the adoption laws so that adoptees have the right to obtain a copy of the original birth certificate, acquire family medical history, see their nationality, know if they have brothers and sisters and be able to connect with them. This can be a life-saving matter. I have found out that I have a sister and three brothers out there someplace and I am sure they would love to know about me!

The States of Oregon, Kansas, Alaska, Maine, Louisiana, Indiana, Illinois have open records and it has worked successfully for them. States working in progress of opening these original birth records are Hawaii, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. It has not lowered the rate of adoption nor increased the abortion rights.

I am speaking for many adult adoptees in the State of Pennsylvania that pray you will vote with your conscience and your heart and vote unanimously to pass this extremely important and so very personal human rights legislation into law. Please encourage your colleagues in the Senate to vote with you to unanimously vote to pass House Bill #162 and prove adoptees of Pennsylvania and Governor Corbett that you agree we deserve to be recognized and treated with dignity and respect, not differently than our non-adopted Pennsylvania citizens.

Please vote with your heart to open and pass this bill so I can find my brothers and sisters!

Thank you for hearing my story!

Marirose Buckland
312 East Dorrance Street
Kingston, PA 18704

*"We shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all our
exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place
for the first time." - T.S. Elliot*

www.thephilomenaproject.org

THE PHILOMENA PROJECT

contact@thephilomenaproject.org

Dear Representative Mensch,

In 1952, Irish-born Philomena Lee gave birth to her son Anthony at the State-funded Sean Ross Abbey mother-baby home in Roscrea, Co. Tipperary. Sean Ross was one of three mother-baby homes run by the Sacred Heart Sisters in Ireland, responsible for more than 25,000 adoptions in and from Ireland. Despite the state's funding of the home, for three years, Philomena nurtured and loved her son while working off 'her keep' in the home's laundry, until her son was cruelly taken from her and trafficked for adoption to the US. Anthony was one of more than 2,000 such 'Banished Babies' sent to the US, including **nearly 100 Pennsylvania citizens** (c.f. Banished Babies, Mike Milotte, 1997). I am one of those as well, adopted from Ireland to Philadelphia in 1961. My loving adoptive parents were always truthful with my younger adoptive brother and me about our circumstances, and always respected our right to know who we are. I am also the mother of a daughter born in Philadelphia in 1978 who I was forced to relinquish in a closed, coercive adoption orchestrated by Philadelphia Catholic Charities. I was not asked to sign a confidentiality agreement at the time, nor did I seek such confidentiality. I've always believed, as does Philomena, that we are accountable to our children.

For many years, Philomena tried in vain to contact her son, or at least determine if he was happy and well and gave the Sisters her contact information. Each time, she was rebuffed by the Sisters in Roscrea. Likewise, her son Anthony (now named Michael), tried to find his mother, despite being told by his adoptive parents that his mother had 'abandoned' him. Michael had gone on to a brilliant career in Washington, serving as the chief counsel for the Republic National Committee under both Presidents Reagan and Bush. Twice, he visited the convent in Roscrea and was turned away. His last visit occurred in 1995, as he was dying of AIDS. He asked the Sisters if they would not help him find his mother, would they at least allow him to be buried there in the graveyard at Sean Ross? They finally relented, but only if he would consent to make a very sizeable donation, which he and his surviving partner did. He was laid to rest there in 1996.

Even after Anthony's death, the nuns continued to refuse to divulge information to Philomena – in fact, they didn't even tell her he was buried on their property. It was not until 2003, when Philomena shared her story with her daughter Jane Libberton (and she in turn reached out to our organisation), that we discovered photos of Anthony's gravestone and the truth behind the lies.

Philomena and Anthony's incredible story has become the basis for the Oscar-nominated film *Philomena*, starring Dame Judi Dench and Steve Coogan. But more importantly, it spurred Philomena herself to become a passionate advocate (at 80 years of age) for the rights of all adopted people. In January 2014, Philomena and Jane partnered with our organisation, **Adoption Rights Alliance**, to start **The Philomena Project**. The ultimate goal of The Philomena Project is to change current Irish legislation to restore the right of adult adopted people in and from Ireland to their original birth certificate and documents, including those now US citizens, and the reunification of families that were separated by forced or illegal adoption. This very basic civil and human right is one that has been enjoyed by adopted citizens in the UK for nearly forty years, and in five US states. And to date, the sky has not fallen in as a result.

I had the honour of visiting Capitol Hill with Philomena and Jane, and meeting with key representatives including Sen. Roy Blunt (R-MO), Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO), Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), and Irish Ambassador Anne Anderson on the issue of adoption rights. The feedback and ongoing support we received from those senate offices and the Irish Embassy has been phenomenal. I've also had the privilege of personally testifying on previous PA open records Bills, on behalf of those 'Banished Babies' for whom this legislation represents a civil right long denied them. The bill, which the PA House passed unanimously in October 2013, is now headed for a Senate Committee hearing on March 18.

On behalf of Philomena, Jane, myself and those Irish-born Pennsylvania citizens, we now urge you to do the right thing and make this Bill law. It is long past time to stop hiding behind the skirts of mothers like Philomena and me, using the myth of birthmother 'privacy' or 'confidentiality' (not one single document has ever been produced – in the US or Ireland – to prove this myth) to deny and discriminate against citizens who vote, pay taxes, serve their country in the military and are owed the same right to their identity as every other citizen, including convicted felons. This myth is a dog which simply won't hunt any longer. PA has ample laws covering issues such as unwarranted contact, harassment and other violations of personal conduct. To grant those of us who relinquished children a special right of protection/privacy that no other citizen enjoys suggests that adopted adults are 'damaged,' or somehow pathologically unable to manage their own personal relationships in a reasonable, rational fashion. Would you want your own children similarly discriminated against?

At the end of the day, this Bill isn't about search and reunion – it is about the restoration of rights that once belonged to adopted people, rights that were rescinded as a result of popular bad psychology of the time, along with a desire to protect the identity of all parties of the adoption from the public, not from each other.

Take Philomena's lead and let's get rid of the shame and stigma that was once associated with adoption. That shame isn't ours anymore. But it will be your undying shame and legacy if you continue to abrogate the rights of citizens in your own Commonwealth.

We believe you wish to leave a better legacy than that, and we believe you'll do the right thing.

Respectfully,

Mari Steed

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215.589.9329

US Coordinator, Adoption Rights Alliance

Committee Director, Co-founder, Justice for Magdalenes

The Philomena Project

www.adoptionrightsalliance.com | www.magdalenelaundries.com | www.thephilomenaproject.org

FAX

TRANSMISSION

To:

From:

Subject: ATTN THE HONORABLE BOB MENSCH

Message: The Honorable Bob Mensch
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging & Youth
PA Senate
FAX: 717-787-8004

Pennsylvania Steel Company, Inc.
1717 Woodhaven Drive - Bensalem, PA 19020
Tel: 215-633-9600 Fax: 215-633-9601
Website: www.pasteel.com

This fax was sent by Pennsylvania Steel Company Inc. - Bensalem PA

The Adoptee Rights Bill (HB 162)

March 12, 2014

Kristi B. Lado

Testimony in support of House Bill 162: The Adoptee Rights Bill

Dear Chairpersons Mensch and Washington and Members of the Senate Aging & Youth Committee,

My name is Kristi Lado and I am an adoptee who has reunited with her natural mother. For most of my adult life I have worked with the adoptee community in some capacity, including volunteer work for adoptee organizations and hosting support groups.

The purpose of this testimony is to voice my enthusiastic support for HB 162, a bill that would restore the equal right of Pennsylvania-born adult adoptees to access their original birth certificate.

HB 162 is not about reunion or even medical history, but about being treated equally under the law. Currently, adoptees are the only PA residents without access to our original birth certificates. This injustice was born of an era where society simply didn't know better.

Because of the shame surrounding the circumstances of an adoption, there was an attempt to ensure that nobody would have access to the truth after an adoption was finalized. Government-sponsored secrecy in the form of closed records became the norm in the mid-20th century. Pennsylvania was one of the last states to do this in the 1980's, respectively.

While most first-world nations allow adoptees access to their records, we are still behind the times in many U.S. states. Despite the fact that open adoptions have become the norm and nothing terrible happened when our records were open, this outdated law remains unchanged.

Freedom of Information laws exist because we as a nation believe in truth and transparency. Imagine being barred for the truth of your own existence.

We have a chance here in PA to do the right thing. By voting for HB 162 we are saying we believe in every individual's inherent worth and dignity.

Please vote for HB 162.

Thank for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Kindest Regards,

Kristi B. Lado

The Adoptee Rights Bill (HB 162)
March 18, 2014
Gail Edith Walton

Testimony in support of House Bill 162: The Adoptee Rights Bill

Dear Chairperson Mensch and Washington and Members of the Senate Aging and Youth Committee,

My name is Gail Edith Walton. I am an adult adoptee of the state of Pennsylvania, and I am a birth parent. I have a PhD in Human Development and I am a professor of child development. The purpose of my testimony today is to give my support for HB 162, a bill that would restore the equal right of Pennsylvania-born adult adoptees to access their original birth certificate.

As an adoptee, I have longed to know my entire history, my ancestry, and my ethnic origin. I want to know who I really am. This very personal information has been hidden from me. I am not ashamed of being adopted. To be denied access to my original birth certificate means that I am treated differently from Pennsylvanians who are not adopted. Hiding this information sends a negative message about adoption - and I should know - I am both an adoptee and a birth parent. Restoring access to my original birth certificate means that Pennsylvania acknowledges and values the dignity of all of its native born citizens. It not only restores access, it sends a clear and positive message about equality for all in this great state of Pennsylvania.

HB 162 is a fiscally neutral bill. It would even provide benefits to the state because adoptees would be less dependent on the courts and registries to obtain information about themselves. In addition, research from New Hampshire shows that access does not negatively affect the privacy of birth parents. Birth parents want to know how well their birth children are doing. It helps birth parents heal from the grief of their decision.

I am respectfully requesting your support of HB 162. Please recommend HB 162 to the Senate for a vote.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,
Gail Edith Walton

The Adoptee Rights Bill (HB 162)

March 18, 2014

Elizabeth Cecelia Richards

Testimony in support of House Bill 162: The Adoptee Rights Bill

Dear Chairpersons Mensch and Washington and Members of the Senate Aging & Youth Committee,

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. I am Elizabeth Richards. I am 30 years old and a Captain in the United States Air Force. I have served in Iraq, Afghanistan, and South Korea. I was also adopted out of foster care when I was three weeks old. Everyone has an innate desire to know who they are and their origins. Adult adoptees are no different; we just have a harder time answering some of life's most basic questions. House Bill 162 would help us address some of these intrinsic identity issues, while restoring a sense of equality with our non-adopted peers.

My parents never hid the fact I was adopted. They did their best to answer my questions about where I came from, but there were a lot of questions they could not answer. As I got older, I became determined to know my full life story. When I was first told I would need a lawyer to petition the court to unseal my original birth certificate, I assumed it was because I was a teenager at the time. I decided to wait. I didn't want to involve lawyers and courts in my personal quest. Years later, in 2012, after returning from Afghanistan, I decided to try again. My year tour to South Korea was coming up and I wanted to get access to my original birth certificate before I left. I was very surprised when Lebanon County's Clerk of Orphans informed me I would still need a lawyer to petition the court to get my original birth certificate. It didn't matter that I was an adult; I was still adopted and thus not allowed access to my original birth certificate without a court order.

That is unacceptable. A majority of adult Americans do not need a court order to access their original birth certificates and neither did adult adoptees in Pennsylvania until the 1980s. Pennsylvania sealed the original birth certificates of adoptees at a time when many states across the nation were doing the same. The original intent was to protect the child from the stigma of being 'illegitimate.' The same states that restricted access to original birth certificates for adoptees during the latter half of the last century, are now considering similar legislation as House Bill 162. Empirical research on states that have restored access to original birth certificates, and other nations that never limited access, all found there are no negative side effects to the adult adoptee, the birth parents, the adoptive family, and society as a whole. There is no corresponding rise in the abortion rate or reports of intruding in the lives of birth parents.

Testimonials from adult adoptees in states that have restored the right to access original birth certificates are positive.

House Bill 162 is a fiscally neutral bill. Based off the evidence from similar legislation in other states and nations, there are no likely negative consequences associated with it. It will have the very positive impact of restoring equality to Pennsylvania adult adoptees. It will help us answer some fundamental questions dealing with identity, like ethnicity, that non adopted adults take for granted. It will restore a sense of equality to all adult adoptees, so we can stop feeling like second class citizens that must ask the court's permission to get access to the most essential documents that deal with our lives.

I took an oath to uphold and defend the Constitution of this nation. I've deployed to combat zones twice and have served all over the world supporting our country. I shouldn't need a lawyer to petition a court to get my birth certificate. I would just like to ask my state, the place I still call home, to pass House Bill 162 and restore to all adult adoptees of Pennsylvania access to our original birth certificates.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration in this matter.

Very respectfully,

Elizabeth Richards

The Adoptee Rights Bill (HB162)

March 18, 2014

Mary Ellen Verna

Testimony in support of House Bill 162: The Adoptee Rights Bill

Dear Chairpersons Mensch and Washington and Members of the Senate Aging & Youth Committee,

My name is Mary Ellen Verna. I am an adult adoptee. I am writing to you today to show my support for HB 162, a bill that will restore the equal right of Pennsylvania-born adult adoptees to access their original birth certificate.

I was adopted shortly after my birth. As I grew older I came to realize the huge impact and hurdles I would face when trying to access any of my original birth information. Those issues still remain today and are now passed onto my children and grandchildren. Not knowing my true identity, ethnicity, medical history, etc., is frustrating, unfair and embarrassing at times. I have found that the only way to **POSSIBLY** find out any information is to pay hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars to agencies, Courts and any other organization involved in the adoption. Even after paying these fees, an Adult adoptee is not guaranteed to even receive the requested information leading to further anger and frustration. Adult adoptees should have the equal right as other non-adoptee adults to their original birth certificates and information.

Passing HB 162 into law will not be a financial burden on the taxpayers of PA. It will actually reduce government waste and time by eliminating the need for adult adoptees to tie up the court with attempts to access the rightful original birth certificates.

Please recommend HB 162 to Senate for a vote to pass HB 162 into law and give Adult Adoptees the equality they deserve!

Thank you for opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely


Mary Ellen Verna



Pennsylvania Adoptee Rights
www.adopteerightspa.org

Adoptee Rights Bill (HB 162)
March 18, 2014
Pennsylvania Adoptee Rights

Testimony in support of House Bill 162: the Adoptee Rights Bill

Dear Chairman Mensch, Chairwoman Washington, members of the Aging and Youth Committee,

Although opposition to legislation like this is not nationally prevalent, we understand that there have been objections voiced in Pennsylvania regarding HB162. As our board has a combined half-century of experience in educating about this issue—we are comprised entirely of mothers and advocates for women—we are eager to offer our insight. As HB162 is foremost intended to send positive messages about being adopted, our concern with the opposition is not that they disagree. Our concern is that harmful messages about the adoption community are being communicated through these objections. We express our deep concern to you that this is occurring. With this testimony, it is our intention to address the misconceptions of the opposition regarding HB162.

Pennsylvania has *not* always sealed original birth certificates and history shows that previous policy worked:

According to a 1978 official opinion by the Pennsylvania Attorney General, the 1925 law that sealed adoption records did not impound the original birth certificates of adoptees. This opinion also stated that the law was being interpreted correctly by releasing original birth certificates to adult adoptees upon request. This law was in place for over 60 years with no opposition or reported issues.

Birth Parents were *not* promised anonymity:

The Adoption Act of 1984 severely restricted access to original birth certificates; however, we are wary of the claims that The Adoption Act promised anonymity to birth parents as it has always allowed the release of the original birth certificate at any time *per a judge's discretion*. According to two thorough national policy evaluations, The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute concluded that there is little evidence that sealed original birth certificates substantiate guarantees of anonymity to birth parents. Furthermore, University of Baltimore Law Professor, Elizabeth Samuels, concluded after studying adoption relinquishment papers, that there was no promise of anonymity found within the legal documents that birth parents sign.

There are *no* known negative repercussions to legislation identical or similar to HB162:

As demonstrated by Pennsylvania's 60-plus year history of allowing original birth certificate access, research on this policy's implementation, such as seen in the research by renowned law expert Dr. E Wayne Carp, both nationally and internationally, has concluded that there are no known negative repercussions to legislation similar to HB162. In fact, the feedback we have received from the adoption community abroad is that they are confused as to why the United States is quite behind on this issue, a viewpoint prevalent in the popular writing of Finnish adoptee and sociologist Dr. Katrina Wegar.

Pennsylvania Adoptee Rights
www.adopteerightspa.org

HB162 does *not* increase abortion rates:

We know from data in states that have already implemented legislation similar to HB162 that there is no statistically significant relationship between original birth certificate access and abortion rates. Furthermore, a recent Guttmacher survey (2008) of women who had abortions noted that anonymity when considering adoption was not a concern. However, they did report that the idea of one's child being out in the world without them made adoption unfavorable.

Current provisions are *not* adequate and we *need* HB162:

Adult adoptees and birth parents across the commonwealth have reported to us that they do not feel the court systems have helped them. Recorded match rates for the alternative registry systems indicate they have been inefficient and ineffective. The old AMHR registry received over 2,500 applications from adoptees and 800 submissions from parents but made fewer than 10 matches in 14 years of operation. From 1985 to 2010, the Biological Parent Registry received consents for the release of identifying information from about 1,600 birth parents. However, Pennsylvania failed to record how many adoptees applied and how many matches were made. In two years of operation, the new P.A.I.R. registry has made only ten matches despite hundreds of registrations from birth parents and adoptees.

Most importantly, the current system does not address the right of adult adoptees to in equal regard to those who are not adopted when accessing their original birth certificate. HB162 seeks to rectify this inequality.

Birth mothers *should not* be assumed to have lied on birth records:

According to Title 23, an unmarried father must sign a witnessed statement acknowledging paternity that is forwarded to the Department of Public Welfare along with his social security number.

Stereotypes of birth parents and adoptees *should not* be the basis of public policy:

We have left this point for last because it is the most important. We are deeply saddened that we have heard the following damaging sentiments exuded by some of the opposition to this bill:

- Birth mothers can be presumed to have lied on the birth record.
- Birth mothers can be presumed to have had multiple sexual partners and not know the fathers of their children.
- Birth mothers can be presumed to have given birth to "illegitimate" children and are ashamed of themselves.
- Adult adoptees can be presumed as "unwanted," "almost aborted," or "shameful secrets."

We stand firm to defend the dignity and worth of birth parents and oppose that these negative messages in any way form the foundation for public policy. We hold that birth parents are as valuable as any other parent, and that the births of their children are no more shameful or worthy of being hidden than the birth of any other child. We hold that adult adoptees were once the children for whom adoption claimed to be working in the best interest of, and are adults who deserve dignity, equality, and respect.

Pennsylvania Adoptee Rights
www.adopteerightspa.org

Lastly, we hold that the birth of every person is worthy of acknowledgement and that being adopted does not exclude someone from this basic human right. It is with these simple truths that we respectfully ask you to recommend HB162 to the Senate for a vote.

In Dignity and Truth,

The Legislative Board of Pennsylvania Adoptee Rights

Adoptee Rights Bill (HB 162)

March 18, 2014

Marianne Novy

Testimony in support of House Bill 162: The Adoptee Rights Bill

Dear Chairman Mensch, Chairwoman Washington, and members of the Aging and Youth Committee,

I grew up in an atmosphere where my adoption was a secret that I was never supposed to talk about. What a relief it was to find adopted people writing about their experiences openly in the 1970s! I discovered that I could find my birth certificate by requesting it, and thus I learned my birthparents' names. I discovered that my birthfather was Jewish, which I had never known before. It did not shake my Christianity but it allowed me to learn more about my history. Knowledge of my birthparents did not hurt my relationship with my adoptive parents--in fact, it was helpful. When I wrote discreetly, my birthmother was glad to hear from me, as is usually the case. My birthfather was not, and I have not intruded on his life. Having my original birth certificate is a sign that I am treated equally by my state and I do not need to feel that it is shameful that I was born.

I am a professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh and I have researched and written about the way that adoption is portrayed in literature in two published books, Imagining Adoption and Reading Adoption. The idea that if adoptees meet their birthparents they will neglect their adoptive parents, or that there will be some other kind of disaster, is found in some influential fiction and drama from centuries ago, but memoirs of recent adoptees give a very different picture of how adoptive parents remain important while new knowledge of birthparents is beneficial. Birthparents have also found that knowing what has happened to their adopted away children is beneficial to them—see, for example, interviews in Ann Fessler's book The Girls Who Went Away.

The Evan P. Donaldson Adoption Institute, headed by an adoptive father, Adam Pertman, has made a careful study of the impact of closed and open birth certificates and concluded that allowing adult adoptees access to their birth certificates as others have to theirs is the best practice, and many other responsible organizations with knowledge about how adoptive families work have concluded this as well. Neither an increase in the number of abortions nor any other bad effects have been found to result from this access. I hope that you will vote to restore adoptees' equal access to birth certificates. These rights were removed in 1984 without debate. A number of other states have given their adoptees equal rights again in recent years--Pennsylvania should do the same.

Sincerely,

Marianne Novy

(A)

Written Testimony Regarding House Bill No. 162, respectfully submitted to the Pennsylvania Senate Aging & Youth Committee in conjunction with the public hearing scheduled for March 18, 2014.

by: Gaye Sherman Tannenbaum
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Dear Chairpersons Mensch and Washington and Members of the Senate Aging & Youth Committee,

My name is Gaye Sherman Tannenbaum and I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Adoptee Rights Coalition. The Adoptee Rights Coalition is a national, grassroots organization of adoptees, original parents and adoptive parents, dedicated to supporting legislation that will restore the rights of adult adopted persons to unconditional access to their own original birth records.

I am urging the Committee to recommend HB 162 to the Senate for a vote. This is one of many Adoptee Rights Bills across the United States and, while it doesn't directly affect me, it affects many of my friends and colleagues as well as serving as a model for other states. I was born in New York City in 1953 and placed for adoption shortly thereafter. Some 55 years later, I found my biological mother and her family, and she welcomed me with open arms. Still, despite my excellent relationship with her and her family, neither one of us can obtain the original document that states that SHE gave birth to ME. Were I born in Pennsylvania, we would have the same problem as current Pennsylvania law only provides a summary of the birth record, not a photocopy of the original.

It is my understanding that adoptees were able to obtain their original birth records up until the law changed in 1985. Prior to that, it was considered the adoptee's right as a Pennsylvania-born citizen. Indeed, the original laws surrounding providing amended birth certificates to adoptees (including step parent adoptees) made it clear that the records were only to be sealed from the eyes of the general public.

"Birth Records of Illegitimates and of Adopted Children", a paper read before the Vital Statistics Section of the American Public Health Association at their fifty-ninth Annual Meeting on October 30, 1930, gives an excellent historical perspective from a time when all birth certificates were open public record. (I have included a copy with my testimony.)

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1556353/>

The practice of amending birth records and sealing the originals was created to save the child from the stigma of illegitimacy and to present a single document that identified the individual by his/her legal name and as the child of his/her legal parents.

The proposal was never about denying access to individuals with a legitimate interest in the original birth record.

'Then on receipt of such copy the State Registrar shall cause to be made a new record of the birth in the new name, and with the name or names of the adopting parent or parents. He shall then cause to be sealed and filed the original certificate of birth with the decree of the court, and such sealed package shall only be opened upon the demand of said child, or his natural or adopting parents, or by the order of a court of record.' (Emphasis added.)

In many states, that was the original law. The record was sealed from the public but not from the individuals to whom it pertained.

A lot has changed since the 1930s. Not only has adoption changed (becoming more open in many ways) but our knowledge of and feelings toward all members of the "triad" has changed. Social workers' notion of "best practices" has changed. Where once it was considered good parenting to never tell the child he was adopted, now most people are horrified by the notion of keeping this information a secret. At the very least, the individual would be giving his/her doctors the wrong family medical history – something I did for years.

The Donaldson Adoption Institute has undertaken numerous studies on the changing nature of adoption, including this important study on "Openness In Adoption":

http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/publications/2012_03_OpennessInAdoption.pdf

'In historical terms, absolute secrecy in adoption is a relatively recent practice; it began in the U.S. in the 1930s and grew out of the prevailing attitudes of the day, primarily the desire to protect adopted children from the stigma of illegitimacy.'

'In fact, most states did not begin sealing adopted children's original birth certificates until the 1930s through 1950s; even then, these documents were initially closed only to the public, not to the affected parties.'

'The greater practice of openness came about largely in response to growing recognition of the negative impact of secrecy and to the demands of birthparents (mainly mothers).'

'The number of "closed" infant adoptions in the U.S. has shrunk to a tiny minority. Indeed, respondents said confidential adoptions constituted only 5 percent of their placements during the past two years, while 55 percent were fully disclosed and 40 percent were mediated. Ninety-five percent of the agencies said they now offer open adoptions.'

With secrecy no longer the norm in "current" adoptions, one of the key recommendations of The Donaldson Adoption Institute is the repeal of archaic sealed records laws.

http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/publications/7_14_2010_ForTheRecordsII.pdf

'The laws on the books in most states do not benefit the vast majority of the affected parties, and therefore should be changed. Modern adoption practice, with its emphasis on openness, honesty and family connections should be the operating model. It is time to end the secrecy that has not only resulted in shame and stigma for nearly everyone concerned, but also has undermined the institution itself by sending a signal from the very start – at the time a birth certificate is issued – that adoption has something to hide.'

http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/publications/2012_12_UntanglingtheWeb.pdf

"Laws that impede the parties to adoption from gaining significant information, including "closed records" statutes, should be repealed since the Internet obviates their main contemporary rationale (i.e., preventing the affected parties from learning about and finding each other)."

Opponents to restoring access generally bring up "birthmother privacy" as the main reason for their opposition; yet records do not seal upon relinquishment, only upon adoption – any adoption. A child who has been relinquished but never adopted retains rights to his/her original birth certificate. Further, nearly half of all adoptions are step-parent adoptions and those records are sealed as well. A person who has lost a parent to death has a birth certificate which lists that parent, unless that person was subsequently adopted. In that case, the deceased parent is legally expunged and the person must "show good cause" to obtain the original birth certificate. Records even seal in "open" adoptions. Clearly, there's some disconnect between what opponents say the purpose of sealed records is and the reasons these laws were passed as far back as the 1930s.

In restoring access, Pennsylvania would not be operating in a vacuum. Legislative changes over the past 15 years provide a well documented history of what happens when original birth record access is restored for adult adoptees. Oregon effectively repealed its sealed birth certificate law in 2000 and recently expanded that law to include sealed court files. Kansas and Alaska have always allowed adult adoptees unrestricted access to original birth certificates. Kansas also provides the full adoption file. Maine, New Hampshire, Alabama and Rhode Island also provide unrestricted access. Several states have access dependent upon date of birth and/or date of adoption although the trend is to eliminate these "black hole" periods.

Recently, legislation was passed in Ohio that would expand birth certificate access to ALL adoptees:

<http://www.adoptionnetwork.org/roar-2013.aspx>

Prof. Elizabeth Samuels of the Baltimore School of Law was among many who testified in support of expanding access.

<http://www.adoptionnetwork.org/media/documents/document-gallery/roar/hb61-testimony-samuels-elizabeth.pdf>

"The evidence is that birth mothers who sought confidentiality were seeking to conceal their pregnancies from their parents, or from other members of their communities, rather than to conceal their identities forever from their children or to foreclose for themselves any chance of learning how their children fared in life."

Adam Pertman, Executive Director of the Donaldson Adoption Institute, put it this way:

<http://www.adoptionnetwork.org/media/documents/document-gallery/roar/hb61-testimony-pertman-adam.pdf>

"The critics of restoring the right of adult adoptees to access their original birth certificates warn that approving this law will set off an array of dire consequences – from ruined lives, to increased abortions, to fewer adoptions, and on and on. Whether the critics are right is no longer the subject of conjecture or

speculation. A growing number of states around the country during the past decade have done what you are considering doing, while two states (Kansas and Alaska) never sealed these records.

So now we can see with our own eyes what calamities might transpire when adult adoptees gain access to their original birth certificates. And the answer, very simply, is "none." The newspapers in those very diverse states – from Alabama to New Hampshire, from Tennessee to Oregon, from Delaware to Maine to Illinois – contain no horror stories about stalker adoptees or weeping women. The statistics in those states show no inkling of rising rates of abortion or falling rates of adoption.'

Even traditional opponents testified in SUPPORT of this change:

NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio

<http://www.adoptionnetwork.org/media/documents/document-gallery/roar/hb-61-proponent-testimony-naral-pro-choice-ohio.pdf>

"This bill will allow adoptees born and adopted between 1964 and 1996 to get access to their original birth certificate and important family medical information; while protecting the privacy of birth parents by allowing them to express their desire for or against being contacted by the adult adoptee. This system will, in fact, better protect the privacy of birth parents by creating a system where they can express their preferences for being contacted, which currently does not exist."

Ohio Right to Life

<http://www.adoptionnetwork.org/media/documents/document-gallery/roar/proponent-testimony-ortl.pdf>

"If we had any reservations about this bill and the effect it would have on chances of women choosing abortion over adoption, I would not be standing before you in support of the measure today."

Catholic Conference of Ohio

<http://www.adoptionnetwork.org/media/documents/document-gallery/roar/hearing-3/hb61testimonycatholicconference.pdf>

"We acknowledge and affirm that providing adopted adults access to their original birth certificate is not only good practice, but also, more importantly, the right and just thing to do. Legislation allowing such access, while establishing a way for birth parents to state their contact preference (which could include "no contact"), has been shown to work in other states."

Progress is being made elsewhere but some states are apparently loath to repeal these unjust decades old laws. Even the reasons given for keeping the law do not match the original legislative intent.

In states (including Pennsylvania) which still deny birth record access, the laws have changed. Until recently, there was little an adoptee could do to obtain any information. Now most adoptees have a right to some form of "non-identifying" information. It is interesting to note that these reports usually contain sensitive personal information about the birth parents – drug use, promiscuity, family abuse, alcoholism, mental illness, criminal record – freely obtainable by law without notice to, review by or permission from of the natural parents. The notion of "birthparent privacy" apparently does not extend to "non-identifying information". I know many natural parents who are very upset by this "non-identifying information". They would much rather tell the story

(or not) themselves, than have some agency do it without their review or consent, especially if the report is inaccurate, as many are.

The sheer volume of readily available information has also changed. Gone are the days when a searching party had to spend hundreds of hours at the courthouse or local library, and send out hundreds of personal letters. Most information is online now and email addresses are readily obtained. Adoptees (and their parents) are able to use an unprecedented number of resources – many of them free.

The most recent tool to be added to this information gathering arsenal is Direct-To-Consumer DNA testing for genealogy. There are three major companies that do this and adoptees can add their DNA to all three databases for under \$300. These are not “adoption registry” DNA databases. These databases are mainly used by the general public to expand their knowledge of family genealogy. Adoptees will typically be matched with hundreds (usually thousands) of “distant cousins”. Increasingly, those matches are with first cousins, siblings and even parents – what we call “hitting the DNA lottery”. I know of several such close matches within the past year and know of several other adoptees who have been able to find immediate family through analyzing “distant cousin” matches. I also know many children and grandchildren of adoptees who are pursuing this. In some cases, the adoptee is long deceased and the records are still sealed, but the DNA lives on.

In summation:

- Adoptees’ original birth certificates were supposed to be sealed from the public eye, not from the individuals affected by the adoption.
- Data from search organizations (including adoption agency search programs) show that the vast majority of birthparents are open to contact. This fact is supported by the tiny number of “no contact” forms filed by birthparents where state law permits this.
- Advances in information technology and DNA testing make “sealed records” basically ineffective.
- A significant percentage of adoptees know the names on their original birth certificates but do not have access to those documents because of state law.

The legislation at hand, House Bill No. 162, seeks to treat adoptees just like everyone else in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Please recommend HB 162 to the Senate for a vote. It is the right thing to do. It’s time.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Regards,

Gaye Sherman Tannenbaum

(B)

Birth Records of Illegitimates and of Adopted Children*

Part I

SHELDON L. HOWARD

Illinois State Registrar of Vital Statistics

Part II

HENRY B. HEMENWAY, M. D., F. A. P. H. A.†

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SEEMINGLY no better conception of the existing conditions surrounding illegitimacy in this country, and of the more or less progressive legal steps taken by our various states in connection therewith, can be obtained for consideration, than in Dr. Marietta Stevenson's "Analysis and Tabular Summary of State Laws Relating to Illegitimacy in the United States, in effect January 1, 1928, and the Text of Selected Laws," as set forth in 1929 in "Chart Number 16" of the Children's Bureau of the U. S. Department of Labor.

The pithy first paragraph of this article summarizes most effectively the present status of unlawfully born children:

Birth statistics are incomplete and no one knows exactly how many children are born out of wedlock in the United States each year. It was reported, however, that 55,134 children were born out of wedlock in the states included in the registration area in 1927 (exclusive of California and Massachusetts, for which illegitimacy statistics were not available). The population of the registration area exclusive of these states comprised more than two-thirds of the population of the United States. It is known that the percentage of illegitimate births is much higher in some states than in others, higher in the city than in the country, and higher for the negro than for the white race. Many of the mothers are pathetically young and are handicapped oftentimes in other ways. It is estimated that about half the mothers are under 20 years of age, and a large proportion of the remainder under 25. The fathers also are quite often mere boys. Considering the problem of illegitimacy from the standpoint of the child, his mother, his father, and society, the need for humane, comprehensive, and constructive laws for safeguarding the rights and insuring the fulfillment of the obligations of the four parties interested becomes clear.

* Read before the Vital Statistics Section of the American Public Health Association at the Fifty-ninth Annual Meeting at Fort Worth, Tex., October 30, 1930.

† Deceased.

Dr. Stevenson's treatise is a noteworthy accomplishment. It succinctly lays before us the *legal gains* which have already been made by the states in behalf of this unfortunate class along the lines of rights and obligations of parents, action necessary to establish paternity and legitimation, and child's rights of maintenance and inheritance or succession. It contains, as well, some very timely and inspiring comments which should generate within all the determination to do our utmost to insist on equally rational treatment of the inhumane features of the problem, which, under present custom, continue to exist as hindrances to the well-being of each illegitimate child long after all statistical requirements are satisfied and all legal redress secured.

Doubtless many of us directly concerned with the work of registration of births, under statutes patterned closely in accordance with the so-called "Model Law," experienced a hopeful thrill as we came in contact with Dr. Stevenson's analysis and read these words:

The old unscientific point of view, evidently inspired by moral indignation, expressed itself in legislation meant to punish and stigmatize the unfortunate child and his mother. *The modern aim is instead to protect and care for the child.* Much of the legislation is in an experimental stage, but certain tendencies are discernible, *the result of a growing feeling that the child born out of wedlock unavoidably suffers enough disadvantages without emphasizing these by legislative discrimination.*

In that paragraph, it seems, is the keynote—the guidon which we should follow, until the sorely needed modern legislative measures suited to the "growing feeling" are enacted, and are accorded liberalized administration.

Registrars, as birth record keepers, from a statistical standpoint, know that the factor of illegitimate births has no inconsiderable bearing on the distortion of their returns with respect to bona fide area of inception. A high percentage of such births are recorded at places other than the "usual abode" of the mother. The very character of these births has a marked tendency to inhibit their being reported at all. Would not legal provision for the recording of foundlings under a plan, similar to that mentioned further on, improve the "Degree of Completeness of Birth Registration"?

So much for the statistical aspects—but what of such cases in relation to their individual rights as members of society?

Turning again to the Stevenson analysis, we read that at a regional conference of the Children's Bureau, in 1920, "The duty of the State to protect the interests of children born out of wedlock was recognized and affirmed," and "the numerous laws defining the relationship of the

illegitimate child to his parents and placing a duty of support upon the father, especially laws passed in the last 15 years, are indications of a changing social attitude." So far, so good—the legal rights of these unfortunate children, as they became apparent to the public mind, have been fairly well established. But what of their social rights?

Unquestionably, the establishment of the illegitimate child's rights was, and still is, the first consideration—it must so be for the protection both of the child and the State, especially in cases where one or both parents are known. Naturally and logically then, the adjustment of the legal phases of such cases has occupied the major portion of the time and effort of child welfare bureaus, as is reflected by the character of the enacted laws. Under the old order of things such legal adjustment was sufficient, and accordingly helpful legislation was not developed further.

The old order has given way to the new, and although formerly the statements of the child or its parents as to name, age, and relationship were accepted; now the presentation of a duly authenticated birth certificate has become an almost universal prerequisite for admittance to school or employment, or for foreign travel. Small barrier, this, to the legitimate child or his parents who have merely to apply for a certified copy or a transcript of the birth record—but what of the illegitimates, adopted children, and foundlings?

These and their foster parents or guardians are apt to find themselves in a predicament, for if they are successful at all in securing a record of the birth, that very act may carry with it most distressing revelations likely to permanently impair otherwise peaceful mental conditions and happy lives. Where can we find the remedy?

Again we are encouraged by the hopeful rays which appear to light the pathway of our search when we note from the "Analysis" a tendency on the part of some states, such as Iowa and North Dakota, to minimize the broadcasting of distressing trial details by statutory exclusion of the public, or vest the power of such exclusion, as in New York and Minnesota, in the trial judges.

We are further heartened by finding among the Statutes of Colorado (Laws of 1925, ch. 133—Maternity Hospitals) that the divulgence or disclosure of the contents of any records relating to illegitimate children is prohibited.

We are convinced that our attitude is right when we read in Section 7 of this Colorado Act:

That this chapter shall be liberally construed with a view to effecting its purpose which is primarily to safeguard the interests of illegitimate children, and those

of undetermined legitimacy born in maternity hospitals as herein defined, and secure for them the nearest possible approximation to the care, support and education that they would be entitled to receive if born of lawful marriage, which purpose is hereby acknowledged and declared to be the duty of the State.

In the words "secure for them the nearest possible approximation to the care, support and education that they would be entitled to receive if" lies the sought for antidote. True, it is there only in embryo as it were, not specifically expressed by the addition perhaps of the words "and rights of citizenship," following the "care"—"support"—"education" benefits now provided. Nevertheless it is inconceivable that the Colorado Legislature could have had other intent than that these unfortunates should be equally vested with the "inalienable constitutional rights" of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," as are children legitimately born. Now, in the light of dawning consciousness of the social factors mentioned, and in the discernibly favorable crystallization of public opinion indicating that the time is ripe for action, how can this be accomplished so thoroughly, humanely and sensibly that it will practically insure for these children immunity from unnecessary embarrassment, pain, or disgrace, from the time of the launching of their individual careers—their advent into school or employment?

Clearly it is most desirable to secure such legislation as will authorize and enable bureaus of vital statistics or other custodians of birth records to include among their functions, subsequent to the taking of required statistical data, the suppression of such original records or statements of facts as may have become nullified, readjusted or supplanted through legal procedure accomplished after the time of registration.

As members of this Association primarily concerned in the record keeping which is a counterpart of birth registration, both in our respective states and at the U. S. Bureau of the Census—we seem to be, logically, the missionaries who should bring about the rectification of the existing evils. If we are registrars of vital statistics, ours is a dual rôle—on the one hand, as statistical craftsmen we must insist on the accuracy of the basic data, but on the other, in serving the public we must do all possible to furnish only such copies of birth records as will best promote the welfare of the persons concerned.

Due to our unique positions, we are best qualified to act. It is signally fitting, therefore, that we should take the lead in this matter, and accordingly the following plan of my associate and collaborator is respectfully submitted for consideration:

Legitimation, Adoption and Foundlings

Registrars of vital statistics are guardians and trustees of the interests of the people. This is peculiarly true in relation to records of birth.

In drafting the "Model Law" for the registration of births, stillbirths and deaths, three very important classes of cases were apparently entirely overlooked, namely cases of legitimation of birth, those of adoption, and those of foundlings. In consequence many children are often unjustly stigmatized as bastards, and the birth records of adopted children frequently cannot show their legal names by adoption. In many cases of adoption there is also the stigma of bastardy. A foundling has no birth record.

When a child begins to attend school in many states he is required to present evidence that his birth has been recorded. A certificate for "John Jones" is not satisfactory in the case of a boy legally known as "John Miller." It must be accompanied with other evidence showing illegitimate birth, or legal adoption, or both. This not only is a direct injury to the child, and a cause of embarrassment for parents, but seriously interferes with the placing of children in desirable homes.

The statutes of the states relative to these subjects vary. Minnesota, for example, provides for reporting cases of legitimation to the vital statistics office; but in a certified copy of birth record, it does not prohibit the certification of illegitimate birth.

The statutes of Illinois may be considered typical for the country at large, and are therefore taken as the basis for this presentation, in order that specific sections may be cited. With slight changes in wording the recommendations would apply for many other states.

A common law marriage is not recognized in Illinois. It is illegal, and births from such unions are therefore illegitimate. Chapter 89, Smith-Hurd Statutes of Illinois, Section 17(a), however, provides that although the marriage may have been contrary to law, if the parents "have attempted to contract and be joined in marriage, and some form of marriage ceremony recognized by law has been performed in apparent compliance with the law in relation to marriage," the issue of such union "is hereby made legitimate and may take the name of the father, though such attempted marriage is declared void or might be declared void for any reason."

Chapter 39, Smith-Hurd Statutes (relative to descent of property), in Section 3 says:

An illegitimate child, whose parents have intermarried and whose father has acknowledged him or her as his child, shall be considered legitimate.

Chapter 17 (relative to Bastardy) in Section 15 provides:

If the mother of any bastard child, and the reputed father shall at any time after the birth intermarry, the said child shall, in all respects, be deemed and held legitimate and the bond aforesaid be void.

There is no provision in the statutes for reporting such acts of legitimation to the vital statistics office, and the Attorney General has held that the Registrar has no authority to accept such documents when offered, nor to permit a change in the record of illegitimacy.

The Illinois Vital Statistics Act, Chapter 111½, Section 48, prohibits that a certificate of birth for an illegitimate child shall

. . . contain the name or other identifying fact relating to the father or reputed father or to the mother thereof, without the consent of said father or reputed father to the use of his name, nor the use of the name of the mother without her consent to the use of her name.

Under present statutes the birth registration of illegitimates is therefore frequently very defective from a statistical standpoint.

It is therefore suggested that vital statistics acts be amended by providing that in case an affidavit is presented to the State Registrar, signed by the father, acknowledging the paternity of the child, and the fact of place and date of his legal marriage to the mother of the child, a new certificate of birth may be filed which shall be considered as the record of birth; and it should further provide that the original certificate of illegitimacy and the aforesaid affidavit shall be placed in a sealed package, only to be opened under orders from a court of record. It should also be provided that in case of marriage of the parents of an illegitimate child before a certificate of birth has been filed, such child shall be considered as legitimate at birth.

Chapter 4 (relative to Adoption) provides in Section 3 that on the filing, hearing and granting of a petition for adoption in the proper Court

. . . a decree shall be made, setting forth the facts and ordering that from the date of the decree the child shall, to all legal intents and purposes, be the child of the petitioner or petitioners, and may decree that the name of the child be changed according to the prayer of the petition.

This section should be so amended as to require that when the name of the child is changed, the clerk of the court shall send an attested copy of the decree to the State Registrar of Vital Statistics. Then on receipt of such copy the State Registrar shall cause to be made a new record of the birth in the new name, and with the name or names of the adopting parent or parents. He shall then cause to be

sealed and filed the original certificate of birth with the decree of the court, and such sealed package shall only be opened upon the demand of said child, or his natural or adopting parents, or by the order of a court of record.

The state has a peculiar responsibility relative to foundlings. The state has not fulfilled its obligation when it provides for their care, food, and clothing. It must also provide for proof of citizenship and age. At present there is no statute in Illinois which requires or even authorizes a legal registration of foundlings. Birth certificates are impossible. When such a child should enter school, attempt to work, try to register as a voter, or require the protection of the government as a citizen, how is he to establish his rights? This question is of greater importance since the registration of all births has been required by law. It seems, therefore, that a statute should be enacted which will require that the *finding* of an unknown child shall be immediately reported to the local registrar of vital statistics; such report to show the sex and color of the child, the date and place of finding the child, and the name of the person or institution with whom it is placed. The city, village, township, or road district in which the child is found should be known as the place of legal birth. Inasmuch as the date of birth is unknown, the report should state such date as nearly as can be determined, and the date so given should be known as the legal date of birth.

The person or institution with whom the child is placed for care should be required to give it a name, and report the same to the local registrar. The "Certificate of Finding" should then be sent to the state registrar, and there filed. If the child should later be identified, and a certificate of birth be found or obtained, such fact should be reported to the state registrar, and indorsed upon the "Certificate of Finding," with citation to the certificate of birth.

RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE VITAL STATISTICS SECTION

RESOLVED that in the opinion of this Section, methods should be devised and made legally effective for the correction of birth records of children legitimized, and of adopted children, and also for the registration of foundlings; and be it further

RESOLVED that a committee of five be appointed by the chair to consider and report, at the next Annual Meeting of this Section, the advisability of a uniform or "standard" system for:

1. Acts correcting birth records of illegitimate children subsequently legitimized
2. Acts regulating birth records of children legally adopted
3. Acts for the making of birth records of foundlings

The Adoptee Rights Bill (HB162)

March 18, 2014

Joanne C. Currao

Testimony in support of House Bill 162: The Adoptee Rights Bill

Dear Chairpersons Mensch and Washington and Members of the Senate Aging and Youth Committee,

My name is Joanne Currao. I am a NY adoptee living here in the lovely Commonwealth of PA. The purpose of my testimony today is to relay my support for HB 162, a bill that would restore the equal right of Pennsylvania-born adult adoptees to access their original birth certificate.

I came to find out about my own adoption a year and a half ago at the age of 48. My adoptive parents had failed to tell me during their lifetimes that I was adopted. I was lucky that a cousin slipped and told me the truth. I always knew something about me was different, but was never able to figure out what exactly that was. I asked my adoptive mother if I was adopted as a child and she denied it vehemently. Even after I found out that I carried the genetic mutation for Cystic Fibrosis, she denied it. For me, access to my original birth certificate is so much more than the obvious. It is very hard for me emotionally to feel connected to who I am told I am (I already know my birth name and have made contact with my biological family on both sides). Not seeing that document forever makes it hard for me to grasp that I was actually born and did not just suddenly appear. They call this phenomenon "Genealogical Bewilderment".

In addition to the stress caused by genealogical bewilderment, I do not meet the criteria for gaining a passport to vacation out of the country due to the fact that my Amended Birth Certificate is dated 2 ½ years after my birth. It is not considered an acceptable form of proof of my citizenship. Any record that is acceptable will need my biological parent's name on it. In a non-access state, I am not entitled to that information and thus have no recourse to satisfy the burden of proof that I was in fact born in this country and am a fully natural citizen deserving of a passport like everyone else. This is a civil rights issue for many adoptees since those of us who have this problem cannot access the very documents that any other American Citizen can to provide the necessary proof for a simple passport. Any other naturally born US citizen can simply write and obtain their original birth certificate for a nominal fee and for the asking and then provide that online with the application for their passport and generally find that there are no problems at all. Adoptees in my situation need to go to great expense and hardship to try to procure some alternate document to satisfy that burden of proof of citizenship merely because we are adopted persons, a decision made for us without our consent and knowledge that affects us to this day. Many will be denied a passport even after all their efforts. This should never happen to a natural citizen at all, and the fact that it happens to an entire class of citizens, namely adult adoptees, is a real shame and a real inequality of rights.

I was not born in PA, but I was born in NY and that is also a closed records state. I support HB 162 because I know there are many PA adoptees like me who need to see they were born...need to have their civil rights balanced with other American citizens...need a passport to travel out of the country with their families, husbands, children and grandchildren. Passing this bill will not affect me personally in the sense that I will still need to see the law changed in NY to get my original birth certificate, but if I can at least help others like me, it will be enough for me for now. Adult adoptees have suffered enough injustices. We need to know we are just like any other citizen in the US. We need to be able to know we were born, feel connected to society and our heritage. We need to belong somewhere.

If you would like to learn more about genealogical bewilderment and the necessity for adoptees to have the knowledge of who are, please see the following links:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genealogical_bewilderment

http://www.academia.edu/4758587/Addressing_The_Harms_of_Not_Knowing_ones_Hereditary_Lessons_From_Genealogical_Bewilderment

HB162 is a fiscally neutral bill. It will not cost the taxpayers any more money. The fact is that most citizens are not even aware that adult adoptees cannot access their original birth certificates. Anyone I have ever spoken to about this who is not an adoptee (and even some who are) did not know that PA did not allow their adult adoptive citizens to access their original birth certificates. Not one of the people I have discussed this with thought it was fair for this to be the case. Many became downright irate. Universally, everyone I have spoken to agrees that this is a civil rights issue for us adoptees.

Please recommend HB 162 to the Senate for a vote. Please pass this legislation and make PA a state that reflects liberty for all. Inequality is wrong for anyone. I believe that HB 162 brings equality to PA adoptees and would have a positive impact upon PA's adoptees emotional wellbeing and physical wellbeing and therefore the Commonwealth of PA as a whole.

I thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,

Joanne C. Currao

Sent: Thursday, March 13, 2014 6:18 PM
To: Azeles, Matt
Subject: HB 162

To the Honorable Bob Mensch and the entire Senate Committee on Aging and Youth,

We are the adoptive parents of a now middle aged child. It was vitally important to her identity, growth, and mental health that she found her birth mother and her roots after she became an adult. We had to do this through not completely legal means at that time. Fortunately, the state where we adopted has been wise enough to now make the original birth certificate available to adult adoptees. Adoptees in PA deserve the same wisdom from their state.

Please support HB162.

Sincerely,
Anne and George Vivino-Hintze
40 Change Your Mind Ln
Rome, PA 18837

I speak today of three children of Texas. Two were born before Roe v. Wade, the third was the reason that Roe v. Wade came to pass. All were given up for adoption. Their mother has since come to believe that she was wrong to seek an abortion, and has spent the last ten years working in pro-life causes, regretting her choice. If her children wished to find her legally, they would have to show good cause. Good cause is usually defined as a medical need, perhaps some bone marrow or a kidney.

I speak today of two children of Pennsylvania. I am one: the other one is my cousin's son. I hope to meet her someday. We were each given up for adoption. My cousin and her aunt were each single and in their late teens when, thirty years apart, they had to make the toughest choice of their lives. Today, you will hear people talk about a promise that was made to these women--a promise of a chance to start anew, to clean their slate and to never cross paths with those children again. For each of these women, my cousin and her aunt (my birthmother), only the last part of the promise could have ever been fulfilled. My cousin married and raised a family. My mother remained single and had no other children. They both always wondered. My cousin may only place a letter for her son in their file, which she has done. She is not permitted to search, and her son is not permitted to find, without good cause. I did not even know I had a file until I was 52 years old, as I was never told that I was adopted. I found my birthmother, with no help from the state or my faith. I could not show good cause, as I did not seek a kidney, but rather a heart. I sought her out not to ask why she left me, but to thank her for her loss and sacrifice. Only six months elapsed between our reunion and her death, but I have been told that her spirits were greatly lifted by my return. It sounds pretentious to say that I forgave her, because both God and her family forgave her long before I even knew she existed. But she could only hear that forgiveness from me. My mother rests. My cousin waits.

I speak today of one additional child of Pennsylvania. Perhaps you are that child, or the reason for that child's existence. Today, you will hear people caution you about abortion rates going up if adult adoptees are allowed to learn the circumstances of their origins. The rights to privacy, the right to life, the right to choose—these are all rights that can be granted by the state. *But the state cannot grant the ability to choose wisely and without remorse. If it could, then only orphans would be in need of adoption, as all children would be conceived in love.* People will argue, "If it saves just one life....", and ask you to keep a promise made long ago, a false promise of hope. What hope may a mother have in being forced to agree never to see her child again? How is such a hope offered by an agency, guaranteed by the state, any better than the hope offered by a police station's doorstep or a clinic? I tell you from my own experience that an open birth certificate would not save just one life--it would save two. I ask you to replace a bad promise with a good one.

I speak today of the children, mothers and fathers of Pennsylvania, but I cannot speak for them. Only you can do that. I urge you to pass the bill as it stands.

I thank you for your time and consideration.

-Philip J. Ruggiero, Jr.

The Adoptee Rights Bill (HB 162)

March 14, 2014

Shawn K. Clary
112 Forrest Avenue
Norristown, PA 19401

RE: Testimony in support of House Bill 162: The Adoptee Rights Bill

Dear Chairperson Mensch and Washington and Members of the Senate Aging & Youth Committee.

My name is Shawn Clary. I am an adoptee born on November 12, 1967 in Philadelphia, PA. Unlike many adoptees, I know that my birth name was Constance Witherspoon and the agency of record was the Children's Aid Society of Philadelphia. The purpose of my testimony is to communicate my support of House Bill 162 that would allow Pennsylvanians access to their original birth certificates.

This is a topic that is personal because I've explored the idea as long as I've known that I was different than everyone I have known. I was adopted into a marriage as an only child from the orphanage at nine months of age. To no fault of my own, the parents that raised me masked to the public, family and neighbors that our household was fueled with alcohol, emotional, verbal and physical abuse—towards one another, myself and anyone who attempted to intercede. I lived a shell of a life until the age of 12 years old with people who had no right, tools or ability to adopt a child.

Now I am now 46 years old and still often wonder who I am and where I come from. Both of my adoptive parents have been deceased for almost 20 years. Til this day, there is a major void in my life. And whether 6, 16, 46 or 56, everyone deserves to know they are. This socially moral and important bill will allow those like me a window of understanding and an opportunity to embrace our heritage. This should solely be at my discretion and not the state legislatures.

Regardless of assuming a position of right or wrong—fact: the right to end a life through abortion is legal. So how can the right to know be illegal? We have developed the best country in the world of one that boasts freedom, justice and equality for everyone. So why stop with blameless adoptees?

Uncertain of the reliability of this source, but it is quoted that there are 6 to 10 million adult adoptees in the United States. That could potentially be 100,000 more Pennsylvanians like me. Please join other states and allow the unsealing of this information. While the United States is unrivaled in economy, democracy, military, technology and such, Pennsylvania's stance on family values lag behind even the most undeveloped third world countries. I urge you to pass this bill and permit the original birth certificates to be accessed by those who desire knowledge of their ancestry. Give back what has been taken and denied of me.

*Remember today, for it is the beginning.
Today marks the start of a brave new future.*

Thank you for this opportunity to submit my heartfelt testimony.

Respectfully,

Shawn K. Clary

Adoptee Rights Bill (HB 162)
March 18, 2014
Liberty Lea Hultberg Ferda

Testimony in support of House Bill 162: the Adoptee Rights Bill

Dear Chairman Mensch, Chairwoman Washington, and members of the Aging and Youth Committee,

When I married, I added a new last name, choosing to not drop or replace my maiden name—I wanted my new name to continue to reflect and honor the family who raised and supported me. I was grateful for the choice, because as an adopted person I know what it's like NOT to have a choice.

I am a resident of Pittsburgh, PA, but I was born and adopted in Illinois, where my original birth certificate was sealed.

My husband fully supported me retaining my maiden name on all my government legal documents upon marriage—because that name is part of me too. It made me wonder again, *Why would a birth certificate and its standard information be forcibly sealed away from the individual it belongs to?* It just doesn't make sense, and I believe we've become so entrenched in a skewed status quo that we've invented reasons to fear openness and change, even if that change is corrective.

Illinois recently took a step forward, away from fear of change. In 2011, it became the 9th—and most populous—U.S. state to pass legislation allowing adoptees access to their birth certificates. At age 31, I received my birth certificate. Myself and many IL residents I know who are touched by adoption—adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive families—rejoiced at the new legislation, which simply recognized adoptees as citizens and restored the basic right to their birth certificates.

Adult adoptees are just like everyone else, and deserve the same rights as everyone else. Fear not the light!

My Kindest Regards,

Liberty Lea Hultberg Ferda

The Adoptee Rights Bill (HB 162)

March 18, 2014

Jocelyn Moore-Hill
3014 East Yukon Street
Tampa, FL 33604-2235
813-985-0618

Re: Testimony in support of House Bill 162: The Adoptee Rights Bill

Dear Chairpersons Mensch and Washington and Members of the Senate Aging & Youth Committee,

My name is Jocelyn Lynette Moore (Moore-Hill), and I am a PA Adoptee born February 9, 1967 in Philadelphia, PA (Philadelphia County). The purpose of submitting my written testimony today is to relay my support for HB 162: The Adoptee Rights Bill; a fiscally neutral bill that would restore the equal right of Pennsylvania-born adult adoptees to access their original birth certificate. Thus, having a positive impact on adult adoptees by restoring their dignity of adult and treating them the same as all other persons not adopted.

Adoptees are the only group of US citizens denied access to their Original Birth Certificates (OBC). It truly is a form of discrimination as the adoptee has no way of choosing the circumstances of their birth, relinquishment and adoption, but the circumstances of their birth is held against them long into adulthood. PA law treats adoptees differently than those who are not adopted. The problem with this is that there is an inequality in the system whereby adoptees are treated like second-class citizens based on no fault of their own. HB 162 is the solution to this problem and addresses the unique issue of equality for adoptees and should be recommended to the Senate for a vote.

Adult adoptees should be able to access their OBCs because:

- It's their right along with every other American.
- It allows them their identity; which is a right of all children according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (Articles 7-10)
- It gives them access to their medical history; which is recommended by the United States Surgeon General's Family History Initiative

As an adult adoptee that was diagnosed with a life threatening illness July 2011, I needed to know my medical history out of necessity for myself and my children. Having met with numerous medical professionals, had countless medical procedures and genetic testing, I was frequently asked about my ethnicity and medical history and did I have a family history of Cancer? As an adoptee, I knew very little and it was frustrating to and unfortunate for me that I could not provide any assistance to the medical team that would aid me in the

treatment of my diagnosis. Having to go through this ordeal made me experience the inequality of being an adoptee, for I did not know who I was based on a decision that was made by others that affected my life four decades later and continues to negatively affect aspects of my life today.

Adult Adoptees that have reached the age of maturity, i.e. age of 18 should have the unilateral right to access their original Birth Certificates because it is their truth, their history and their lives.

Thank for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jocelyn Moore-Hill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the last name "Moore-Hill" being more prominent.

Jocelyn Moore-Hill





National Adoption Center®

There are no unwanted children... just unfound families.

March 7, 2014

The Honorable Bob Mensch
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging & Youth
Senate Box 203024
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3024

Dear Senator Washington,

HB 162, sponsored by Rep. Benninghoff, would allow adopted adults to obtain a copy of their original birth certificate at age 19. The bill passed the full House in October 2013. I understand the Senate Committee on Aging & Youth, chaired by you and Senator Washington, will hold a hearing on HB 162 on March 18. The National Adoption Center supports this bill.

Sincerely,

Ken Mullner
Executive Director



Adoptions From The Heart®

30-31 Hampstead Circle, Wynnewood, PA 19096 Phone: 610-642-7200 Fax: 610-642-7938
Email: adoption@afh.org Website: www.afh.org
Maxine Chalker, MSW/LSW, Executive Director

February 25, 2014

The Honorable Bob Mensch
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging & Youth

Re: HB 162

Dear Senator Mensch:

I am writing in support of the above bill. We are a non-profit, non-sectarian adoption agency that has been licensed in Pennsylvania since 1985 and have been practicing Open Adoption since then. We have placed more than 6,253 infants. It is very rare that we have had a pregnant woman and her partner ask NOT to have an open adoption and even if they do, they often come back again and ask that they have some information either letters or pictures so that they know how their child is doing.

Most of our placements now are totally open with at least one visit a year and sometimes more. Birth parents DO want to know how their children are doing. They are not afraid of being contacted and would welcome even more information coming their way about how their children are doing.

Please allow adult adoptees access to their original birth certificates and do NOT insist they use an intermediary as this is a personal relationship between adults.

Sincerely,

Maxine Chalker, MSW/LSW
Executive Director

Branch Offices

30-31 Hampstead Circle, Wynnewood, PA 19096 ♥ 2212 Union Boulevard, Allentown, PA 18109 ♥ 1525 Oregon Pike, Suite 402, Lancaster, PA 17601
18A Trolley Square, Wilmington, DE 19806 ♥ 451 Woodland Avenue, Cherry Hill, NJ 08002 ♥ 1225 South Main Street, Suite 207, Greensburg, PA 15601
1407 Stephanie Way, Suite H, Chesapeake, VA 23320 ♥ 703 Hebron Avenue, 1st Floor, Glastonbury, CT 06033



Dear Representative Mensch,

In 1952, Irish-born Philomena Lee gave birth to her son Anthony at the State-funded Sean Ross Abbey mother-baby home in Roscrea, Co. Tipperary. Sean Ross was one of three mother-baby homes run by the Sacred Heart Sisters in Ireland, responsible for more than 25,000 adoptions in and from Ireland. Despite the state's funding of the home, for three years, Philomena nurtured and loved her son while working off 'her keep' in the home's laundry, until her son was cruelly taken from her and trafficked for adoption to the US. Anthony was one of more than 2,000 such 'Banished Babies' sent to the US, including nearly 100 Pennsylvania citizens (c.f. Banished Babies, Mike Milotte, 1997). I am one of those as well, adopted from Ireland to Philadelphia in 1961. My loving adoptive parents were always truthful with my younger adoptive brother and me about our circumstances, and always respected our right to know who we are. I am also the mother of a daughter born in Philadelphia in 1978 who I was forced to relinquish in a closed, coercive adoption orchestrated by Philadelphia Catholic Charities. I was not asked to sign a confidentiality agreement at the time, nor did I seek such confidentiality. I've always believed, as does Philomena, that we are accountable to our children.

For many years, Philomena tried in vain to contact her son, or at least determine if he was happy and well and gave the Sisters her contact information. Each time, she was rebuffed by the Sisters in Roscrea. Likewise, her son Anthony (now named Michael), tried to find his mother, despite being told by his adoptive parents that his mother had 'abandoned' him. Michael had gone on to a brilliant career in Washington, serving as the chief counsel for the Republican National Committee under both Presidents Reagan and Bush. Twice, he visited the convent in Roscrea and was turned away. His last visit occurred in 1995, as he was dying of AIDS. He asked the Sisters if they would not help him find his mother, would they at least allow him to be buried there in the graveyard at Sean Ross? They finally relented, but only if he would consent to make a very sizeable donation, which he and his surviving partner did. He was laid to rest there in 1996.

Even after Anthony's death, the nuns continued to refuse to divulge information to Philomena – in fact, they didn't even tell her he was buried on their property. It was not until 2003, when Philomena shared her story with her daughter Jane Libberton (and she in turn reached out to our organisation), that we discovered photos of Anthony's gravestone and the truth behind the lies.

Philomena and Anthony's incredible story has become the basis for the Oscar-nominated film *Philomena*, starring Dame Judi Dench and Steve Coogan. But more importantly, it spurred Philomena herself to become a passionate advocate (at 80 years of age) for the rights of all adopted people. In January 2014, Philomena and Jane partnered with our organisation, **Adoption Rights Alliance**, to start **The Philomena Project**. The ultimate goal of The Philomena Project is to change current Irish legislation to restore the right of adult adopted people in and from Ireland to their original birth certificate and documents, including those now US citizens, and the reunification of families that were separated by forced or illegal adoption. This very

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basic civil and human right is one that has been enjoyed by adopted citizens in the UK for nearly forty years, and in five US states. And to date, the sky has not fallen in as a result.

I had the honour of visiting Capitol Hill with Philomena and Jane, and meeting with key representatives including Sen. Roy Blunt (R-MO), Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO), Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), and Irish Ambassador Anne Anderson on the issue of adoption rights. The feedback and ongoing support we received from those senate offices and the Irish Embassy has been phenomenal. I've also had the privilege of personally testifying on previous PA open records Bills, on behalf of those 'Banished Babies' for whom this legislation represents a civil right long denied them. The bill, which the PA House passed unanimously in October 2013, is now headed for a Senate Committee hearing on March 18.

On behalf of Philomena, Jane, myself and those Irish-born Pennsylvania citizens, we now urge you to do the right thing and make this Bill law. It is long past time to stop hiding behind the skirts of mothers like Philomena and me, using the myth of birthmother 'privacy' or 'confidentiality' (not one single document has ever been produced – in the US or Ireland – to prove this myth) to deny and discriminate against citizens who vote, pay taxes, serve their country in the military and are owed the same right to their identity as every other citizen, including convicted felons. This myth is a dog which simply won't hunt any longer. PA has ample laws covering issues such as unwarranted contact, harassment and other violations of personal conduct. To grant those of us who relinquished children a special right of protection/privacy that no other citizen enjoys suggests that adopted adults are 'damaged,' or somehow pathologically unable to manage their own personal relationships in a reasonable, rational fashion. Would you want your own children similarly discriminated against?

At the end of the day, this Bill isn't about search and reunion – it is about the restoration of rights that once belonged to adopted people, rights that were rescinded as a result of popular bad psychology of the time, along with a desire to protect the identity of all parties of the adoption from the public, not from each other.

Take Philomena's lead and let's get rid of the shame and stigma that was once associated with adoption. That shame isn't ours anymore. But it will be your undying shame and legacy if you continue to abrogate the rights of citizens in your own Commonwealth.

We believe you wish to leave a better legacy than that, and we believe you'll do the right thing.

Respectfully,

Mari Steed maristeed@gmail.com 215.589.9329

US Coordinator, Adoption Rights Alliance Committee Director,

Co-founder, Justice for Magdalenes The Philomena Project

www.adoptionrightsalliance.com | www.magdalenelaundries.com | www.thephilomenaproject.orgxxx

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF HB 162

My name is Wayne Linton Weismandel (birth name John Joseph Battey). I reside at 635 Baldwin Way, Mount Joy, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Though I was born, and adopted, in New York, I have resided, voted, and paid taxes in Pennsylvania for over 40 years. I am 68 years old. Before I retired in 2011, I served for 18 years as an Administrative Law Judge for the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission. I held a license as an attorney from the Pennsylvania Supreme Court (#36522) from October 20, 1982 until my retirement in 2011.

I was raised as an only child by my wonderful adoptive parents and knew from a young age that I was adopted. While the fact that I was an adoptee was not a secret, I was never told much about my birth family. I did not ask my adoptive parents questions about my birth family for fear of seeming disloyal to the two people who raised me and provided me with a good life and upbringing. However, this does not mean that I was never curious about my birth family or why I was given up for adoption. Those questions have been with me all of my life.

After both of my adoptive parents died, I thought more about how I might find out information about "me" – the biological roots that created me and the heritage from which I came. I was fortunate enough to have the names of my birth parents, due to my adoptive parents having kept the New York Surrogates Court adoption papers. By searching the 1940 census records, I was able to discover that my birth parents had lived within a few miles of where I grew up and had, in 1940, five other children. After that, I ran into a wall trying to discover if either of my birth parents or any of my siblings were still alive.

Fortunately, I ultimately found an organization, the adoptiondatabase.org, whose volunteer "search angels" attempt to aid both adoptees looking for their birth families and birth families looking for those given up for adoption. In August of 2013, one of the search angels used the information I was able to provide and found my only surviving brother living in Florida. He is 85 years old and not in the best of health. After making telephone contact and determining that he and his wife and children would be happy to meet, my wife and I flew to Florida in

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September, 2013 and met my brother, Frank Battey, and his wife in person. I have subsequently located 20 nieces and nephews and am in contact with 11 of them.

In addition to the "knowing who I am" that has come from finding my birth relatives, I have gained family medical knowledge and personal connections with birth relatives happy to share memories and stories about the birth parents and siblings I never got to meet. This is a basic human right that should not be denied to any family living in Pennsylvania. Passage of HB 162 by the Senate (it was unanimously passed in the House) and signing into law by the Governor will ease the path of those looking to find their families. Society has progressed to the point where so-called "open" adoptions (where the birth parent or parents stays involved in the adoptee's life) are not uncommon. Each of us has the right, as a human being, to know who we are and where we came from. Allowing adults access to original birth certificates so that they can begin the process of trying to locate birth relatives should not be the least bit controversial and Pennsylvania should not hinder the process.

I urge you to support Senate passage of HB 162 as a means of fostering the rights of all Pennsylvanians.

Thank you.

1

Abbey Madden
858 Tennis Avenue
Ambler, Pa. 19002
215 646 0668
215 817 1192

Honorable Bob Mensch
Chair of Senate Committee of Aging and Youth

February 25, 2014

Dear Honorable Mensch,

My name is Abbey Madden and I am a resident of Ambler, Pa. I understand that you are the Chair of the Senate Committee of Aging and Youth, and HB 162 will be heard by your committee on March 18th of this year.

I am an adult adoptee who found out that I was adopted at the age of 39 years old. I have been searching since that time for my biological parents to no avail (I am now 56 years old) . I implore you to please pass HB 162 to the Senate for discussion and a vote. I often say that I know more about my dog's history and lineage than I do about my own. There is a feeling of overwhelming incompleteness in adult adoptees that do not have the information that is supplied on the original birth certificate of all other citizens. I so need to know my " chapter one". My adoptive parents have since died and left me with no clues. I have hired a private investigator who did nothing but take my money, I have joined every council and blog, spent countless hours searching the internet, utilized every resource that I am aware of, and even went so far as to write to two television shows that reunited families, but I am still no closer to finding out any more information than I was 17 years ago.

I have done much research concerning the reuniting of family members, and realize that it may not end with the desired result, but you hope for the best, and wish for the most. I can only imagine how difficult it has been for my biological parents, and would certainly respect their wishes concerning any future relationship with me, if there was to be one at all.

As a medical professional, and a responsible adult, I am also very well aware of the importance of knowing ones familial history when it comes to many illnesses. As I have seen repeatedly throughout my career, devastating illnesses such as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes to name a few, occur in offspring of parents that have been afflicted with these diseases. I attempt to be proactive in my care and the care of my children, but we deserve the right to know what may be in store for us.

If you should ask either one of my sons, what would be their mother's greatest wish come true, they would without hesitation tell you that it would be to know where she came from. They have lived this journey with me, and have supported me by continuing to encourage me to keep searching.

Honorable Mensch, please help us by passing this bill to the Senate. Not allowing this bill to be voted on will only serve to build another brick wall that I, along with many other adult adoptees, will run head first into.

Please don't help to put us back to square one. We so need your support!

Thank you for your effort and time ,

Abbey Madden

February 26, 2014

To The Honorable Bob Mensch
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging and Youth

I am writing to you on behalf of HB 162. I am 65 years old and I was adopted at the age of 6 months. I have spent my entire life wondering who I am, why I was given up, do I have siblings, cousins or relatives that might want to meet me. I am not saying that my adoptive family were anything but kind, they fed me, clothed me, made sure I received an education. However, they had a daughter of "their own" and I was never allowed to forget I was adopted. When they died everything went to their "real" daughter and I didn't even exist. I really don't care what my "sister" received, but it was very difficult knowing I meant nothing to them. Please help pass this bill, I believe children like I was should at least be given a chance to find out if anyone cares.

Patrice Davidson
706 W. Third Street
Erie, PA 16507

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February 25, 2014

Senator Bob Mensch, Chairman
Senate Committee on Aging and Youth

Dear Sen. Mensch,

My name is Frances Guido Scalise. I am a mother who placed her son for adoption through Catholic Charities of Philadelphia in 1960. I strongly support HB 162. I was a junior at Penn State when I became pregnant. My son's father abandoned me. I lived at St. Vincent's Home in west Philadelphia from September until December 18, 1959 when my son was born. I had him baptized and gave him the name "David Joseph Guldo."

I returned to Penn State, graduated with a B.A. in Secondary Education, met and married my husband, Louis F. Scalise. I gave birth to and raised three subsequent children. I earned an M.A. degree at the University of Akron and taught successfully for twenty-seven years. I was teaching on February 18, 2000 when I found a post from my son on my maiden name site on Ancestry.com. He'd posted using his baptismal name, the one I gave him. Forty years after I placed him for adoption, my son was reaching out to me. I HAD to respond. Even though he was removed from my body and I'd never held him in my arms, I'd prayed for him constantly. I believe God brought him back to me. My son told me he'd been searching "for about 20 years" with no success, yet *he and his adoptive parents always knew my name and where I was from*. My son and I have been reunited for 14 years.

I support the right of all adoptees in Pennsylvania to access their original birth certificates. I was never promised confidentiality. In fact, I was threatened with prosecution if I ever searched. My son knew my name, but it still took forty years for us to connect with each other. Please pass HB 162.

Respectfully,

Frances G. Scalise
241 Varsity Lane
State College, PA
16802
(816) 308-8231

11
4601 5th Ave., #129
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
February 26, 2014

The Honorable Bob Mensch
Chari, Senate Committee on Aging & Youth
Harrisburg, PA

Dear Senator Mensch:

I am writing today in support of HB 162, a bill which would allow all Pennsylvania- born adoptees to receive their original birth certificates at age 19.

I am now age 77, and I was born in Pittsburgh, PA, then adopted into West Virginia. At the time of my birth, 1936, it was generally believed that one's original parents should be kept secret. No records were kept concerning the health of my birth parents, and no information or advice was given to my adoptive parents. My adoptive parents never felt able to discuss the story of my birth with me over the 51 years until their deaths. Because I grew up in a small town, I heard about my adoption through rumors. As a young person I felt hurt that the only parents I ever knew did not trust me enough to tell me what had happened. As I learned more about life, I realized that they too suffered as a result of the secret, and were unable to overcome their fear and lack of support.

During the 1970s, having moved from West Virginia to Pittsburgh for employment, I heard from a fellow adoptee that my original birth certificate could be obtained through an anonymous state employee, and for the first time saw names without any background. This was a psychologically stunning even hard to describe. Since both of my birth parents were apparently from vastly different states, I knew it would be very expensive and time consuming, after 40+ years, to trace them. It is only in the last 5 years that I have been able to find the story of my birth mother from Federal Census records on the internet, and I now know and appreciate the story of our family, hers and mine.

During the almost 20 years which elapsed from the time when I received my original certificate and my adopted parents died, I continued to maintain my adopted family ties, caring for my adopted parents when they needed me, and being with them through their funerals. I do strongly believe, however, that our lives would have been happier if secrecy and fear had not haunted us all.

The only secrecy which is justifiable and helpful is that secrecy which we freely choose for ourselves. I urge you to support HB 162.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Polen

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2/26/14

The Honorable Bob Mensch
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging & Youth

re: PA HB 162

My name is Martin J. Barum. I am a former resident of the state of Pennsylvania. I am also an adoptee. At the present time I live in Texas. In the past few years there have been health issues that I have had to deal with that have been serious. I have had to deal with prostate cancer, stroke caused by an AVM, early extra beat in my heart and at the present time I have been diagnosed with cancer of my left kidney. I am presently 58 years old. **I am going to live a long and full life!** What I request of you is to consider these facts in the making your decision. When I go to the doctor's office, the question arises, "what is your family history of illnesses". I advise that I am adopted and that I cannot provide that information. With the advances in medicine, persons in my position may be able to be proactive in lifestyle choices as to minimize and/or eliminate illnesses that in any other situation can be life threatening. This is a quality of life issue that can be addressed with legal remedy and improve people's lives. You cannot expect a portion of the population to keep you as a priority in our lives when we are only an option in yours. We matter. We have questions that are answerable. You can assist all of us in this process. Please take this into consideration in making your decision.

Respectfully Yours

Martin J. Barum
7112 Lowery Lane
North Richland Hills
TX 76182-3511

March 1, 2014

The Honorable Bob Mensch
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging & Youth

RE: HB 162

As an adult adoptee born in 1947 in Pennsylvania I feel that I must write to you regarding the importance of HB 162. I was born during a time of shame and secrecy when unwed mothers were seldom supported by family and encouraged to give their children up for adoption. These young women and their children have seldom been able to express their innermost thoughts as a result of the adoption.

My adoptive parents always told me that I was adopted and taught me to be respectful and sensitive to others. My mother would gently ask me if I ever thought of the young girl who gave birth to me and offered to help me if I ever decided to look for her. Unfortunately, my adoptive mother died when I was 16; however, I knew that I had her blessing if I ever decided to search. As a teenager I began to understand how difficult it must have been for a young girl to bear and give up a child and I promised myself that someday I would try to find her. I wanted to thank her for finding it in her heart to do what she had to do at the time. I wanted her to know that I was okay and hoped that she was also. After I was married and children of my own, the need to find her grew as my children had questions about their roots (as well as medical history) when they came to the assignment in school relating to the "family tree".

I was one of the fortunate adoptees, who thanks to the support of Adoption Forum, requested my original birth certificate before they were "sealed". The people that I met that day, adoptees, birthparents and adoptive parents, comforted and encouraged me and helped to forever change my life. I wondered if I had any "right" to look for my birthmother, but words from my heart kept coming back to me "You are the only person on earth that can say the words that she needs to hear." All I wanted was the opportunity to thank her and let her know that I understood; if she did not wish to meet me, I would understand and be content.

Thanks to the fact that I was able to obtain my original birth certificate, I made a phone call and was able to thank my birthmother for my life. When we met face-to-face a short while later, her first words to me were "How can you ever forgive me for what I did to you?" I replied, "There is nothing to forgive....what you did was not "to me but "for me". She said, "But the words illegitimate" are stamped in red on your birth certificate." I replied, "They are not there". You see, all those years she had carried a burden of guilt and shame. She was told that she should never try to look for me because it would ruin my life. (I had the words that she needed to hear.)

I have come to realize that life is a gift and that as an adopted person I became the gift from one family to another....I have always felt that I was both given and received in love.

In time my birthmother and I developed a relationship that spanned nearly 30 years. An unforgettable life journey. At one point she asked me if I would be her medical POA...she said "I brought you into this world and left you go. If it should ever be for me that I no longer have quality of life and there is no

hope, will you let me go?" I could not refuse her that request....all the while hoping that I would never have to act. It's an awesome responsibility. She became ill and passed away a few years ago.

Had I not gotten my original birth certificate before they were sealed, we both would have been denied a beautiful relationship as women. We were the fortunate ones who had the opportunity to be reconciled, to forgive and heal from the adoption experience. It is my hearts desire that you will see fit to unseal the records so that others can fix the hole in their hearts as well.

I have formed a small group at my church called "Matters of The Heart"...a discussion group for all adult members of the adoption triad .

A place to come and share concerns, joys and sorrows, the knowns and unknowns, to explore unanswered questions with the realization that some questions may forever go unanswered. A place of understanding and compassion to share our adoption experiences from the heart to help ourselves heal. The name of our group is from my birthmother who said "Matters of the heart are not logical".

Sincerely,

Linda Hettinger

I am writing in support of HB162 - the Adoptee Rights Bill. I am a mother who lost a child to adoption in 1964 (reunited in 1986) and am very passionate about the absolute right of every person to their own personal birth information. I have spent the past 25 years of my life, full-time since retirement seven years ago, advocating for adoption reform, adoptee and parental rights, and providing Search Angel services free of charge. I have personally facilitated more than 500 adoption reunions. From my experience and knowledge, more than 95% of the mothers are happy to be found and look forward to having their lost children back in their lives. There is simply no justifiable reason to keep adoptees' original birth certificates (OBCs) sealed.

But, ultimately this bill is not about search and reunion; it is about the absolute right of adoptees to be free of state-imposed discrimination and oppression by the sealing of their OBCs. What they choose to do with it is their personal business. The public and the State have no more right to intrude in their personal lives and question their motives for wanting their personal information than we do in anyone else's who was not adopted.

This is such an important piece of legislation that is way overdue for passage. Especially in this age of information technology and the generally-accepted acknowledgement of the importance of knowing one's family history, heritage and the identity of those to whom one is blood related, to force adopted persons - and only adopted persons - to live in the dark ages of secrets and lies is cruel and ludicrous. As a basic human right, adopted people deserve the opportunity enjoyed by every other citizen of saying "I know" instead of "I wonder." We have the examples and experiences of several other states that have restored dignity, justice and respect to people whose records were sealed because of adoption - OR, AL, ME, NH, RI, IL, among them - where tens of thousands of adoptees have received their original birth certificates with no negative repercussions whatsoever. I hope and pray PA legislators will now step up and do the right thing.

Priscilla Stone Sharp
124 Green Acres Lane
State College, PA 16801-7014
814.867.0664

Mother of Loss to Adoption,/Search Angel/Adoptee Rights Advocate
www.priscillasharp.org

February 28, 2014

The Honorable Bob Mensch
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging & Youth
Pennsylvania State Senate
Harrisburg, PA

Dear Senator Mensch:

Although our adopted son Jeremy was not born or adopted in Pennsylvania, he lived in the Commonwealth since he was less than 2 years old until he passed away in 2010.

Although we were able to find his birth mother and father from the information provided during the private adoption, the Commonwealth of Kentucky placed overwhelming burdens on Jeremy's ability to obtain his actual birth record. If his adoption were not private, there would not have been a way for us to even try to get the life saving bone marrow transplant that he needed.

Our son Jeremy was born on June 23, 1977 in John Graves Ford Memorial Hospital in Georgetown, Kentucky and joined our family through a private out-of-State adoption. We had tried to have children for four or five years and the one pregnancy ended with premature twins being delivered who were too small to survive. The happiest day of our lives was that June day when our son was born.

Although we never met the birth mother, we had her name and some sketchy information about her and we also had the name of the birth father that the birth mother had provided.

Jeremy was healthy until he turned 30. He developed congestive heart failure, type 2 diabetes, and was afflicted with rectal fistulas and fissures. Just before he turned 33 in June 2010, Jeremy was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL). He endured intense chemotherapy, which resulted in remission. However, his type of ALL was caused by a chromosomal abnormality, which had a very high chance of relapse if not treated with a bone marrow transplant.

The Doctors at Jefferson University Hospital Cancer Center in Philadelphia started a search for a bone marrow donor. The Doctors told us that the best donor would be one of Jeremy's birthparents or a full sibling. There were no full siblings.

As mentioned before, we had the names of the birth parents and some information about the birth mother. We first called the Commonwealth of Kentucky to see if we could obtain more information about the birth parents and find out if the birth mother had ever contacted the Commonwealth to reconnect with her child. We found out that, even in life-threatening situations like Jeremy's, no information could be provided without a Court Order AND the birth parents' permission.

We hired a Confidential Investigative Service to find the birth mother, which they did. Without going through the very difficult and frustrating details of the search and the contact, the Investigative Service found that the birth mother was very ill likely with some form of cancer and the birth father had died suddenly in his early forties. They also found out that Jeremy had three half sisters by his birth mother and a half brother by his birth father. Although half siblings are not automatically good donors, they

have a higher probability of being a match than other people and should be tested. Testing half siblings for a match was important since the birth mother, due to her illness, might not be a candidate.

With the information about the birth parents' families, we had five potential candidates. Regretfully, we were never able to pursue the medical testing to find out if there was a bone marrow match. Jeremy's immune system was compromised and he passed away in September 2010 from a septic infection.

We urge that your Committee recommend passage of HB 162 that allows adoptees access to their actual birth record. We hope this will include free and immediate access at any age to birth information needed for life saving or extreme medical emergencies.

Sincerely yours,

Mark & Joan Halpern
275 Silverbell Court
West Chester, PA 19380

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February 28, 2014

The Honorable Bob Mensch
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging & Youth
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2144

RE: HB 162 – Adoptee Access to Birth Certificate

Dear Senator Mensch:

I am the birth father of an adopted person born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in July 1966 and relinquished for adoption shortly after birth. I am writing in support of HB 162.

Information about my birth son was unavailable to the birth mother despite her requests to Catholic Charities in Philadelphia and to the Pennsylvania Bureau of vital records. At the time of his birth, she was not promised confidentiality. In actuality information about our son was withheld despite repeated requests that she made after he turned 21. It was not until 2008 that contact between them was finally made. We are now in reunion with our son.

I ask for your support of HB 162. It is about correcting inequities in Pennsylvania law and about treating persons equally, whether they are adopted or not adopted. All people have a right to their original birth certificate and a right to their identity. My son now has his medical records in addition to his birth family histories and legacies. I ask the Senate Committee on Aging and Youth to support HB 162.

Respectfully submitted,

Edward Bastian, Ph.D.
Santa Barbara, CA

Feb. 28, 2014

The Honorable Bob Mensch
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging & Youth
Pennsylvania Legislature
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2144

RE: HB 162 – Adoptee Access to Birth Certificate

Dear Senator Mensch:

I am the mother of an adopted person born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and relinquished for adoption. I am writing in support of HB 162.

I gave birth to my only child in July 1966. My son was adopted three days after, I was told. Lifelong anonymity or confidentiality was not promised to me. Instead I was told to forget all about my son, to return home and to 'honor' my parents and keep the secret forever. I lived and gave birth at St Vincent's Home for unwed mothers in Philadelphia, run by Catholic Charities. After I relinquished my son, I went back to graduate school and slowly attempted to remake myself. I would have welcomed any information about him, any contact, any communication. It was out of the question....for the sake of the child and his new family. Ultimately a new found passion in secondary science education took me to a far away land and in 1970, I 'adopted' the children of Hawaii. For 40 years they have been the principal recipient of all my energy and enthusiasm. Shame and fear over relinquishing my son have been mountains in my life. Worry about his health, his happiness have weighed heavy on my heart. Happily, it has been my students who allowed me to mask both shame and fear and to build my own bridges so that I could be productive, creative and maybe even significant in their lives. In 1989 and 1996 I contacted Catholic Charities in Philadelphia with the intention of finding my son or at least to leave my information so that he could find me if he wished. I paid to have a search done. I received no information and no communication at all.

I am now in reunion with my son. It has been five and a half incredible years. He has special relationships with his birth father and a half brother and half sister as well. He also tried to make connections earlier in his adult life but was unsuccessful. He was denied the right to his original birth certificate. Adoption laws that do not allow adoptees the right to know their genetic and cultural identity are not fair and not compassionate. It is about the child, the adopted person. It is about 'my son.' It is about all adopted 'sons and daughters.' Instead the law implies that he must be protected from who? From me? Or is the implication that birth moms need protection.....from what? From love? From the opportunity to know their children? These laws need to be reassessed with 21st century eyes. You have that opportunity now by passing HB 162 which will allow adult adoptees the right to their original birth certificate. And more the right to pursue their genetic and cultural identity.

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My son's first parents are now in his life, as are his genetic sibs and aunts and uncles and cousins-all in addition to the family who provided the foundation for his values and his accomplishments, his adoptive family. His identity is now complete...and the energy that he has had to put into making sense of a life that was not really the full story is now reversed. That energy can now go into perfecting his already sensitive self and talents as a citizen in his community and isnt this the energy that we 'the people' need and want to encourage.....for the SAKE OF OUR CHILDREN.

Respectfully,
Jacquelyn Wesolosky,
Kaneohe, Hawaii

The Honorable Bob Mensch
 Chair, Senate Committee on Aging & Youth
 In c/o Mr. Matt Azeles

Dear Senator Mensch,

I am writing to implore you to consider me, and my fellow adoptees, when House Bill 162 comes before you and our fellow Senators for a vote this March. We pray that you will vote, with your conscience and your heart, and join the PA House of Representatives, to vote unanimously to pass this extremely important and personal human rights legislation into law.

I am offering to testify at the committee hearing on March 18, 2014. My story is similar to most adoptees, not just in Pennsylvania but, nationwide.

Imagine for 51 years of your life to not know who you really are? To look at your parents and extended family and wonder, who am I, where do I fit in the picture of the faces who look nothing like mine? What is my REAL name and what are the names of my first mother and father?

What is my risk compared to others for heart disease, Parkinson's Disease or passing on genetic defects to my children and grandchildren? What is the chance of early Alzheimer's Dementia or mental illness striking my family or myself?

Obtaining our original birth certificate is the first key to unlocking the mystery of who we are. And we are your neighbors, your friends, your co-workers, your family members, perhaps your spouse, we are not strangers, or them, or those people.

I am one of the 'fortunate' ones, so to speak. After 32 years of painful, heart-breaking searching, I was able to discover my birth name and consequently found my blood brother and sisters. For 50 years I had no idea who I really was. And although I now know who I truly am, the fact that I should be entitled, just like every other non-adopted adult, and not just Pennsylvania but the entire United States, to have my true, original birth certificate, is still, until this very moment, extremely important to me. It is MY record of MY birth, it is who I was BORN to be, and I am entitled to it as a human being, and being a resident of Pennsylvania should NOT be what is standing in the way of that very, very precious piece of paper and MY BIRTHRIGHT.

I pray you will encourage your colleagues in the Senate to vote with you to unanimously vote to pass House Bill 162, and prove to the adoptees of Pennsylvania, and Governor Corbett, that you agree we deserve to be recognized and treated with dignity and respect, not differently than our non-adopted Pennsylvania citizens.

I deeply and gratefully thank you in advance as I trust you will do the right thing.

Respectfully,

Michelle Maria Coletta-Roberts
1612 N. Adams Street
Pottstown, PA 19464

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The Adoptee Rights Bill (HB 162)
March 18, 2014

Testimony in support of House Bill 162: The Adoptee Rights Bill

Dear Chairpersons Mensch and Washington and Members of the Senate Aging and Youth Committee:

My name is Juline Elizabeth Sterner. I am a reunited adult adoptee. The purpose of my testimony today is to express my support for the Adoptee Rights Bill and urge the Senate to restore the historically held right of Pennsylvania adoptees to access their original birth certificates just like all other citizens.

I was born outside Philadelphia in 1979 to an unmarried couple who due to circumstances in their lives were unable to raise me. An adoption plan was made prior to my birth, and at two days old my adoptive parents brought me home from the hospital. Two months later, my natural parents signed relinquishment papers, and at the end of 1980 the adoption was finalized. I had by all accounts a very normal childhood with a loving family in the Main Line suburbs. I subjected my parents to sleepless nights through infancy, skinned my knees as a child, survived middle school, and went to a good college. I am no less than my non-adopted peers and deserve to be treated equally under the law. In 2002, I met my natural family. My natural mother had passed away some years before, and my natural father had gone on to marry and have two more children who were 9 and 11 at the time I first met him. For the past 12 years I have had a close and supportive relationship with him and with all of my natural mother's relatives.

Unlike many adoptees you will hear from today, I already have a copy of my original birth certificate, via court order. As satisfying as it is to finally have this factual record of my own entry into personhood, it is demeaning to have had to "beg" someone - two years AFTER my reunion - for a document that all other citizens can access with a simple form and small fee. I support HB 162 because I have felt an immense personal benefit from having my original birth certificate, and all adoptees deserve their documents without having to meet an ambiguous standard of "good cause" not applied to non-adopted citizens. Treating adopted adults as equal under the law is a very important issue to me. The relinquishment papers my natural parents signed were given to me by my natural father, who had kept everything in anticipation of the day he would see me again and be able to give them to me. After my natural parents signed the relinquishment form, their parental rights to me were terminated, yet my access to my original birth certificate did not stop at that time. If my adoption had not been finalized for any reason, if I had remained in foster care, I would now have complete access to my original birth certificate with no restrictions, despite the fact that my natural parents relinquished me. Nowhere in these papers is the word "confidential", "private", or "sealed", and indeed at the time they signed them, had I been an adult I would have been entitled and able to request and receive a copy of my original birth certificate. In 1985, this right was taken away from adult adoptees and today if I wanted to receive a copy of my original birth certificate I would be required to provide a court order from a judge. I could walk into the Department of Vital Statistics hand in hand with my natural father, and the law would still not allow me to receive it without having gone through the process of convincing someone that I had "good cause" for a court order. My natural parents, both lifelong residents of Pennsylvania, did not know I would not have access to my birth certificate in the future, and indeed I had relatives who had been waiting for me to contact them once I turned 18 and were surprised to find that the law prevented me from accessing this most basic of documents.

HB 162 is important because adult adoptees deserve to be treated no better and no worse than any other segment of the population. Adult adoptees are equal to our non-adopted counterparts. We hold jobs, we raise families, we vote. Our adopted status should not be used to remove our rights, to brand us as perpetual children who need special permission or procedures to obtain our documents, or to make preemptive assumptions about our behavior or intentions. Our adoptive families are strong and vibrant, and do not need abnormal "protection" to maintain close and loving bonds. What harms adoptive families is being indirectly told that their child's birth information is so shameful or threatening to them that the government needs to lock it away from even the very person it concerns. There was no crisis caused by access to original birth certificates in Pennsylvania prior to 1985, and there has been no crisis in the states who never sealed them or who have had the good sense to restore their adopted citizens' rights to access their original birth certificates. Preventing adult adoptees from accessing their original birth certificates did not lower the abortion rate or increase the adoption rate as some had hoped it would, and it is time for Pennsylvania to join the growing number of states who treat their adopted adults as fully equal citizens and have restored adult adoptee rights.

As a former employee of a county government (I was the Customer Service Supervisor at the Lancaster County Domestic Relations Office from 2004-2011), I can also understand that there are always practical concerns over cost in dollars and workload. Our Courts are heavily burdened and HB 162 would contribute to freeing up valuable Court time and resources by allowing adult adoptees to receive their original birth certificate through a simple form submitted to the Department of Vital Statistics, rather than letters, forms, petitions, and Court contacts which have to

be handled by Court staff and Judges. HB 162 is a fiscally neutral bill; it does not add a financial burden to our state, and instead frees up Court resources for matters which actually need judicial attention.

I respectfully urge you to recommend HB 162 to the Senate for a vote, to restore adoptees' equality by voting in support of HB 162, and I thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,

Julie Sterner, "Baby Girl Stephens"
750 Althouse Rd
Cochranville, PA 19330

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To:
The Honorable Bob Mensch
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging & Youth

From:
Carol Chandler

Re: HB 162 ~ Adoptee Rights

Please allow me to briefly share my story and reason for supporting HB 162 to allow adopted adults in the Commonwealth access to their Original Birth Certificate.

In 1966 as a 19 year old single student at the University of Pittsburgh, I lost my infant son and only child to adoption. My father was serving our country at the time in Viet Nam as a navigator for the USAF. My mother felt if I kept my child, it would bring shame upon our family and perhaps even cause my father to be court martialled if it became known that his daughter had a baby without benefit of marriage. The stigma of unwed pregnancy at that time prevented my family from helping me in any way, so while feeling hopeless, I unwillingly surrendered my newborn son for adoption based on the only information I had available to me at the time.

I had no legal representation, no explanation of my rights as a single mother – only the option to give away my baby was presented to me. I held my son in my arms on his third day of life and promised him that I would find him when he was an adult to let him know he was never forgotten and always loved. In fact, I was told by the adoption agency that if he had interest in finding me, he would be given my contact information at his age of majority. This assurance was the only thing that gave me hope and comfort about the horrific tragedy of losing my son for the simple crime of being unmarried and young.

As we now know however, in 1984 Pennsylvania sealed/closed all adoption records to include copies of adoptee's original birth certificates! I learned this after the fact when my son was 18 and I finally decided to attempt to search for him.

Eventually, after a 3 year emotional search, I was able to make contact with him and we have now been reunited for 23 years. The rest of his extended family of origin to include my parents, siblings and nieces have welcomed him with open arms.

I am well aware that allowing adopted persons access to their OBC does not necessarily mean that they will wish to search for family. However, whether they wish to search or just have access to their genetic and/or medical information; I believe this information should be a basic human and civil right and that continuing to keep OBC's sealed; continues to treat adoptees as second class citizens and stuck in perpetual childhood as if they are not capable of making wise choices about something so basic as the truth of their origins. No other group of individuals in our country are treated in this manner.

Not only is this senseless and unfair; it is not what I and thousands of young single mothers were promised when strongly urged to do the right thing and give my baby to people who could give him what I could not at the time; a 2 parent home.

I have also submitted copies of the Release form forced upon me to sign in the recovery room and my actual Surrender of Parental Rights documents from Allegheny County Orphan's Court in order to illustrate that nowhere is confidentiality even mentioned, let alone promised to me. Nor would I have participated at all if I had any idea that the laws would change from 1966 to 1984 and adoptees records would be sealed forever. Not only did I believe what I had been told by the court and the social worker from Jewish Family &

Children's Services with respect to the fact that my son would be given my contact information should he desire it when he was an adult; but I lived in a perpetual state of grief until the day I was able to learn that my son was alive and well.

Please right this injustice that has been forced upon The Commonwealth's adopted persons when they had no choice in the matter and vote to pass this important legislation.

Respectfully,

Carol Chandler
9708 E. Via Linda
#1311
Scottsdale, AZ 85258

March 3, 2014

The Honorable Bob Mensch
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging & Youth

Dear Judge Mensch:

I am writing this letter as an adoptive mother in support of HB 162. As I write this letter it is the eve of the ninth birthday of my adopted twin boys. Our boys have been with us since they were five weeks old, first as foster children, and since the age of two and one-half as permanent members of our family. While I wholly agree with the court's decision to terminate the parental rights of the boys' biological parents due to issues of abandonment and neglect while they were babies, and would also agree with this if they were older children, I do not believe this should cut them off forever from knowing who they are and where they have come from. I believe there comes a time in everyone's life when a person truly needs to know this information.

Many people have asked me how I would feel if my boys ever want to search for their birth parents. This does not pose any type of threat to me as their adoptive mother, as they certainly know who has loved them, provided for them and been with them every day of their lives. I fully expect them to want to do this. By the age of nineteen, as stipulated in HB 162, my boys will be legal adults, hopefully capable of making good choices for themselves. This is also an age when many adoptees yearn to know their roots, so that they can move forward with their lives. This is often a nagging question that continues to haunt adoptees until they are able to find the answer. It seems those of us who were not adopted take this sacred knowledge for granted, as we move through our lives. I would like my children to have this same right to peace of mind and heart when the time comes for them to ask these tough questions.

Without an original birth certificate it is extremely difficult and frustrating for adoptees to obtain this vital information. I truly hope you will consider the rights of adult adoptees as upheld in HB 162. Thank you so much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Maura Carroll
1025 Oxford Road
Lincoln University, PA 19352

From Carolyn Cornell Holland, Adoptive parent and Human Service worker

Mailing address: P. O. Box 300, Laughlintown, PA 15655

House address: 12 Hemlock Rd., Laurel Mountain Borough, PA

Adoptees are among your family and/or friends. They're in my family — an adopted daughter and two sisters my mother released for adoption (being born in states having open birth record laws for adult adoptees enabled them to contact me).

I've done home studies for an adoption agency, counseled adolescent and adult adoptees, and been a foster parent for pregnant women planning on releasing their infants for adoption. This personal and work history showed me how much harm the secrecy surrounding adoption does by denying a significant portion of the adult population access to its medical and cultural history.

We all acknowledge the importance of our medical history. We are instructed to know it as part of our health care.

Pennsylvania adoptees — including my daughter — cannot fill out doctor forms. This has health implications for her.

The goal of state House Bill 162 is to allow Pennsylvania-born adult adoptees to obtain their original, factual birth certificates. It passed the House unanimously on Oct. 23. I support its passage in the Senate.

Senator Bob Mensch, Chairman of the Committee on Aging & Youth

Dear Senator Mensch,

My Name is Jonathan Stauffer, I am a current resident of Virginia Beach VA, however I was born in Lansdale PA.

I am writing to you, because in July of 2013, I came across an article on Yahoo about birth records being opened in many states, one of the states mentioned in the article was Pennsylvania. This prompted me to visit the AAC website, where I found the email address of Carolyn Hoard, so I could communicate my story to her, and my support for the bill and what it represents to me.

A little about myself and my adoption situation,

I was adopted from Lansdale Pennsylvania, by a loving family, who will always be my parents, regardless of any info I find out, when I was 4 months old through Bethany Christian Services.

My Adoptive Parents were always very forthcoming with the information that they had regarding my adoption, and were always willing to give & tell me anything they knew. Unfortunately this was all non-identifying information. During my time in college, I began searching for my birth parents, working with the basic information that I was provided with. I went through Bethany Christian Services at the time, paying first for the records to which I was privy at the time, and then for them to do a people search, and try to reach out to my birth mother. Neither instance provided me with any more information or connection than what I already had.

Following this search, I went to the internet in 2008, posting my search on cousinconnect.com, again not hearing anything from anyone, until 2010, when the couple who had adopted my two sisters got in contact with me. We compared notes and everything lined up, my birth mother's birth date and the birth date of their daughters' biological mother, and the basic description that I had of my birth mother, compared to their birth mother. We met for the first time that fall, and have enjoyed getting to know one another ever since.

Through circumstances relating to my sisters' adoption, their adoptive parents have access to their (our) birth mother's information. Including her name, location, and location of many half siblings.

Not all adoptees are as fortunate to find themselves in a situation like mine, and the passing of this bill would no doubt open up a wealth of resolution for them, many of whom probably have spent their lives wondering where they came from.

To me, having access to my original birth certificate would be the final piece of the "puzzle". The final confirmation of where I've come from, and where my family tree leads. It would allow me to take a deeper look into my family history, and trace my lineage in a way I never imagined possible.

Thank you, Senator Mensch, for taking the time to read my email; I look forward to seeing the progress of this Bill with your support.

God Bless,
Jonathan Stauffer

Dear Senate Committee on Aging & Youth,

I was given information about HB 162 and wanted to send you my thoughts because I was adopted and had a difficult time with finding my birth parents. Having access to my original birth certificate would have made the process slightly easier but regardless of process it would have also helped me truly have a greater sense of identity. I struggled for years with being adopted and not knowing anything about my birth parents. I had contacted the agency I was adopted from, when I turned 18. I spoke to a woman who got all my information and said she would be in contact with me regarding my request. I waited a few days and no one ever got back to me, as promised. To this day, 7 years later, I still have never heard back from that agency in regards to how I would meet my biological parents. Instead, a letter was generated after our first conversation that simply gave me a list of my birth parents medical history from when I was born but no name or contact information. Luckily, after those few days passed of not hearing back from the agency, I had taken it upon myself to try to find my birth parents. I asked my parents for documents they had from the agency and began reading through the materials. Surprisingly, I had found what I had needed! The agency had forgotten to white out the name of my birth mother on one of the forms. I was able to take my birth mothers name and begin to search for her on the internet. After calling multiple numbers and looking at multiple listing on the white pages, I had found the woman who gave birth to me. Since that time, my relationship with my biological family has grown and I am still in contact with them today but yet a piece of me is missing. Had it not been for the mistake of an employee, I still might have been searching for even more answers.

Having access to legal documents related to me as an individual is my right and something that I still would be interested in obtaining even though I know my birth parents. The William Glasser Institute discusses the five basic needs our genes try satisfy: love and belonging, survival, freedom, power, and fun. I would strongly advocate that for me having access to my original birth certificate would fill the need I have been trying to satisfy from the beginning of my life, belonging. Today, some adoptions may be more open and the cases might not be as closed as in the past, but it still happens. There is that gap of information that leaves one constantly empty until that need is filled. In my mind, I was someone who was rejected at birth. Denying me access to a record that may help me fill my basic need in life is heartless. Where is the social and economic justice in denying someone access to their birth records?

If you were turned off by my testimony in the beginning and believed it was all about the reunion and the search for my birth parents, you were wrong. The message I am trying to portray is had that employee not make a mistake, had she removed my birth mother's name, I would have nothing. Why would I as an adoptee not be allowed the same rights other people because of a decision someone else made? What makes me a second class citizen?

Sincerely,
Colleen Harnish
518 Saratoga Rd.
Lancaster, PA 17603

Cynthia Knaub
51 South Main Street
Dover, PA 17315

March 5, 2014

The Honorable Bob Mensch
Chair, Senate Committee on Aging & Youth

Dear Senator Mensch,

I am writing in regard to PA House Bill 162. This bill guarantees equal access to truthful birth information for all Pennsylvania born adults over the age of 19. This is an important bill for my family and I. I was born, adopted, raised and still reside in York County, PA. a total of 44 years. I look forward to the day that I can have an accurate birth certificate just like any other Pennsylvania citizen. With all the new Homeland Security regulations and scrutiny, it is unsettling to know your most basic document is not correct. In my case, I feel that the term "birth certificate" is a misnomer. My current birth certificate should really be called a certificate of guardianship, because those who actually made my birth happen are not listed.

Rep. Benninghoff and the House Children and Youth Committee did such an outstanding job on this bill. The House of Representatives voted unanimously to pass it. Now it is in the hands of the Senate Aging and Youth Committee. I hope the fine members of this committee will keep this positive momentum going.

This country was built on strong values such as truthfulness and I am sure Pennsylvania's elected officials will always want to ensure that the truth be made available. Especially when it is one's own personal truth.

Thank you for your time and consideration of House Bill 162.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Knaub

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The Adoptee Rights Bill (HB 162)

March, 18, 2014

Julie Stromberg

Testimony In support of House Bill 162:

In adoption, further providing for original birth record.

Dear Chairperson Mensch and members of the Senate Aging and Youth Committee,

My name is Julie Stromberg. I am a reunited adult adoptee (born and adopted in Connecticut) who has been a resident of Pennsylvania for eight years and is currently in possession of my original birth certificate. The purpose of my testimony today is affirm my support of HB162, a bill that would restore to adult adoptees born in Pennsylvania the legal right to access their original, factual and unaltered certificates of birth.

Non-adopted adults born Pennsylvania can access their factual birth certificates by making a simple request. Adult adoptees born in Pennsylvania cannot. The message provided to adult adoptees by the Commonwealth is that we are less deserving than non-adopted adult citizens. Adoptee rights is a matter of restoring equal treatment under law for all adult citizens born in Pennsylvania and ending the decades-long practice of considering adoption to be something shameful and secretive.

Adoptee rights is not about:

Search and reunion. Some individuals and organizations oppose restoring equal access to adult adoptees based on the notion that some natural parents might not wish to have contact with their relinquished sons or daughters. Contrary to what many in society have been led to believe, there is not one legal document involved in any adoption that legally guarantees a parent total anonymity from their own son or daughter. In most states, an adoptee's file and original birth certificate can be opened at a judge's discretion. As such, it is a legal impossibility that a natural parent could assume total anonymity from the adoptee. What an adult adoptee may choose to do, or not do, with the information contained on his or her original birth certificate is a personal matter and not one that requires the involvement of state governments. Adult citizens manage their personal engagements with other adults on their own every day. And there are many options available to any adult citizen who does not wish to engage with another adult citizen. The personal preferences of some (natural parents who do not desire contact with their sons or daughters) should not be given priority over the legal rights of all adults who were adopted as children.

Natural parent privacy. Birth certificates are not amended until an adoption is finalized. Children who are in foster care because the parental rights of their parents have been terminated, and who have not been legally adopted, use and have access to their factual birth certificates. If the amending of birth certificates was contingent on the privacy of natural parents, the process of legal fiction would occur upon termination of parental rights. Instead, an adoptee's birth certificate is only amended upon the finalization of adoption. One could

surmise, therefore, that the amending of birth certificates is for the adoptive parents' benefit and has nothing to do with natural parent privacy.

Abortion. Alaska and Kansas have never sealed the original birth certificates of adoptees. Both states have also been noted as having very low abortion rates according to data compiled in 2010 by the American Adoption Congress. The same data also revealed that in the states with more recent restored access, abortion rates lowered significantly following the passing of access legislation. Data shows that access legislation will not result in more abortions.

Our adoptive families. An adult adoptee who determines that it is in his or her best interest to obtain his or her original birth certificate has simply made a decision about his or her well-being as an adopted person. Desiring one's original birth certificate is not an indication of how an adult adoptee feels toward their adoptive family. We can love, cherish and respect our adoptive families and still need our original birth certificates. Adult adoptees existed, and had an identity, prior to being adopted. For many of us, it is important to acknowledge this fact regarding our personal histories. Adoptee rights legislation empowers adult adoptees and this is something that everyone connected to adoption should support.

Adoptee rights IS about restoring to all adult adoptees the right to access their own original birth certificates and treating adult adoptees as equal to non-adopted adults under law.

With this testimony in mind, I request that you recommend HB 162 to the Senate for vote. Send the message to adult adoptees born in Pennsylvania that they are deserving of equal treatment under law to non-adopted adults born in the state.

Sincerely,

Julie Stromberg
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