

July 17, 2013

Committee on Children & Youth

HB 162 – Adoptee Access to Birth Certificate Testimony

Kathleen Raab

I am a resident of Chalfont, Pennsylvania, born in Louisville, Kentucky in 1988. I was adopted as an infant, and my adoption was finalized in Bucks County Pennsylvania. I have been in contact with my birth mother for over three years. I am also a volunteer Pennsylvania Representative for American Adoption Congress.

Not having my original birth certificate has affected my ability to obtain a passport. My (first) amended birth certificate stated Pennsylvania as my place of birth. I received my first passport in 2002, and renewed it in 2007. Both stated Pennsylvania as my place of birth. In 2008 I was visiting Bloomsburg University when my backpack was stolen. The contents of my backpack included my passport. When I returned home I wanted to apply for a new passport, but when my (adoptive) mom and I went searching for my birth certificate we could not locate it. We still have not found it, and believe I may have lost it when I went away to college at Kutztown University in 2006. After realizing that we lost my birth certificate I called Pennsylvania Vital Statistics to obtain another copy. I was informed that one did not exist for me, and that is because I was not born in Pennsylvania. I proceeded to contact Kentucky Vital Statistics and I was issued an amended birth certificate on November 7, 2008. I soon realized that this would create an issue concerning my passport; my first two passports said I was born in Pennsylvania, and now my passport application would say that I was born in Kentucky. I feared it would look like I was claiming to have been born in two different states, or that I lied on one of the applications. I let the issue go, and figured I would wait until I needed to travel again.

I realized that this problem was not just going to go away, so my mom and I met with the lawyer she and my father used to finalize my adoption. Our meeting was on January 4, 2013. He explained to us that it was not possible that my first amended birth certificate stated Pennsylvania as my place of birth; even though it did because, how else would my first passport say Pennsylvania? He also said that he looked in my files and he did not have a copy of my amended birth certificate. The only useful information he gave us was that he believed a Pennsylvania court should have my original birth certificate. I have since decided to apply for my passport using my Kentucky amended birth certificate. The appointment date was June 17th. In May I mailed a request to the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare for any and all of my adoption information. On June 21st I received a letter from the PA Adoption Information Registry stating that they are "awaiting response from the Division of Vital Records".

Even though I know my birth mother, and I know everything that my original birth certificate says, I still cannot obtain a copy of it. I support HB 162 because it is my right to have my original birth certificate. No other U.S. citizen is denied this right, and I did not choose to be put in this situation. I am an adult, but because I am adopted I am still treated as a child; even now I am not allowed to have original and factual documentation of my birth.