

Pennsylvania House of Representatives - Children and Youth Committee
Representative Ann M. Williams, State of Illinois
July 17, 2013

My name is Ann Williams, and I am a State Representative in the Illinois General Assembly. I represent the 11th District, on the north side of Chicago. I am also a Pennsylvania adoptee, and am here today to strongly urge your support of HB 162.

Illinois passed a similar bill in 2010. Now, in Illinois, adoptees have access to their original birth certificates. The Illinois law, which went into effect in 2011, has been tremendously successful, and over 9000 adult adoptees now have a critical piece of their identity.

I was adopted into a wonderful, loving and supportive family from the Catholic Social Agency in Allentown in 1968. Like all of us, I have a birth certificate to reflect my entry into the world. The difference between me and many of you, however, is that my birth certificate is not real. Although it is called a birth certificate, it is really only an adoption certificate; I don't have possession of and have never seen my actual birth certificate with the name or names of my biological parents.

Pennsylvania law does permit an adoption agency, upon request of an adoptee, to obtain some very basic "non-identifying information" regarding his or her birth parents and circumstances of their adoption placement. I requested and obtained mine several years ago. But HB 162 bill would give me and other adult adoptees access to their original, real birth certificates.

Having access to my original birth certificate is important for many reasons. First, it would enable me to access the medical history information that so many take for granted. It also will provide me with a sense of my ethnic background; something most take for granted but something that is a big part of the identity of many people. Finally, it would fulfill a basic, intangible human need to know who you are and where you came from.

I believe in adoption – it has given me the most wonderful parents and family I could ever ask for. My quest to find out my identity in no way jeopardizes my family and doesn't change the fact that they are my one and only family.

I turned 45 years old in April, so my adoption took place 45 years ago. The world looks a lot different now than it did then. As for my birth mother? The young woman who put me up for adoption is now a 65-year-old woman. If she is still alive and if we meet someday, the two of us – as adults – will have to determine what sort of interaction we will have. This relationship cannot and should not be regulated by government in the form of a state law.

It's now 2013, and it's time for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to join the growing number of states in recognizing the basic human right of every adult person to know who they are and where they come from. And it's time to change the laws that tie us to adoption policies that just don't make sense.

Thank you for your time and consideration.