

## **The Adoptee Rights Bill (HB 162)**

**July 17, 2013**

**Julie Stromberg**

### **Testimony in support of House Bill 162:**

**In adoption, further providing for original birth record.**

Dear Chairpersons Watson and Bishop and members of the House Committee on Children & Youth,

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 HB 162, 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 House of Representatives 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,

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