

Letter to the Asbury Park Press

April 10, 2008

Adoption bill fair, balanced -----

As an adult adoptee, I have been following the progress of the pending state legislation to permit adoptees access to their original birth certificates. I find the views in the March 21 letter "Unsealed record breaks promise" to be perpetuating the negative stereotypes that were the prevailing wisdom for years.

Until the 1970s, unwed mothers were sent away to give birth in shame and secrecy. Birth mothers were counseled by social workers to forget their babies and to go on as if nothing had happened. Keeping their babies was never an option, as they were told their babies would bear the stigma of illegitimacy.

Opponents of the proposed legislation miss a key point about anonymity. No one is proposing that birth records be made public. The purpose of this legislation is to give adoptees, the people who are the subjects of the sealed documents, access to records pertaining to them. For adoptees, our legal identity does not match our genetic identity. In this age of DNA testing, we are at a distinct disadvantage. Learning the identity of one's birth parents can be a matter of life or death, not idle curiosity.

The proposed legislation adequately balances the adoptees' need for accurate family medical information with preserving the promise of anonymity made to birth mothers. Upon passage of the law, birth mothers will have a one-year period in which to indicate whether or not they wish to be contacted by their children. If a mother does not wish to be contacted, she must provide a detailed family medical history to be placed with the original birth certificate. Currently, adoptees must hire an investigator, who obtains the birth record by suspect means and makes the first, often unsettling contact with the birth mother. It makes for a great Lifetime TV movie, but it causes more pain and expense for the parties.

It is my hope that this bill becomes law in New Jersey.

Linda DeBrango

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REACTION TO THIS LETTER -----: [pam_hasegawa](#) wrote:

Personal access to a government document with one's own name on it seems to be a civil rights issue. If serial killers may have a copy of their own birth record, what's preventing adopted person as adults, and their parents when the adoptee is a minor, from obtaining their birth certificates?

Unfortunately, the answer is "fear." It was fear that sealed the records in the first place (fear of birth parents' attempting to reclaim their child) and fear that keeps that archaic law in place. Adoption practice is now far more humane than when a relinquishing parent was severed for life from her or his child trusting an agency's promise to place the child in a home.

Readers who would like to help urge Members of the Assembly to pass the bill into law may check the web site of NJ Coalition for Adoption Reform and Education, www.nj-care.org or write to be placed on a listserv to stay updated.

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