

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2004 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
Revised

House Bill 232

(Delegate F. Turner, *et al.*)

Judiciary

Judicial Proceedings

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Family Law - Adoption Search, Contact, and Reunion Services - Siblings

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This bill expands the adoption search, contact, and reunion services program within the Department of Human Resources (DHR) to include siblings who have been adopted and who are at least 21 years old.

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** The bill's requirements could be handled by DHR with existing budgeted resources.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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Analysis

**Current Law:** Chapter 679 of 1998 provides that the Social Services Administration of DHR must provide adoption search, contact, and reunion services. Biological parents of adopted individuals at least 21 years of age and adopted individuals themselves who are at least 21 years of age are currently allowed to apply for these services through the use of an approved confidential intermediary.

Once the adopted individual or biological parents are located, the intermediary assesses whether the individuals want to communicate or share information. The intermediary also provides or refers the individuals to counseling. The intermediary may charge a reasonable fee for this service.

**Background:** DHR advises that since the time that Chapter 679 went into effect, birth siblings have expressed a strong desire to be able to take advantage of the adoption search, contact, and reunion services so that they can be in touch with other children born to their parents. In some cases a family of siblings was released for adoption who have not seen each other since. These individuals share common family and medical histories and many wish to contact each other. Frequently, a sibling wants to search for an adopted sibling for an ailing parent who wants to reunite with the child before the parent dies. In fiscal 2003, DHR received 311 requests for confidential intermediaries to provide these services.

Since 1985, birth siblings of adoptees and adoptees interested in contacting birth siblings have been able to register with DHR's Mutual Consent Voluntary Adoption Registry. However, birth siblings of adoptees and adoptees are excluded from actively searching for each other. The registry contains approximately 2,200 listings. However, DHR cannot say how many of the people listed have found their birth siblings and how many are still searching.

Once a person lists themselves with the registry, staff compares the information provided and matches adoptees with their birth family members. They confirm the information before a social worker contacts registrants and gives them the information. Registrants are charged a \$25 one-time fee for the service, although the fee is waived for individuals who cannot pay.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** This bill was introduced during the 2001 session as HB 395. The bill passed the House but received an unfavorable report from the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. HB 185 of 2002, a bill that would have extended these services to the adopted siblings and other individuals, received an unfavorable report by the House Judiciary Committee.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Department of Human Resources, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 5, 2004  
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