

# **Suzanne Bachner\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Bachner, Suzanne

Position: FAV

# Suzanne Bachner

February 19, 2020

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB1039/SB0743

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Chairman Smith and Members of the Committees:

I am an adoptee who was born, raised and adopted in New York City. I am passionate about Adoptee Rights and restoring adult adoptees' unrestricted access to our original birth certificates nationwide. I have traveled all over the U.S. and to the London International Fringe Festival presenting my award-winning autobiographical play, **The Good Adoptee**, that tells the dramatic and often outrageous story of my adoption experience and advocates for the restoration of adult adoptees' access to our original birth certificates, a vital Civil Rights and Human Rights issue and one of Equality for all.

As I'm sure you are aware, my home state of New York just restored adoptees' unrestricted access to our original birth certificates, ending 83 years of discrimination and inequality and becoming the 10th and largest state with Equality for its Adopted Citizens. This happened with a Supermajority in the Legislature last June and Governor Cuomo's support and enthusiastic signature last November. The law went into effect January 15th and adult adoptees in New York are getting their original birth certificates every day now! Mine is on the way. Maryland now has the unique opportunity not only to be on the right side of history, but also to make history and become the 11th Equality State.

As an adult, I was shocked to discover that the birth certificate that I had grown up with for my entire life was a fake. It was not my original, authentic BIRTH certificate but rather, what is known as an Amended Birth Certificate, which was created when my adoption went through a year after my birth and lists my (adoptive) parents as if they gave birth to me instead of adopted me. I am an adult, after all, a contributing member of society who pays taxes! How could a random government worker have access to my most basic personal information and not me? I realized what a shocking civil rights violation was being perpetrated on me and my fellow adoptees - we were second class citizens under the law, denied access to this essential information that most non-adoptees take for granted. All other Americans have access to their original birth certificates. This is not right.

With technology, surveillance and consumer DNA, we live in an age of little personal privacy. Thankfully, we also live in a world where children – and the adult citizens they become – are no longer considered “illegitimate”. The draconian laws sealing original birth certificates protect no one, but rather perpetuate the shame and secrecy around adoption that was created decades and decades ago. Adoptees need to be treated like every other citizen. Otherwise we remain stunted as children, forever denied equality, civil rights and true citizenry (while every other obligation is required and met). It's time to put an end to this outdated and discriminatory practice and move forward. We need Equality.

If you would like to hear more of my personal story in an entertaining theatrical presentation with an exquisite and award-winning performance by actress Anna Bridgforth, please feel free to take a look at the video from an early Off Broadway performance of **The Good Adoptee**.

Trailer: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUX85Z\\_mnu0&t=1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUX85Z_mnu0&t=1s)

Show: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mD6roVEFgmg&feature=youtu.be>

More Info: [www.TheGoodAdoptee.com](http://www.TheGoodAdoptee.com)

As I anticipate finally obtaining my own original birth certificate along with my fellow New York born Adult Adoptees who choose to do the same, and as I enjoy us all having legal access, I can only imagine holding my original birth certificate in my excited, shocked and grateful hands. Without even yet possessing that simple piece of paper, it means the world to me to have access to this sacred record of my birth and all that it entails and to be treated equally under the law like every other non-adopted American. I wish the same for my adoptee sisters and brothers in Maryland and across the nation.

This is an incredible opportunity for Maryland to be on the right side of history and help propel the tide in restoring civil rights, and yes, human rights, to Adopted Americans living in Maryland and join New York in leading the way towards Equality for All. It's not every day that you have the opportunity to end discrimination, restore civil rights and make the world a little more fair and just. We are counting on you to do the right thing.

Please vote YES on the bills and recommend passage of HB1039 and SB0743!

Thank you.

All my best,

*Suzanne Bachner*

...

Suzanne Bachner

Adoptee, Playwright, Director

[www.TheGoodAdoptee.com](http://www.TheGoodAdoptee.com)

**200 West 54<sup>th</sup> Street, #10L • New York, NY 10019 • 212.758.3820**  
**[suzannebachner@mac.com](mailto:suzannebachner@mac.com) • [JMTCTheatre.com](http://JMTCTheatre.com) • [TheGoodAdoptee.com](http://TheGoodAdoptee.com)**

# **Amy Bonsall\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Bonsall, Amy

Position: FAV

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman House Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101 Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: HB1039/SB0743**

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Chairman Smith, and Members of the Committees:

I'd like to respectfully ask that members of the Committees vote Yes on the bills and recommend passage of HB1039 and SB0743.

As a child of adoption myself, I know first-hand the emotion that comes with not knowing one's origins. While I understand that in the past adoption has been shamed, it is celebrated now. And with DNA services (which is indeed how I was reunited with my own birth family), a preference of secrecy is simply a thing of the past. Most of us are able to track down our families without the state's engagement. However, obtaining access to one's own documents can have huge significance.

Though I know all of the content of my original birth certificate, and though I have the support of my adoptive and birth parents, because of where I was born and when, I'm still not entitled to it. For those of us with lost months or years before we were placed, this small thing has huge significance.

Thank you for your consideration.

Amy Bonsall  
Amy.bonsall@yahoo.com

## **Anne Cauman\_FAV\_SB743**

Uploaded by: cauman, anne

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 743 BY ANNE CAUMAN SUBMITTED TO THE SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE, FEBRUARY 25, 2020

My name is Anne Cauman. As a birthmother and lawyer, I urge you to enact SB 743, Adoption – Access to Birth and Adoption Records and Search, Contact, and Reunion Services.

There has been a growing consensus in recent years that, in most instances, open adoptions have benefits for all parties. (According to the New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/07/nyregion/adoption-laws-new-york.html> , a 2012 report by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute showed that approximately 95% of all recent infant adoptions were open.) Concomitantly, there has been increasing recognition that parties to older closed adoptions benefit from having information not previously available to them. The obvious case is adopted adults' entitlement to their original birth certificates. CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF AMERICA, CWLA STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE FOR ADOPTION SERVICES 87 (2000) states:

“The interests of adopted adults in having information about their origins have come to be recognized as having critical psychological importance as well as importance in understanding their health and genetic status. Because such information is essential to adopted adults' identity and health needs, the agency should promote policies that provide adopted adults with direct access to identifying information.”

Other organizations which support such access include the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). Elizabeth J. Samuels, Surrender and Subordination: Birth Mothers and Adoption Law Reform, 20 MICH. J. GENDER & L. 33, text at pages 63-64 and footnotes 133-135 (2013), <https://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1030&context=mjgl>

Knowledge of your origins is part of one's identity, but it goes beyond that for all of us – adoptees, birthparents, and adoptive parents. We are all entitled to truth and knowledge in our lives.

When I relinquished my son, I lost more than my child. I lost a piece of myself. I both experienced it as feeling that I had a huge hole in my chest (this persisted for several years) and in becoming a different person. I believe that most, if not all, birthparents lose a piece of themselves when they relinquish and that this is especially true for the many birthparents, mainly birthmothers, whose surrenders were coerced, as was common in the mid, and even late, 20<sup>th</sup> century. Obtaining our children's birth certificates, both original (which very few birthparents received although they were entitled to them) and amended, is part of reclaiming our identity. It confirms our status and a connection.

Please do the right thing and provide all parties to adoption with access to information central to our lives. Please pass this bill.

Thank you.

/s/Anne Cauman  
4405 38<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20016  
[annecau@gmail.com](mailto:annecau@gmail.com)  
202-363-3903

# **Access Maryland\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: clausen, linda

Position: FAV



**TESTIMONY: SENATE BILL 743    Submitted by: Linda B. Clausen, MSW  
February 25, 2020**

**Adoption: Access to Birth and Adoption Records and SEARCH, Contact and Reunion  
Services**

I very strongly support SB 743 giving all Maryland born adoptees access to a copy of their Original Birth Certificate.(OBC). This is so very important to their lives. I believe that whether age 18, or 60 years of age, seeing their original birth certificate will aid them in visualizing themselves in their full identity. In merging their original and adoptive selves, they will understand themselves in a healthier way.

I am a birthmother, and a Social Worker. I relinquished two children to adoption in the 60's. My youngest son found me in 1990. Not long after we met, he asked me to make him a copy of his OBC. I did not have a copy as I was not allowed. He was shocked, and wrote for a copy to VT. where he was born. He received it. That OBC represents the adoptee's beginning. It connects the adoptee with the person he/she was before adoption. I have heard many adoptees in the support group I facilitate., and the adoption conferences I attended state in numerous ways, its importance to them. We were reunited for 26 years; a healing 26 years for both of us.

A recent NY times article stated that 95% of adoptions are OPEN adoptions. With so many open adoptions, it is time for Maryland to change the practice of keeping the birth certificates of older adoptees hidden away

in 1958, 1968, and 1978 Dr. Paul Sachdev, a Canadian researcher, studied adoptive parent, adoptee, and birth parent attitudes toward open adoption records in *Unlocking the Adoption files* (1989). Sachdev, whose work is respected worldwide found that 69.7% of adoptive parents surveyed. as compared with 88.5 birthmothers, and 81.85 adoptees said that adult adoptees should be able to receive identifying information. In a book, *Ethics in American adoption*, L. Anne Babb, Ph.D. reported results of a 1994 study, conducted of the 50 state licensors of adoption agencies and 23 professional adoption-related or child welfare associations. The findings showed that the majority, 625 said that adult adoptees should be given access to their original birth certificates. Yet, here we are in 2020, still requesting that Maryland adoptees be able to have a copy of their OBC's.

PLEASE CLOSE THIS GAP. Give equal rights to each MARYLAND adoptee. Give adoptees access to their birth certificate if they want it.. Please pass SB 743. It truly means more than those of us not adopted can ever understand. Treat all Maryland born adoptees the same.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, and for your consideration.

Linda Clausen, MSW, LGSW,  
Board of Directors, Concerned United Birthparents, [dcmetroclub@aol.com](mailto:dcmetroclub@aol.com) [www.cubirthparents.org](http://www.cubirthparents.org)

ACCESS OBC MARYLAND, Founder, 2012: [accessobcmaryland@gmail.com](mailto:accessobcmaryland@gmail.com) 301-275-6624

# **Patty Collings\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Collings, Patty

Position: FAV

I support Maryland HB1039 and SB0743

This is my personal testimony. I am a birth parent who surrendered my son to adoption in 1969. I was never promised, nor did I ever want confidentiality. I searched and found my son in 1998 when he was 29 years old. My son and I are fortunate to know each other and our extended families, yet still he does not have access to his Original Birth Records. I believe he, and all adopted adults, should have the unconditional right to access their Original Birth Certificate and records.

I have been on the Board of Directors of Concerned United Birthparents, Inc. (CUB) since 2006. In my work with CUB over these years I have met over a thousand birth parents at our annual retreats and at our monthly support group meetings. None of them want to be kept a secret from their own children.

Knowing one's original identity is a right that all citizens have except those who were adopted. This creates two classes of people in our country. This is wrong and must be corrected. I urge you to support this bill that would allow adopted adults to have what is rightly theirs.

Sincerely,

Patty Collings  
patty.collings@gmail.com

# **Rachida Djebel\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Djebel, Rachida

Position: FAV

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101 Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: Testimony in Favor of Maryland Assembly SB0743 & HB 1039**

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Chairman Smith, and Members of the Committees:

My name is Rachida Djebel (née Llireva Jean Averill) , born in Cleveland, Ohio (1945) , adopted in Sarpy County, Nebraska (1950), and Maryland Resident since 1976. I am also a Viet Nam veteran (1963-1966). I have been an advocate for adoptee rights for many decades and work with adoptees to secure information regarding birth history.

I and my younger sister were abandoned in a dog pound in Douglas County, Nebraska in 1948 by our parents who kept our brother with them. Once found, my sister and I were immediately separated and I have not seen her since, nor have I seen my brother since that fateful day. My sister, born in 1947, was adopted at or shortly after 6 months in Douglas County, Nebraska, because of worse than Dickensian law, still refuses to give me any information regarding her, citing 'confidentiality' ---laughable since she and I share between 2000 and 3500 cMs of DNA.

DNA has confirmed my direct genetic ties to both maternal & paternal sides of my family, but has not produced matches with close family, siblings or parents, with the exception of one paternal uncle who I asked to submit a DNA sample just for the record..

Because of childhood trauma (abuse from both parents and adopters), all I remembered for years was that my father's surname was Averill and that my siblings were taken away from me. I was 38 years old before I retrieved my OBC in a time when there were no advocates for adoptees. This because my Nebraska adoptive birth certificate had no city/county/state of birth listed on it, thus denying me a passport. That denial propelled and compelled me to determine where I was born and to whom. It was my right to know my birth origins and to secure the OBC. Ohio-whose laws were as Dickensian as Nebraska's in 1982- agreed. Once I knew it was the place of birth. I petitioned the Court who agreed that I had shown just cause, and in turn provided me with a line-by-line exact copy of the original OH birth certificate CERTIFIED. Because the judge confirmed my rights, I was able to satisfy the Passport Agency's requirements for my passport and, more importantly, was able to give my son and now grandson the history and reality of mother and grandmother. DNA has proven genetic relationship to both my paternal and maternal families.

**I urge respectfully that you grant Maryland's adoptees born in the state unrestricted access to their Original Birth Certificates by passage of these two bills which will return equal rights to adoptees born and adopted in Maryland.**

Sincerely,

Rachida Djebel  
1426 Harberson Road  
Catonsville, MD 21228-1116  
rachida1@msn.com

# **Carol Fox\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Fox, Carol

Position: FAV

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101 Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: HB1039/SB0743**

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Chairman Smith, and Members of the Committees:

As an adoptee and one who has spent thousands of hours and dollars to learn the truth about my origins, I strongly support HB1039 and SB0743 and all legislation that ends the discriminatory practice of denying me access to an official government record that every other non-adopted person is entitled to possess and that restores my right to obtain my original (pre-adoption) birth certificate. In spite of the conspiracy of secrecy, through a chance encounter by a dedicated Search Angel with a local legal notice concerning my birth in 1952 in Washington, D.C., and **my subsequent adoption in Maryland**, and later, through Ancestry and AncestryDNA testing, I am one of the grateful adoptees who searched and found both my maternal and paternal heritage and have been lovingly welcomed by many family members.

If the government is to be trusted to maintain accurate records on every individual, they should carefully consider the continuation of the practice of falsifying/amending them for spurious reasons and diligently work to address the injustices done to those of us affected by their questionable action in the past. I offer my thanks to the many community organizations and activists that continue to champion this noble but difficult cause throughout the USA and would just remind Legislators that, not only are adoptees' and their families' health and well-being at stake but also our birth Parents and Grandparents, our siblings and our Aunts and Uncles and Cousins and each of their family members too who are forced to endure the cruel and unfair consequences of keeping secrets.

Please feel free to share my story as you may deem appropriate and please feel free to contact me via email [truthseeker52@aol.com](mailto:truthseeker52@aol.com) should you have any questions or wish to know more of my story.

Carol Fox  
Baltimore [truthseeker52@aol.com](mailto:truthseeker52@aol.com)



# **Ellen Jane Goldberg\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Goldberg, Ellen Jane

Position: FAV

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman House Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101 Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: HB1039/SB0743**

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Chairman Smith, and Members of the Committees:

I was adopted at 3 days old. My father passed away in 2008, & my mother is 92 years old. They had no other children. I never married. When, G-D forbid, the time comes, when my mother passes away; I will have NO family! Everyone should have the right to know where they come from, & who they come from. I'm 63, so I doubt my biological parents are still alive, but, you never know. I don't know what it's like to hear . . . "You look just like your \_\_\_\_\_."

Maybe I have full or 1/2 siblings, cousins, aunts &/or uncles out there. I'd be happy if I could just find ONE! I need that connection! I know people who have found biological connections, & I've been told..."there's nothing like it!" I love the man & woman that adopted me . . . MY MOTHER & FATHER! I'm not looking to replace them, I'm looking for my biological identity. Please, consider my testimony when you're making your decision!!

Thank You So Much.

Ellen Jane Goldberg  
Boynton Beach, Florida  
janekiki0808@gmail.com

# **Marley\_Greiner\_Bastard\_Nation\_FAV\_SB0743**

Uploaded by: Greiner, Marley

Position: FAV



**PO Box 4607  
New Windsor, New York 12553-7845**  
*bastards.org*      **614-795-6819**      **@BastardsUnite**

**SB0743--Original Birth Certificate Access  
Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee**

**February 20, 2020  
Submitted Testimony in Support  
Submitted by  
Marley E. Greiner. Executive Chair**

Bastard Nation: the Adoptee Rights Organization is the largest adoptee civil rights organization in the United States. We support only full unrestricted access for all adopted persons, to their original birth certificates (OBC) and related documents. We are a core partner with the Capitol Coalition for Adoptee Rights.

Bastard Nation and its members in Maryland have worked in Maryland since the late 1990s to secure a change in OBC/adoption record access laws that restore the right of all the state's adoptees ,not just the select few as under current law who are currently forced to navigate a cumbersome, difficult, and insulting gauntlet of restrictions, arbitrary procedures, and naysayers, to receive their own OBCs, which are rightfully theirs, without restriction.

We are happy, therefore, to support passage of SB0743 an inclusive bill that restores that right of Original Birth Certificate access to all adopted Marylanders with no restrictions or conditions at the age of 18.

We urge you to support this bill and pass it into law.

\*\*\*\*\*

Unrestricted OBC access is not a “privacy” or “birthparent confidentiality” issue. In fact, “privacy” “confidentiality,” and “anonymity” are not synonymous either legally or linguistically.

There is no evidence in any state that records were sealed to “protect” the reputation or “privacy” of biological parents who relinquished children for adoption. On the contrary, records were sealed to protect the reputations of “bastard children” and to protect adoptive families from birthparent interference.

\*\*\*\*\*

Courts have ruled that adoption anonymity does not exist. (*Doe v Sundquist, et. al.*, 943 F. Supp. 886, 893-94 (M.D. Tenn. 1996) and *Does v. State of Oregon*, 164 Or. App. 543, 993 P.2d 833, 834 (1999).

Laws change constantly, and the state, lawyers, social workers, and others were never in a position to promise anonymity in adoption. In fact, in the over 50 years of the adoptee equality battle, not one document has been submitted anywhere that promises or guarantees sealed records and an anonymity “right” to birthparents.

Identifying information about surrendering parents often appears in court documents given to adoptive parents who can at any point give that information to the adopted person. (In some states adoptive parents, at the time of the adoption order, can petition the court to keep the record open.) The names of surrendering parents are published in legal ads. Courts can open “sealed records” for “good cause” without birthparent consent or even knowledge. **Critically, the OBC is sealed at the time of adoption finalization, not surrender. If a child is not adopted, the record is never sealed. If a child is adopted, but the adoption is overturned or disrupted, the OBC is unsealed.**

The influential American Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys in 2018 passed a monumental resolution in support of adoptees’ right **to full access to our OBC, court, and agency records.**

\*\*\*\*\*

Legislation needs to catch up with technological reality. We are well into the 21st century. The information superhighway grows wider and longer each day, and adoptees and their birth and adoptive families are riding it, utilizing the Internet, social media, inexpensive and accessible DNA testing services, and a large network of volunteer “search angels” to locate their government-hidden information and histories. Thousands of successful adoption searches happen each year—many in Maryland alone—making adoption secrecy virtually impossible. The minuscule number of birthparents or so-called “professionals” who believe that restricted OBC/records access or no access equals adoption anonymity are greatly mistaken. The fact is, nearly all successful searches are done *without* the OBC and other court documents.

\*\*\*\*\*

OBC access is not about search and reunion. It is about the right to one's own state-held birth record. Rights are for all, not some. Clearly, Maryland's burdensome law discriminates against the state's adoptees .

There is no state interest in keeping original birth certificates sealed from adult adoptees to which they pertain. Nor does the state have a right or duty to mediate and oversee the personal relationships of adults. Those who claim a statutory right to parental anonymity through sealed records promote statutory privilege and state favoritism.

SBO743 creates equal birth certificate access for all Maryland adoptees. It treats the state's adoptees as equal with the not-adopted, It reflects the simple inclusive, unrestricted access process that ten states have on the books (Kansas, Alaska, Oregon, Alabama, Colorado, New Hampshire, Maine, Rhode Island, Hawaii, and New York,

New York's 40-year battle for OBC access ended when on January 15, OBCs were opened to all New York adoptee s upon request without restriction. In only three days, over 3,600 adoptees filed for their record of birth. The bill which unsealed records was passed 196-12.

Please support Maryland in being a leader in adoptee equality and adoption reform. Return unrestricted and unconditional OBC access to all Maryland adoptees. When SBO743 comes up for a vote, please vote DO PASS and urge the bill be sent to the floor ASAP for passage. It's the right thing to do!

#### **Bastard Nation Mission Statement**

Bastard Nation is dedicated to the recognition of the full human and civil rights of adult adoptees. Toward that end, we advocate the opening to adoptees, upon request at age of majority, of those government documents which pertain to the adoptee's historical, genetic, and legal identity, including the unaltered original birth certificate and adoption decree. Bastard Nation asserts that it is the right of people everywhere to have their official original birth records unaltered and free from falsification, and that the adoptive status of any person should not prohibit him or her from choosing to exercise that right. We have reclaimed the badge of bastardy placed on us by those who would attempt to shame us; we see nothing shameful in having been born out of wedlock or in being adopted. Bastard Nation does not support mandated mutual consent registries or intermediary systems in place of unconditional open records, nor any other system that is less than access on demand to the adult adoptee, without condition, and without qualification.

# **Adoptee Right Coalition al\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Grubb, Lynn

Position: FAV

# ADOPTEE RIGHTS COALITION

---



19 February 2020

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: Support for HB1039/SB0743**

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Chairman Smith, and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for allowing the **Adoptee Rights Coalition** to submit this testimony in support of **House Bill 1039 and Senate Bill 0743**, which will restore the right of **all** adopted persons born in Maryland, and their descendants, to obtain copies of their original birth certificates by extending that right to Maryland adoptees adopted before the January 1, 2000 cutoff and to eliminate counter-productive disclosure vetoes.

The **Adoptee Rights Coalition** is a nonprofit adoptee-led group advocating for restored access to original birth records for all US born adoptees. We educate and advocate through social media and through written testimony. Since 2008, we have been a presence at the National Conference of State Legislatures where our members engage with legislators and other interested parties regarding legislation affecting access to original birth records for US adoptees.



**HB1039/SB0743**, An Act Concerning Adoption - Access to Birth and Adoption Records and Search, Contact, and Reunion Services, would restore the right of **every** adopted adult in Maryland to obtain a copy of his or her original birth certificate. Passing this bill would fully achieve the restoration of access that began in 2000, and which has proven to be the appropriate path in and other states.

A number of states have recently changed their adoption records access laws in recognition of the fact that sealed records are no longer an insurmountable barrier to identifying biological family. Between DNA testing, social media, and other widely available resources, most adoptees will be able to learn the identities of **both** parents if they so desire. For most adoptees, obtaining their original birth certificates will be about equality, not search and reunion.

Restoring access to the original birth certificate for Maryland adoptees will allow them to contact the biological parent directly in a discreet and sensitive manner rather than involving members of the parent's extended family through DNA matching. In addition, **HB1039/SB0743** eliminate counter-productive disclosure vetoes and provides for private communications between a birth parent and an adoptee - via a contact preference form.

Please approve **House Bill 1039** and **Senate Bill 0743** to restore access to original birth certificates for Maryland's adult adoptees who were adopted before January 1, 2000, and eliminate counter-productive disclosure vetoes, thereby completing the restoration process that Maryland started twenty years ago.

Respectfully submitted,

### **Adoptee Rights Coalition**

Lynn Grubb, President  
Kettering, Ohio

Jackie Fallon, Secretary  
Monticello, Minnesota

Regina Zimberlin, Director  
Warwick, Rhode Island

Karen Florence Gills, Director  
Antioch, Tennessee

Becky Conrad Drinnen, Vice President  
Sidney, Ohio

Gaye Sherman Tannenbaum, Treasurer  
Piriápolis, Uruguay

Jeff Hancock, Director  
Avon, New York

Kara Albano, Director  
Riverside, Rhode Island

# **American Adoption Congress\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Hodgson, Shawna

Position: FAV

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman House Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101 Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB1039/SB0743

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Chairman Smith, and Members of the Committees:

I'm writing to ask you to support HB1039 and SB0743, bills that will provide all Maryland adult adoptees the right to obtain a copy of their own original birth certificate without restrictions. I was born and adopted in the early 70's and endured a ten year battle for information about my own birth and adoption with the courts and the adoption agency and I can honestly say it was the most dehumanizing experience of my life. I'm a mother of four, a wife, and co-owner of a successful business. I've put three children through college, I vote and pay taxes yet I'm prohibited from obtaining a copy of my own true record of birth. I can't think of anything more infantilizing than the state treating one like a child who can't handle their own information.

I implore you to vote HB1039/SB0743 favorably out of Committee and once and for all, right a historic wrong and restore dignity to all Maryland adoptees. Adopted people deserve the same rights to know their origins, and access their own vital records, just like all other non adopted citizens in Maryland.

Respectfully,

Shawna Hodgson  
Member, Board of Directors, American Adoption Congress Washington D.C.  
shawna.hodgson@yahoo.com

# **Janice Vincent\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Kelch Vincent, Janice

Position: FAV

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: HB1039/SB0743**

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee:

My name is Janice (Kelch) Vincent and I am an adoptee. I was adopted through Baltimore County Social Services when I was almost 6 months old.

I don't ever remember a time when I did not know that I was adopted. I was told that my birth mother was unable to give me the care she wanted and that she loved me so much, she wanted me to grow up in a home that could provide for all my needs.

When I was 4 years old, my mom received a phone call and then told me we were going to get a baby brother the next day. For a few years, I thought you just drove to Towson to get a baby.

My adoption papers only show a birth history of a Protestant background. Sadly, no health or other information. As my own children got older, they were curious about medical history. Our doctors told us that medical science was so advanced we did not have to be concerned.

In 2002 my husband and I moved to our current address and through the years, I learned that my next door neighbor happened to be adopted. Around 2014, she was told that she could now legally access her original birth certificate. She did and her family received a lot of background and health information.

Curious, I thought I would look into getting my OBC. Sadly, I learned that my birth year remained in a "black-out" timeframe.... My neighbor, just 2 years older, was indeed included in the new timeframe, as were children born in the year 2000 and after. BUT NOT ME... Because of 2 years, I cannot get my own personal history, but my neighbor could AND next year, as adoptees turn 21, they can also.... BUT NOT ME.....

I believe the current Maryland law to be inequitable and unfair. I now have 8 grandchildren asking about their family and medical history.

On their behalf, I encourage you to support SB0743.

Thank you.

Janice Lynn Kelch Vincent  
Middle River, Maryland  
wallis104@yahoo.com

# **Mary Kellermann-Bryant\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Kellerman-Bryant, Mary

Position: FAV

To: Maryland Legislature

I am writing this testimony for the bill HB1039 and SB0743.

I am an adoptee who was adopted officially in Baltimore Maryland in June of 1965. In the year 2000 I contacted the Baltimore Department of Social Services for my non-identifying information. I was informed that both of my birth parents are deceased. I was also informed that my half sister was not able to be found as well. I am now 55 years old. Neither birth or adopted parents are living. I feel that at this age I should have the right to know all information about my birth parents and any siblings or relatives that are still living. I know that when I was 18 I was not emotionally strong enough to have handled any information that was given to me. As a parent myself and not being able to share any medical information has been very difficult. I also feel that having my culture stripped from me has caused me severe mental anguish and loss. To be able to have my original birth certificate and to have all of the records of my adoption would be a gift that I have waited for over 30 years. I feel that Bill HB1039 and SB0743 is a right that adoptees should be allowed to have. Please consider what has been lost by each child that has been adopted and how these bills can give back to each of us.

Thank you in advance,

Mary Kellermann-Bryant

theresasue44@gmail.com

# **Kristen Lynn Kellick\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Kellick, Kristen

Position: FAV



Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB1039/SB0743

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Chairman Smith, and Members of the  
Committees:

My name is Kristen Lynn Kellick. I was born in Baltimore City on  
January 7, 1978; and I am an adopted person.  
I have always known I was adopted; it was never a secret in my family.  
I was a college student, uninterested in contact with my biological  
parents, when I first learned that adopted people have two birth  
certificates - and that in most states, adoptees do not access to our  
original birth certificates. Since then, I have firmly believed that  
adult adoptees should be able to request their original birth  
certificates. I believe this is a civil right, one that is only denied  
to adopted people based on our adopted status. Most would never  
consider denying any other adult access to their unaltered birth  
certificate. It seems to me that it is therefore a violation of  
adopted people's civil rights to deny us access to information about  
our origins, information that is freely available to all others born  
in the state of Maryland.

It was only a few years ago, when I became curious about my purported  
ethnic background, that I considered DNA testing - and before I went  
ahead with that option, I had to consider the possibility of inquiries  
from biological relatives who may or may not have known about my  
existence. While there was a significant up-front cost, I knew it was  
still less expensive, and more likely to provide me with answers, than  
attempting to navigate Maryland's legal system from out of state.

Thanks to AncestryDNA, I now know the names of my biological parents,  
my half-siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and many more. I  
have met both of my biological parents and their respective spouses;  
we correspond regularly and visit several times a year. I am proud of  
and love both my adoptive and biological families, but Maryland law  
does not allow me the dignity of equal access to my original birth  
certificate that truthfully states that I was born to my biological  
parents, and not to my adoptive parents. My having been adopted does  
not change where I came from.

With this letter, I ask that Maryland choose to follow in the steps of New York and grant all adult adoptees equal access to our original birth certificates, per HB1039 and SB0743. "Get It Right" and vote yes.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Kristen L. Kellick  
klkellick@gmail.com

# **Deborah Keys\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Keys, Deborah

Position: FAV

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101 Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: HB1039/SB0743**

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Chairman Smith, and Members of the Committees:

**I am a Maryland adoptee** writing to ask you to support HB1039 and SB0743 that will provide all Maryland adult adoptees the right to obtain a copy of their original birth certificate and adoption records. It is paramount that these bills result in legislation that has NO exceptions and NO conditions. It is time for Maryland to end the secrecy imposed by the closed adoption system and put a stop to denying adult adoptees the right to know the truth of their origins.

Many opponents counter that birth mothers were promised secrecy, but this is not typically the case. My birth mother was not promised anything and I have not spoken with any birth parent that was promised anonymity. Opening previously sealed records will allow adoptees to directly contact their birth parents without resorting to commercial DNA testing that reveals themselves to other family members, thus preventing privacy in this very delicate situation. Direct contact will allow the concerned parties to move forward with privacy, if desired.

All adults should have the same access to their vital records and adult adoptees should not be subject to discrimination. We deserve the right to equal treatment under the law. I appreciate your time and attention to this matter.

Thank you for your support. Sincerely,

Deborah Keys Huntingdon, Pennsylvania [dkeys419@hotmail.com](mailto:dkeys419@hotmail.com)

# **Kristin Kjellson\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Kjellson, Kristin

Position: FAV

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB1039/SB0743

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Chairman Smith, and Members of the Committees:

I am writing in support of the bills HB1039 and SB0743 that are to be presented on February 20 and 25, 2020. **I was born in the state of Maryland in November of 1966** and given up for adoption and my records were sealed under the laws of the times. Unfortunately, all these years later these laws are still in existence in the state of Maryland. It is my belief that these laws are archaic and if I am to be completely honest, cruel. It is a basic human right to be allowed to know where one comes from. These laws originated with the purpose of protecting the privacy of adoptees and their adopted families but have with time been flipped in order to protect the birth mothers and fathers and their families. Through my readings and research, I have learned that in the majority of all cases the families of origin are more than willing to be contacted but are unable to be because of the current laws. While provisions have been made to assist in this dilemma (mutual consent registries and the like) it can be very expensive and is not enough. By supporting the bills being presented you will not only be affecting Maryland adoptees but adopted people across the nation by sending the message that Maryland will not discriminate against adoptees right to obtain their files and Original Birth Certificates.

With Appreciation,

Kristin Kjellson  
Aurora, Colorado  
kkjellson@comcast.net

**Kristin Kjellson\_FAV\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Kjellson, Kristin

Position: FAV

Bill Number: SB0743

Title: Adoption - Access to Birth and Adoption Records and Search, Contact, and Reunion Services

Committee: Judicial Proceedings

Sponsor: Senator Susan Lee

Hearing Date: February 25, 2020, at 12:00 p.m.

Position: Support

I am writing in support of the bill SB0743 that is to be presented on February 25, 2020. I was born in November of 1966 and given up for adoption and my records were sealed under the laws of the times. Unfortunately, after all these years, these laws are still in existence in the state of Maryland. It is my belief that these laws are archaic and if I am to be completely honest, cruel. It is a basic human right to be allowed to know where one comes from.

These laws originated with the purpose of protecting the privacy of adoptees and their adopted families but have with time been flipped in order to protect the birth mothers and fathers and their families. Through my readings and research, I have learned that in the majority of all cases the families of origin are more than willing to be contacted but are unable to be because of the current laws. While provisions have been made to assist in this dilemma (mutual consent registries and the like) it can be very expensive and is not enough.

By supporting this bill being presented by Senator Lee you will not only be affecting Maryland adoptees but adopted people across the nation by sending the message that Maryland will not discriminate against adoptees right to obtain their Original Birth Certificates.

With Appreciation,

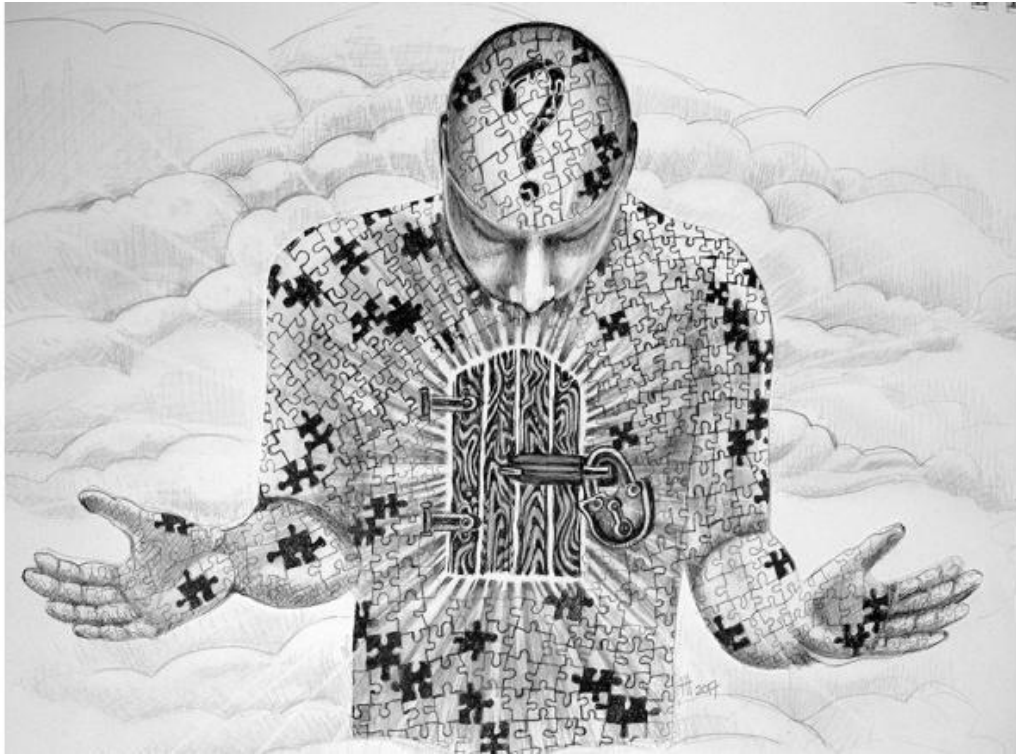
Kristin Kjellson



# **Oregon's adoptee\_FAV\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Klappenberger, Peggy

Position: FAV



*(Illustration by Helen Hill)*

# Oregon's adoptee rights initiative, 20 years on

COMMENTARY | The 1997 ballot measure to unseal original birth certificates wasn't about exposing birth parents' secrets; it was about rewriting an archaic statute from an era when illegitimate births were shameful

by **Helen Hill** ([/users/helen-hill](#)) | 17 Nov 2017

Twenty years ago, a rag tag team of political neophytes came together to make Oregon legislative history. In the process, they ignited a firestorm of controversy in Oregon and across the country, challenged decades of secrecy and shame, and unlocked the long sealed birth certificates of thousands of Oregon adult adoptees.

The sealing of adoptees' birth certificates began in the 1950s as a way to protect children born outside of marriage from the stigma of illegitimacy. "Bastard" was often the word stamped across the original certificate that listed the name of the true birth mother and father. An amended certificate was created at the time the child was adopted into a

conventional family. The amended certificate stated the names of the adoptive parents as the true biological parents. The original birth certificate, or OBC, was then deep-sixed in the state archives in Salem to be opened only, and rarely, by court order.

The sealing of the OBCs of illegitimate children was originally intended as a compassionate gesture of protection from a lifelong stigma that could prevent them from marrying, getting a decent job or being accepted in society. Through the years, however, our views of birth outside of marriage have drastically changed. Just over 40 percent of births were to unmarried women in 2015, compared to 5 percent in 1960, [according to National Vital Statistics Reports \(https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr66/nvsr66\\_01.pdf\)](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr66/nvsr66_01.pdf). Even though the disgrace of birth outside marriage has largely diminished (although to this day, the word bastard is still a stinging insult), the birth certificates of adoptees continue to be sealed in most states.

In November 1997, a loosely organized coalition of Oregon “bastards,” birth mothers and adoptive parents (known as the adoption triad) decided to use the initiative process to overturn the Oregon statutes that required the sealing of adoptee’s OBCs, and allow adult adoptees age 21 and older to access them without a court order. I was the chief petitioner for that ballot initiative, which came to be known as Measure 58. I was adopted as an infant; my OBC is still sealed somewhere in Missouri.

There had been many failed attempts nationwide to introduce a bill to open the sealed records of adoptees, but it proved impossible to ask a legislator to carry water on a largely unknown but potentially contentious issue advantageous to so few constituents. The public generally views adoptees’ desire for the OBC as an invasion of the birth mother’s privacy at best; at worst, a ticket to hunt down a defenseless woman and expose a wasp’s nest of secrets that should remain hidden.

For those of us in the early adoptee rights movement, however, the desire for access to the OBC was never about exposing identities or forcing contacts, but about rewriting an archaic statute held over from a repressive era when illegitimate births were shameful. Many of us had long been frustrated with the “pass the Kleenex,” hand-wringing culture of adoption support groups focused on search and reunion and the emotional morass of hit-or-miss registries. Meeting after meeting involved a roomful of discouraged members tearfully lamenting the difficulty of obtaining information. There were a few searchers with smuggled DMV databases and an underground search network of strategically placed clerical moles, but it was expensive, unreliable and, to be honest, humiliating. Why should we have to beg, buy or steal our own vital information, information that is readily available to every other citizen? Why should our true identity be a state secret? Can we not be trusted with our own information? Instead of complaining, it was time to act.

When we formed the political action committee, we decided to take a radical departure from the usual emphasis on the need to know birth facts for medical, emotional and psychological reasons and present the measure as a pure civil rights issue. We were warned this would be a grave mistake, but we persevered, and, in retrospect, I believe this was the reason we succeeded. It was clearly an abrogation of civil rights to deny a class of citizens access to their own vital information based on the circumstances of their birth, but would the voting public see it that way?

All we needed was 120,000 signatures for our simple measure to be placed before the Oregon voters. It seemed doable; it was 1997, the miraculous World Wide Web was brand-new, and there was already a network of triad members connected through this

thing called the internet. We optimistically hoped it would help us assemble an instant statewide army of signature gatherers.

Adoptees and birth mothers had been among the first to recognize the potential of the Web as a tool for matching those searching for each other. With the privatization of the internet in the mid 1990s, triad members seized and filled the ponderous mIRC and HTML chat rooms that were springing up long before Facebook and other social network sites revolutionized how we organize to find each other. Bastard Nation was perhaps one of the earliest activist organizations to form exclusively on the Internet, using the Usenet newsgroup alt.adoption. Those were heady days as we realized the embryonic possibilities of online political activism. It might take three hours to download a song, but sitting in our homes across the country, we could brainstorm strategies at light speed on actions such as mass burnings of amended birth certificates, building solidarity with adoptees in other countries, and framing letters to newspapers and legislators. The process of toppling the closed-record system and ending years of shame and secrecy had begun.

Using the direct route of the initiative system had never been tried before, but it made sense to take the issue out of the hands of reluctant elected representatives and bring it straight to the people. However, we had no idea how much work this would involve. There were the massive piles of signatures, which proved impossible to get on our own steam (we ended up paying for most of our signatures), inscrutable filing rules and regulations, fundraising, publicity and an ad campaign to organize, and, our most difficult challenge, combatting a negative media image.

Once we succeeded in turning in our signatures and were officially on the ballot, print, radio and television media insisted on presenting the issue as a sensational struggle of adoptees hellbent on destroying the privacy of their birth mothers. As the voting deadline drew near, even Gov. “Dr. No” Kitzhaber came out against Measure 58, as did the Oregon Civil Liberties Union, Catholic Charities, numerous adoption agencies and adoption attorneys. The issue seemed to explode overnight, and we were unwittingly, and sometimes unwillingly, placed in the glare of the media spotlight. There was a constant whirlwind of press both in Oregon and across the country and in Europe, as well. Rolling Stone magazine, The New York Times, Newsweek, Time, France’s Le Nouvelle Observateur, Talk of the Nation, The Today Show – it was hard to keep up with the frenzy of interviews. And nearly all wanted to frame the debate as one of birth mother privacy versus adoptees’ desire to know.

The issue was and is much more complex. At stake in a closed record system is not only the falsified history of adoptees and the sexual shaming of birth mothers, but also the collusion of the state in protecting the secrets a long dominant patriarchal structure wishes to hide. Deep-sixing the record of an unwanted pregnancy can absolve responsibility for the man, but it increases the lifelong shame and burden on the woman. What we as adoptees wanted more than anything was an end to the era of shame and secrecy, both for ourselves and for the women who bore us.

The debate grew unexpectedly bitter and dangerous. I received death threats and also anonymous, dark warnings that the Catholic Church would stop at

---

At stake in a closed record system is not only the falsified history of adoptees and the sexual shaming of birth mothers, but also the collusion of the state in protecting the secrets a long dominant patriarchal structure wishes to hide.

nothing to end our effort in order to protect the secret identities of the many “priestly babes,” babies fathered by priests. It was a time for strength and fortitude. In the end, Measure 58 won a convincing 53 percent of the popular vote in the 1998 election, but it took a year and a half of challenges that played out in the Court of Appeals, the Oregon Supreme Court, and all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court until it was finally allowed to go into effect.

As of June 2000, Oregon adoptees age 21 and older have been able to obtain their original birth certificates, with no exceptions. Birth mothers may attach a Contact Preference Form if they wish, stating if they do or do not want contact or if they want contact through an intermediary. As of 2017, there have been 12,512 sealed birth certificates requested; 11,953 have been opened and issued by the Oregon Bureau of Vital Statistics. Sometimes, as in the case of foundlings, there is simply no original birth certificate. There have been 699 Contact Preference Forms submitted by birth mothers. Of these, 575 requested contact, 37 asked for contact through an intermediary, and 87 requested no contact. Since Oregon’s successful Measure 58, seven more states now have open records: Alaska, Alabama, Hawaii, Kansas, Maine, Rhode Island and New Hampshire.

And for all the controversies and dire warnings, it has been peaceful since Measure 58 went into effect. Nearly 12,000 adult adoptees and counting have been restored the civil right to their vital information, and all parties now have the freedom to make their own respectful decisions regarding contact, or no contact, and the nature of their personal relationships without the state in the middle.

That is how a free society works, and it works well that way.

1 Comment

Sort by

Top

Add a comment...



**Jim Ansbro**

Helen Hill - You personify  
The Butterfly Effect. What  
started as a simple  
question in Missouri,  
rippled through Oregon, &  
now OBC's are unsealed  
in N.Y. ; the wave  
continues forward !  
Gratefully Yours - Jim in  
S.F. CA

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 2 · 3w ·  
Edited

Facebook Comments Plugin

# **Peggy Klappenberger\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Klappenberger, Peggy

Position: FAV

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 743

Chairman William Smith  
Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland State Senate  
Annapolis, MD

Chairman Smith,  
Vice Chair Jeff Waldstreicher,  
Members of the committee:

Thank you for hearing testimony today on SB 743 which would allow all adult adoptees access to our Original Birth Certificates.

My name is Peggy Klappenberger and I am an adoptee and a life-long Marylander.

It's not possible to condense into 2 minutes all the ways being adopted and not having access to my information has impacted my life. I don't think we could cover that even if we had all day.

It would be a story filled with embarrassing trips to the doctor's office and being handed back forms because they are 'incomplete' or being told by the doctor in the NICU after my oldest son was born 6 weeks early that I should get my medical history.

There would be stories about having to go to the health department and get a new copy of my amended birth certificate when presenting documents for my real ID because the one I had listed an issue date more than one year after my birth. The new copy, magically, has a different issue date from the copy I had used for most of my life.

Or the other time at the MVA after I had turned 21 and they were skeptical of my amended birth certificate because it doesn't list a hospital and is not signed by a doctor.

Or stories about all the times in school my well intentioned teachers gave us an assignment based on the assumption that we all came from related households. I turned in a genetics assignment one time blank, and it didn't go over well. But it was my truth. I couldn't fill out the Punnett Square.

But perhaps the most important story to tell, is the one when I had gone through the Confidential Intermediary to access my information. I had asked a simple question – in what hospital was I born? A question that likely, any non-adopted person can answer and couldn't imagine not knowing. But there I was, on the phone with a total stranger asking questions about myself. I will never forget how it felt to hear her say "I can't tell you that." It was a gut punch. She sat on the other end of the phone with my file laid out in front of her. I could hear the paper shuffling as she looked through them. She likely had every answer to every question I had ever had, but I was only asking one. And I was denied.



I urge you to vote favorably on SB 743. It past time for Maryland to give adoptees the voice they have been denied in adoption.

Peggy Klappenberger  
Crownsville, MD  
pklappen@gmail.com

# **Ben Knight\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Knight, Ben

Position: FAV

My name is Ben Knight. I was born in Baltimore 63 years ago and adopted by a loving family in Catonsville. I currently live in Harford County and work in Baltimore County. I consider myself a proud son of Maryland. However, I am denied the right to see my original birth certificate (OBC).

The current law in Maryland will grant some adult adoptees the right to see their OBC, but it discriminates against other adult adoptees because of their age. HB1039 and SB0743 would change that. These bills would give all adoptees who are old enough to vote in Maryland the equal right to receive a copy of their OBC. Each adoptee's story begins with a birth. An original birth certificate serves as a record of that moment. It is a treasure to be passed down in a family and treated with respect. It is not a document of shame that must be hidden from view. It is a testament to who we are, the first certificate of our lives, and a part of our heritage as citizens of Maryland.

Adoptees like me deserve to be treated with the same dignity and rights as other citizens. We deserve equality in the law. In your role as Committee Member, please think of the positive effect HB1039 and SB0743 will have on adult adoptees and their families throughout Maryland. I respectfully ask you to improve the current law by voting Yes and supporting the passage of these bills.

Ben Knight  
Harford County  
benknight7@msn.com

# **Ed Knight\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Knight, Ed

Position: FAV

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB1039/SB0743

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Chairman Smith, and Members of the Committees:

I am an adult adoptee and am a Maryland citizen. I support HB1039 and SB0743. I believe that at age 18 adoptees should be able to receive, upon request, a copy of our original birth certificates. This is just a matter of basic civil rights. If Maryland passes such legislation, it will not only be good for adult adoptees in Maryland, but will hopefully influence other states such as Virginia, where I was born and adopted.

When I contacted a lawyer in Virginia about getting my own original birth certificate, the lawyer discouraged me because such petitions are rarely granted. You have to show "good cause". I think to the contrary that it is the government that should have to show "good cause" for denying me the same type of birth certificate that other citizens take for granted. I am an adult tax-paying citizen, but in this one respect the government treats me like a perpetual child. It is very paternalistic and just wrong.

By the way, I have done DNA tests with Ancestry.com and 23&me. Now in Ancestry, I have two family trees, my adoptive tree and my biological tree. I've gotten into genealogy. I found an ancestor who was a Minuteman at the Lexington Alarm. I joined the Sons of the American Revolution. My point is that the laws haven't caught up with modern reality. I found my ancestry, and I enjoy it. Explain to me why it is in my best interest or the best interest of society that adults like me not have access to our original birth certificates? It makes no sense to me.

I respectfully ask that members of the Committees vote Yes on the bills and recommend passage of HB1039 and SB0743.

Sincerely,

Ed Knight  
knighted2@gmail.com



# **Adoptee-Rights-Law-Center\_FAV\_SB0743**

Uploaded by: Luce, Gregory

Position: FAV

**Adoptee Rights Law Center • Gregory D. Luce  
Testimony in Support of SB0743  
Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
February 25, 2020**

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

My name is Gregory Luce. I am an attorney and the founder of Adoptee Rights Law Center, a law firm and nationally-recognized resource on legal issues related to adult adopted people, whether those issues relate to identity documents, original birth certificates, or securing U.S. citizenship. I am also the president of Adoptees United Inc., a national nonprofit organization dedicated to securing equal rights for all adult adopted people. Adoptees United has also submitted a joint letter to this committee from more than 30 organizations and 400 individuals, all in favor of SB0743. I have attached that letter as part of my testimony.

Personally, and on behalf of the Adoptee Rights Law Center and the adopted people I represent, I strongly support enactment of SB0743 and request that you act favorably on the bill. Please report it out as DO PASS from the Judicial Proceedings Committee, without amendment.

Maryland is not unusual in its history of sealing original birth certificates, particularly in cases of adoption and legitimation. First, as in every state, the sealing of pre-adoption birth records was intended to protect adoptive parents, the adoptee, and the newly formed adoptive family. It was not intended to permanently erase a relinquishing parent's name from an adoptee's own birth record.

The process of sealing original birth records started in California in 1935, when Assembly Member Charles Fisher introduced a bill to seal records because "unscrupulous persons have obtained access to the adoption records and have blackmailed the adoptive parents by threatening to tell the adopted child it was adopted." New York followed in 1936, though last year it fully repealed its 83-year-old secrecy law. The District of Columbia and Maryland began sealing pre-adoption birth records in 1937, though court adoption records in Maryland were public until the middle of 1947. Sealing of



pre-adoption birth records continued in other states through the 1940s and 1950s, almost always in response to national scandals involving black market trafficking of children for adoption. The reason for sealing records during this time was consistent and strong: 1) keep records from the public to avoid potential blackmail of the adoptive family; and 2) seal records to secure an adoptee's "legitimate" status within the adoptive family, primarily by preventing any future interference from birthparents. Indeed, when a committee of the US Congress considered this issue in 1954, it reiterated that the purposes of sealing records was to protect:

(1) the adoptive child, from unnecessary separation from his natural parents and from adoption by persons unfit to have such responsibility;

(2) the natural parents, from hurried and abrupt decisions to give up the child; and

(3) the adopting parents, by providing them information about the child and his background, and *protecting them from subsequent disturbance of their relationships with the child by natural parents.*

Pub. Law 392, 68 Stat. 246 (1954)(emphasis supplied). Sealing of a person's own birth certificate was never about enforcing permanent secrecy in a government record by preventing that person—the adoptee—from later obtaining an unaltered copy of the record as an adult.

This was true in Maryland and in most other states (Kansas and Alaska have never made the original birth record unavailable to an adult adoptee). Many other states did not seal original birth records until much later in the century, with Florida doing so in 1977 and Pennsylvania, one of the latest, in 1984. Most states during the middle of the century followed what was then the best practice in creating vital records after an adoption. This was first outlined in 1949-1950 by the country's child welfare and vital records experts, as more fully explained by E. Wayne Carp, one of the foremost scholars on the history of sealed pre-adoption birth records:

There is no evidence that child welfare or public health officials ever intended that issuing new birth certificates to adopted children would prevent them from gaining access to their original one. On the contrary, they specifically recommended that the birth records of adopted children should 'be seen by no one except the adopted person when of age or upon court order.' This policy, which provided adoptees with the right to view their original birth certificate, was staunchly affirmed by [U.S.]

Children's Bureau officials in 1949, who worked out guidelines for a nationwide directive on the confidential nature of birth records with members of the American Association of Registration Executives and the Council on Vital Records and Statistics. They declared that the right to inspect or secure a certified copy of the original birth certificate 'should be restricted to the registrant, if of legal age, or upon court order.'

Carp, E. Wayne, *Family Matters: Secrecy and Disclosure in the History of Adoption*, p. 55 (Harvard University Press: 1998); see also, *The Confidential Nature of Birth Records: Including the Special Registration Problems of Children Born Out of Wedlock, Children of Unknown Parentage, Legitimated Children, and Adopted Children*. Washington, D.C: Children's Bureau and National Office of Vital Statistics, Federal Security Agency, 1949.

Maryland is not alone in its current discriminatory and date-based approach to this issue, which currently limits requests for a pre-adoption birth record to adoptions finalized after January 1, 2000. But it also would not be alone in restoring an unrestricted right for all adult adoptees to obtain their own birth records. Ten other states, including New York, New Hampshire, Alabama, Colorado, Rhode Island, Oregon, Hawai'i, Alaska, Maine, and Kansas, have either restored an unrestricted right for adult adoptees to obtain their own birth record or never restricted that right in the first place (see the attached map with details). That these are diverse states with diverse populations and greatly varied political affiliations speaks directly to how this is a bipartisan and widely supported issue with no general ideological focus. No problems have been reported in these states on any issue, whether related to the impact on adoption in those states or on any other "hot button" social or political issues often used against adoptees who simply seek a basic human right to identity.

It is a mistake to assume that Maryland's sealing of original birth certificates was intended to secure permanent secrecy. This is historically and irrefutably wrong. I understand, solely at an emotional level, the repeated response of "what about birthmother privacy?" I hear it every time I discuss this issue. But privacy is vastly different from secrecy and anonymity, two concepts that are impossible to assure in an era of widespread social media and the availability of inexpensive DNA testing. More significantly, no one is suggesting that Maryland or any other state open their pre-adoption birth records to the public. SB0743 releases the original birth record to the adult adoptee at age 18, if the adoptee feels compelled to request it at all (many adoptees actually do not request an OBC).

Vague and misplaced notions of “privacy” does not justify shifting control over an adoptee’s own birth record to a person who is not the record’s specific registrant. Only conservators, guardians, or parents of minor children typically have control over another person’s birth record, with the notable exception of adopted people, whose records in a number of states are controlled by the government and, for historically inaccurate reasons, subject to permanent parental oversight. We are not minor children, nor are we incapacitated or in need of a guardian to manage our affairs. I, for one, am a 54-year-old father with a wife and two sons, whose own birth record the District of Columbia sealed a year after my birth in 1966, once my adoption by a Silver Spring, Maryland, couple was finalized.

Do the right thing in Maryland. Reject an outdated and misplaced notion of secrecy in adoption. A birth record is the registrant’s own record, to do with however he or she believes is right. Vote DO PASS on SB0743 and restore a right that all Maryland adoptees once had: the right to request and obtain their own pre-adoption birth records, free from government restrictions and alterations, and free from the stigma and humiliation of enforced permanent secrecy.

Best regards,

**ADOPTEE RIGHTS LAW CENTER PLLC**



Gregory D. Luce



February 20, 2020

Chairwoman Nancy Barto  
Health and Human Services Committee  
Arizona House of Representatives

Chairman Luke Clippinger  
Judiciary Committee  
Maryland House of Delegates

Chairman John Lesch  
Judicial Finance and Civil Law Committee  
Minnesota House of Representatives

Co-Chair Steve Cassano  
Planning and Development Committee  
Connecticut Senate

Co-Chair Cristin McCarthy Vahey  
Planning and Development Committee  
Connecticut House of Representatives

Chairman William C. Smith, Jr.  
Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland Senate

Chairman Warren Limmer  
Judiciary and Public Safety Finance and  
Policy Committee  
Minnesota Senate

Speaker Robert A. DeLeo  
Speaker of the House  
Massachusetts House of Representatives

Dear Honorable Chairpersons and Massachusetts House Speaker DeLeo:

We are state and national adoptee rights organizations as well as individuals and allies who are either adoptees themselves or impacted by adoption in a direct way. A bill that will restore a right once provided to all adult adopted people in this country is now pending in your committee or chamber. **Indeed, within a span of 24 hours this week, committees in three different states will hear such bills: Arizona (HB2600), Connecticut (SB113), and Maryland (HB1039).**

It is no coincidence that these bills are making their way through state legislatures across the country, from Maryland, Massachusetts, and Connecticut in the East, Mississippi in the South, Minnesota in the Midwest, and Arizona in the West/Southwest. It is past time for this legislation. It is past time to restore a right **every person** in the United States once had: to request and obtain, as adults, a copy of their own original birth certificate, free from government restrictions and alterations, and free from the stigma and humiliation of enforced permanent secrecy.

These bills are truly bipartisan and have overwhelming support from colleagues and constituents. Primary sponsors of these bills are Republicans, Democrats, liberals,

conservatives, centrists, and libertarians. Yet they have one thing in common: they “get” what it means to have your identity treated like a state secret. They get what it means to be shamed as an adult when others maintain control over your own personal vital record. They get that these bills will positively impact hundreds of thousands of constituents, whether they are adoptees, adoptive parents, birthparents, descendants, or any of the 150 million people impacted by adoption.

Many of the organizations and individuals listed below are already active in your state and working on these bills, and many are separately providing written support or testimony in your upcoming committee hearings. Please listen to these individuals and organizations.

We ask for your strong support for these bills. We ask that you and your colleagues vote to move these bills favorably toward enactment and to do what we have consistently asked of every legislator across the country: #GetItRight and #MakeItEqual. Adopted people deserve no less.

Best regards,

**ADOPTees UNITED INC.**

**AMERICAN ADOPTION CONGRESS**

**CAPITOL COALITION FOR ADOPTEE RIGHTS**

**MARYLAND ADOPTEE RIGHTS**

**ACCESS MARYLAND**

**HERITAGE ARIZONA**

**ACCESS MASSACHUSETTS**

**MINNESOTA COALITION FOR ADOPTION REFORM**

**BASTARD NATION: THE ADOPTEE RIGHTS ORGANIZATION**

**NATIONAL CENTER ON ADOPTION AND PERMANENCY**

**CONCERNED UNITED BIRTH PARENTS**

**ADOPTEE RIGHTS LAW CENTER PLLC**

**ADOPTEES FOR JUSTICE**

**TEXAS ADOPTEE RIGHTS COALITION**

**NEW YORK ADOPTEE RIGHTS COALITION**

**PEOPLE FOR ETHICAL ADOPTION REFORM (PEAR)**

**ADOPTIVE AND FOSTER FAMILY COALITION OF NEW YORK (AFFCNY)**

**POST-ADOPTION CENTER FOR EDUCATION AND RESOURCES (PACER)**

**ADOPTION CONCERNS TRIANGLE**

**MISSOURI OPEN**

**C2ADOPT**

**ADOPTION HEALING, INC.**

**MICHIGAN OPEN ACCESS**

**CALIFORNIA OPEN**

**EQUALITY4ADOPTEES**

**MICHIGAN ADOPTEE COLLABORATIVE**

**NPE FRIENDS FELLOWSHIP**

**THE GOOD ADOPTEE | JMTC THEATRE**

**GREATER CLEVELAND GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY**

**CANADA OPEN**

**ADOPTEE RIGHTS AUSTRALIA INC**

**ADOPTIEZAKEN & FAMILIERECT (NETHERLANDS)**

**INDIVIDUAL ENDORSEMENTS**  
**Adoptees, birthparents, adoptive parents,**  
**and those impacted by adoption**

Peggy Klappenberger  
Peter Moore  
Gregory Luce  
Marilyn Waugh  
Claudia Corrigan D'Arcy  
Arielle Tjandruwati  
Sheryl Tracy  
Pamela J Zaebst  
Marley Greiner  
Rebecca Ricardo  
Jean Uhrich  
Mitzi Saffos  
Shawna Hodgson  
Patricia Glover  
Frances Watts  
Susie Stricker  
Erica Curry Van Ee  
Mona Brant  
Annette O'Connell  
Steven King  
Bob Brader  
Suzanne Bachner  
Brenda Sulliva  
Katherine Howell  
Cara Wall  
Karyn Myers  
Sandy Rogers  
Chynna Luschen  
Crysta Goodman  
Jean Sharpe  
Debbie Ismail  
Katherine Trumbaturi  
Tamber Diefenbach  
Elizabeth Iyalla  
Elizabeth Keller  
Corrine Stadler  
Tamar Silverman

Katherine Zollo  
Jennifer McGinnis  
Stephanie Clinton  
Sue Kindred  
Susan King  
Janine Geddes  
Jennifer Slingluff  
Stephanie Staats  
Patricia Hadfield  
Melissa Wieting  
Martha H  
Patricia Radzik  
Laurie Scott  
Tiana Hawver  
Margaret LyBurtus  
Nancy Schoeggel  
Jane McNulty  
Anthony Morris  
Tina Morris  
Jim Davis  
Patricia Cofield Lynn  
Catherine Pfister  
Adrienne Lusk  
Laura Read  
Nancy Douglas  
Tracy Jordi  
Lynn Jeremiah  
C. A. Taylor  
Roy Wilkinson  
Suzanne McClendon  
Catherine Johnson  
Crystal Center  
Rebecca Bailey  
Judith Pecorino  
Judith Pecorino  
Gretchen Anderson  
Jenny Wiese

Kurt McClearn  
Natalie Musilli  
Devona Thomas  
Emma Breckenridge  
Lori Precious  
Aparajeeta Sridej  
Ruth Almen  
Msgr. David Eugene Hewes, Jr.  
Tina Smith  
Ashley Carroll  
Donn Sharp  
Wendy Jorgenson  
Sandra Shaw  
Michele Newell  
Samantha Lidman  
Kristin Giannantonio  
Ruth Almen  
Carolyn Counterman  
Diane Kucinski  
Christina Reeder  
Dana Springer  
Pamela Tabor  
Susan Congdon  
Donita Dinkens  
Sharon Kelly  
Ruth Sanderson  
Joan Edelman  
Claire Hutt  
Dana Johnson  
Marti Sichel  
Gina DeStefano  
Diana Darrow  
Nora Thapa  
Maureen Mooney  
Lisa Greene  
Ken Holden  
Mary Keon  
Delisha Upshaw  
Katherine Runyon  
Jeri Lea Kroll  
Jennifer Flowers-Key  
Rita Taub  
Betty Holden

John Davis Peticolas  
Agnes Nilsen  
Gillian Moynihan  
Rebecca Salminen Witt  
Donna McGranahan  
Louise Sherman  
Kerry McKendry  
Margaret Duran  
Lauren Sisco  
Maureen Mullaley  
Cassia Oaks  
Lila Garner  
Ardella Cottrill  
Steven Hodgson  
Aimee Seger  
Leigh Emerson  
Raymond Kruse  
Tina Wood  
Heather Wiley  
Roian Baskin  
Mary Zoller Lightner  
Susan Phipps  
Susant Tull  
Amanda Anderson  
Nikki Carlson  
Lavonne Chase  
Sybril Brown  
Amy Bonsall  
Deborah Keys  
Elea Barclay  
Jody Dixon  
Katrina Smalenberg  
Kristin Slaby  
Brenda Thomas Taylor  
Rebecca Townsend  
Carol DeNaro  
Linda Brown  
William Avery  
Carol Green  
Jan Frey  
Becca Fenlon  
Angie Porter  
Jennifer Vroon



Christina Ritter  
Tanisha Bynum-Frazier  
Tammie Fischer  
Virginia Dorris  
David Gulledge  
Jeffrey Curtis  
Julie Davis  
Kelly Dawson  
Robert Donker  
Kelly Donker  
William Pasciotty  
Linda Burke  
Julie Berglund  
Kelley Allison  
Robert Tackett  
Helen Fischer  
Katherine Van Arnum  
Peggy Hortie  
Janey Hall  
Pamela DeCicco  
Dawn Waite  
Justin White  
Denisa LaCombe  
Timothy Davis  
Michele Trotter  
Katherine Sharp  
Malinda Clark  
Summer Lane  
Lynda Hrislyovski  
Kit Axton  
Anne Guillory  
Kathleen Flaherty  
Kim Forcina  
Tammy Houk  
Lorinda Thompson  
Kathryn Johnson  
Holly Lysne  
Jo Shea Maureen George  
Charlene Fenn  
Cathy Hahn  
Lorraine Miller  
Steven Smalenberg  
Debra Gaylor

Sharry Curtis  
Pamela Gregorio  
Steve Tiffany  
Julieann Sylvester  
Pat Lairson  
Susan Bowen  
Susan Grundberg  
Elana Rugh  
Erika Ostern  
Stacie Testerman  
Mary Walsh  
Nickolas Xiros II  
Courtney Humbaugh  
Stacey Little  
Rachel Krohn  
Cynthia Kjerting  
Linda Niehaus  
Nelson Gonzalez  
Angela Swanson-Kyriaco  
Grace Del Real  
Tracy Whitmire  
Carole Wyland  
Susan Watkins  
Brenda Inns  
Wendy Belcourt  
Linda Moss  
Jemma Sullivan  
Donna Turner  
Christina Baxter Perry  
Brenda Schmitt  
Judith Bassett  
Christine Zende  
Deborah Hawrylynko  
Amy Ball  
Laurie McCracken  
Crystal Jackson  
Richard Kozik  
Sarah Rissolo  
Hart Theopheles  
Dawn Carpenter  
Paul Valles  
Melody Nordvik  
Lori Drozd

Eileen Mertens  
Kimberly Theurer  
Lisa Bodell  
Jamie Weiss  
Lisa Lauderback  
Tiffany Baran  
Anne Genovese  
Gigi Coppola  
Kelly Gallagher  
Michael Whybark  
Dottie Hand  
Suzanne Baker  
Richard D. Slaughter  
Keith Sciarillo  
Yolanda Sanders  
David Stennes  
Mary Stennes  
Susan Kettel  
Michele Benson  
Robyn Sesso Sheffield  
Brenda Guevara  
Elise Lewis  
Pamela Lynn  
Lydia Hellrich-Dawson  
Kaye Pearse  
Mary Sisco  
Nancy M. Thompson  
Terri Miller  
Gregory D. Luce  
Noelle Lightbourne  
Chiara Ryder  
Carol Fox  
Deborah Engisch-Platt  
Sheri Hennings  
Donna Taylor  
Vicky Mazza  
William Brown  
Mary Newman  
Natalie Casey  
Rhonda Dodd  
Michele Galante  
Amy Dalton  
Catherine Leffew

Kimberly Vargas Agnese  
Barbara Crank  
Carroll Ann Swanson  
Susan Ortiz  
Sara Jappinen  
Ilanthe Mauro  
Cheryl Keckritz  
Elizabeth Ellis  
Mike Shinko  
Marlys Bruley  
Meredith Goode  
Travis Buster  
Michele Dalier  
Heather Resto  
Sally Foster  
Jennifer Lovett  
Wendy Gronemeyer  
Ashley Hoven  
Karri Baker  
Carol Brothers  
Christine Geraczynski  
Patty O'Gorman  
Janelle Humphreys  
Meredith Porter  
Tara Landis  
Sage Goodman  
Tracy Roche  
Winona Abrams  
Kristopher Larsen  
Ted Price  
Kathleen Kelly  
Eileen Rotolo  
Brenda Lasher  
Kimberly Penrod  
Rebekah Henson  
Susan Sullivan  
Deborah Vaughan  
Holly Harken  
Michelle Fort  
Kristina Fletcher  
Glenda Bennett  
Peter Hamilton  
Valerie David

Betsy Ickes  
Jennifer Craig  
Judith Ann McCann  
Joseph Soll  
Becky Hollenback  
Laurel Heiser  
Emily Johnson  
Christine Studenroth  
Pamela Marsanskis  
Maria Eriksson  
Eryn McEwan Seavey  
Christina Peters  
Emily Brown  
Anne Serapiglia  
Lesley Harvey  
Brandy Hoot  
Pamela Perry  
Laura Sams  
Suzanne Shirazi  
Laura Greenfield  
Linda Kurtz  
Rachel Demeny  
Stephanie Thomas  
Megan Clark  
Laura Kaiser  
Mary Jamba  
Benjamin Eichert  
Jennifer Matthews  
Karen Henson  
Mirren Theiding  
Janet Mancini  
Gina Kohn  
Lorrie Wyatt  
Michelle St. Amant  
Janet Sipe  
Karen Hall  
Hargis Pennington  
Maureen Palahach  
Erika Baadte  
Shannon Raybuck  
Annette Meister  
Kate Barnes  
Julie Schneider

Ashley Kjellson  
Nikki Baldwin  
Michael Grenfell  
Tj.W. Strubbe  
Kristin Kjellson  
Carmen Uzelac  
Kelly Crist  
Heather Smith  
Sarah Sanfilippo  
Beth Frank  
Dianne Gundlach  
Mary Jo Daniel  
Etta Lappen Davis  
Nikki Kalthof  
Loretta Stolarz  
Yvonne Brennan  
Candace Wazny  
Marla Meislin  
Kathleen Snuffer  
Greg Kalthof  
Katy Puccio  
Anna Wollenzin  
Brenda Daniel

# **Adrienne Lusk\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Lusk, Adrienne

Position: FAV

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101 Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: HB1039/SB0743**

Dear Chairman Clippinger and Chairman Smith:

Advocates have been working on equal rights legislation in Texas and across the country for more than 50 years, going back at least to Jean Paton and Florence Fisher, considered two of the founders of the adoptee rights movement in the early 1970s. Like other states, Texas sealed and made adoptees' original birth certificates unavailable in the 1950s as a way to protect the adoptee and the adoptive family from outside interference.

Despite recent efforts in the Texas legislature to restore a right that had existed since statehood—including nearly unanimous support for a measure four years ago—Texas failed again to advance a bill to the governor this past session.

Do not let Maryland fail adoptees as Texas did in 2019. Sincerely,

Adrienne Lusk  
Austin, Texas  
adrienne.lusk@gmail.com

# **Robin Luxemburg\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Luxemburg, Robin

Position: FAV

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB1039/SB0743

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Chairman Smith, and Members of the Committees:

My best friend spent her whole life (50 years) with unanswered questions about her birth parents. She finally learned who they were, her history, and her original birth name. She met her birth parents. Got written permission from both mother and father to open her birth records. She was hit with a roadblock. Although they could tell her she had letters and photos in a file, she's not allowed to see them. Even though both parents have okayed it, she can't see papers that are her personal records. Hospital, foster-care, original unedited birth certificates, etc. Even Carfax allows you to look at a car's total history no matter where it was owned. A human life is not owned by its parents. Babies should not be sold to parents like merchandise, with promises of anonymity. Adoptees should have the right to know everything they can about their heritage, medical history, and birth.

With DNA testing, it's only a matter of time before nothing is secret and wouldn't it be better for things to be above board in the first place? Let's open the records please.

Robin Luxenburg  
Harwood, Maryland  
Luxenbubbles@gmail.com

# **Margaret Susan Hoffman LyBurtus\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: LyBurtis, Margaret

Position: FAV



Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB1039/SB0743

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Chairman Smith, and Members of the Committees:

As a mother to a child surrendered to adoption in 1966 and having been involved in adoption issues since 1990 I can assure you that most birthparents are hoping to know the fate of their children and want them to have access to their medical information and their family. The baby scoop era caused many children to be surrendered because these mothers were given no choices. They were not promised confidentiality. They also never received anything that they signed.

It is time to lift the secrecy for all those adopted in the United States. The truth will set them free. It is high time that every American have access to their information.

I urge you to please support this bill #HB1039 and SB0743 for equal access for those adopted in your state.

Margaret Susan Hoffman LyBurtus  
Bakersfield, California  
mlyburtus@gmail.com

# **Richard Maio\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Maio, Richard

Position: FAV

My name is Richard Maio and I am here to testify in support of HB 1039 and SB 743. My wife, Anne, and I are the proud parents of an adopted daughter, Peggy, who was born in 1971 and came into our home when she was five and a half months old. We have a marvelous relationship with her, her husband and their two sons. Peggy (now 48) has always been a cherished gift in our life.

I support this bill because I believe adoptees should have the right to know their heritage through their birth certificate. The current law (passed in 2000) allows for an intermediary of the state to work toward contact for adoptions that took place prior to 1-1-2000. This is appropriate when each party wants contact. But if the adopted person wants contact and the mother does not want contact, then an adoptee, whose adoption was finalized prior to 2000, has no avenue available for seeking birth records.

Access to these birth records should be a right of ANY adopted person. In reading over the current proposed legislation I feel the age of consent should remain 21 and not be changed to 18 as indicated. I don't feel that an 18 year old should have access to this document because they are not mature enough to understand its content and implications that it contains.

Thank you for considering my opinion on these bills and I urge you to work toward the passage of this bill with the single change as noted.

Richard A. Maio  
25 Warehouse Creek Lane  
Edgewater, Maryland 21037  
410 956-5099

# **Simone Martinez\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Martinez, Simone

Position: FAV

I, Simone Martinez (Silver), support Maryland HB 1039 & SB 0743 and I urge you to vote in favor of this bill. I am 62 years old, born and raised in Maryland. I am also an adoptee that was born on 4/10/1957 in Baltimore City.

I was fortunate enough to have wonderful loving adoptive parents and extended family but have always wondered about my heritage and bio family. About five years ago I did my DNA with Ancestry, My Heritage and Gedmatch and have recently been in contact with second and third cousins that have been sweet and kind to me but unfortunately no one closer in DNA. I strongly believe that I and other adoptees over the age of 18 should have non-restrictive access to our original birth certificates as a matter of our civil rights and equality. Thank you for the opportunity to share my views and personal story.

Simone Martinez  
Howard County, Maryland  
martinez.si@verizon.net

# **Jenni McGinnis\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: McGinnis, Jenni

Position: FAV

To whom it may concern:

I am writing in support of Maryland HB1039 and SB0743. I am a current Maryland resident, but I was born in New York, which is a state that recently opened records. I am currently waiting to receive my OBC.

Two years ago I was unable to obtain it, just as Maryland adoptees are currently unable to. So I had to submit my DNA to 23&me, giving up significant privacy to obtain answers about my ethnicity and biological family. I was able to locate them through DNA, but my half brother was the person I connected to. Thankfully he had been told of my existence so it wasn't a total shock.

By the time I located my bio family, my bio father had already passed, so I was denied the opportunity to meet him. This would not have been the case if records were open. Adoptees deserve the same rights to know who we are and where we came from as anyone else. Please give Maryland adoptees the same right I now enjoy as a New York adoptee.

Thank you for your time.

Jenni McGinnis  
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20879  
Jennimcg819@yahoo.com

# **Stephanie Mendoza\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Mendoza, Stephanie

Position: FAV



Hello!

My name is Stephanie Mendoza and I was born in Baltimore, MD, in July of 1961. Although that is not my original name, I have no access to that information because I was adopted under Maryland's strict closed adoption laws. Even though I am a law-abiding, productive citizen, who is nearing her retirement, I do not have the right to access basic information concerning my history.

Having pursued DNA testing, I did discover that genetically I am 50% Ashkenazi Jewish. I wish that I had this information as an 18 year-old. Now, I am struggling to learn all I can of my heritage. My 3 daughters have also been deprived of a truthful history.

In my opinion, as adults, we should have access to our legal paperwork. I urge you, please pass this legislation to give us (adoptees) the right to pursue our valid histories. Thank you.

Most sincerely,

Stephanie Mendoza  
Topeka, Kansas  
Ladybugz61@cox.net

# **Mary Newman\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Newman, Mary

Position: FAV

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101 Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: HB1039/SB0743**

Dear Chairman Clippinger and Chairman Smith:

I urge lawmakers to pass the bill allowing adoptees access to their original birth certificates. I think adoptees are discriminated against by not allowing them access to their biological information. I can't imagine going to the doctor and have to leave blank space for family medical history. I can't imagine having a conversation with a group of friends discussing their ancestors' roots and not being able to join in. I cannot think of a more basic right than your own birth certificate!

Thank you for considering this bill and I hope your heart tells you it's the right thing to do.  
Sincerely,

Mary Newman  
Baltimore, Maryland  
maryjnewman@verizon.net

# **Melody Nordvik\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Nordvik, Melody

Position: FAV

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101 Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr. Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Maryland  
General Assembly Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB1039/SB0743

February 15, 2020

Dear Honorable Members of the Children & Family Law Committee:

My name is Melody Nordvik and I am a Seattle, WA born and adopted person. I have lived in Prince George's County Maryland for the last 48 years. I care deeply about changing our State's long standing discrimination against adoptees in accessing their Original Birth Certificate. A right should be inclusive to Everyone. Regardless of their adoptive status.

I ask each of you to consider what it's like to be a Maryland adoptee wanting to know your historical, genetic, and legal identity. How many of you OR your non-adopted constituents would agree to having to justify to judges, agency social workers, and vital records clerks why you have a desire to know your own origins?

I found my birth mother and extended family long before Washington State open records. I used DNA testing to learn the identity of my birth father. I can attest to you that there is no longer forever secret adoptions. But, I will also tell you that DNA search methodology left me in a position of divulging private and sensitive info to 2nd, 3rd and 4th cousins. It would have been much easier to protect my Fathers confidentiality by having direct contact with my birth father.

I respectfully ask members of this Committees vote Yes on the bills and recommend passage of HB1039 and SB0743.

Sincerely,

Melody Nordvik  
13029 Martin Road  
Brandywine, MD 20613 (301) 873-1291  
mn125@aol.com

**Kate O'Connor\_Fav\_SB0734**

Uploaded by: O'Connor, Kate

Position: FAV

SENATE BILL 0743  
Adoption - Access to Original Birth Certificates

SUPPORT

Submitted by  
Kate O'Connor - Birthmother  
February 25, 2020

There are many reasons why I support SB 0743 that will provide adoptees access to their original birth certificates, should they need one or want one. Today there is a minority of the population that is denied that access and in my opinion that this denial is not only discriminatory, but is also a violation of human rights. The group being discriminated against is those who were born in Maryland and at some time later were legally adopted. Those individuals, the adoptees, had no voice nor counsel during the adoption process. Consequently, those persons born in Maryland and then later adopted have been denied knowledge of their true identity, heritage and even the basic information regarding their birth that we, the non-adopted, find not only interesting but important. Most adopted persons are denied any personal information about themselves, i.e., place of birth, time of birth, weight, length, and even their given name.

One might question why adoptees want their original birth certificates. Besides what is listed above, the main reason is because it is the official record of their birth, the beginning of their story, the validity of their identity. It is the record of who they were before adoption. It is theirs, not mine, not yours, and it should be theirs to have.

I urge you to carefully consider what we are asking for: equal access to original birth certificates for all persons born in Maryland.

Respectfully submitted,

Kate O'Connor  
4 Mast Court  
Ocean Pines, MD 21811

ACCESS MARYLAND

**Adam\_Pertman\_NCAP\_FAV\_SB0743**

Uploaded by: Pertman, Adam

Position: FAV





February 17, 2020

*Written comments regarding HB 1039/SB0743, respectfully submitted by Adam Pertman, President and CEO of the National Center on Adoption and Permanency, a Massachusetts-based nonprofit organization:*

First, thank you for reviewing my comments, which are based on research, professional experience and accepted/emerging best practices. The issue you are examining is far more important than most people perceive it to be, both in practical terms for those directly affected – I refer here to both adopted people and first/birth parents – and symbolically, because we keep secrets about things we are ashamed of or embarrassed about. So, when we seal birth certificates, we send the clear signal that adoption is somehow a lesser way to form a family, because it has something to hide.

Thank God, we are leaving behind the period of our history in which people actually believed that was true, a period in which adoption was a shadowy secret, in which we denigrated nearly everyone touched by this wondrous institution, in which we even turned the words “you’re adopted” into an insult. My children (both adopted) are not an insult, and neither are anyone else’s, regardless of when they were born. But some remnants of those dark days remain, and limited access to birth certificates are one such remnant.

It is also difficult to learn much about secrets. As a result, many myths, misconceptions and stereotypes have come to be believed. The National Center on Adoption and Permanency (NCAP), which I am proud to head, has no formal ties with any interest group. It is an independent, nonpartisan, not-for-profit education organization that was created for one principal reason: to improve laws, policies and practices – based on the best available research and experience – so that they empower children and their families to succeed. Providing accurate information to policymakers is one way NCAP furthers its mission.

I’d like to start by offering an obvious observation: The critics of restoring the right of all adopted people to access their original birth certificates warn that doing so could set off an array of dire consequences – from ruined lives, to increased abortions, to fewer adoptions. Whether the critics are right is no longer the subject of conjecture or speculation. None of those negative outcomes have occurred in any of the numerous states that have updated their laws, or in Kansas and Alaska, which never sealed their OBCs.

So now we can see what calamities might transpire as a result, and the answer is “none.” The newspapers in those very diverse states – from Alabama to New Hampshire to Tennessee to Ohio – contain no horror stories. Furthermore, the statistics show no inkling of increased abortions or decreased adoptions.

All of this information, and far more, is contained in two comprehensive, research-based reports issued by the Donaldson Adoption Institute, of which I am Executive Director Emeritus. They are entitled “For the Records I” and “For the Records II” and I can provide copies of either or both on request.

Viscerally appealing arguments can be made by anyone, on any subject. Compelling anecdotes and singular experiences can be produced by any side, in any argument. So, to form the best possible policies, it is vital that we examine real evidence, solid research, and broad-based knowledge. Here, in bullet form, are a few things we do indeed know from hard data, widely accepted studies, or pervasive experience.

- Adoption-related records were sealed to protect adoptees from the stigma of illegitimacy and prevent first/birth mothers from trying to see their children again; some social workers also personally wanted to protect biological mothers from the stigma/shame of unwed motherhood. The clear legislative intent was to prevent access to those records by the public, not by the parties to an adoption themselves. Historically, the notion that birth certificates were sealed to ensure the anonymity/privacy of birth mothers is untrue, irrespective of whether providing anonymity/privacy is a good idea or not.
- Adopted persons are not stalkers, ingrates or children searching for new parents. They are simply adults who want the same information the rest of us receive as a birthright. In his book “Roots,” Alex Haley wrote: “In all of us there is a hunger, marrow deep, to know our heritage, to know who we are and where we have come from. Without this enriching knowledge, there is a hollow yearning; no matter what our attainments in life, there is the most disquieting loneliness.” Research, experience and instinct all affirm Haley’s eloquent observation. And adopted people are not exempt from the laws of nature. They love their adoptive parents, but virtually all want to know about their roots.
- Adopted adults may or may not form relationships with their biological kin; that choice is up to them, and I believe it should not be government’s role to decide for them. Moreover, many if not most adult adoptees do not make contact; for them, just having the most basic information about themselves makes them feel whole and equal. Access to adoption records is now a separate issue from “search” anyway because the internet, social media and DNA testing enable most adoptees who want to find their birth relatives to do so without their original birth certificates.
- Every study I am aware of relating to whether birth/first mothers want anonymity/privacy clearly shows the vast majority do not; that applies to those who were verbally assured of anonymity as well as those who were verbally assured they would one day have contact with the children they bore; yes, many were promised exactly the opposite of anonymity, but those promises are seldom discussed. Depending on the study, between 90 percent and 95 percent of birth mothers do indeed want some level of information or contact with the lives they created. It is also highly significant that only a tiny percentage have said “no” to the release of OBCs in any state that has unsealed them.

During my tenure leading the Donaldson Institute, I am proud to have instigated the most comprehensive birthparent study to date, titled “Safeguarding the Rights and Well-Being of Birthparents in the Adoption Process.” I can provide copies upon request. Even among those who truly thought they wanted anonymity at the time of placement, the majority eventually change their minds. Few of us, after all, would want to live forever with decisions we made at the age of 17, or even 25. Yet the core argument against allowing OBC access is predicated on the mistaken belief that birthmothers are of one mind – and it will never change.

This is not only a critical misunderstanding of research and experience, on a human level it assumes a woman can carry a child, part with it and just “move on.” That view – essentially relegating women to the role of baby-making machines – pervaded adoption for generations. Thank God, it is changing radically and adoption practices are being reshaped in comprehensive ways as a result. The bottom line is that birth certificates remain sealed in much of the U.S. because of lingering myths and mistaken stereotypes.

I respectfully ask you to put aside the aberrational anecdotes, emotional appeals, and corrosive myths on which too much public policy relating to adoption has been based for far too long. Instead, please examine the research that has been conducted and the experience of states across the U.S. I believe, after you do, you will come to the conclusion that the gap in Maryland law needs to be filled. Please feel free to contact me at 617-332-8944 or [apertman@ncap-us.org](mailto:apertman@ncap-us.org) if you have any questions or want more information.

With gratitude for your attention and important work,



Adam Pertman, President and CEO, National Center on Adoption and Permanency

# **MD NARAL\_FAV\_SB743**

Uploaded by: philip, diana

Position: FAV



## **SB0743 - Access to Birth and Adoption Records and Search, Contact, and Reunion Services**

Presented to the Honorable Will Smith and Members of Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 25, 2020 12:00 p.m.

---

### **POSITION: SUPPORT**

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee a favorable report on SB0743 - Access to Birth and Adoption Records and Search, Contact, and Reunion Services**, sponsored by Senator Susan Lee.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. Adoption provides birth parents with an alternative to parenting and in turn provides adoptive parents with an alternative to pregnancy and childbirth. To ensure that adoptees have full access to personal information about their health and family health history, we must expand adoptees' rights to include access to their original birth certificate. NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland believes that expanding adoptees' rights is a reproductive justice issue.

Though adoption can be a healthy option for all parties involved, attitudes surrounding adoption are often ones of secrecy and shame. These harmful attitudes are misguided. Open adoption—a form of adoption which allows birth parent(s) to have contact with adoptive parent(s) and the child—has numerous benefits for everyone involved. While open adoptions still legally give permanent rights and responsibilities to adoptive parents, adoptive parents in these situations can work with birth parents to determine what type and amount of contact with the adoptee is best for the child and family.<sup>1</sup> Further, like non-adopted children, adoptees should have the opportunity to learn about their birth families and ancestry, both of which are important to an individual's identity formation.<sup>2</sup> However, closed adoptions mandate that adoptees in Maryland cannot access their original birth certificate, and instead receive an amended birth certificate with their adoptive parents' names listed as the birth parents.<sup>3</sup> This provides adoptees with inaccurate information regarding their ancestry and prohibits adoptees from accessing important information about their birth family's health history. Restricting adoptees' access to such information inhibits their ability to learn about potential health concerns and to discuss such concerns with medical care providers.

SB0743 will ensure adoptees in Maryland receive the same access to basic information about themselves as Marylanders who were raised by their birth parents. The legislation calls for the creation of a contact preference form for both the biological parent as well as the adoptee, setting the parameters of that contact. If allowed knowledge of and contact with birth parents, or certain kin if the parents are deceased, adoptees as young as 18 years of age can learn about their origins during a critical time of personal identity formation. Like any other individual, adoptees have a right to know about their own personal and medical histories. Adoptee justice is reproductive justice. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on SB0743**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

---

<sup>1</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway, and Office of Population Affairs. "Open Adoption: Could Open Adoption be the Best Choice for You and Your Baby?" PDF. Washington, D.C., n.d. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/openadoption.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> NJCARE. "History - Open Records Bill for Adoptees." NJCARE: New Jersey Coalition for Adoption Reform & Education, July 5, 2016. <http://www.nj-care.org/bill-history/>.

<sup>3</sup> "Linda Clausen: Maryland Must Change Its Adoption Laws to Allow Access to Birth Certificates." Capital Gazette, January 5, 2020. <https://www.capitalgazette.com/opinion/columns/ac-ce-column-clausen-20200105-qngkzngobfd6de4it6xeti24yy-story.html>.

**Leni Preston\_FAV\_SB743**

Uploaded by: PRESTON, LENI

Position: FAV

*Leni Preston  
Independent Consumer Voice on Health Policy  
6306 Swords Way, Bethesda, MD 20817  
Email: lenipreston@verizon.net; Cell: 301.351.9381*

**SUPPORT**

Senate Bill 743: Adoption - Access to Birth and Adoption Records and Search, Contact, and Reunion Services

Judicial Proceedings Committee

25 February 2020

-----  
I appreciate the opportunity, as both an adoptee and birth mother, to provide testimony on HB1039 - Adoption - Access to Birth and Adoption Records and Search, Contact, and Reunion Services. As both an adoptee and birth mother, I bring a personal perspective on the importance of this legislation. And, it is uniquely valuable for those "innocent" individuals, the adoptees, who through an accident of birth are denied the most fundamental information on their origins. It is they who bear the greatest burden by being denied access to their birth and adoption records. The implications for their physical and mental health should be obvious and these are layered upon years of uncertainty about one's very identity.

In my own case, I was adopted in the District of Columbia in 1948 and it was not until 2006 that I was able, after three court filings, to locate both of my birth families. By then both of my birth had died. However, thanks to my half-siblings, I now have health histories to share with both of my daughters - the elder who was adopted and worried about her own children's health and my younger daughter who hopes to be a parent soon.

After 58 years of uncertainty, I now have not only my health history, but I also see reflected in the mirror, my mother's eyebrows and my father's smile. What I can't see, however, are either my birth certificate or adoption records. During the 18 months it took to complete my search process, my adoption file was placed beyond my reach on the desk in front of me. Tidbits of information were shared, but I could not to read it for myself. And, when the D.C. adoption agency "closed out" my case, that file went back under court seal. Only a law like HB1039 would make it possible for me to access my own records. You have the opportunity to make this a reality for all those fortunate enough to be born in Maryland.

In November 2019, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed legislation in New York that "set adoptees' birth certificates free<sup>1</sup>." At the time he correctly captured the importance of the fundamental tenet of HB1039 when he said, "Where you came from informs who you are, and every New Yorker deserves access to the same birth records — it's a basic human right..."

No matter where we live, we all have a fundamental right to know the full story of our lives and to understand the image reflected in the mirror. With that I urge a favorable report on House Bill 1039.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Chronicle of Social Change, November 19, 2019 - <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/adoption/new-york-adoptee-birth-certificates/39220>

**Raskin\_FAV\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Raskin, Rep. Jamie

Position: FAV



HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

VICE CHAIR, SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSTITUTION,  
CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ANTITRUST, COMMERCIAL  
AND ADMINISTRATIVE LAW

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RULES



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT  
AND REFORM

CHAIR, SUBCOMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS  
AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION  
VICE CHAIR

JAMIE RASKIN  
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES  
8TH DISTRICT, MARYLAND

February 24, 2020

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East Wing  
11 Bladen St.,  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Jeffrey D. Waldstreicher  
Vice-Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East Wing  
11 Bladen St.,  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401


Dear Chairman Smith and Vice Chair Waldstreicher,

I write to express my strong support for Senate Bill 743, Adoption – Access to Birth and Adoption Records and Search, Contact, and Reunion Services, which has been introduced by Senator Susan C. Lee. This significant piece of legislation would provide all Maryland adult adoptees the right to obtain a copy of their original birth certificate and adoption records.

For many of my constituents who are adult adoptees, obtaining their original birth certificate is important to achieving a complete understanding of their identity, their history, their medical makeup, and their family tree. At the same time, this is also an important piece of legislation for constituents seeking answers regarding their citizenship. As it stands, constituents with pressing questions about their identity must seek a court order to obtain their original birth certificate, which can be a difficult and protracted process. In other cases, constituents resort to online DNA services that raise serious privacy concerns and do not provide the government documentation that is most important.

This was a problem I regretted leaving Annapolis before seeing a relevant solution emerge, so I respectfully ask that the Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee give all due consideration to SB 743. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Martha Sanchez of my staff at 202-225-5341 or at [martha.sanchez@mail.house.gov](mailto:martha.sanchez@mail.house.gov).

Yours truly,

  
Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress



# **Christina Ritter\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Ritter, Christina

Position: FAV

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: SB0743**

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee:

As you sit in this room, you may consider the privileges life has afforded you. Whether that be the ability to have access to good food, an education, or a job. But there is one type of privilege that goes unspoken. It is non-adoptee, or biological identity privilege. **I am a Maryland adoptee. I was born in Baltimore, Maryland.** Or, so it states on my amended birth certificate provided to me six years after my birth through adoption. It may seem small but I have come to know this information is inaccurate. Yet, denied any basic information about my life, I held onto any minute detail and built my whole life story around it. Much of what I was given to serve as the foundation for my life was inaccurate, and I felt as though I was living a lie my entire life. The details are not mine. To experience this is to feel as though the government has no respect for my identity as a person. I do not matter to this country.

As an adult I was able to take a DNA test. Thanks to science, the human right to know my identity has been provided to me. Sites like Ancestry and 23 and Me allow for adoptees to connect with people we know are our genetic relatives. However, without our original birth certificate we are still not made whole. It is dehumanizing to have to spend hundreds of dollars and endless hours trying to connect the dots. Throughout this process, we are treated as criminals for a crime we did not commit, and an agreement we had no legal decision over.

The adoptee experience is not something that can be fully comprehended by those who have not lived it. We are humans, like non-adoptees, who deserve equal rights as protected by this country. It is time Maryland remove antiquated restrictions and allow adoptees their original birth certificate. While society tends to infantilize the adoptee, we do not remain children our entire lives. At 18, we are deserving of all information that is rightfully ours. I ask that you bring our country into modern times and vote 'yes' on SB0743.

Thank you,  
Christina Ritter  
Maryland Adoptee  
christina-ritter@hotmail.com

# **Katherine Runyon\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Runyon, Katherine

Position: FAV

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman House Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101 Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: HB1039/SB0743**

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Chairman Smith, and Members of the Committees:

**I was adopted in Montgomery County, Maryland when I was six years old in 1984.** I was lucky that my adoptive parents wanted an older child and not a baby but it also meant that I was old enough to understand what was happening with my biological parents giving me up and the adoption process in general.

I've known and communicated with both of my biological parents for over 20 years but still the state of Maryland says that I don't have the right to my adoption records, specifically my original birth certificate. This document may seem like just a piece of paper, but it represents so much more to adoptees. These are the only records of my birth and circumstances surrounding my placement in foster care and subsequent adoption. My original birth certificate is the only indication of the name given to me at birth and the only documentation of who my biological parents were.

I respectfully ask that the members of the committees vote yes on these bills and recommend passing HB1039 and SB0743 and grant adoptees their basic civil right to know where they came from.

Thank you.

Katherine Runyon  
Conway, South Carolina  
beachkat1977@yahoo.com

# **Elizabeth Samuels\_FAV\_SB743**

Uploaded by: samuels, elizabeth

Position: FAV

Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
February 21, 2020

Elizabeth J. Samuels  
Professor of Law  
University of Baltimore School of Law  
1420 North Charles Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201-5779  
esamuels@ubalt.edu

**RE: Support for Senate Bill 0743**

Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I write in support of Senate Bill 0743, the adoptees' rights bill. I am a professor at the University of Baltimore School of Law, where the subjects I have taught include constitutional law and family law. Since the 1990s much of my research and writing has focused on adoption law, including the history and current state of the law governing adoption records. Citations to this work are provided below.

In summary:

With this Act, the State can join the steadily increasing number of states that have successfully restored the right of adult adoptees to access original birth certificates.<sup>1</sup> The lawmakers in these states have recognized what an accurate history of adoption records demonstrates: birth parents have never been guaranteed lifelong anonymity by federal or state constitutions or state laws.

Birth mothers during the last century were not given a choice about whether to remain forever unknown to their children. To the contrary, they neither retained nor received any rights. Records were closed to protect adoptive families. Birth mothers understood, and commonly promised in writing, that *they* were not to seek information about their children. When birth mothers desired confidentiality, it was to conceal their pregnancies either from their families or their communities, not to conceal their identities forever from their children or to deny themselves any chance of learning how their children fared in life.

That history is consistent with today's realities. Openness is now the norm in domestic infant adoption; birth parents are more open to placing their children *if* there will be some degree of openness. Studies and surveys conducted since the 1980s show that overwhelmingly large majorities of birth parents, up to 95 percent and above approve of access and are open to various kinds of contact with their children. Many birth parents as well as adult adoptees spend years, and considerable sums of money, searching for information about one another. Many of them are successful in their searches, as countless media stories attest. More and more are finding family connections in popular DNA databases. But many adult adoptees remain frustrated because they lack access to their original birth certificates.

In greater detail:

**1. There is no guarantee of lifelong anonymity for birth parents.**

As federal and state courts found in cases challenging restored access, lifelong anonymity has not been guaranteed by federal or state constitutions or by state laws sealing court and birth records. And confidentiality has not been promised in the agreements that birth mothers entered into when they surrendered their children for adoption. Adoption records have been accessible by court order without notice to birth parents. It has typically been up to the adoptive parents, not the birth parents, whether to change the child's name (and often

---

<sup>1</sup> Two states, Alaska and Kansas, have never denied adult adoptees access to original birth certificates. Access for all adult adoptees has been restored in ten states: Alabama, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Oregon, and Rhode Island. Access for most adult adoptees has been restored in ten states: Arkansas, Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, New Jersey, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Washington.

even whether to have an amended birth certificate issued). In many adoptions, the adoptive parents received copies of documents with identifying information about the birth mother.

When the first two states restored access for adult adoptees -- Tennessee and Oregon -- their laws were unsuccessfully challenged in the courts. The Oregon courts held that under state and federal constitutions, restoring access neither unconstitutionally impairs the obligation of contract nor invades a guaranteed privacy right. Oregon's adoption laws never "prevented all dissemination of information concerning the identities of birth mothers. At no time in Oregon's history have the adoption laws required the consent of, or even notice to, a birth mother on the opening of adoption records or sealed birth certificates." A birth mother does not have "a fundamental right to give birth to a child and then have someone else assume legal responsibility for that child .... Adoption necessarily involves a child that already has been born, and a birth is, and historically has been, essentially a public event."

Opponents of the Tennessee law argued unsuccessfully in federal court that the law violates constitutional rights of birth mothers to familial privacy, reproductive privacy, and the non-disclosure of private information. In subsequent state court litigation, the Tennessee Supreme Court upheld the statute, deciding under the state constitution that the law neither impaired birth mothers' vested rights nor violated their right to privacy. The court noted that early state law did not require sealing records, and that later law permitted disclosure upon "a judicial finding that disclosure was in the best interest of the adopted person and the public" with no requirement that birth parents be notified or have an opportunity to veto contact. The court found that "[t]here simply has never been an absolute guarantee or even a reasonable expectation by the birth parent" that records would never be opened.<sup>2</sup>

## **2. Choices were not offered to birth parents, and promises were not made to them in surrender documents.**

Opponents of adult adoptee access to original birth certificates have never produced a copy of a document that promises a birth mother even confidentiality on the part of the agency. This fact inspired me to investigate what the surrender agreements did provide. I collected documents from birth mothers who had been given copies of the documents they signed; many birth mothers were not. I analyzed 77 documents signed by birth mothers from the late 1930s to 1990, the date the last state passed a law denying access to adult adoptees. These documents' provisions are similar from decade to decade and from state to state.

The birth mother surrenders all of her parental rights and is relieved of all of her parental obligations. She does not retain or receive any rights. While an adoption of the child is an aim of the surrender, there is no promise that the child will be adopted. Many documents spell out the possible alternatives of foster care or institutionalization. The birth mother has no right to notice of any future proceeding and therefore will never know if the child is successfully adopted. If the child is not adopted, there will be no amended birth certificate.

None of the documents promise the birth mother confidentiality or lifelong anonymity, the latter of which an agency of course could not guarantee. Responsible adoption services providers have known at least since the 1970s that adoption experts increasingly supported adult adoptee access to information and that legislative efforts were underway to restore access in those states in which it had been foreclosed.

Forty percent of the documents do contain promises about future access to information or future contact. *It is the birth mother who promises that she will not seek information about the child or interfere with the adoptive family.*

## **3. Birth mothers who sought confidentiality were not seeking lifelong anonymity.**

---

<sup>2</sup> The quotations in this and the previous paragraph are taken from and cited in pages 432-434 of my 2001 article, which is cited at the end of this testimony.

As a commission appointed by the governor of Maryland found in 1980, the birthmother “had no choice about future contact with her relinquished child;” “[s]ecrecy was not offered her, it was *required* . . . as a condition of the adoption.” The evidence is that birth mothers who sought confidentiality sought to conceal their pregnancies only from their families or from members of their communities.

#### **4. Records were closed to protect adoptive families.**

When adoption records around the United States gradually were closed to inspection by the parties to the adoption as well as to the public, they were closed to protect adoptive families’ from the stigma of illegitimacy, to protect their privacy, and to protect them from possible interference or harassment by birth parents.

In the 1940s and 1950s, many states followed the recommendation of adoption and vital statistics experts to make adoption court records, and original birth certificates, generally available only by court order, but to keep original birth records available on demand to adult adoptees. That was the recommendation of the first Uniform Adoption Act, promulgated in 1953. Similarly, the position of the United States Children’s Bureau was that an adopted adult has a “right to know who he is and who his people were.”

Despite the experts’ recommendations, many states did begin to close original birth certificates to adult adoptees as well as others. By 1960, 26 states had done so, although in a few of those states, court records remained available for some time after that date to either adoptive parents or adult adoptees or both. In the states in which access to court and birth records had become available only by court order, the reason given for closing records to the parties was the need to protect adoptive families, not birth parents.

Of the states that in 1960 still recognized adult adoptees’ right to original birth certificates on demand, four states closed the original birth records in the 1960s, six states closed them in the 1970s, and seven more did so only after 1979. Alabama was the last state to pass a law foreclosing access, in 1990; in 2000 it restored access.

#### **5. Restoring access has proved beneficial.**

States’ legal systems in which adult adoptees have access to their original birth certificates are operating successfully, including those systems in which records have always been open and those systems in which formerly closed records have been opened to adult adoptees. In all of those states, adult adoptees are not arbitrarily separated into two groups -- adoptees who are able to find information about their origins without access to their birth certificates and adoptees who cannot. Birth parents in a number of those states have been afforded a means, contact preference forms, that they formerly lacked to alert adult adoptees about their wishes; adult adoptees have obtained fundamental information about themselves; and in cases in which adoptees and birth relatives have wished to meet and become acquainted, access has led to countless fulfilling reunions.

Related references:

*Surrender and Subordination: Birth Mothers and Adoption Law Reform*, 20 Michigan Journal of Law and Gender 33 (2013). (Available at [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2233400](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2233400).)

*The Strange History of Adult Adoptee Access to Original Birth Records*, 5 Adoption Quarterly 63 (2001). (Available at [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1281475](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1281475).)

*The Idea of Adoption: An Inquiry into the History of Adult Adoptee Access to Birth Records*, 53 Rutgers L. Rev. 367-437 (2001). (Available at [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=275730](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=275730).)

[\*How Adoption in America Grew Secret\*](#), Op-Ed, Wash. Post, Oct. 21, 2001, at B5.



**Lee\_FAV\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Senator Lee, Senator Lee

Position: FAV

SUSAN C. LEE  
Legislative District 16  
Montgomery County

MAJORITY WHIP

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on  
Cybersecurity, Information Technology,  
and Biotechnology

Chair Emeritus  
Maryland Legislative Asian American  
and Pacific Islander Caucus

President Emeritus  
Women Legislators of the  
Maryland General Assembly, Inc.



James Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street, Room 223  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3124 · 301-858-3124  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3124  
Susan.Lee@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 25, 2020

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

**Senate Bill 743 – Adoption – Access to Birth and Adoption Records and Search, Contact and Reunion Services**

Senate Bill 743 ensures that adoptees born in Maryland have access to the same basic vital records and information about their origin as any other person. Technology has caught up to any privacy concerns that might have previously existed, and the state should provide a dignified process to obtain one of the most important government documents about you. Not everyone wants to contact their birth parents, but nearly everyone we have spoken to wants their birth certificate.

There was a modification of this law about 20 years ago, when adoptees pushed for more access to their family history, which created a process with an intermediary and a veto against the reunion process. If you were born before 1947, there were no limitations on access to your birth certificate, but if you were born in between, it might be impossible to get access to your original birth certificate. This date-based discrimination is arbitrary and our bill eliminates the date-based approach in favor of an unrestricted right for all adult adoptees to obtain their own birth records. States as politically diverse as New York to Alabama to Alaska to Oregon have already taken this step, and it is time Maryland do the same.

Current law also allows a biological parent or an adoptee to file a disclosure veto that bars the disclosure of information about the parent or adoptee in a birth or adoption record, we do away with that veto power and replace it with a contact preference. The sealing of birth certificates was never meant to ensure permanent secrecy, and even if it was, that secrecy has been wholly undercut by technological changes. The social workers who previously raised objections to changing this policy, have now relented because of the technological realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

To rely on the “what about the privacy of the birthmother” response when this issue is raised is to ignore the fact that inexpensive DNA testing, like 23andMe, render any perceived yet unenforceable privacy promise of the birthmother essentially impossible. Given that reality, our current law stands as a barrier to adoptees claiming their full identity for the sake of protecting a privacy that does not, in fact, exist because the document relates to that individual themselves.

Our bill also recognizes that the age at which an adoptee should have access to their vital records should be the same as the age of majority; therefore, we lower the age requirement to request an original birth certificate and other vital records from 21 to 18. If the committee wants to revisit the age of majority, I would be happy to consider a higher age here as well. It is important for younger individuals to have access to information that might help them to more early detect hereditary diseases. Insurance companies provide access to genetic testing if you have a family history, but adoptees don’t know if they have a family history and are not routinely afforded these tests under their plans.

Birth records belong to the birthed, not to the parents of the birthed. With no group other than adoptees does the government give a permanent right to the parents of a child to seal vital records once that child comes of age. Privacy is important, and my driving force this session, but human dignity is paramount and access to one’s own documents does not violate the principle of privacy. The government should protect our privacy, but they shouldn’t protect our own access to our private information such as original birth certificates. With technological advances, there are no remaining rationale against enacting this legislation.

For all these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 743.

# **Robyn Sesso Sheffield\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Sheffield, Robyn

Position: FAV

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB1039/SB0743

Good day members:

I am an adoptee, born in 1965 and **adopted in Maryland in 1966**. My original birth certificate and adoption records are sealed, as per the norm at the time.

Adult adoptees should be provided the right to their original birth certificate as is every other person in Maryland. We are the only group of people who have been denied our own vital record. This is a basic civil right/equality issue. It is also an issue of identity. Shouldn't adoptees have the opportunity to embrace their identity just as every other person does? DNA testing has made the sealing of original birth certificates and adoption records unnecessary and obsolete. I personally tested with a well known company and within 6 months I had the names of both of my birth parents and have been in contact with them since.

I respectfully ask that members vote yes on the bills and recommend passage of HB1039 and SB0743.

Robyn Sesso Sheffield  
[robynsesso@gmail.com](mailto:robynsesso@gmail.com)  
Bedford, Indiana

# **Michelle Terse St Amant\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: St. Amant, Michelle

Position: FAV

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB1039/SB0743

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Chairman Smith, and Members of the Committees:

I am a sixty-seven-year-old woman and was born in Detroit, Michigan on September 11, 1952. My mother relinquished me at birth and I was sent to the Sarah Fisher Orphanage. When I was two months old a couple took me to their home then adopted me. I then soon became the eldest of eight adopted children and we also had a series of thirty-five foster children living with us until I reached the age of twelve. A little over twenty years ago I surprisingly and sorrowfully learned that **my daughter had traveled to Maryland, gave birth to my granddaughter then relinquished her for adoption to a couple who lived in the state.**

I have always been a strong advocate for Adoptees Rights and in 1993 founded and directed the "Adoption Identity Movement of NorthEast Michigan " Our slogan was "Knowledge Is The Key To Our Identity!" It is my heartfelt belief that adopted persons age eighteen and older should have the right to request and receive their own original unredacted birth certificates. Not knowing who my birth parents were, my heritage and medical history had a severe and profound impact on my life, especially as an adult. The secrets of my origins and circumstances of my relinquishment caused me to fantasize of endless scenarios and quite often left me with strong feelings of hopelessness, depression, at times paranoid and dealing with an acute identity crisis. This led to difficulties in most of my relationships that numerous other adoptees I've met through the years expressed they suffered with as well. Besides these psychological impacts not

having access to one's own medical history is equally as devastating since it's imperative to be aware of inheritance risks which could be offset by preventative measures. I am well able to attest to this fact through my personal life story.

This is nothing short of a Civil Rights Issue. Allowing adoptees to obtain their original

unredacted birth certificates would provide the answers to many of the questions we've struggled with and agonized over since childhood and bring dignity to our lives! I am respectfully asking the Committee to vote YES and recommend the passage of HB1039 and SB0743.

I sincerely appreciate your time and efforts towards this life-changing issue.

Respectfully,

Michelle Terse St. Amant  
Traverse City, Michigan



# **Alice Stephens\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Stephens, Alice

Position: FAV

Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB1039/SB0743

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Chairman Smith, and Members of the Committees:

I am a Korean adoptee, long-time resident, and voter of Maryland writing in support of HB1039 and SB0743 because knowing where, when, and to whom you were born is vital information that should be available to every human being on this planet.

We say that the sins of the parents should not be visited on the children, but that is exactly what is done when adult adoptees are refused the right to know the very basics of their origins. We say that children should not be made to suffer for their parents' mistakes, but that is what happens when adopted children are denied the basic building blocks of identity.

By denying access to original birth certificates, the state of Maryland tells adult adoptees we are second class citizens, unequal in the eyes of state law. Please grant adoptees their basic civil rights and pass these important bills.

Alice Stephens  
Silver Spring, Maryland  
waqap@yahoo.com

# **Susie Stricker\_FAV\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Stricker, Susan

Position: FAV

**RE: Testimony in support of HB 1039**

Susan Stricker  
1101 Cumberstone Rd  
Harwod, MD 20776  
[Susiems64@gmail.com](mailto:Susiems64@gmail.com)  
443-223-5938

Good Afternoon Chairman Clippinger, Vice-Chair Atterbeary, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony on 1039.

I was born in Baltimore, was raised and currently live in southern Anne Arundel County, Maryland. I am a U.S. citizen. For over 50 years this state has not allowed me to know who gave birth to me. Not even a name. Because I was adopted after 1947 and before Jan. 1, 2000, I am not authorized to have my original birth certificate. An original birth certificate is a government issued document, independent of adoption, that records information about a citizen's birth and provides proof of identity and ancestry. I have an amended certificate with my adoptive parent's names substituted for my biological parent's name to appear as if they gave birth to me. I was totally cut off from my own heritage and medical information. Since my adoptive parents didn't have my medical background, they were unable to find answers to the cause of my progressive hearing loss. As an adult, I agonized about the possibility that my hearing loss could be hereditary. Were my children going to have special needs as well? Our laws prevent adopted people, as well as their offspring and future generations, access to genetic data and family medical history that could ultimately allow potential to aid in the early detection and prevention of thousands of inherited diseases.

If I wish to learn any identifying information about my biological family, current Maryland law requires me to use the state's expensive and time-consuming search and reunion services. This service allows a confidential intermediary to access my adoption file, however, I still was only allowed selective information. Really? A complete stranger has access to all of my personal information, but I don't? Even after meeting both my biological parents, a judge still denied my petition to unseal my records. I am a U.S. citizen; Aren't I entitled equal protection under the laws? I am being discriminated because I am adopted. I didn't ask to be adopted. Don't get me wrong, I love my adopted family. But I continue to be treated as if I am still that adopted child who had no voice nearly 50 years ago.

This week hearings on legislation for equal access for adoptees have also been scheduled in two other states. Currently, ten states allow unrestrictive access. They got it right. Let's Make Maryland Next. MLK said, "It is always the right time to do the right thing." I'm asking you to do the right thing.

Respectfully,

Susan Stricker



# **Sant'ea Taylor\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Taylor, Sant'ea

Position: FAV

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB1039/SB0743

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee:

I am Sant'ea Taylor, an adoptee who did not find out that I was adopted until I was 13, by accident of course. My adoptive parents were not very helpful as they had promised to help me locate my family. When I turned 18 I started calling the Wicomico County Agency, Maryland Department of Archives and Baltimore Vital Statistics for my birth certificate. Every time I wrote or called in for a birth certificate it was told to me that my information was closed. I got married at the age of 24 and could only use my Notification of Birth with my immunization on the back to show that I was an orphan or adopted. I could not understand why a copy of my new birth certificate so that I could have traveled with my husband while he was in the Navy.

Down through the years I continued until I was 40 years old and that is when I first received my copy of the adopted parent birth certificate. I had been searching for years writing letters calling the Orphans Court in Wicomico County and just simply asking family members if they could recall any information about me. Finally, December 2019, I threw caution to the wind and took the DNA Ancestry Test, contacted the Department of Human Services in Baltimore, MD, Wicomico County DSS Agency and along with Agency on Exploited Children was able to finally connect the dots.

I now have a relationship with my biological father in Ohio. I do not have access to my OBC or files to be able to actually finalize what I have been told by the Department of Social Services concerning the foster care I was in or a receipt of an adoption. I was able to petition the Circuit Court for hearing with a date of February 27, 2020 at 9:00am to see if they will allow me access to my OBC along with information.

Adoptees should have a right to our heritage, family information and more. We need access to our OBC records.

Sant'ea Taylor  
Salisbury, Maryland  
athomesantea@gmail.com

# **Catherine Treaster\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Treaster, Catherine

Position: FAV



Delegate Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
House Office Building, Room 101  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB1039/SB0743

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Chairman Smith, and Members of the Committees:

My name is Catherine Treaster. I am 64 years old. My adoption happened in 1961 after mother had passed. I was separated from my brother and sister. The day I was adopted the social worker told me to forget my family. I have a new family. I felt like my heart would break and I still cry when I think about it. Everyone has the right for happiness. For adoptees is that little piece of paper that tells who they were when they were born. Please give our rights back and pass HB1039 and SB0743.

Thank you.

Catherine Treaster  
Lusby, Maryland  
catz19561@hotmail.com

# **Michelle Horrigan Trotter\_Fav\_SB743**

Uploaded by: Trotter, Michelle

Position: FAV

February 17, 2020

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Maryland General Assembly  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB1039/SB0743

Dear Chairman Smith, and Members of the Committee:

**I was born in Washington, DC in 1961, adopted at three days old in Prince George's County Maryland and have since lived my whole life in the State of Maryland.**

I strongly believe access to a person's original birth certificate is a civil right. Once a person reaches the age of 18, this fundamental and precious document should be provided to the person to which it belongs or the birth family. It is simply a matter of human dignity. After all, it is MY birth record. My birth record remains under seal for 100 years in the District of Columbia. It has been a humiliating experience to only possess my redacted and revised version of my birth certificate when every other citizen has full access to their birth records. I strongly support equality for every single human to be able to have a copy of their birth record.

I discovered I was adopted when I was ten years old. I have spent the last 50 years pursuing every available avenue to obtain a copy of my original birth certificate to no avail. In 2018, I took a DNA test and within two days of my results I was in contact with my birth family. I immediately found two sisters and a brother, all living in Maryland less than half hour from me my whole life. Sadly, my birth parents had both passed away in 2015.

Upon meeting my birth family within a week of my results, they told me my birth mother and the entire family had been looking for me for years. In fact, it was a second cousin in another state who first contacted me via DNA. Even she and her extended family knew about me. Meeting them was a joyful occasion, but also quite bittersweet to learn that my whole birth family knew all the details of my birth, they prayed for me my whole life, celebrated my birthdays, remembered me at holidays and were dismayed

that there was no way to find me. They were especially sad that my birth mother and father never got to meet me after searching for me all these years. My sisters and brother remain quite incredulous that I still do not have a copy of my original birth certificate. Even they would like to see it and hold it.

I respectfully ask that you vote YES on SB0743. Please grant me the dignity and equal rights to my birth certificate before I die. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Michele Horrigan Trotter  
18908 Tributary Lane  
Gaithersburg, MD 20879  
240-246-4986  
michele.trotter1@gmail.com

**Leni Preston\_FAV\_SB743**

Uploaded by: White, Barbara

Position: FAV

*Leni Preston  
Independent Consumer Voice on Health Policy  
6306 Swords Way, Bethesda, MD 20817  
Email: lenipreston@verizon.net; Cell: 301.351.9381*

**SUPPORT**

Senate Bill 743: Adoption - Access to Birth and Adoption Records and Search, Contact, and Reunion Services

Judicial Proceedings Committee

25 February 2020

-----  
I appreciate the opportunity, as both an adoptee and birth mother, to provide testimony on HB1039 - Adoption - Access to Birth and Adoption Records and Search, Contact, and Reunion Services. As both an adoptee and birth mother, I bring a personal perspective on the importance of this legislation. And, it is uniquely valuable for those "innocent" individuals, the adoptees, who through an accident of birth are denied the most fundamental information on their origins. It is they who bear the greatest burden by being denied access to their birth and adoption records. The implications for their physical and mental health should be obvious and these are layered upon years of uncertainty about one's very identity.

In my own case, I was adopted in the District of Columbia in 1948 and it was not until 2006 that I was able, after three court filings, to locate both of my birth families. By then both of my birth had died. However, thanks to my half-siblings, I now have health histories to share with both of my daughters - the elder who was adopted and worried about her own children's health and my younger daughter who hopes to be a parent soon.

After 58 years of uncertainty, I now have not only my health history, but I also see reflected in the mirror, my mother's eyebrows and my father's smile. What I can't see, however, are either my birth certificate or adoption records. During the 18 months it took to complete my search process, my adoption file was placed beyond my reach on the desk in front of me. Tidbits of information were shared, but I could not to read it for myself. And, when the D.C. adoption agency "closed out" my case, that file went back under court seal. Only a law like HB1039 would make it possible for me to access my own records. You have the opportunity to make this a reality for all those fortunate enough to be born in Maryland.

In November 2019, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed legislation in New York that "set adoptees' birth certificates free<sup>1</sup>." At the time he correctly captured the importance of the fundamental tenet of HB1039 when he said, "Where you came from informs who you are, and every New Yorker deserves access to the same birth records — it's a basic human right..."

No matter where we live, we all have a fundamental right to know the full story of our lives and to understand the image reflected in the mirror. With that I urge a favorable report on House Bill 1039.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Chronicle of Social Change, November 19, 2019 - <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/adoption/new-york-adoptee-birth-certificates/39220>

**William Wright\_FAV\_SB743**

Uploaded by: wright, william

Position: FAV

JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE, Maryland Senate  
Senate Bill 743, Hearing February 25, 2020

Honorable Senators:

A single page cannot convey the loss to myself and others due to the lack of access to my adoption records, but I will try to highlight key points as best I can.

I was born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1963 and placed into adoption 18 months later.

It took until I was forty-nine years of age to gain access to my adoption records. It took an additional eight years to locate all of my biological siblings, including six brothers and sisters on my mother's side and nine brothers and sisters on my father's side. When you add aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and first cousins, there are slightly more than 200 biological family members I never knew existed until a year ago! While many are deceased, including both biological parents, getting to know the others has been among the most profoundly fulfilling and cathartic experiences of my life!

My adoption was essential, because as I have learned, my birth parents were unfit. However, my adoption experience was also full of challenges. And while I escaped much of the dysfunction by joining the military after high school, these challenges persisted. For example, my adopted family forever regarded me as defective; however, only once my adoption records were made available, could I be properly diagnosed with *Complex-Posttraumatic Stress Disorder* and begin receiving appropriate care.

Can you imagine living 50 years of your life with a major health disorder, yet unable to receive the medical attention you required, while also being fed a toxic story by the people who were supposed to support you, telling you that you were defective!? Can you imagine the lost opportunities that resulted from this nonsense?

For starters, all my personal relationships over my entire life have been a disaster: that's what complex trauma does to a person. Complex trauma also does not go away by ignoring it; to heal, I have had to devote most of the last eight years to intense therapy. For much of this time I was unable work because therapy retraumatized me. On top of that, this ordeal has cost me more than \$900,000, including all my life's savings plus over \$200,000 of debt...all because my adoption records were unavailable to me.

In summary, I was able to join the military at 18 to serve, and potentially die, for my country, yet my country was not there for me. I encourage you to reconsider this law in favor of full records disclosure once the adoptee reaches age 18.

Thank you.

William James Wright  
[Bill@Proclivity.org](mailto:Bill@Proclivity.org)  
Access OBC Maryland



**DHS\_INFO\_SB743**

Uploaded by: DHS, DHS

Position: INFO

**DATE:** February 25, 2020

**BILL NUMBER:** SB 743

**COMMITTEE:** Judicial Proceedings

**BILL TITLE:** Adoption - Access to Birth and Adoption Records and Search, Contact, and Reunion Services

**DHS POSITION:** Letter of Information

---

The Department of Human Services (the Department) respectfully submits this letter of information regarding Senate Bill 743. Senate Bill 743 would allow access to original birth certificates for all adoptees and amended birth certificates for all birth parents for any adoption regardless of when it took place.

This bill will directly affect all persons who have been or will have adoption finalizations through the Department. This bill proposes to replace the disclosure veto with a “Contact Preference Form,” which is advisory only. Since the contact preference form is merely advisory, whereas the disclosure veto places a mandate to redact the disclosure of information, birth parents and adoptees may both equally experience undesired contact from their child or birth parents respectively. For individuals whose adoptions were finalized before January 1, 2000 there are no provisions regarding how previously submitted disclosure vetoes will be handled. If an individual has filed a disclosure veto previously, this bill may remove a reasonable expectation of confidentiality and privacy, providing no notice or due process for these individuals involved in such adoptions because amended and original birth certificates would be subject to disclosure. Should this legislation ultimately annul these disclosure vetoes, the individuals involved would need to be immediately notified of the need to submit a new form in order to maintain a respected level of privacy and confidentiality.

Provided that both parties, i.e. the adoptee and the birth parent(s), are interested in pursuing greater openness between them, Maryland law allows for such openness as a default for adoptions occurring after January 1, 2000. Currently the Department offers Adoption Search, Contact and Reunion Services through a Confidential Intermediary to all persons no matter when the adoption occurred. The Department currently provides these services and the disclosure of birth records to all biological parents and adult adoptees who are open and interested in such contact. However, at this time both adoptees and birth parents have the ability to file a disclosure veto, which bars disclosure of information about that individual from the records attempted to be accessed. This provides both privacy and security to both parties who determine that they do not wish to disclose that information to the interested party. It is important to note that the individual may withdraw their disclosure veto at any time in writing to the Department.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to share the aforementioned information regarding SB 743 and respectfully requests this information be taken into account during the Committee’s deliberations.

**MD Dept of Health\_INFO\_SB 743**

Uploaded by: Shek, Heather

Position: INFO



*Larry Hogan, Governor · Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor · Robert R. Neall, Secretary*

February 25, 2020

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr., Chairman  
Judicial Proceedings Committee  
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**RE: SB 743 – Adoption – Access to Birth and Adoption Records and Search, Contact and Reunion Services – Letter of Information**

Dear Chairman Smith and Committee Members:

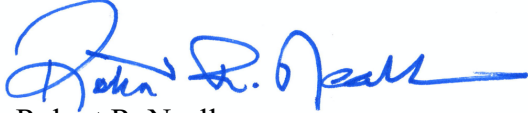
The Maryland Department of Health (Department) submits this letter of information for Senate Bill 743 (SB 743) – Adoption – Access to Birth and Adoption Records and Search, Contact and Reunion Services.

The Department's Vital Statistics Administration is the custodian of many of the vital records discussed in this bill. In the Committee's consideration of this bill, we respectfully ask the Committee to address the following items:

- Under current statute, adoptions that took place prior to 2000 are sealed, and are only made available under court order. This bill effectively unseals all of these records, without providing any ability for biological parents to block disclosure of their information. This would result in approximately 70,000 sealed records of individuals adopted between 1930 and 2000 to become immediately available to adoptees, without any ability of the biological parents to request a disclosure veto or to request redaction of their names.
  - There is no provision in the bill to notify these parents of this change.
- It also removes the ability to file disclosure vetoes for adoptions after 1999, so even those records sealed until age 21 (age 18 under this bill), would be unsealed and made available to parents and adoptees who request them (without redaction) as the adoptee reaches age 18.
- The Division of Vital Records would likely experience a substantial surge in requests for copies of original birth certificates. This would require additional staffing to support.

I hope this information is useful. If you would like to discuss this further, please contact Director of Governmental Affairs, Webster Ye, at (410) 260-3190 or [webster.ye@maryland.gov](mailto:webster.ye@maryland.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Robert R. Neall", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert R. Neall  
Secretary