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SUPPORT

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

Judicial Proceedings Committee

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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 free¹." 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.

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