

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 331 BY ANNE CAUMAN SUBMITTED TO THE SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE, JANUARY 26, 2021

My name is Anne Cauman. As a birthmother and lawyer, I urge you to enact SB 331, 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, 20th 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.

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