

To Whom It May Concern:

I am an adoptee born in Cheverly, Maryland in 1969. As such, I fall in the gap that SB 331 is intended to cover and that is why I am writing to you today.

I have always known that I was an adoptee; like almost all adoptees, questions like “who are my parents?”, “what nationality am I?”, “do I have brothers or sisters?”, “is my original family ok?”, and even “what was my name when I was born?”, and many others, were constantly in my mind as I grew up—questions with no answers. The lack of knowledge of these fundamental aspects about ourselves leaves a massive hole in the adoptee’s life experience, one which non-adoptees are fortunate to never experience.

In the mid 1990’s I attempted a search for my birth family. The process was expensive and filled with bureaucracy, and, faced with such challenges at a relatively young age, I quickly and sadly gave up. I tried again in 2010. Armed with better support and life skills, I was able to navigate the process with more success; I found my birth family, including my mother, father, three sisters, two aunts, and several cousins, all of whom were incredibly glad I found them. I am extremely fortunate and grateful to have a happy ending to my search.

However, the process of finding my family highlighted severe problems with Maryland’s current law that SB-331 addresses:

- At the time Maryland’s birth records were sealed, the prevailing school of thought said that infants were a “blank slate”, and that being raised by a different family would cause no ill effects on an infant. Since then this theory has been almost totally discredited. Research has shown that the process of adoption causes severe trauma to an infant; infants suffer severe psychological distress when taken from their mothers that is almost never addressed, and it often leads to significant mental health issues later in life. Finding their birth family can heal those wounds, which is my experience. Current Maryland law addresses this for those born before 1947 and after 2000, but needlessly and unfairly discriminates against those born in between those years. We deserve the same treatment as those born outside of this range of years.
- To find my birth family, I had to obtain a court order to have my records unsealed. Even then, I was prohibited by Maryland law from seeing them—they were sent to the original adoption agency, which is affiliated with a religion I no longer am a member of. I met with a social worker from that agency which dangled tantalizing non-identifying information to me, and then stated that for a “modest” donation of \$500 they would perform a search for my birth family. No donation, no search; the records would be re-sealed. I was fortunate enough to be able to afford the “donation”; many others are not. Once again, Maryland law needlessly and unfairly discriminates against those adoptees born between 1947 and 2000 by requiring them to go through a maze of bureaucracy and unfair financial burdens to obtain information that is freely available to non-adoptees and adoptees born those born outside of those years.
- Non-adoptees always know where they come from, who their ancestors are, what their genetic history is, what their name has always been. When I met with the social worker

from the adoption agency, she told me that I had a different name at birth. When I asked her what it was, she calmly refused to tell me, saying that it was against state law for her to do so. I was dumbfounded. At the time I was unable to process the fact that my status as an adoptee born between 1947 and 2000 allowed some social worker to know my name, but prohibited me from the same information. This is not only unfair, it is cruel.

- SB-331 allows Maryland's administrative processes to be streamlined because there will be only one standard applied to anyone seeking their original birth certificates. This will speed the servicing of these requests as well as likely reducing costs.

It is astonishing to me that a law like Maryland's current adoption law ever existed, and even more astonishing that it exists today in a form that not only discriminates against adoptees for being adoptees but also discriminates against adoptees based on the year of their birth. It should be every human being's right to know their history, where they come from, what their culture is, and even what their name is, regardless of choices their original parents made or the year of their birth. This is a common-sense change with broad bipartisan support. Please pass SB-331.

Thank you,

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