



January 26, 2021

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

RE: SB0331

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee:

I am the spokesperson for the Capitol Coalition for Adoptee Rights and a Maryland adoptee. CCAR is a coalition of organizations and allies in the District of Columbia, Virginia, and Maryland, working to secure equal rights for all adult adopted people who were born or adopted in the region. It supports passage and enactment of SB0331. While I have submitted my own personal testimony in support of SB0331, CCAR has also collected testimony from individuals from across the state and country who are impacted by this bill. Those written testimonies are attached.

Thank you for your service and for your consideration of SB0331, which we ask that you vote in favor of passage.

Best regards,

Susie Stricker
Spokesperson
Capitol Coalition for Adoptee Rights
capitoladoptees.org

Partner Organizations: Maryland Adoptee Rights; Adoptee Rights Law Center; American Adoption Congress; Bastard Nation. *Strategic Partners:* New York Adoptee Rights Coalition; Texas Adoptee Rights Coalition

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RE: SB0331

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 infantize 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 SB0331.

Thank you,

Christina Ritter
Maryland Adoptee
christina-ritter@hotmail.com

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

RE: SB0331

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee:

My name is Damon L. Davis and I'm am the host and producer of the adoptee focused "Who Am I Really?" podcast (<https://www.whoamireallypodcast.com>). I've interviewed nearly 150 adoptees about their journeys through adoption. Those who have expressed an opinion about having access to their original birth certificate (OBC) on the show, over social media, or in emails to me have unanimously stated OBC access should be open to adoptees upon request. I am an adoptee with a missing piece of my life that I wish I could see: my OBC. That document is a testament to the person I was when I was born, while I was in foster care, and before I was adopted -- months of my life that I cannot account for at all. It's an extremely personal document. If I were never born, that document would not exist.

Seeing one's OBC might seem inconsequential, but the truth is that piece of paper is the beginning of my personal history -- it is the very first recording of my existence. Adoptees' birth certificates rightly belong to us, just as yours belongs to you.

Open access to their original birth certificate should be an adoptee's right under Maryland law. **I respectfully request the members of the Committee vote YES for the passage of SB0331.** You will be part of an historical change impacting adoptee rights. Adoptees born in Maryland, who reside across the nation and around the world, will be deeply grateful.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and your vote.



Damon L. Davis
Host/Producer
Who Am I Really? podcast
www.whoamireallypodcast.com

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

RE: SB0331

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee:

It is essential that adult adoptees have access to their information. Denying us that is thoughtless and cruel. Please allow us the same rights as other adults.

I am a 62 year young adult adoptee that was trafficked out of Maryland in 1958, happily raised in NY, reunited with BirthMother at 20, and later on, siblings. While I was content with my Adoptive family, succeeding at the uphill task of locating biological family is a life changing joy. Unfortunately he who Fathered me died before I could introduce myself. His nieces said he would have welcomed me happily.

Please allow adult Adoptees access to their truths, it means the world.

Thank you,

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

RE: SB0331

Dear Sirs, or Madam,

My name is Paul Edwin Belsinger. I was adopted on December 09, 1953 in Baltimore Maryland. My adopted parents are Myrtle Mae Crafton/Belsinger and Victor Riland Belsinger. Through my investigation with Ancestry DNA, I have established my true biological family on my biological mothers side. The family last name is Carver. There are several Carver sisters who's biological mother is Dorothy Alexandria Ruder and biological father is Adrian John Carver. These are my matriarchal grandparents. All of these individuals have passed away as far as I can determine. I have been able to eliminate several of the siblings whose parents are Dorothy and Adrian Carver but not all.

The identity of my biological father is still unknown and may well possibly be related to the Yaryan family. I have a strong DNA connection to the Yaryan family. I cannot find a reference or DNA connection within the Carver or Ruder lineage for Yaryan so I am suspecting the Yaryan lineage may prove to be on the patriarchal side of my heritage.

The only way to determine this for certain is if I can be allowed access to my original birth certificate. As you know the adoption birth certificate retains certain information relating to the birth parents, ie. age place of birth or residence, how long the birth mother stayed in Baltimore prior to the birth, living siblings, possibly place of employment for the birth father. The only information which appears to have been changed is the names of the biological parents having been substituted with the adoption parents.

On the maternal side I have made contact with some of the Carver relatives. Little information can be obtained from them for various reasons but predominantly the lack of any knowledge of the circumstances of my birth. Once the relatives I've contacted can see through Ancestry.com the relationship I have been accepted into the family of the Carvers to a limited degree.

This has been a long road for me. Maryland being considered a closed state when it came to adoption records after 1948.

Paul Belsinger
New Llano, Louisiana

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
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Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SB0331

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 SB0331.

Thank you.

Janice Lynn Kelch Vincent
Middle River, Maryland
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Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
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Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SB0331

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

RE: SB0331

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 SB0331.

Robyn Sesso Sheffield
robynsesso@gmail.com
Bedford, Indiana

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

RE: SB0331

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee:

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 Committee vote yes on this bill and recommend passing SB0331 and grant adoptees their basic civil right to know where they came from.

Thank you.

Katherine Runyon
Conway, South Carolina
beachkat1977@yahoo.com

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

RE: SB0331

January 21, 2021

Dear Honorable Members:

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 Committee to vote Yes on the bill and to recommend passage of SB0331.

Sincerely,

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

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

RE: SB0331

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee:

I am a genealogist who has helped adoptees find their biological families through DNA results. Being able to "see" their original birth certificates with the parent(s) names on them is a gift they are very thankful for. I can't imagine not being able to know at least your parents names! This to me is a basic civil right. Please vote for passage of this bill.

Thank you.

Mary Jo Newman
Baltimore, Maryland 21234

I, Simone Martinez (Silver), support Maryland SB0331 and I urge you to vote in favor of this bill. I am 63 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

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

RE: SB0331

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee:

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 SB0331 for equal access for those adopted in your state.

Margaret Susan Hoffman LyBurtus
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Senator William C. Smith, Jr.
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Maryland General Assembly
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RE: SB0331

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee:

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

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

RE: SB0331

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee:

As an adoptee and one who has spent thousands of hours and dollars to learn the truth about my origins, I strongly support SB0331 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 should you have any questions or wish to know more of my story.

Carol Fox
Baltimore
truthseeker52@aol.com

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Maryland General Assembly
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RE: SB0331

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee:

I'd like to respectfully ask that Members of the Committee vote Yes on the bills and recommend passage of SB0331.

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