

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman and members of the committee for the opportunity to speak on behalf of HB 482. My name is Audrey Tornblom, and I am a Maryland native and current resident of Silver Spring. I was conceived via anonymous sperm donation at a fertility clinic in Washington, D.C. in 1985. Fortunately, my mother has always been open and communicative, so I have known I was donor-conceived my whole life. Unfortunately, there was much less information to offer in response to questions I had about my donor.

At the time of my conception, my mother was told minimal identifying information about him, including his height, build, and hair and eye color. The attending nurse also shared that he was finishing his residency at a D.C.-area hospital and had two daughters with his wife, one of whom had red hair. As an only child, I desperately wanted to meet my siblings, and I vividly remember scrutinizing the face of every older red-headed girl I met for any similarity to mine, wondering if she could be my long-lost older sister.

Around four years ago I took both 23 & Me and Ancestry DNA tests, through which I learned the identity of my donor and connected with three half-siblings, all of whom were raised by my bio dad. Since then, I have become particularly close with one sister, and we both lament that we were unable to grow up together.

Not knowing my donor's identity for most of my life has had real implications on my psychological and physical well-being. For over three decades, half of my family medical history was utterly unknown, making my own mysterious health issues baffling. Recently, I've learned that cancer runs on our paternal side, and that one sister and I share similar underlying autoimmune issues. Additionally, while on the journey to grow my own family, genetic testing revealed that I am a carrier for Cystic Fibrosis, a rare but potentially lethal condition, which I apparently inherited from my bio dad. I should have had the right to know pertinent family medical history which could affect both me and my future children. I shouldn't have had to wait this long to get it, or to have been lucky enough to have found a forthcoming half-sibling to disclose what should have been rightfully mine.

Not knowing the number or identities of half-siblings also made dating complicated, as I could never be certain I wasn't dating an unknown half-brother! While this may sound far-fetched, it was a real and disturbing possibility for me. To this day, I have no idea how many half-siblings I have. The clinic assured my mother they set a maximum of 5 recipient families per sperm donor; however, there was, and as yet still is no regulation requiring this. For all I know, I could have many more half-siblings, all of whom were likely born and raised in the greater D.C. region, and may or may not have known they were conceived via donor sperm.

Lastly, learning the identity of my bio dad has given me a sense of clarity and self-understanding that I have been searching for my entire life. I don't look much like my mother, and my personality is also quite unlike that of my maternal relatives. Without knowing the other half of my identity, I felt a sense of genetic bewilderment. I vividly remember the first time I saw my donor's face in a photograph: how I instantly saw myself reflected in him. Knowing from whom I inherited some of my looks and personality traits has been profoundly therapeutic and healing.

My personal experience as a donor-conceived adult has led me to the firm conclusion that recipient parents and the humans created by gamete donation have a right to know their donor's identity and to access accurate and updated family medical history. Additionally, regulation limiting the number of half-siblings created by each donor is vital to prevent unintentional consanguinity. It is for these reasons that I am strongly in support of Maryland House Bill 482, and I hope I have impressed upon you the importance of passing this much-needed legislation. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I urge a favorable report for HB 482.