

My name is Jeddy Wilkinson Jr. I am a lifelong Maryland resident and currently reside in legislative district 8. I am writing to express my support for HB0482. I am donor conceived.

When I was in eleventh grade my mother told me that my dad was not my genetic father. That they had procured donor sperm from Johns Hopkins. Freezing samples was not common at the time, so a medical student in his final year of med school was in an adjacent room providing a fresh sample at my mother's 10am appointment on February 2nd, 1978.

So many questions I had always had but not yet been able to properly articulate were suddenly answered. Why didn't I look like anyone in my family? Why was I so utterly different from every cousin on my dad's side? I wasn't particularly similar to anyone from my mother's side, either, but I had always felt like I had evolved on an entirely different planet than my dad's family. Even more importantly, I was also dramatically different from both of my social parents. Emotionally, intellectually, academically even in our interests and personal tastes, it had always been challenging to say the least for us to relate to each other. My mother had an 8th grade education. My dad had his high school diploma and no interest in pursuing any further education. They loved me and I loved them, but through no fault of their own they were ill-suited to raise the genetic offspring of a successful spinal surgeon.

I told myself it didn't matter. That my dad was my dad and the genetics didn't matter. I repeated it to myself over and over until I had convinced myself. I wasn't self-aware enough at the time to spot the self-deception. But in retrospect, the revelation that my parents had lied to me my entire life was enormously traumatic. I spiraled into the first of a lifetime of depressive episodes. I would become enraged every time anyone called me a bastard, which was not uncommon among teenagers trying to act like adults by using every vulgarity they could think of. I felt like a freak. A science experiment. I felt like Frankenstein's monster. Pieced together by parts of people I would never know. I never let my parents see any of this. My dad is the hardest working man I've ever met, but emotional reflection is outside his wheelhouse. My mother was emotionally insecure and would have surely turned things around and somehow made herself the victim and me the monster, so I just never bothered telling her. It wasn't until I joined online communities for donor conceived people after her death that I learned what I had experienced, what I was experiencing anew after her death, was called genealogical bewilderment, and that I was not alone in these feelings, doubts, and worries.

When I was 30 I was diagnosed with kidney cancer. Every doctor involved told me that I was by far the youngest patient with that particular type they had ever treated. What was the cause? Heritable kidney cancer is rare, but exists. There was no history on my mother's side. Nor was there a history of the depression I continued to battle. Were they environmental, inherited, or just a bad hand in the poker game of life? I had no way to tell. No way to find answers. No way to learn if I had known earlier if I could have had a better outcome that didn't result in a radical nephrectomy.

After my mother's death I finally felt able to truly reflect on my feelings about the situation and decided to DNA test. I immediately matched with my genetic father. It took about five

weeks for him to respond to my message requesting a family medical history. “My family and I are quite healthy with no known medical problems.” Not much detail there. I can only hope it’s accurate. But how many families actually have no medical problems? Let’s just say I find the chances of this being true low. Many donor conceived people have not even been able to get as much of a reply as the one sentence on the topic I was able to. And far too many of them have experienced lifelong harm, or outright died because of surprise diagnoses that if they had known ahead of time to be watchful for, could have been minimized or prevented entirely.

Donor conceived people have had no rights for far too long in the US. We are created to fulfill parental wants while our needs aren’t even considered, or even worse; outright ignored. It’s time for our state to join the 21st century and begin regulating this industry, whose only argument against any regulation boils down to not wanting to pay the higher cost of doing business without violating the human rights of the conceived. With the advent of cheap commercial DNA testing and family matching databases, even if it was ethical, donor anonymity has become a myth. Donors should be fully aware that they are genetic parents, helping create humans who very well may want to meet them one day. It is a disservice to both them and their donor conceived children when this point is not made clear to them before they go through with creating these offspring. What’s done is done, but now that we know better, it’s time to start doing better. This bill allows you to take a significant step toward making things right by helping future donor conceived people have early and lifelong access to their medical records, and to learn the identity of their non-raising genetic parents.

Jeddy Wilkinson Jr. 2/21/2023
2313 Ellen Avenue
Parkville, MD 21234