

Testimony in support of HB 1039

Peggy Klappenberger
782 Paul Birch Drive
Crownsville, MD 21032
pklappen@verizon.net
410-507-9066

Good afternoon Chairman Clippinger, Vice-Chair Atterbeary and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee.

Thank you for hearing testimony this afternoon on HB 1039. My name is Peggy Klappenberger and I am an adoptee and life-long Marylander.

I was looking through my baby book this morning, the one that starts when I was 5 ½ months old, and felt such a mix of emotions. The front of the book says 'All About You' but sadly, it's missing almost the first half year of my life. It really isn't 'All About Me' at all. And the reality is, it will never be. Those first 5 ½ months are gone. Two small photographs and some general information about my schedule are all that I will ever have from that time of my life. Even when this bill passes, there will always be parts of my life that will be unknown to me. That is part of what it means to be adopted. There is profound loss that is never fully realized until we are old enough to know the magnitude. For me, it was so evident upon the birth of my first son who was premature and whisked off to the NICU almost immediately. I barely got to see him, much less hold him and the first thought I had was 'it figures...I've never laid eyes on someone biologically related to me and the universe has decided more time should pass.' It hurt. It was just another layer of indignity in my life. But, as with all the other indignities I have felt, I pushed through it and never let the world around me know how deeply it cut. That is part of what I had learned to do as an adoptee. Push through it. You couldn't change what had been done, it was just how it was. You learn to move beyond things other people couldn't imagine.

As I got older, and the internet opened doors to people I might not otherwise meet – adoptees like myself – I began to see the threads we all had running through our lives. A thirst to know our story. A need to understand where we came from. But the state of Maryland did not allow for us to know this information. In 2000, when the law created the CI program, I signed myself up almost immediately. Sadly, my birth mother did not wish for contact, and because of that, I was still denied any information about my beginning. Someone that signed away any and all rights to me still held the power to deny me even the simplest information of where I was born. I was not a child trying to find this information, I was 30. Now I sit here, almost 49 years old, still asking for the same information. Information my CI had right in front of her as I asked questions. I asked her 'where was I born' and she said Baltimore. I asked for the name of the hospital, and she said she couldn't tell me, but that she was looking at the name, and it was definitely in Baltimore. She knows more about me than I do. I hung up the phone after that call (where I also learned that my birthmother had been married and I had an older half brother – information they certainly didn't disclose to my parents when they adopted me) and was angry.

But adoptees aren't supposed to be angry. We are supposed to be grateful. Grateful we weren't aborted. Grateful for any family at all. Grateful we had a birthmother that made such a sacrifice, and gave us the ultimate gift. And I am grateful. I'm just also very angry.

I'm angry, that as an adult, I am still bound by the legal framework of adoption. Angry that the state of Maryland considers the location of my birth to be a state secret that needs to be sealed away from even myself just down the road at the archives. Angry that I am made to feel as less than any other citizen of the state I love so very much. Angry that my voice, for far too long, hasn't been heard. Angry that someone, other than myself, can dictate whether or not I am ALLOWED to see the state issued vital statistic of my own birth.

So I sit here before you, asking you to see us, the adult adoptees, and to acknowledge us. To finally close the donut hole created by the 1999 legislation and restore access to our OBC's.

I would like to close with a quote from Alex Haley – who is memorialized just steps from where we sit today at the city dock.

“In all of us there is a hunger, marrow-deep to know our heritage – to know who we are and where we have come from. Without this knowledge, there is a hollow yearning. No matter what our attainments in life, there is still a vacuum, an emptiness and the most disquieting loneliness.”