

RE: Testimony in support of HB 1039

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Good Afternoon Chairman Clippinger, Vice-Chair Atterbeary, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony on 1039.

I was born in Baltimore, was raised and currently live in southern Anne Arundel County, Maryland. I am a U.S. citizen. For over 50 years this state has not allowed me to know who gave birth to me. Not even a name. Because I was adopted after 1947 and before Jan. 1, 2000, I am not authorized to have my original birth certificate. An original birth certificate is a government issued document, independent of adoption, that records information about a citizen's birth and provides proof of identity and ancestry. I have an amended certificate with my adoptive parent's names substituted for my biological parent's name to appear as if they gave birth to me. I was totally cut off from my own heritage and medical information. Since my adoptive parents didn't have my medical background, they were unable to find answers to the cause of my progressive hearing loss. As an adult, I agonized about the possibility that my hearing loss could be hereditary. Were my children going to have special needs as well? Our laws prevent adopted people, as well as their offspring and future generations, access to genetic data and family medical history that could ultimately allow potential to aid in the early detection and prevention of thousands of inherited diseases.

If I wish to learn any identifying information about my biological family, current Maryland law requires me to use the state's expensive and time-consuming search and reunion services. This service allows a confidential intermediary to access my adoption file, however, I still was only allowed selective information. Really? A complete stranger has access to all of my personal information, but I don't? Even after meeting both my biological parents, a judge still denied my petition to unseal my records. I am a U.S. citizen; Aren't I entitled equal protection under the laws? I am being discriminated because I am adopted. I didn't ask to be adopted. Don't get me wrong, I love my adopted family. But I continue to be treated as if I am still that adopted child who had no voice nearly 50 years ago.

This week hearings on legislation for equal access for adoptees have also been scheduled in two other states. Currently, ten states allow unrestrictive access. They got it right. Let's Make Maryland Next. MLK said, "It is always the right time to do the right thing." I'm asking you to do the right thing.

Respectfully,

Susan Stricker

