

To: Senator Rita Heard Days and Honorable Members
Missouri State Senate Senior, Families and Public Health Committee

RE: SB1132
February 26, 2008

Honorable Senators:

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute is an independent/nonpartisan, nonprofit research, policy and education think tank. We conduct research and analysis on many issues in order to improve adoption laws, policies and practices. This correspondence – along with the attached written testimony regarding SB1132 – is intended to explain the state of professional knowledge on one of those issues: the availability (or lack thereof) of original birth certificates to adopted persons once they reach the age of majority. Indeed, the Adoption Institute has conducted the most extensive study to date on this issue; I would be delighted to provide you with a copy.

I will keep this letter brief, as I'm sure you already have received a great amount of information from all sides. We can provide any additional data you might need or want, and would be delighted to address any questions you encounter; unfortunately, scheduling will not permit me to be on hand to testify in person at your hearing.

In short, studies consistently show that sealed birth certificates are an anachronism born of society's desire to protect the reputations of adoptees and their parents at a time when unwed mothers were severely stigmatized and the children born to them were denigrated as "bastards." Indeed, birth certificates were often stamped with the word "illegitimate." Over time, the cultural rationale has shifted to maintaining the anonymity of birthmothers. However, nearly all available evidence indicates that these women – while sometimes wanting privacy in their families and not wanting their situations public – overwhelmingly desire some level of contact with or knowledge about the children they bore; that they favor adult adoptee access to their birth certificates (or, at least, do not oppose it); and, contrary to popular perception, that they were not legally assured of anonymity. Moreover, the vast majority of adult adoptees want the records for a variety of reasons, notably medical and genealogical.

Two additional, critical points: First, a number of states in recent years have enacted laws granting adult adoptees access to their records – with none of the negative consequences that critics had predicted. And, perhaps most important, the unambiguous conclusion from a growing body of research is that greater knowledge about their histories (biological and personal) yields better outcomes for adoptees and their families. That is the principal reason, in both professional practices and new statutes throughout our country in the last decade, the singular trend has been toward increased disclosure. A few adoption practitioners, and organizations representing them, still advocate for closure – sometimes by confusing "anonymity" and "privacy" or by using discredited data on a supposed "link" with abortion – but these practitioners represent a small and shrinking minority in the field.

I hope these comments are useful. Please feel free to contact me at apertman@adoptioninstitute.org or 617-332-8944 if you have questions or need more information. Thank you for your attention and for your important work.

Sincerely,



Adam Pertman
Executive Director

