

# Bill on adoptees' access to birth records to be heard

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PROVIDENCE, R.I. -- The state [Senate Health and Human Services Committee](#) is taking up a bill on Wednesday that would give adopted adults access to their original birth certificates.

There are at least eight states that currently allow open such information to adoptees: Maine, New Hampshire, Alabama, Alaska, Delaware, Kansas, Oregon and Tennessee. But under Rhode Island law, adoption records are sealed once a child is adopted and can only be opened by a court.

In 1993, the General Assembly created "a voluntary adoption reunion registry" where adoptees who want to find their biological parents can contact the registry when they turn 21. If their biological parents have given the registry permission to be contacted, the state can help reunite them.

[The proposed Senate bill \(S-0779\)](#) would repeal that registry program, granting adoptees access, at age 21, to their birth certificates outright.

It also gives birth parents the option to have the state release their current contact information to their biological child so that the two sides may reconnect.

Proponents of the bill say the birth records (and accompanying medical information) would allow adoptees a better idea of their genetic dispositions and chances for developing health problems in the future.

They also argue that it is a human right to know who they are and where they come from. Adoptees are often willing to pay thousands of dollars to an investigator to glean such information, but not everyone can afford that, proponents say.

Opponents of the bill, however, argue that opening up the birth information violates the privacy of birth parents who counted on secrecy when they put up their kid for adoption.

(Proponents counter that Rhode Island law makes no such promise of confidentiality since birth certificates are not sealed until a child is adopted, so that the only guarantee to a mother when she gives her child up for adoption is no future legal liability.)

Opponents also say that the stigma of having others learn that a mother had a child out of wedlock, while it has diminished over the years, can be detrimental to those that have started new lives.

The bill, which is being sponsored this year by [Sen. Rhoda E. Perry](#) (D-Providence), has been proposed a number of times in recent years. Perry chairs the Health and Human Services Committee, which is taking up the bill at the Senate's rise.

A version cleared the House in 2001, but never made it out of the Senate. That bill would have only provided original birth certificates, at age 19, to children born after July 1, 2001.

A bill similar to the one currently being proposed was also introduced in the Senate in 2005.

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