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N.J. Assembly committee approves bill unsealing adoptees' birth records

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Susan K. Livio/Statehouse Bureau



Tony Kurdzuk/The Star-Ledger A March 2010 file photo of the Assembly Chamber.

TRENTON — Lawmakers this evening advanced a bill that would allow adoptees in New Jersey to access medical history and birth records.

The measure was approved by the Assembly Human Services Committee by a 6-0 vote with four abstentions. It now advances to the full Assembly. It has already passed the state Senate.

The hearing drew scores of people who supported and opposed it in a five hour meeting.

With six Democrats voting yes and four Republicans abstaining, the Assembly Human Services Committee approved the bill, (S-7999/A1406, siding with most adopted adults who argued having access to the birth records was a civil rights issue.

Assemblyman Angel Fuentes, (D-Camden) said he was convinced having those records "gives you a completeness about life. You deserve that. I belong strongly it is your constitutional right."

Tim Martin, spokesman for the Medical Society of New Jersey, urged the bill's passage because it would guarantee adopted people would gain their family medical history. "Access to families' medical history is access to care," Martin said.

Previous coverage:

- **N.J. Senate approves open adoption birth records bill**
- **N.J. Assembly committee to consider unsealing adoptee birth records**
- **N.J. Senate panel approves bill unsealing adoptee birth records**
- **N.J. adoption groups push for Assembly to consider bill unsealing adoptee birth records**

But there was emotional testimony from opponents as well. Susan Williamson of Woodbridge said she was testifying on behalf of her adopted daughter, a college student who doesn't want to look for her birth parents. Her daughters feels "honoring her biological mother's right to privacy is the very least she can do for the gift of life," she said.

All four Republicans on the committee abstained from voting, saying they thought the bill could do more to protect the identity of biological mothers.

"An abstention is not a cop-out. It means you support the concept but don't agree with the technicalities of the bill, " Assemblywoman Alison Littell McHose, (R-Sussex), who described the issue as one of the most difficult to decide in her seven years in Trenton.

If the bill becomes law, parents in the future who put their children up for adoption would be able to request in writing not to be contacted, but the state would still have to produce the birth certificates and the contact preference form if requested.

Biological mothers who surrendered children before the law passes and who want to maintain their privacy have 12 months to submit a notarized letter to the state requesting no contact. After that initial year, an adopted person 18 years of age or older would be able to request from the State Registrar a copy of the adoptee's original birth certificate.

If enacted, New Jersey would be the ninth state in the nation to give adopted people access to their birth records.

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