

## New Jersey adoption bill gets conditional veto from governor



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By [Jonathan Allen](#)

NEW YORK (Reuters) - New Jersey Governor Chris Christie conditionally vetoed a bill on Thursday designed to make it easier for adopted people to obtain birth records, saying he wanted stronger protection for birth parents who wished to remain anonymous.

Christie said he would lift the state's current requirement that adoptees must get a court order to see their original birth certificates, but he proposed birth parents should keep the option of remaining unidentified if they wish and release only non-identifying family medical records.

"The decision of any biological parent to seek adoptive parents for a child is an enormously complicated choice and the protections of anonymity can be a significant consideration when choosing adoption," the Republican governor said in a statement.

"Yet I also strongly empathize with the adopted child, and adoptive parents, who may long to know the identity of the birth parents."

He said an erosion of birth parents' right to privacy could have a chilling effect on adoptions.

Under Christie's proposals, adult adoptees could use an intermediary at an adoption agency to trace their birth parents. Once contacted, the birth parents would be able to give or withhold consent for the release of the adoptee's original birth certificate, which would include the birth parents' names, or choose to release only medical records.

The intermediary could help arrange direct contact if both parties agree. And, if the intermediary could not find the birth parents within a year, or if they have died, the birth certificate and other details can be given to the adoptee, under Christie's proposals.

### BIRTH PARENT WISHES

Should his recommendations become law, birth parents in the future would be asked to record their wishes -- complete information sharing, sharing via an intermediary or sharing only non-identifying medical information -- at the time of adoption.

The bill passed the state legislature in May, and Thursday marked the last day in which the governor could veto it or sign it into law.

The bill as approved by the legislature put the burden on the birth parents, providing for a one-year opt-out period from the law's enactment in which birth parents could register their wish not to be contacted.

The American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey praised the governor's decision, saying it had fought for the privacy rights of birth parents.

"We are relieved that Governor Christie has helped to bring this decades-old struggle to a fair conclusion by recognizing the rights of everyone involved," said Deborah Jacobs, executive director of the ACLU-NJ.

The ACLU said similar measures are in place in about a dozen states, including Washington, Illinois, Michigan and Maryland.

Pam Hasegawa, a spokeswoman for the New Jersey Coalition for Adoption Reform & Education, said she was "shocked and dismayed" by the governor's veto.

"This will set up a new bureaucracy in the registrar's office requiring the adoptee to hire an independent intermediary," she said.

"The adoptee is left in a one-down position for a lifetime, simply for wanting to know her identify at birth and that of her parents. It puts adopted adults in the position of perpetual children, always having to ask, 'May I?'"

She said six states, including Kansas and Alaska, provide adoptees straightforward access to birth documents, and there was no evidence such provisions caused adoption rates to decline or abortion rates to rise.

(Editing by [Ellen Wulfhorst](#) and [Jerry Norton](#))