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## State's adoption law protects privacy of birth mothers, too

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I write to point out misstatements and misrepresentations by individuals and groups who are trying to eliminate an important privacy for birth mothers — a privacy that has been protected by law for decades. Those who want to eliminate a mother's privacy claim that New Jersey's adoption law protects only the adopted child. That claim is wrong. New Jersey's adoption law protects all of the parties: the child, the birth mother and the adopting parents.

The Catholic Church has provided adoption services in New Jersey for well over a century. The New Jersey Catholic Conference has long supported mutual consent reunions and the sharing of health information between adoptees and birth parents. Catholic Charities provides adoptees with information about their social background and health information even in instances when they are unable to facilitate a reunion.

In the 1977 Mills case that challenged a sealed adoption record in Atlantic City, the court reviewed at length the interests that are involved in placing adoption records under seal. Superior Court Judge Philip Gruccio noted that the purpose of the Adoption Act is to protect the child placed for adoption, the adopting parents and the birth parents. Analyzing each of their respective interests, Gruccio first addressed those of the birth or natural parents, and the adoptive parents.

He determined the assurance of secrecy regarding the identity of the natural parents enables them to place the child for adoption with a reputable agency, with the knowledge that their actions and motivations will not become public knowledge. Assured of this privacy by the state, the natural parents are free to move on and attempt to rebuild their lives after what must be a traumatic and emotionally tormenting episode in their lives.

The adopting parents also have an interest in having the birth records placed under seal. They have taken into their home a child who they will regard as their own and who they will love and raise as an integral part of their family unit. It is important to these adopting parents that they may raise this child without fear of interference from the natural parents and without fear that the birth status of the illegitimate child will be revealed or used as a means of harming the child or themselves. The state has an active interest in protecting and nurturing the growing family relationship it has statutorily created.

Clearly, the court recognized that the state has an obligation to protect the interests of all three parties. Gruccio wrote, "The statute requiring that the records be sealed clearly serves the interest of all three parties in the adoptive triangle: adoptive parents, natural parents and the child." Thousands of birth mothers placed their children for adoption through the New Jersey courts in reliance on that statutory assurance of privacy.

It is time for those trying to end the privacy of birth mothers to tell the truth: New Jersey's adoption law protects birth mothers, adoptees and adopting parents.

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