



March 1, 2017

Honorable Maida Townsend, Chairperson
Committee on Government Operations
Vermont General Assembly
Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Re: H 111

Dear Chairperson Townsend:

The International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) generally supports the intent to update and revise the vital records process delineated in H 111. However, we are concerned about the proposed repeal of the requirement to compile indexes.

One of the provisions in H 111 would repeal the requirement for indexes compiled by town clerks (page 17 §5012 and §5013.) Indexes are critically important to those who are researching events such as a birth, marriage or death. We appreciate that the records database is searchable, but in instances where there is no prior knowledge of the event, searching an index is very useful for determining whether an event actually occurred and for identifying the correct record. Consider, for example, the problem of determining the correct record for individuals with common names. It takes an index to know that one is looking for the correct bride and groom. The index would show the brides' and grooms' names so one could cull through the list to find the correct William Allen when the bride's name is known—as William Allen is a common name. The same would be true for birth records; finding the correct Jane Brown if one knows the parents' names, or if one wanted to find out if there was a birth at all.

In these instances, the index may be the only correct vehicle to search and then order the actual record— certified or non-certified— from the state agency at the established price. Having indexes available to ensure someone can find the “event” and then order the actual record will enhance the revenues to the state by an increase in purchased certificates.

We respectfully request that either § 5012 and § 5013 be reinstated or a new section be written to require the state registrar create indexes for births, marriages and deaths. We also request that the indexes and the information contained therein be available to the public and not considered confidential under § 5014 (confidentiality).

The International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies is the umbrella organization of 74 Jewish genealogical societies and Jewish historical societies worldwide whose approximately 10,000 members are actively researching their Jewish roots. We want to ensure that our members will be allowed continued and maximum access to these vital records.

The IAJGS and its predecessor organization were formed in 1988 to provide a common voice for issues of significance to its members and to advance our genealogical avocation. One of our primary objectives is to promote public access to genealogically relevant records.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide our comments on H 111.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jan Meisels Allen".

Jan Meisels Allen
Chairperson, IAJGS Public Records Access Monitoring Committee

cc:

Rep. Ronald E. Hubert, Vice Chair

Rep. Warren F. Kitzmiller, Ranking Member

Rep. Jessica Brumsted

Rep. Dennis J. Devereux

Rep. John Gannon

Rep. Marcia Gardner

Rep. Robert LaClair

Rep. Patti J. Lewis

Rep. Tristan Toleno

Rep. Cynthia Weed

Richard McCoy VT. Public Health Statistics Chief

Denise Diehl, Committee Assistant

Helena Gardner, Legislative Counsel and Records Officer