

To: Vermont House Committee on Judiciary

From: Roxane McKinley Blake

Date: February 12, 2022

RE: H.629, relating to access to adoption records

As an adoptive parent of 2 children in Vermont, born and adopted here in 1985 and 1987, this issue is pertinent to our family and primarily to their lives and wellbeing. Each adoption was facilitated by the same private agency with the same workers who were extremely supportive of us as we proceeded through the adoption process. Each child's birth and relinquishment situation was quite different and their responses to being adopted very different also.

Therefore, I would like to comment on the proposed bill, H.629 from my specific vantage point. We were interested in "open" adoptions as we felt even then that our children should have access to any available information about their birth parents. Of course, at that point in time, we were only told general basic background information about the birth parents, but especially in the first case, our son came to us with only a few bits of information. His birth in 1985 prevents his access to the same information as his sister has, born in 1987. He has shown little interest in wanting more information, as of now.

Our second adoption was handled differently as the birth mother wanted to be involved in choosing the home for her child. Therefore, we were able to meet her and learn a bit more about her and her family, background, etc. She requested ongoing contact through letters and eventually meeting and having some involvement in her daughter's life. She did not disclose information about the birth father and that aspect of our daughter's heritage remained a secret until recently.

With these very different scenarios in our family, it remains important to me that both have the same rights of access to their birth family heritage in whatever way is important to them. Our son is now a dad, what if there is important genetic information which is unattainable at this time? How are medical situations /other health history managed if a person does not know this information? Understanding their identity is a basic human right. Nothing about the requirement for the birthparent "to consent to disclosure "would apply to or register with a young woman who was in college in Vermont in 1985 and probably now lives out of state, so that does not offer a genuine pathway for my son.

Given the above scenarios, the only reasonable and humane answer is to allow adoptees access to all information that each adult in Vermont has access to in the birth records held by the state- and to their parents, if under age 18. I want my adoptive children to be able to find answers to questions they may have about their family tree and have the opportunity to reach out, as adults, to make contact - even if that is rejected by the birth parents.

Our relationships with both of our adoptive children are very strong and we have wonderful family connections. The fears of somehow threatening these relationships by the attainment of this

knowledge of the birth family is not grounded in our reality. The ability of our children, who we love, to know who they are on all fronts and to feel supported in this by us...is the most important thing to me. It only makes our connections stronger. And now that we are also grandparents, that information may become important to our grandchild in the future. The assignment in elementary school to create your "family tree" will have more options for him.