

Amber Burke

From: Kate VanWagner <katev@lundvt.org>
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Hi Amber, my statement is below.

I am the Options Coordinator at Lund. I am compelled to speak today from my experience of a decade working with Vermonters who are birth/first/former parents of children whom they have relinquished for private adoption.

I am in support of adoptee access to their original birth certificates on the whole. I appreciate the importance of this access for adoptees. I understand that there is great momentum with this bill for unrestricted access to OBCs. However, it is my obligation to complicate this, having worked with a small number of birth parents who have chosen to sign non-consents for the release of their identifying information. These people are not the majority of birth parents, but they matter. They have been through intensely traumatic circumstances surrounding their pregnancies, and on top of that trauma, as well as the trauma of relinquishing one's parental rights, they have made yet another heart-wrenching decision to request confidentiality- the withholding of their identifying information should their child request it once they reach adulthood. The bill as it currently is drafted would render null these birth parent's request for confidentiality which was allowed under the current law. I feel strongly that we need to honor these people's *no's*, to respect those *no's*.

I realize there is trauma for adoptees in not having access to identifying information, like OBCs, about their biological parents. I also know there is trauma for some birth parents in being contacted by their children who were adopted when this was not their hope. As awful as this is from the perspective of the adoptee, this is real for these birth parents and I feel obligated to bring this perspective to the committee as these are not people who will come forward.

I can't talk about specific situations, as these people have not consented for me to share their experiences. However, I can give you some ideas about some of the types of circumstances that may surround one of these requests for confidentiality, or non-consents. Again, these are not frequent scenarios, but they are very real to the people living them, and they deserve consideration.

A woman is sexually assaulted and becomes pregnant from this assault. She learns of the pregnancy too late to have an abortion. She conceals the pregnancy from her children and her entire family. The trauma she experienced from the assault brought her into crisis. She feels she is making the best decision she can for this child and she fears that future contact from this child will throw her into crisis again, so she signs a request for confidentiality with her relinquishment.

A woman is trying to leave a violently abusive spouse. She is able to leave for a period of time and during that time becomes pregnant with another person. She makes an adoption plan for this child and fears for her safety should her spouse ever find out about this child. She chooses to request confidentiality with her relinquishment.

We at Lund feel strongly, again, that overall, adoptees should have access to their OBCs and we support this bill, with the exception that we feel that the state needs to respect the choice of these individuals who have signed non-disclosures for reasons of their safety and/or wellbeing. Should an adoptee request an OBC from one of these individuals, Lund would make an attempt to contact them to discuss the request and see if they have had a change of heart.



KATE VAN WAGNER, MSW, LICSW

Options Coordinator
pronouns: she/her or they/them

Direct 802.258.0366

Fax 802.861.6460

www.lundvt.org

PO Box 4009

Burlington, VT 05406-4009

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