

**Testimony of Cary Brown, Executive Director of the Vermont Commission on Women
Vermont Senate Committee on Judiciary
March 23, 2022**

Re: H629, an act relating to access to adoption records

Since the Vermont Commission on Women (VCW) last considered the issue of adopted people accessing the identifying information of their birth parents and copies of their original birth certificates in 1996, the culture and societal ideology regarding adoption have changed considerably, and consumer DNA testing is widely available, changing the landscape for adopted people who want to learn about their histories and ancestry information.

VCW has been following committee discussions on H629, and has heard the expressions of concern for birth parents, especially for birth mothers who may have been promised anonymity when placing their child for adoption. It seems that birth mothers who do have concerns about their privacy may be unlikely to attend a public hearing or offer to testify before the committee.

Considering this, we created a very brief online survey to provide an opportunity for people who are impacted by adoption to anonymously share their thoughts about H629 and adopted people's access to their original birth certificates more generally. The survey is available at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RVVK5CK>.

The survey was published on Friday, February 18, 2022. We distributed the survey link on social media channels, including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram; it was sent to our newsletter audience of more than 1000 subscribers, the majority of whom are Vermont women; it was published on the front page of our [website](#); and on Monday, February 21, 2022, the [Burlington Free Press](#) published an article about the survey, which included the link to respond to the survey.

As of the writing of this letter, we've received 127 survey responses. The detailed survey results are available at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/stories/SM-R263F39W/>. This site will automatically update as new results come in.

A few items of note from the responses so far:

OVERALL RESPONSES

- 127 people have responded to the survey
- 84.25% of respondents identified as women (107 people)
- Only 7 respondents indicated they are opposed to adopted people having access to their birth records without mutual consent, and just one of these 7 was a birth/first/biological parent. One birth father said he wasn't concerned personally, but he was recognized that other birth parents might be.

RESPONSES FROM BIRTH/FIRST/BIOLOGICAL PARENT & FAMILY MEMBERS

- 20 of the 127 respondents identified as birth/first/biological parents, and 3 identified as birth/first/biological family members.
- All but one of the birth parents and birth family members who responded expressed support of adopted people having access to their original birth records.
- When asked if they had any privacy concerns if their identifying information were to be released, only one birth parent or family member said yes.
- When asked, “Please share your thoughts about this proposal,” some responses from this group included:
 - “Adopted individuals should have access to their original birth certificate and other relevant information ”
 - “Everyone should have access to their biology ”
 - “This bill treats people who are adopted like second class citizens. Non- adoptees don’t have to “ask” anyone for access to their vital records. This bill has roots that are l’ll informed about the reality of why a women relinquished her parental rights. In almost all cases it is because of poverty and lack of support. Let’s move away from bills that are held up by classism and mysoginistic beliefs. Adoptees and their mothers don’t need government interfering with their own personal lives. ”
 - “Adopted people should be treated like every other citizen and have a right to THEIR records”
 - “I know many natural moms that were told they could see their baby in 18 years. I don’t know any mom that asked for or were promised anonymity. As a person in reunion, it is very easy for children and moms that don’t want contact to refuse it.”
 - “I believe all adopted people have a right to their original, unredacted birth certificates.”
 - “Most birth mothers were not promised secrecy. In fact, they were threatened with legal issues if they made any attempt to contact their child. It is time to allow adoptees to know their family history and connect with family members. ”
 - “Adoptees should have access to their birth certificates and information. It is important to have this information especially for medical reasons. It affects not only the adoptee, but any children they may have. ”
 - The one negative comment was, “Adoptee and birthparents deserve their voice to be heard. We can’t go backwards we need to move forward but there still needs to be an option for birth parents to be confidential . ”

RESPONSES FROM ADOPTED PEOPLE

- 48 of the respondents were adopted people, 79.17% of whom identified as women.
- this group expressed strong support for expanding record access to adopted people.

The survey remains open, and we will be happy to provide updates as desired by the committee.