

Virginia Delegate Wendell S. Walker  
Chair of the Health, Welfare and Institutions Sub-Committee  
Pocahontas Building, Room E304  
900 East Main Street  
Richmond, VA 23219

January 18, 2023

Dear Chairman Walker and Members of the Subcommittee:

I write on behalf of the New York Adoptee Rights Coalition (NYARC) regarding Virginia's HB1969. New York State recently enacted bipartisan legislation that secured—like HB1969 would secure—the right of adult adopted people to obtain certified copies of their own original birth certificates (OBC). NYARC was instrumental in securing this right.

Adult adoptees are the only group of people who are denied access to the state's original record of their birth. We are denied this document not because we were relinquished or because our parent(s) had their rights terminated for just cause; but because we were adopted. OBCs are only changed and sealed upon adoption. This fact is true regardless of what year we were adopted. This is true in infant, step-parent, intercountry, and foster care adoptions. Had a person not been adopted but, instead, aged out of the foster care system their name and birth certificate would never have been changed. Critical to note is that every child in foster care, like adoptees, was also relinquished or their parent(s) had their rights terminated for just cause.

Obtaining one's OBC is about dignity and equality. It is not about searching for one's biological family. Adopted adults do not need a record of their births to locate family. They need only spit in a vial or swab their cheek. I, personally, have helped upwards of 200 people locate their biological families using consumer DNA testing and public records. The people I have helped range in age from 21 to 83. In the technological world of social media and consumer DNA testing, I assure you that the idea of anonymity for anyone is impossible.

There are approximately six million adopted people in the United States. We are your neighbors, friends, and family members. We represent first responders, teachers, military, union workers, corporate professionals, and even legislators. We represent every religion, political party, sexual orientation and gender. Imagine if Virginia's current law stated that military personnel/first responders/teachers/LGBTQ/etc., must secure a court order or approval from a state agency in order to access their original birth certificate. Virginians would never stand for such discrimination. We ask that you not stand for it either.

It is our hope that Virginia will, like New York, allow ALL adults born in the state to be able to apply for and receive a copy of their original birth certificate without restrictions or court orders. We hope that you will join New York and the 12 other states (Alaska, Alabama, Colorado, Connecticut, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Louisiana, Oregon, and Rhode Island) who allow for complete adoptee equality. Vermont will soon become the 13th state. You have the potential to get it right and make it equal in Virginia. It is our hope that you make history happen in your great state, just as we did in New York, Make Virginia the 14th state to restore an adopted adult's right to their own birth record.

We ask for a favorable subcommittee report for HB1969.

Respectfully,

Annette O'Connell  
Spokesperson - New York Adoptee Rights Coalition  
845-821-4303