

# Morristown Post-Adoption Support Group

Affiliated with

*New Jersey Coalition for Adoption Reform and Education (NJCARE)  
and American Adoption Congress*

The Morristown Post-Adoption Support Group consists of birth parents, adoptees, adoptive parents, professionals and significant others. Our members come mostly from New Jersey and New York, and we've had people come from Australia, England, California, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Maine, Pennsylvania, Texas, Vermont and Washington.

We support S2814/A4253, the Adoptees' Birthright Bill.

**Bill Statement:** The pending legislation would permit adult adoptees to have access to a copy of their original birth certificates. It allows relinquishing parents to file a document indicating their preference regarding contact. Birth parents submitting a contact preference form will be asked to submit a family medical history form, which would also be given to the requesting adoptee.

**Brief History:** Similar bills have been in the legislature for 30 years! Bills passed twice in the Assembly, 1991 and 1994, and 4 times in the Senate, 2004, 2006, 2008 and in March 2010 by a vote of 27-10.

Listen to what those who live adoption every day have to say:

*My birth name is on my adoption decree. As an adoptee, looking at my amended birth certificate is like looking into a mirror without seeing a reflection. No validating information is provided, just the city of my birth. I only want what every other American is entitled to...an original birth certificate. It will make my existence real, not amended.*  
Ginny Bayard, East Hanover, NJ

*As adoptees, the only thing we are looking for is what 98% of the world takes for granted...our birth name and medical history. "It's our birthright."* Andrew Majkowicz, Saddle Brook, NJ

*In 1998, my daughter and I joyfully reunited under the closed records system. I never asked for nor was I promised confidentiality. In fact, my daughter's adoptive parents knew my name. We mothers who surrendered our children so many years ago need to recognize that it's time to throw off the mantle of shame and guilt. Adoptees deserve to know the truth of their heritage and to have their current medical information.* Judy Foster, Randolph, NJ

*England has had open records since 1975! What a fantastic case study for the NJ legislature to examine. I am confident that someday health, honesty, and healing will prevail over illogical myths, and that NJ adoptees will have all the rights given to them by God. Long live the pursuit of happiness. Peter W. Franklin, Lincoln Park, NJ*

*As an adoptee, I look for truth in the documentation of my life. I want to know my true birth date, place of birth and heritage, as well as medical/genetic information. It is supremely important as this impacts my health as well as those of my children. I am tired of putting "unknown" on my family medical history forms and having lots of tests "just in case". Those concerned with spiraling health costs would do well to give the pending legislation a hearty thumbs up! Karen Rittenbach, Freehold, NJ*

*I relinquished my daughter, my only child, in 1969. Throughout the entire process confidentiality was never considered, discussed, nor promised. Our reunion has brought immeasurable joy to both my life and hers. I can no longer imagine life without my daughter and her family. Closed records are horribly unfair to the majority of birth parents who want very much to know their children, and to those adult adoptees choosing to find their original parents. Pamela Cook, Somerset, NJ*

*I am a birthmother who was forced by circumstance to give up her only son for adoption. I was never given any assurances of anonymity or confidentiality nor did I want them. Everyone deserves to know their heritage. Unsealing the original birth certificate gives adult adoptees the rights that the rest of the U.S. population has. Why discriminate against adoptees? They deserve the full human and civil rights afforded to all other U.S. citizens. Patricia C Gilleran, Bloomfield NJ*

*I found out I was adopted at the age of 48 years. Right now I feel like my entire life was a lie - my medical history, my ethnic background, my birth certificate, the fact that I thought I was an only child but I'm not, etc. - everything everyone else takes for granted in their life to be true, but not for me!!! I want to be able to learn the truth - the whole truth - my right as an American! Maryellen Stefano, Saddle Brook, NJ*

*I am an adoptee with no information about my ancestry, my heritage, my familial medical history. These are basic rights I am entitled to know, and stress and frustration of the inability to know is emotionally torturous. Tammy Cohen, Montclair, NJ*

*As an adoptee, all I am looking for is what most citizens of this state take for granted everyday. They have accurate medical histories not only for themselves, but for their children. They know what their heritage is and where they come from. Their Birth Certificates reflect who they are and where they come from. Mine does not. Am I less of a citizen just because I am an adoptee? Michele A. Fortier, High Bridge, NJ*

*Adoption is a circular event that leaves the child a victim, unless he/she is given the right to know the truth. An explanation for the adoption is a choice, but to know ones origin is a RIGHT that responsible, moral adults owe the child they bring into this world. Birth parents, adoptive parents, and adoption agencies alike, must recognize the need to know,*

*and insist that our legal system be brought up to date and provide adoptees with accurate information about their birthright. Helen Emire, Newton, NJ*

*Adoption is a complex issue, which leaves many questions unanswered, sometimes for a lifetime. To allow access to our original birth certificates is the key step toward answering many questions about ourselves. We have had no decision making power in the arrangements that have affected our beginnings, and for some, their endings. We need to know OUR TRUTHS so that we can join the rest of the world as equals. George Bullis, Saddle Brook, NJ*

*I am a birthmother whose son was conceived in rape in 1965, and I still wanted to know my son. It took me nearly 30 years to accept the responsibility I had to my son in spite of having surrendered my parental rights. The strength of my son's relationship with his loving and caring adoptive family has increased since our reunion – he no longer feels like a misfit. In the New Jersey triad support group in which I was a member for over 5 years, there was not one person who was sorry they searched even if they found rejection, death, mental illness or other devastating results. It is their own story. Bobbi Beavers, South Berwick, ME*

*The sealed records are a guillotine, permanently severing a relationship originated by God, allowing no room for reconciliation, forgiveness or peace. Pam Hasegawa, Morristown*

*As a nation, we are obsessed with health maintenance and preventative health care measures. As insurance rates rise and less dollars are paid out for healthcare, why, as an adult adoptee am I not afforded the same birthright knowledge as a non-adopted adult, to know the potential health risks I may face later on in my life? Cathy Pettyjohn, Atlanta, GA*

*As a former teacher of adoptees and now a friend of adoptees, I support the legislation, which would permit adult adoptees access to a copy of their original birth certificate. To me this is just a human right. Those of us who have our birth certificates should not take it for granted, but should work towards the passage of this legislation. Marie Varley Ed.D., Newark, NJ*

*When people talk about family history and ancestors I have nothing to offer that is mine. Yes, I could go into details about my adopted family, but I cannot claim ownership. Non-adoptees can look in the mirror and see their past and their future...when I look in the mirror, I see a blurred image like you see on TV when they want to shield someone's identity. Who am I? What is my biological medical history. I don't like an amended existence. Deb Buntzen, Amarillo, TX (born in Teaneck, NJ)*

*I had a wonderful adoptive family, and found my birth mother when I was an adult - with great difficulty. Had I not been able to find her, I would not have known about a certain genetically pre-disposed medical condition that happened during my birth mother's pregnancy. Had my doctor not had the information, it is quite possible I would not have*

*my two children with me today. This law is misguided and, frankly, unconscionable. It must be changed.* Alison Keenan, Morris Township, NJ

*As a birthmother recently reunited with my 25 year old son I could not provide answers to all of his questions specifically around medical history because I am also an adoptee and do not know my own history. When I gave my son up for adoption, it was not confidentiality but rather his well-being that was my only concern. My entire life I have had to state "unknown" when asked about my own medical history and in this day of modern medicine it is nearly criminal for such important information to be withheld. It is critical this legislation be passed as it impacts my children and future generations.* Susan Berntheisel, Sweetwater, NJ

*It's hard to fault non-adopted people for the unequal treatment adoptees get. It's very difficult to imagine a complete subtraction of roots, maternal connection, heritage, the chain of genetics, health, and looks like..., sounds like... for people who have always had them. Shame and fear have distorted the law over the years with the result: we are denied equal rights. I've been lucky to see both sides, and it's impossible to overstate the deep satisfaction of knowing your own heritage. If lawmakers continue to be shaped under the hammer of whispered, dark fear, rather than plain-spoken, light-of-day needs, facts, and values of real people, thousands of New Jersey affected adoptees will continue to be subordinate to the anonymous, the invisible, the few, and the motives of a small group of non-adopted people.* Richard Ramsdell, Chester, NY

*I signed up for a state registry 3 times to no avail. When I found my mother on my own, she said she was never told about the registry. I would still be waiting to have my mother in my life and to have my medical history if I put my trust in a registry. Registries just don't work!* Nancy Jeffery, Morris Township, NJ

*As a birth mother, I had no idea I could search for my daughter. I thought I had to stay out of her life. My daughter put her identifying information into a registry in 1990. I registered in 2001, but was off by one day because she was born 20 minutes after midnight and no one told me that. Thank God that I was finally able to connect with her!* Pat Fox, Morristown, NJ

*I am adopted, and as a masters level psychologist and counselor have studied the adoption triad on the graduate level with Baden and Brodzinsky, two well-known adoption researchers. It is imperative that adoptees be allowed access to their original birth certificates and other available information about who they are and where they come from. This information is important from a health and heredity standpoint, but equally important for adoptees to have a full sense of identity and connectedness. If you are not an adopted person, imagine not knowing where you were born, who your mother was, or anything real about your identity. It sounds like a movie, right? This is true of almost all adoptees. Please help us to have the same rights as all other people.* Randy James Fusaro, Toms River, NJ

*Legislation to allow adult adoptees access to their birth certificates would not be infringing on the rights of birth mothers. We were never given that right. Furthermore, studies of birth mothers show they frequently reconsider and remain uncomfortable with the decision they made to surrender their child. These feelings of guilt, grief, and loss might be lessened by knowing what actually happened to their child. Valerie Drabyk, Edison, NJ*

*Seven years ago when my 32-year-old daughter and only child found me, and we hugged for the first time, we both felt as if the holes in our hearts had been filled. Our reunion has been a journey that has healed deep sorrows for both of us. I wish people would understand that this basic emotional and physical bond of 9 months can never be erased. If those opposed to an adoptee having access to their original birth certificate understood that love is not a finite commodity when given to one will be taken from another, but rather multiplies – they could never be opposed to this bill. Bonnie Shapiro, New York, NY*

*I am reunited with my son for 2 years and had relinquished him in 1968 because I was convinced that it would be best for him. That decision was made so that he would not feel different & not be outcast because his mother was not married. I never wanted nor was promised anonymity. By keeping records sealed we are saying, to the adult adoptee, that yes you are different & an outcast. You are not entitled to medical or genetic history for you or your children. Who you were before adoption has no value, you are insignificant, you are erased. This is not a mother's wish. Lisa LoRusso, Little Neck, NY*

*When we adopted our son and daughter in the mid-sixties, the agency told us that if we loved our children enough, they would have never have the need to know their birth families. They also said that the birth mother knew she made the right decision and would go home, forget and get on with her life. I found it hard to believe that a woman could carry a baby for nine months, give birth and "go home and forget", but in those days, we didn't question the professionals. Thirteen years later, a month before our son's birthday, we received a letter from his birth mother. She did not forget - and needed to know that her son was alive and well. After we recovered from the shock, we agreed to meet with her - and the experience was so rewarding for all of us, that we searched and found our daughter's birthmother. She lived 8 miles away from us and welcomed our contact. This happened 25 years ago, and since then, I have advocated for honesty and openness in adoption, and I believe it is time for S-1093/A-3237, to become law in New Jersey so that all adult adoptees can learn the truth of their origins. Jane Nast, Mendham, NJ*

*I have been trying to make peace with a loss that changed my life, and now that my birth son is 22 years old and I just want to know if he is alive and well, I stand looking at all closed doors. How can this make sense to anyone who knows what it is to love someone and to let them go? I feel betrayed and confused. I deserve the right to know, and he deserves the right to know I am out here curious and willing to have a relationship if he*

*so desires. These decisions belong to us not the state.* Madeline McCann Thompson,  
Highland Lakes, NJ

*As an adult adoptee I believe it is my right to have my original birth certificate just like the rest of the population. The secrecy that was forced upon the adoption community has caused me personal damage that I don't believe will ever go away. My birth certificate is a symbol of my truth and proof of my existence before I became forever an adoptee and consequently treated like a second class citizen where this matter is concerned.* Connie Germer, Dover, NJ

*I believe I should have a right to a copy of my original birth certificate in order to contact my biological parents particularly in matters concerning my health history.* Suzanne Smith, Hillsborough New Jersey

*Being an adult adoptee and not being able to gain access to records concerning my birth is very unsettling. It has caused me a lot of anguish, and has left me with a terrible void of not knowing anything about my birth, heritage, biological parents, ancestry, medical history, etc. Also some adoptions were not done legally and in many cases there is no non identifying information ever recorded. For these facts alone all records should be accessible to adult adoptees!!* Lori Guiliano, Staten Island, New York

*When a baby is adopted their genealogy, family history, medical history, the desire of "where they came from" does not change. They are absorbed into the "new" family, however, who they were born is who they are. Nature most definitely outweighs nurture. It is so very important that adoptees have a right to their original birth certificates. It is a BASIC HUMAN RIGHT for so many important reasons. We as babies had no say, now the babies are adults. Please don't deny us our rights.* Joe Pessolano, Staten Island, New York