

Proponent Testimony for Senate Bill 23
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Hello, my name is Steve Kelly. I am a Captain with the West Chester Fire Department, where I have served that community for the last 17 years. I am also a proud husband, son, and father of two beautiful daughters. I was adopted as an infant in 1976 in Montgomery County, Ohio and found out about my adoption at the age of 9. I have been interested in finding information about who I really am ever since that time.

Like many of the other people you have heard from, I have a very personal reason for searching for the information about my birth. I was adopted by a very loving family that was incapable of having children of their own and was their only child, so I benefitted from a very positive environment filled with encouragement and support throughout my entire life. When I first learned that I was adopted, I was devastated and confused. I thought someone might come and take me away from all that I knew and loved. As I grew older, I no longer feared being removed from my adopted family, but I developed many questions that had no answers due to the laws regarding the sealing of adoption records in the state of Ohio. At some points throughout my life, curiosity made me wonder about my birth parents, but I never felt an overwhelming desire to find them with the intention of having a second family. My desire to meet them was based on my curiosity, the need to ask "why", and to gain valuable insights about who I was with regard to my ethnicity, ancestry, and genetic history.

It is the genetic and medical history that became the main focus of my reason to search for my birth parents in early 2008. My wife and I were pregnant with our first daughter, Cecilia, when we found out that she suffered from a rare genetic disorder that was terminal for fetal development. At 21 weeks in her pregnancy, my wife delivered our daughter still born. We met with genetic counselors and various physicians who asked numerous questions about both of our medical histories. Unfortunately, every response that I gave resulted in a giant "question mark" being placed next to my name. That was not only humiliating, but extremely frustrating as I felt that I had potentially betrayed my own daughter and had maybe been a contributing factor to her terminal genetic disorder.

In 2009, we were blessed with our second daughter, Caitlin. She is the light of our lives and has brought so much joy into our world that was previously missing. Imagine our horror when she developed seizures at 7 months of age and was admitted to Children's Hospital in Cincinnati for extensive testing and therapy. Again, we met with genetic counselors and numerous physicians, who informed us that she suffered from a rare genetic condition, one where she is only one of eight children in the state of Ohio who has been currently diagnosed. The questioning that my wife and I endured was the same as in 2008, only this time, my feelings of despair and betrayal were magnified ten-fold. I attempted to petition the Probate Court of Montgomery County for access to additional information about my birth parents in an effort to find out if I carried some genetic abnormality or had some medical condition in my body that would continue to haunt me. Unfortunately, I was told that I was only allowed a very small amount of non-identifying information.

As an adoptee, I support the right of all adoptees in Ohio to access their original birth certificates in the hopes of finding out more about the most important part of their lives, their birth. Through your help by passing Senate Bill 23, I might have an opportunity to gain valuable information about my past that could significantly impact my future.