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Senate Bill 23
Senate Medicaid, Health and Human Services Committee
Sponsor Testimony – Senator Bill Beagle; Senator David Burke
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Chairwoman Jones, Ranking Member Cafaro, and members of the Senate Medicaid, Health and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 23, which would open access to original birth records for select adult adoptees.

Currently, Ohio has a piecemeal, three-tiered system of access for adopted persons seeking their original birth records: Adoptees who were adopted prior to 1964 enjoy unrestricted access upon request. Adoptees who were adopted after September of 1996 also have access unless the birthparent has specifically denied access. Those unlucky individuals who were adopted between 1964 and September of 1996 have virtually no access to their original birth records, with the only mechanism available to them being to seek a court order under special circumstances.

This legislation will allow adoptees that fall in the 1964-1996 window the same access that pre-1964 adoptees currently have. In order to respect the right of birthparents to express their desire for contact with their children, the legislation also implements a Contact Preference Form option that the birthparent can file with the original birth certificate.

There have been numerous attempts in the past to pass legislation similar to Senate Bill 23, with each attempt culminating in failure. It is important to note that a historic opponent of the legislation, Ohio Right to Life, no longer opposes the bill.

Several other states have recently taken similar steps regarding adult adoptee access to original birth records without experiencing significant issues, including Maine, New Hampshire and Rhode Island.

Simply put, the current system of restricting access to records based solely upon when a person was adopted is unfair and has outlived any useful purpose it may have once had.

Aside from this being an issue of fairness and the inherent right of people to know who they are, this is also a health issue, as the State is currently keeping valuable hereditary information from many people. As we know, modern medical science has proven a link between genetics and a host of diseases and conditions, and the hereditary risk factors in a person's life can be crucial information.

Madame Chair and members of the Senate Medicaid, Health and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide supplemental testimony on Senate Bill 23 with my colleague Senator Beagle.

As an adoptee myself, I believe I bring quite a unique perspective to this legislation. Ironically enough, I personally fall into this window of adoptees that have no mechanism of accessing their original birth records for no reason other than the year they were born. While I was fortunate enough to find my birth parents others are not so fortunate.

While it is my belief that families are created through time and not necessarily genetics, it is for each individual to decide for themselves if they want to search for their birth parents. This decision is not an easy one and the discoveries are not always positive. However, I think, at the end of the day, it is important that we provide an open and fair process for both parties; the birth parents and the adoptees. I believe this bill does just that. As Senator Beagle mentioned earlier, while this legislation will open up access for adoptees born between 1964 and 1996, we included language for a Contact Preference Form which the birthparent can file with the original birth certificate.

Thank you, Madame Chair and members of the committee. We are happy to field any questions you may have at this time.