

EDITORIAL: Make adoption records more accessible

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Illinois adoption records info

For more information about obtaining an original birth certificate for an Illinois adoptee or adult descendants of deceased adoptees, visit http://www.idph.state.il.us/vitalrecords/vital/non_certified.htm.

On Nov. 15, all Illinois adoptees and adult descendants of deceased adoptees will gain access to their original birth records. This is a law that should be adopted in Indiana as well.

For years, adoptees' quest to locate birth parents, and vice versa, has been spun as a sentimental story, and it is that. Adoptees and birth parents who are able to find each other often have a sense of closure as they reunite and find out about each other's lives.

But there's more to it than tugging at heartstrings. There's also a need for patients to fill in information about their ancestors' health backgrounds.

Illinois state Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, who spearheaded the effort to open the adoption records in Illinois, is continuing her crusade. Feigenholtz told Times staff writer Lauri Harvey Keagle that she is in talks with U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley, D-Ill., about the issue. Quigley is a second-generation adoptee.

"I said we've got to do this for second-generation adoptees for nothing other than health reasons," Feigenholtz said. "This is a national issue."

Health care is indeed a national issue, as the debate over the health care reforms passed by Congress, and promoted so forcefully by President Barack Obama, has shown. But access to adoption records is also a state issue, and state action can come quicker than a national solution.

Feigenholtz, who was adopted, said the lack of information about her birth family and her identity has haunted her throughout her life.

"It's not about trying to replace our family," she said. "It is human nature to want to know your lineage." This is true. And that quest becomes urgent when health concerns are factored in.

Indiana began an adoption history program in 1988 to allow for the release of medical, identifying and nonidentifying information. However, identifying information can be released only when the adult adoptee and the birth parent register with the Indiana Adoption History Program, which is run by the Indiana Department of Health. Illinois has had a similar program since 1985.

What makes the new Illinois law stand out is the access to birth certificates.

Indiana should follow the lead set by Illinois in providing adoptees and their adult descendants easier access to their original birth records. This isn't just about satisfying curiosity, although that should be reason enough, but it also is about helping patients track down vital information about their birth family's health.