

# Chicago Tribune

## For many Illinois adoptees, door will soon open to the past

New law will let thousands born after 1946 get birth certificates with the names of their biological parents



State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz becomes emotional at a Thursday news conference about Illinois' new law allowing adoptees to get their birth certificates. In the background are radio personality Steve Cochran, left, who like Feigenholtz is an adoptee, and Dr. Damon T. Arnold, director of the Illinois Department of Public Health. (José M. Osorio, Chicago Tribune /June 9, 2011)

By Bonnie Miller Rubin, Tribune reporter

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Illinois Department of Public Health officials are bracing for a flood of requests in November when a new law will allow thousands of adult adoptees to obtain their birth certificates.

The law passed in [Illinois](#) last year could give some adoptees the names of their birth parents for the first time. Birth parents can remain anonymous and have their names redacted from any released birth certificate by filling out a form by Nov. 1.

Rep. [Sara Feigenholtz](#), an adoptee and chief sponsor of the measure, public health officials, and adult adoptees held a news conference at the Thompson Center in [Chicago](#) on Thursday to raise awareness of the issue.

Since last year when the bill was signed, about 645 adoptees born in Illinois before 1946 have been issued their birth certificates. Starting Nov. 15, those born after 1946 — when a privacy provision allowed birth parents to decide if they wanted their identities to remain secret — will be able to do the same thing.

"On Nov. 15, I will be able to mail my application to the state's office of vital records, enclose my \$15 and get a copy of my

original birth certificate," said Feigenholtz, D-Chicago.

Feigenholtz already found her birth mother in the 1980s, but she still has not been able to view her original birth certificate. "On it will be the name of the woman who gave birth to me 53 years ago. ... can't wait to hold it in my hand," said the lawmaker.

In addition to making sure adoptees know about greater access, the state also wants to inform birth parents of the coming changes. If they wish to remain anonymous, they should file a birth parent preference form by Nov. 1. If biological parents fail to do so, the state will assume that the information is fair to release.

Since January 2010, 336 parents have asked that their names and contact information be shared with birth children, while 95 birth parents have requested that their identities remain secret, according to the Health Department.

"People thought that (opening records) will lead to things we don't want to happen," said radio personality Steve Cochran, an adoptee who has also been active in the issue. "That's the beauty of this legislation. Anyone can opt out."

To spread the word, the state launched **[newillinoisadoptionlaw.com](http://newillinoisadoptionlaw.com)**, is running public service announcements on radio and TV and distributing fliers at churches, synagogues and doctor's offices. Notifications also have been included with the state's driver's license and vehicle registration mailings.

Under the previous law, adult adoptees who wanted a copy of their original birth certificate faced considerable legal hurdles, such as obtaining a court order. Illinois is one of the few states, and now the largest state, to enact legislation opening records.

"Other states are watching us," Feigenholtz said.

Joel Chrastka, of [Berwyn](#), was the first in the state to take advantage of the new law.

At 43, he found out that he was adopted, and he waited an additional 30 years to obtain his birth certificate and learn the identity of his birth parents.

"Now I know who I am," he said.

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