

## Adoptees seek birth certificates under new Illinois law

By KAREN HAWKINS Associated Press November 15, 2011 5:46PM

CHICAGO — After decades of searching in vain for her birth mother, Ami Dessen said the chance to see the woman's name on her birth certificate for the first time made Tuesday the most important day of her life.

Dessen was among the first in line at the vital records office in Springfield to take advantage of a new Illinois law that gives her and other adoptees unprecedented access to their original birth certificates. She and others applied for the certificates Tuesday to start a process that could take weeks or months.

Before the law took effect, original birth certificates were generally sealed and new ones were issued once adoptions were final. The 2010 Illinois Adoption Act gave adoptees access to the records in stages. People born before Jan. 1, 1946, could request the certificates last year. Those born on or after that date got access starting this week. The law allows access to birth certificates only for adoptees 21 and older.

Dessen, 50, of Urbana said she's spent decades running into dead ends in her search for her birth mother. She was born in Urbana and has lived there almost her entire life. Doctors she was told had delivered her wouldn't give her any information, and a man she tracked down as her mother's lawyer told her she'd need a court order.

Applying to see her birth certificate Tuesday was part of a long and emotional journey, she said.

"I just want to have some closure," she said. "(To) be related to somebody by blood and make me feel like a complete person."

She expects to get the record back in about four to six weeks, and officials have told other adoptees the process could take months and doesn't have a guaranteed outcome. Though original birth certificates typically include birth parents' names and places of birth, the information may not always be available.

For Joel David Collins, applying is worth the gamble as he seeks information on his family's medical background to pass along to his two sons.

“It’s really weird when you walk into a doctor’s office and they ask for your history, and you can’t give them any,” Collins said.

Collins, 50, of Skokie, said his reasons for wanting to track down his birth mother have changed over the years. When he was younger, he was more curious about his ethnicity, and he had the fantasy he says all adopted children share about whether a reunion would be like “the Hallmark movies.”

Now, he’s conflicted about seeking out his biological mother because he doesn’t want to upset her life. But “I also want her to know she did good by me” and that he ended up with a loving family. If he gets a name, he may try to track down medical information in a way that doesn’t involve meeting anyone, he said.

The Illinois Department of Public Health says birth parents who want their information kept confidential can fill out a form. In such cases, adoptees would get a birth certificate without a birth parent’s name.

Paul Hansen, 50, of Highland, Ind., said the birth certificate will help his search for answers.

“I know I speak for a lot of other kids who were adopted and given away that there’s a big question mark hanging over our lives,” Hansen said. “It’s natural to want to know your parents. It does leave a hole in your life.”