

Adoptees awaiting birth certificates face long wait

By Kurt Erickson | kurt.erickson@lee.net | Posted: Wednesday, February 15, 2012 9:24 pm | (2) Comments

SPRINGFIELD — Adoptees hoping to obtain copies of their birth certificates from the state face a growing wait. Under a new Illinois law designed to give adopted children easier access to their birth records, more than 5,480 people have sent in applications.

But, because only two to three people are working to fill the applications, the backlog of unfinished paperwork dates to Nov. 17 and is already three months long.

It has become frustrating for people like Amy Wilson of Bellefonte, Pa., who was adopted in Evanston and is now seeking a birth certificate. Based on the current flow of records, she could be waiting as long as two years to receive her records.

“It seems so unfair for the department to make people wait so long,” Wilson said.

The Illinois Department of Public Health is asking applicants to be patient.

“IDPH understands this is a very personal and emotional issue and the department is working as hard as it can to process applications,” agency spokeswoman Melaney Arnold noted.

The flood of application stems from a landmark change in how Illinois handles adoption records.

Previously, original birth certificates were sealed and not typically available to adoptees. But, under legislation approved by the General Assembly last year, adoptees age 21 and older and born after Jan. 1, 1946, can get access to the paperwork by applying to the state public health agency.

When the law went into effect Nov. 15, officials had no way of knowing how many people would apply for their records. The two workers handling the requests also deal with other birth records duties.

To help spread the workload, one employee has been temporarily assigned to assist with paperwork and filing. But, said Arnold, “At this time there is no discussion about additional staff as the budget is an issue.”

In all, the crew at Public Health has been able to issue 701 birth certificates, which are processed in the order they are received.

State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, an adoptee who sponsored the new law, said it is important to remember each application is unique, with workers sometimes having to contact county-level health officials to complete an application.

Feigenholtz said she knew a staffing crunch might occur because of the state’s financial problems. “I knew that would be an obstacle,” the Chicago Democrat said.

But, she said, rather than criticize Public Health officials, she said she is working with the department to try and earmark funds to help bring in more workers to tackle the backlog.

Read more: http://www.pantagraph.com/news/state-and-regional/illinois/adoptees-awaiting-birth-certificates-face-long-wait/article_fd00d4ae-584d-11e1-9602-0019bb2963f4.html#ixzz1oeIkXmEq