

[New Era for Ohio Adoptees Began Today](#)

[Becky Drinnen](#)'s adoption was finalized in mid-December, 1963, just weeks before Ohio began sealing birth records on January 1, 1964. She has had her original birth certificate since 1981, what she calls "important proof of my identity." What if her adoption had been delayed just a few weeks? "My birth mother would have signed the same documents, my adoptive parents would have signed the same documents, yet I would not have had access to my original birth certificate," she said. "Which strikes me as completely ridiculous, and illustrates the ridiculousness of the tiered access laws."

The first step in eliminating those tiers, and creating equal access for Ohio adoptees, began today. On December 19, 2013, Ohio Governor John Kasich signed Substitute Senate Bill 23 into law, granting 400,000 adoptees born January 1, 1964 through September 18, 1996 access to their original birth certificates. The law has two key dates.

Between today, March 20, 2014, and March 19, 2015, birth parents may file a "Contact Preference" form or a "Birth Parent Name Redaction" form. The redaction form allows a birth parent to have his or her name removed from the original birth certificate prior to its requested release. If a birth parent chooses to submit the form, a complete social/medical history form must also be submitted. All forms are voluntary, and if the handful of states that have enacted similar legislation are an indicator, a very small percentage of birth parents choose to redact.

Once this waiting period is complete, adoptees can apply for their original birth certificates beginning **March 20, 2015**.

This bill is 25 years in the making and the result of several dedicated people, many of whom worked with Adoption Equity Ohio and it's prime sponsor [Adoption Network Cleveland](#). One of those dedicated people is Betsie Norris, Executive Director of Adoption Network Cleveland, and an adoptee whose father was partially responsible not only for Ohio's sealed records practice, but also for its reversal many years later when he testified in support of the practice's demise.

Ms. Norris searched and was reunited with her birthparents in 1986. Much to her surprise she found that her birth mother and birth father had married and had three sons. They welcomed her in to their family. In 1988, she founded Adoption Network Cleveland to provide support and assistance to others and decrease secrecy in adoption. "Secrecy had been so powerful," she said. "I was steadfast in wanting to create a discourse between all three sides." Over the years, Adoption Network Cleveland has assisted in more than 1,850 adoptee-birthparent reunions.

Ms. Norris has also worked on open access legislation since 1989, and was thrilled that the bill passed virtually unanimously with bipartisan support. In addition, she said, "Ohio is the only state thus far to have a Right to

Life group support the legislation.”

Adoption Network Cleveland’s excellent [resource page](#) provides birth parents and adoptees with information on what to do and when in terms of the new law.

Ohio adoptees can celebrate the new law at the 38th Cleveland International Film Festival (CIFF) next Tuesday and Wednesday, March 25 and 26, when two documentary films by Jean Strauss will be shown together:

[An Adoptee ROARed in Ohio](#) is a short documentary that reveals the interesting story behind Ohio’s sealed records, and how Betsie Norris worked tirelessly to change a system her own father had inadvertently created; and [A Simple Piece of Paper](#), a moving documentary that follows more than a dozen individuals as they apply to the State of Illinois to discover the truth about their origins. The latter offers a preview of what could be in store for Ohio adoptees. Tickets are available [here](#) or by calling: 877-304-3456. Use discount code “ADOPT” to save \$2.00 off the \$14.00 admission price.

Nine states have passed similar legislation. Details are available on our [Restored Access States](#) page. In addition, [New Jersey](#), [New York](#), [Connecticut](#), [Pennsylvania](#), and [Colorado](#) currently have similar legislation pending. To help support access legislation in any of those states click on the state name to be linked to each state’s version of Adoption Equity Ohio.

Kendra Crookston, whose reunion story [Making Sense of Fantasy and Reality](#) is featured on Secret Sons & Daughters, was born during Ohio’s 32 year period of sealed records. Even though she knows her birth parents’ names, she says that when the time comes, she’ll be in line for her record. “To many, I can imagine, the point must seem moot. I can assure you, it is not,” she said. “My existing birth certificate reflects little truth about my birth, and my original one is another piece to a life long puzzle.”

[An Irish mum and U.S. original birth certificates](#)

In the months since *Philomena* debuted and went on to receive four Oscar nominations, Philomena (both the real person and the movie version) has brought international attention to Ireland’s adoption history and helped drum up support for legal changes that would allow Irish adoptees to access records that could help them trace their origins.

What I hadn’t realized until last year, and many of our friends who had been

adopted hadn't either, is that **there are 39 U.S. States with years, if not decades, worth of sealed records—even now in 2014.** This means millions of American adoptees have restricted access to their origins, ancestry, and in some cases—to medical history that could help an adoptee and his or her children with genetic-related illnesses, as [Darlene Coyne's story](#) on this site shows.

Shining a light on that fact—and putting a human face on those numbers—was what inspired us to create Secret Sons & Daughters and begin collecting stories. With that said, it's important to clarify that advocating for a right to one's original birth certificate is often confused with advocating reunions. To us they are separate issues.

Having unrestricted access to your original birth certificate means having the right to the truth about your origins, your ancestry, your medical history—the nonfiction version of your life's first chapter if you will. It's a right every non-adopted adult enjoys, as well as adult adoptees in almost a dozen U.S. states. What you do with that truth, whether or not you initiate a relationship, and at what level of contact (if available), is something very personal, something to be worked out within families, and something beyond the realm of legislation.

It's also something incredibly complicated, as we know from our own experiences. In order to get information beyond what an original birth certificate offers, you have to make contact. For some adoptees, connecting with biological families is meaningful well beyond an exchange of information, for others it's not, and for others still, any sort of contact is not worth the potential complications. As you'll see, we honor all perspectives on this site.

To find out where your birth state stands on records access, visit our [Discover Your Rights](#) page.