



State lawmakers present legislation targeting birth records, costs of adoptions

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SPRINGFIELD — About 5,000 children are adopted in Illinois every year, at a cost of approximately \$25,000 per adoption.

Once the process is complete, the adopted child is severed from their birth records for life unless they go on a hunt for their biological parents.

“You’re forcing somebody to do something they don’t want to do or aren’t ready to do,” said state Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, D-Chicago, House sponsor for legislation to make birth records available to adopted people in Illinois.

All of that could change in Illinois if two measures are approved this year. One proposed law would curb the cost of adopting a child. The other would allow adopted individuals the opportunity to freely gain access to their birth certificate.

“The right to one’s own identity is a basic and unalienable human right,” Feigenholtz said.

“Existing Illinois law robs tens of thousands of Illinois adults of the right to know who they are.”

The law would nullify legislation approved in 1947, and would allow adoptees born before Jan. 1, 1946 to access to their birth certificate. Feigenholtz says current state law protects the interests of biological parents who wish to maintain secrecy. But her data, courtesy of the Illinois Adoption Registry, declares only 17 biological parents who have filed forms to keep their identities disclosed.

Even so, Feigenholtz says the new law would include a series of safeguards to ensure that birth parents seeking confidentiality may do so.

Birth parents whose children were adopted in 1946 or later will be protected by a six-month waiting-period when they can declare their wishes to remain anonymous. Those parents may also ask that their names be scratched from the original birth certificate upon their son or daughter’s request to view the document.

The legislation passed out of a House committee on adoption reform earlier this month on an 8 to 1 vote. It now heads to the full House for further debate.

“Whether I’m three-months-old or 51-years-old, they can receive the document that has my birth mother’s name on it,” said Feigenholtz, who was adopted as a child.

State Sen. Dave Luechtefeld, R-Okawville, has proposed a tax break to encourage more adoptions by adoptive parents.

If approved, adopting parents could qualify for a \$1,000 state income tax break.

“We don’t want to see these kids in foster homes,” said Luechtefeld. “It’s already terribly expensive and this isn’t a whole lot of money, but it is some sort of deduction to encourage the process.”

Luechtefeld said the discount would be more fruitful if the cash-strapped state wasn’t in dire need for every penny it can get.

“What I didn’t want to do was take a large chunk of revenue of the state’s hands,” he said. The proposal has advanced out of a Senate committee and awaits action in the full Senate.

The Feigenholtz legislation is House Bill 4623.

The Luechtefeld legislation is Senate Bill 2282.