



## AS NEW YORK LEADS, TEXAS FALLS BEHIND

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New York overwhelmingly approved a bill last week that will end more than eight decades of iron-clad secrecy over the birth certificates of adult adopted persons, marking a major shift in how states have treated the issue for decades. While a similar bill failed in the Texas House of Representatives this past session, New York sent a message to all other states considering such legislation: times have changed and it's now time to recognize that current laws remain inequitable, unworkable, and discriminatory against adult adopted people.

"Knowing who we are and where we came from is critical not only to understanding our heritage, but for knowing our health history and any risks it might pose," New York Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie said in a statement hailing the New York bill.

Advocates have been working on equal rights legislation in Texas and across the country for more than 50 years, going back at least to Jean Paton and Florence Fisher, considered two of the founders of the adoptee rights movement in the early 1970s. Like other states, Texas sealed and made adoptees' original birth certificates unavailable in the 1950s as a way to protect the adoptee and the adoptive family from outside interference.

Despite recent efforts in the Texas legislature to restore a right that had existed since statehood—including nearly unanimous support for a measure four years ago—Texas failed again to advance a bill to the governor this past session.

"This fight is about equality and doing what's right for all adoptees," said Shawna Hodgson, an adoptee and fifth-generation Texan as well as a spokesperson for the Texas Adoptee Rights Coalition. "We continue the fight, which is about fairness and, at its simplest form, keeping the government out of the business of censoring a person's own vital record."

"New York had one of the most restrictive laws in the country, yet it endorsed the right of all people to possess their own original birth certificate," said Marley Greiner, an adoptee who lives in Waco and the Executive Chair of Bastard Nation, the country's oldest adoptee rights organization. "We should have no problem doing the same here."

With Governor Cuomo's expected endorsement, New York will become the tenth state to recognize or restore the right of adoptees to obtain a copy of their own original birth certificates. Other states include Alabama, Oregon, Kansas, Alaska, Colorado, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Hawaii, and Maine.

"Hundreds of thousands of people were born and adopted in Texas and millions of families are personally linked to those adoptions," said Gregory D. Luce, an attorney and founder of

the Adoptee Rights Law Center. “New York got it right and has made it equal again for adopted people. It has now set the bar for other states to follow.”

“Like the ten other states ahead of it, Texas needs to lead and dismantle antiquated Depression-era laws that do not work and that have treated adopted people as second class citizens,” said Kim Dimick, who was born in 1983 and adopted from the Gladney Center for Adoption. “Advocacy, activism, and a strong coalition made all the difference in New York. That same activism is already here in Texas, and Texans need to get with it and make it equal now. We’ve worked long and hard enough and have enough legislative support to make it happen.”

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