

NYARC REPORT: NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ADOPTEE RIGHTS WORKGROUP MEETING

Despite snowy weather, the New York State Department of Health (DOH) “Adoptee Workgroup” meeting was held on Friday March 2nd in Albany. We remain extremely thankful for the solidarity shown by all our supporters, which helped create this opportunity.

The workgroup brought advocates and government officials to the table to discuss the issue of expanded adult adoptee access to original birth records in New York State, as requested by Governor Andrew Cuomo.

Jane McLaughlin organized and facilitated the discussion. She explained that the role of the DOH was to bring invited stakeholders together, including Assemblymember David Weprin, an Assembly bill sponsor, after which the DOH would develop and provide a report with the agency’s own policy recommendations by April 30, 2018.

At the meeting, the New York Adoptee Rights Coalition (NYARC) was represented by New York adoptee Tim Monti-Wohlpart, the National Legislative Chair and New York state representative of the American Adoption Congress (AAC) and birth mother Claudia Corrigan D’Arcy, Director of Outreach and Advocacy of the Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition of New York (AFFCNY). Tim and Claudia were excited to be joined by April Dinwoodie, transracially adopted person and the former Chief Executive of the Donaldson Adoption Institute (DAI). NYARC is happy to report that all three agreed it was a positive and productive meeting.

As indicated in NYARC’s prior [action alert](#), you may still write to the Department of Health and express your support for unrestricted access to original birth certificates for all adult adoptees (otherwise known as “clean” reform). The email address for written comments is AdopteeWorkgroupComments@health.ny.gov

There was little opposition to “clean” adoption reform at the meeting.

A major development following the meeting has been the formal announcement by the Academy of Adoption & Assisted Reproduction Attorneys (AAAA) that, after many years of opposition, their board has approved a resolution of support for unrestricted access to birth records for all adult adoptees. Denise Seidelman represented the AAAA at the

workgroup meeting. We are grateful for this new support and for the AAAA's resolution, which is [available here](#).

The Women's Bar Association of New York (WBASNY), represented by Leyla Kiosse, was the lone group to express opposition to "clean" adoption reform. However, the dialogue allowed us to address WBASNY's stated concerns. Ms. Kiosse also expressed interest in discussing her group's opposition, including discussions with others in WBASNY leadership. This will afford an opportunity to revisit, and potentially revise, their position. Ms. Kiosse needed to leave the workgroup discussion early, so a meeting with WBASNY is yet to be scheduled. However, we found the possibility of additional discussion encouraging and will keep all posted with further developments.

Other attendees and/or invitees, not mentioned above, included:

- Sumeet Sharma (Office of Assemblymember David Weprin)
- Samantha Howell (National Association of Social Workers)
- Timothy Jaccard (Children of Hope)
- Gretchen Van Wie (NYC Vital Records)
- Janet Fink (NYS Unified Court System)
- John Stupp (Office of Child and Family Services)
- Diana Yang (Department of Health)
- Erin Hammond (Department of Health)
- Jake Locicero (Department of Health)
- Guy Warner (retired; Department of Health)
- Dan Salvin (Assembly Program and Counsel Staff)
- Breanna Morin (Office of Senator Andrew Lanza)

As with WBASNY, follow up to fellow members of the workgroup is in progress.

Other areas of presentation and discussion included, but was not limited to:

- DNA testing in the adoption community
- Estimates on the numbers of New York citizens with sealed records
- Best practices in adoption and the changing landscape of practices today
- The growth of grassroots support for "clean" adoption reform
- The success of "clean" reform, or uninterrupted policy, in nine other states

Assemblymember David Weprin joined the meeting and indicated that his contact with Governor Cuomo's staff suggests that Governor Cuomo would sign a "clean" bill into law if advanced to him. Assemblymember Weprin then asked:

Which bill [among his two bills sponsored with Senator Lanza] will the advocates support?

In response, NYARC representatives stated:

1. We are very pleased that A5036-B (Weprin)/S4845-B (Lanza) was vetoed and we support “clean” reform;
2. We continue to support and endorse S5169-A (Avella)/A6821-A (Weprin);
3. Any change for bills supported by NYARC will require coalition review;
4. We seek, from any sponsor, a commitment to reject amendments with discriminatory limits or restrictions;
5. We recognize S7631 (Lanza)/A9959 (Weprin) as another “clean” bill that warrants discussion;
6. We will act, as we did with A5036-B/S4845-B, to oppose any bill that falls short of “clean” reform.

The pending, and currently “clean,” adoptee rights bills:

- S5169-A/A6821-A (“clean” bill supported and endorsed by NYARC)
- S7550 (Lanza)/A9632 (Weprin) (“clean” bill with contact preference form)
- S7631/A9959 (“clean” bill without contact preference form, which Assemblymember Weprin is slated to invite NYARC to discuss in further detail)

Mr. Weprin would not promise that any “clean” bill he sponsors would remain clean. He indicated that he “doesn’t know what the Governor will do. It’s up to the Governor and the legislative leaders.” He indicated concern that “political” issues may impact the chance for passage of S5169-A/A6821-A.

However, he and his staff have indicated an intent to move forward, including a meeting with NYARC representatives to discuss the current bills and the potential for NYARC’s support for S7631/A9959.

NYARC’s next steps include:

- Follow up with DOH and participant groups;
- Regroup with Senator Avella;
- Schedule meeting with Assemblymember Weprin and his staff.

The DOH report is due to Governor Cuomo by April 30, 2018, and workgroup participants will not have the opportunity to review the report before its completion.

The public may, however, still write to the Department of Health and express support for unrestricted access to original birth certificates (OBC) for all adult adoptees, at the following email address: AdopteeWorkgroupComments@health.ny.gov

Thank you for your support. Please [let us know](#) if you have any questions. We will keep our supporters posted by email as things develop.