



## **NEW YORK STATE SENATORS OVERWHELMINGLY ENDORSE EQUALITY FOR ALL NEW YORK ADOPTED PEOPLE**

**Press Inquiries:** Annette O'Connell  
New York Adoptee Rights Coalition  
[coalition@nyadopteerights.org](mailto:coalition@nyadopteerights.org)

The New York State Senate today overwhelmingly approved a bill that would end 83 years of iron-clad secrecy over the birth certificates of adult adopted persons. The bill, sponsored by Senator Velmanette Montgomery in the Senate, would restore a right that New York adoptees once had: the right as adults to request and receive their own pre-adoption birth records.

It is a right that advocates have been working across the country to restore for decades, going back at least to the beginning of the adoptee rights movement in New York in the early 1970s.

Governor Andrew Cuomo had already vetoed discriminatory legislation in 2017 that would have continued to restrict the rights of New York adoptees. In his message as part of that veto, the Governor requested a better bill from the legislature and ordered a state agency workgroup to study the issue and to make recommendations. The Montgomery/Weprin bill, S3419/A5494, came directly out of that process, and a large bipartisan group of legislators now stand firmly behind it.

After bi-partisan and passionate floor speeches from Senator Montgomery as well as from Senator Diane Savino, Senator James Skoufis, and Senator Andrew Lanza, the Senate voted 56-6 to pass the bill and forward it to the Assembly for final consideration and enactment. Already, Governor Cuomo has pledged to sign the bill if it reaches his desk.

“This is an historic moment in the State of New York where we will for the first time allow for adoptees in the state of New York to receive a certified copy of their own original birth certificate, currently for those people who have never had an opportunity to do that and going forward for anyone who reaches the age of 18,” said Senator Montgomery in introducing the bill on the Senate floor.

“This represents the first time the New York Senate has unequivocally endorsed the right of all people to possess their own heritage and identity,” said Annette O'Connell, spokesperson for New York Adoptee Rights Coalition and who was present at the Senate vote. “It also represents the incredibly hard work of Senator Montgomery and her staff as well as thousands of New Yorkers and civil rights advocates. The Senate’s vote provides clear recognition that New York’s experiment in enforcing eternal state secrecy over a person’s own vital record has become unworkable, discriminatory, and punitive.”

The issue now moves to the New York State Assembly, where a similar bill is awaiting action in the Codes Committee, chaired by Brooklyn Assemblyman Joseph Lentol, with whom NYARC met last week to prompt the bill's movement.

If enacted, the Weprin/Montgomery Bill will also likely influence legislation in other states, with New York as the new leader for honesty and truth in adoption practices. While nine states already recognize or have restored the right of adoptees to obtain a copy of their own birth certificates, numerous states continue to consider similar legislation. For the millions of adoptees in the United States, enacting the Montgomery/Weprin bill may prompt those and other states to follow.

“Hundreds of thousands of people were born and adopted in New York and tens of millions of families are linked to adoption,” said Gregory D. Luce, a national expert on adoptee rights and the founder of the Adoptee Rights Law Center. “We are now looking for continued leadership from the governor’s office and from Assembly Speaker Carl E. Heastie on this issue, which is about basic equality—a simple right to know your own heritage and who you are.”

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