



“TODAY IS TRULY HISTORIC”

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NYARC spokesperson Annette O’Connell delivered these statements at the press conference in Albany on January 15, 2020, in which legislators and advocates announced implementation of S3419, New York’s equal rights law for all adult adopted persons. This is also NYARC’s official press release for the event.

Good morning. I am Annette O’Connell. I was born in the Bronx in 1967 and adopted in Rockland County in 1968. I’m also the spokesperson for the New York Adoptee Rights Coalition, otherwise known as NYARC.

I have been an adoptee rights advocate nationally and in New York for the past six years, and I became a spokesperson for NYARC upon its inception in early 2018.

NYARC is completely adoptee-led. It is comprised of allied advocates from New York State and across the country, including [The Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition of New York](#), [Adoptee Rights Law Center](#) in Minnesota, one of the founders of NYARC and the mastermind behind all of this, and [Bastard Nation](#), the largest adoptee rights organization in the country. And NYARC could not have had a better strategic partner than Brooke Schreier Ganz, whose leadership on the release of public records in New York through [Reclaim the Records](#) has been phenomenal.

On behalf of NYARC and the tens of thousands of adoptees we represent, I’d like to thank Governor Andrew Cuomo, Senator Velmanette Montgomery, Assemblyman David Weprin, Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Speaker Carl Heastie and the supermajority of legislators who voted for passage of this historic piece of legislation. Their staff members and counsel also deserve a great deal of thanks.

Today is truly historic. Advocates have been working on equal rights legislation for adoptees across the country and in New York for over fifty years. New York City adoptee Florence Fisher started this movement in New York in the 1970s, and NYARC is thrilled that she—at age 90—will be able to receive a certified copy of her own original birth certificate.

For more than 80 years, New York adoptees have endured a humiliating, discriminatory, pathologizing, frustrating, and expensive process simply to try to obtain a copy of their own original birth certificates. Today, New York enacts equality in vital records law for all adult adoptees AND their lineal descendants.

New York now joins only NINE other states—Alabama, Alaska, Colorado, Hawaii, Kansas, Maine, New Hampshire, Oregon, and Rhode Island—which have either always recognized or have recently restored the unrestricted right of an adult adoptee to obtain a copy of their own original birth certificates. It cannot be understated what this law will mean for equal rights legislation in other parts of the country.

New York has also taken the lead on this issue. Forty other states and the District of Columbia must catch up to end their discriminatory laws. Today acknowledges that New York's experiment in enforcing eternal state secrecy over a person's own vital record has become unworkable and discriminatory. Adoptees across the country as well as genealogists are now rejoicing.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think that—in my 50's—I would be doing this. Let's face it: this isn't normal for a hockey and football mom. However, here I am, and representing NYARC has been one of the greatest, most challenging, and most humbling experiences of my life.

Visiting each of the legislators' offices, talking with them and their staff, listening to their personal stories about how adoption has affected their lives or the lives of their friends and families has been breathtaking. I have been blessed to always have the support of my husband, Gary, my son Brendan, who is with me here today, and my family and friends. I've also had the support of my own representatives, including Senator James Skoufis and Assemblyman Colin Schmitt, as well as every representative from my home county of Rockland and current county of Orange.

I have forced myself to step far outside my comfort zone. I have stood up to talk out loud and proud about an issue that used to be whispered in the dark confines of people's houses: "Adoption."

I have had the great pleasure to work alongside activists like Tim Monti-Wohlpart from the American Adoption Congress, Christopher Phillip, and Jay Hunter as well as my dear friends— Gregory Luce from Adoptee Rights Law Center, Marley Greiner from Bastard Nation, Shawna Hodgson from the Texas Adoptee Rights Coalition, Barbara Fuller, Claudia Corrigan D'Arcy, Brooke Schreier Ganz, Suzanne Bachner, and Suzanne's husband Bob Brader.

The lessons I have learned and the friendships I have made have been life changing. Listening to the legislators speak at committee meetings and during the Senate and Assembly floor votes rocked me to my core and brought me to tears. It offered us all validation. I remember after the Assembly floor vote specifically thanking Assemblymember Deborah Glick and telling her she validated my existence. Her reply is something I will never forget. She said "Oh no sweetheart, you did that on your own." I anticipate that even more life changing and validating will be the moment I get to hold my own vital record in my hand.

Make no mistake. **This is and has always been about equality and doing what's right for all New York adoptees.** New York was able to Get it Right and Make it Equal. Congratulations to every single adult adoptee born or adopted in New York. Today is about you, and today we celebrate EQUALITY!

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