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Algae

By Sandy Bihn

Some adoptees say the redactions have even included their birth names, presumably because legal concerns that a surname might identify the birth parent. State Sen. Bill Beagle, a sponsor of the legislation, said such steps go beyond the intent of the law. The Republican from Tipp City said he recently met with top officials at the health department. "I don't know that we had a meeting of the minds," Beagle said. "They asked for some time to go back and contemplate the conversation." He's waiting on them to process the meeting and to figure out where they would like to go.

Redactions and missing records are issues among the adoptees who fought for years for the right to obtain their original birth certificates. The new law sought to level the field in Ohio, giving adults whose adoptions were finalized between Jan. 1, 1964, and Sept. 18, 1996, access to their original birth certificates and adoption files. Those adopted before 1964 have always had full access.

Records for people adopted on or after Sept. 18, 1996, are open as long as the birth parent didn't request exclusion. But the 1964-96 group had remained closed until the new law took effect on March 20. "The basic premise of our bill is that the birth certificate belongs to the adoptee," said Betsie Norris of Adoption Network Cleveland. "Proponents wanted the law enacted with no restrictions, but some legislators were concerned that opening records that had been closed was like "going back on a promise," Beagle said.

The compromise gave birth parents a year to request redaction. "It helped to demonstrate good faith that we were giving birth parents the opportunity to say yes or no," he said.

According to the health department, 259 birth parents had requested redaction by the March 20 deadline. About 35 adoptees have received redacted files so far. "We crafted kind of what we could all live with," Norris said of the compromise. "The law very specifically names it. It's a very important point." Some adoptees also say the health department isn't properly overseeing all the social- and medical-history forms that birth parents are supposed to complete if they want their names redacted. On that point, the law seems to have a snare: The birth-parent packet from the health department says the 15-page form must be completed and submitted "along with the request, but a section of the law itself says the history form should be retained after it is completed "to the extent that the biological parent chooses to provide information."

Beagle said he also has talked to health officials about that, too. "We don't want to be giving up information," he said. "They're hoping to give these adoptees as much information as possible," he said. "He's made the director aware that there seems to be deficiencies." For Collins, the medical information is especially important because she has had cancer and other health problems and wants to know what risks her children might face.

"Everything on the form is important," Collins said of the history she received. "Vital statistics, you wouldn't just accept whatever the birth parents send in." With help from a researcher, Collins learned the name of the woman who likely is her birth mother from a few years ago. The woman didn't want to communicate, though, so Collins just used redactions for additional information.

Collins said she has no interest in reaching her relationship. She just wants her own history. "I think there's a lot of interest or track wants is for them to honor or the law," Collins said. "I shouldn't have to sue to get information that is mine."