

Testimony of Janet P. Nordine
Before the Children, Youth and Families Committee
Subcommittee on Adoption
March 20, 2004

To the Honorable Senator Carlton, Chair of the Subcommittee on Adoption,

Good Morning. My name is Janet Nordine and I represent Nevada Open as an adult adoptee. I was born at St Rose De Lima Hospital in Henderson, Nevada and currently reside in Las Vegas, in Senator Valerie Weiner's voting district.

Nevada Open is comprised of 16 member organizations which coalition to support an adult adoptee's right to unconditional access of their state held birth and adoption records.

I submit into the official record letters from:

- The American Adoption Congress
- Bastard Nation
- Concerned United Birthparents
- Ethica

Best policy and practice in adoption today recognizes an adult adoptees best interest in full disclosure of their birth and adoption.

I submit into the official record policy statements from:

- Bastard Nation
- Child Welfare League of America
- Ethica
- Holt International children's Services
- National Adoption Center
- National Association of Social Workers
- North American Council on Adoption

It is our sincerest desire that this committee will take into consideration the information presented here today and do the right thing by giving adult adopted Nevadans the same rights as adults who are not adopted. Lets be honest, please open our records.

EXHIBIT <i>E</i> ChildFam <i>Adopt</i>	Document consists of <i>14</i> pages
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Entire document provided.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Due to size limitations, pages ____ through ____ provided.	
A copy of the complete document is available through the Research Library (775-684-6827 or e-mail library@lcb.state.nv.us).	
Meeting Date <i>3-20-04</i>	

Nevada Open Coalition

American Adoption Congress

Bastard Nation: The Adoptee Rights Organization

Child Welfare League of America

Concerned United Birthparents

Ethica

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute

Foster Care and Adoption Association of Nevada

Holt International Children's Services

Mothers for Open Records Everywhere

National Adoption Center

National Association of Social Workers

National Council of Birthmothers

Nevada Open

North American Council on Adoptable Children

Northeastern Nevada Foster Parent and Adoption Association

Sunflower Birthmothers



Families Rooted In Truth

March 15, 2004

Children, Youth and Families Committee
Subcommittee on Adoption
Nevada State Legislature
401 South Carson Street
Carson City, NV 89701-4747

RE: SB 267

The Honorable Senator Carlton, Chair and
Members of the Subcommittee on Adoption:

The American Adoption Congress (AAC), founded in 1978, is a national organization committed to adoption education and reform. Our membership includes adoptees, birth parents, adoptive parents and adoption professionals across the United States and several foreign countries.

Our organization supports unrestricted access to original birth records for adopted adults. We are voicing this support on behalf of AAC members who live in Nevada and our members throughout the United States who have been affected by a Nevada adoption. AAC joins other adoption reform organizations in endorsing SB 267.

Because adoption has had an impact on the lives of many of us, and because many of our members are birth parents, we are aware that the great majority of birth parents do desire contact with the sons and daughters they relinquished under the closed records system. Adoptees in Kansas and Alaska have always had the right to obtain their original birth certificates. Since 1999, four more states have been added to this list – Alabama, Delaware, Oregon and Tennessee. In these four states alone, over 10,000 adopted adults have applied for and received copies of their original birth certificates, without any reported adverse effects on anyone. It is our hope that the State of Nevada will soon join this list of fair-minded states by acknowledging the right of adopted adults to have the same information about themselves as all other Nevada citizens.



Bastard Nation

The Adoptee Rights Organization

P.O. Box 271672

Houston, TX 77277-1672

March 19, 2004

Children, Youth and Families Committee
Nevada State Legislature
401 South Carson Street
Carson City, Nevada 89701-4747

To the Honorable Members of the Children, Youth and Families Committee:

The membership of Bastard Nation: The Adoptee Rights Organization thanks you for addressing adoption and birth records access for adoptees born in Nevada during this study session. As the largest adoptee rights organization in the world, we wholeheartedly believe that this issue is one of fundamental human and civil rights. We endorsed SB-267 last session, because it would have repealed the violations of the rights of adult adoptees that currently exist under Nevada's adoption laws by proposing to restore access to their own historical records. This is a right that all other citizens take for granted, and it should not be denied to adoptees because of the circumstances of their births. Bastard Nation has supported similar efforts in other states, including a successful ballot initiative in Oregon in 1998 and a legislative victory in Alabama in 2000.

Withholding fundamental identity information from adult adoptees is a failed social practice from a bygone era. There is no evidence that permanently sealed adoption records provide any benefit to the institution of adoption. We maintain that adoption as an institution can only benefit by having a foundation in truth and humanity toward the citizens it is supposed to serve. Since implementation of similar laws to the legislation advocated by Nevada Open in Oregon and Alabama, thousands of adult adoptees born in those states have requested their own birth and adoption records without report of negative incidents.

It is difficult to imagine that the State of Nevada has a vested interest in continuing to hide personal identity information from its own adopted citizens. In our estimation, this is government and bureaucratic secrecy at its worst. The birth and adoption records of adult adoptees are not a matter of state security that require cover-up from the very citizens whose births and adoptions they record. We urge you to consider this issue in terms of the fundamental rights and ethics violations that are occurring through the continued existence of these laws. These should be the framework for your decision, rather than trying to prevent worst-case scenarios of birth and adoptive family dynamics. Upholding the basic rights of the citizens of the State of Nevada is the business of the government, whereas trying to manage *possible* interpersonal relationships is not.

We sincerely hope that in your study of this important issue, the Committee will find an urgent need to improve and modernize Nevada's adoption laws by granting adult adoptees full, unrestricted access to their original birth and adoption records. Similar laws function very well in other states and countries around the world and are also consistent with the best practice standards of adoption advocated by several children's welfare and professional organizations.

Sincerely,

David C. Ansardi, Ph.D.
Anita Walker Field
Co-Chairs, Legislative Committee
Bastard Nation: The Adoptee Rights Organization



A Voice for Ethical Adoption

1116 W. 7th St., Columbia, IN 48401 (931) 840-4365 (931) 381-2953 fax

ethica@ethicanet.org www.ethicanet.org

March 17, 2004

Children, Youth and Families Committee
Subcommittee on Adoption
Nevada State Legislature
401 South Carson Street
Carson City, Nevada 89701-4747

To the Honorable Senator Carlton, Chair, and Subcommittee on Adoption Members,

Ethica is a nonprofit corporation that seeks to be an impartial voice for ethical adoption practices worldwide, and provides education, assistance, and advocacy to the adoption community. We strive to develop organizational policy and recommendations based solely on the basic ethical principles underlying best practices in adoption and the best interests of children.

We are pleased that the Nevada Legislature has taken this matter up for study, and we are pleased to be able to offer testimony for your consideration.

Ethica believes that every American citizen should have complete and unencumbered access to information about his or her identity, including access to his or her original birth certificate, medical records, and social history. *Ethica* believes that limits on such access are a violation of a person's basic human rights, and that equality demands that adult adoptees be afforded the same freedom of access granted to every other American citizen today.

We thank you for the opportunity to submit our testimony to you for your review, and thank you for your hard work and consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

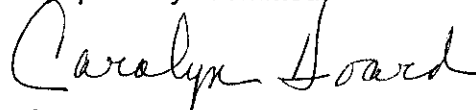
A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Trish Maskew'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Trish' being more prominent than the last name 'Maskew'.

Trish Maskew, President

Children, Youth and Families Committee
Subcommittee on Adoption
March 15, 2004
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SB 267 has the full support of our organization. We urge the Committee to report favorably on the bill so that it can be considered by the Nevada Legislature.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carolyn Hoard".

Carolyn Hoard
Legislative Director

cc: Allison Combs, Legislative Counsel Bureau,
Research Division
Honorable Raymond Rawson, Chair,
Children, Youth and Families Committee

CUB



March 18, 2004

**Children, Youth and Families Committee
Subcommittee on Adoption
Nevada State Legislature
401 South Carson Street
Carson City, Nevada 89701-4747**

To the Honorable Senator Carlton, Chair, and Subcommittee on Adoption Members,

Phone:
800-822-2777

President:
Karen Vedder
kayleevne@earthlink.net

CUB
PO Box 230457
Bucinitas, CA 92023

I believe strongly in all adoptees having the right to access their original, unaltered, birth certificates. I have that right. You have that right. Everyone has that right, except adoptees.

Popular belief is that birthmothers do not want adoption records to be open, that we do not want to be found. I am a birthmother. I am also the president of Concerned United Birthparents, Inc., a national organization. I can honestly report that in the seventeen years I have been involved with this organization, I have NEVER known a birthparent who did NOT want to be found. We all long for a reunion and prepare earnestly for the day the process begins.

In our organization there are also women who relinquished babies resulting from rape. Their reunions and their love for their children, are no less honored, no less deeply felt, than others. Do not use this as an excuse to keep records sealed and unavailable. Our children never chose to be anonymous.

I have been reunited with my daughter for over seventeen years. Her life was financially secure, but physically and emotionally she was extremely damaged. Contrary to what many believe, families formed by adoption are not perfect! Reunion has been a great healing experience for both of us. Please quit using us birthmothers as an excuse to keep records sealed.

I urge you to please support every adult adoptee's civil right to their original birth certificate. Everyone else born in this country has that right. Those who were adopted should have that right also.

Sincerely,

**Karen Vedder, MSW
Concerned United Birthparents, Inc.
7345-B Alicante Rd.
Carlsbad, CA 92009
760-930-9322**



CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF AMERICA
Founded in 1920

CWLA Standards of Excellence in Adoption

http://www.cwla.org/programs/adoption/open_records4.htm

- The agency providing adoption services should support efforts to ensure that adults who were adopted have direct access to identifying information about themselves and their birth parents.
- The prevailing legal practice in the United States prohibits adults who were adopted as children from obtaining access to their original birth certificates or to identifying information contained in their adoption records.
- The practice of sealing records has come under scrutiny as the benefits of openness in adoption for the adopted individual, birth parents, and adoptive parents have come to be understood. The interests of adopted adults in having information about their origins have come to be recognized as having critical psychological importance as well as importance in understanding their health and genetic status. Because such information is essential to adopted adults' identity and health needs, the agency should promote policies that provide adopted adults with direct access to identifying information.
- This trend toward openness has already been recognized by the Indian Child Welfare Act (P.L. 95-608). Under that Act, courts must unseal records for American Indian children, on request, and provide information necessary for the adopted individual to ascertain his or her tribal affiliation and membership. Such information may include the names of the adopted child's birth parents.

Child Welfare League of America Standards of Excellence for Adoption Services, 2000. Section 6.22, p. 87.



Bastard Nation

The Adoptee Rights Organization

Policy on State Records Access

Bastard Nation is dedicated to the recognition of the full human and civil rights of adult adoptees. Toward that end, we advocate the opening to adoptees, upon request at age of majority, of those government documents which pertain to the adoptee's historical, genetic, and legal identity, including the unaltered original birth certificate and adoption decree. Bastard Nation asserts that it is the right of people everywhere to have their official original birth records unaltered and free from falsification, and that the adoptive status of any person should not prohibit him or her from choosing to exercise that right. We have reclaimed the badge of bastardy placed on us by those who would attempt to shame us; we see nothing shameful in having been born out of wedlock or in being adopted. Bastard Nation does not support mandated mutual consent registries or intermediary systems in place of unconditional open records, nor any other system that is less than access on demand to the adult adoptee, without condition, and without qualification.

*Established October 1996 by the Executive Committee
Bastard Nation: The Adoptee Rights Organization*

Holt International Children's Services Statement of Support on Open Records

Holt International Children's Services supports access by adoptees and birth parents to identifying information about each other.

Adoptees and birth parents should have access to identifying information about each other through any of the following methods:

- The original birth certificate
- Passive registry
- Assisted search process through a state licensed intermediary
- Opening sealed adoption records

Holt International supports the right of both adoptees and birth parents to express their wishes to each other regarding contact, and believes this option gives those who feel powerless a voice. We encourage both adoptees and their birth parents to express their preferences regarding contact.

Holt International respects and abides by the laws of the countries where we have programs, and in and the policies of our overseas partner agencies. We recognize that laws governing Holt International, both in the U.S. and abroad, may not permit the opening of the sealed adoption records, or other methods of access to identifying information that we support.

Holt International Children's Services is committed both in spirit and action to positive adoption reform, and works proactively to support the opening of adoption records.



OPEN RECORDS POLICY STATEMENT

<http://www.adopt.org/whoweare/policy.html#Open%20Records>

The National Adoption Center believes it is an inalienable right of all citizens, including adopted adults, to have unencumbered access to their original birth certificates. In keeping with this position, we believe that copies of both the original and the amended birth certificate should be given to the adoptive family at the time of finalization unless specifically denied by the birth parents. In any case, the National Adoption Center advocates that the adoptee, at age 18, be granted access to his/her original birth certificate.

The National Adoption Center also supports an adult adoptee's unencumbered access to all medical and historical records.* These records should be given to adopting families prior to finalization.

*Historical records refer to that information acquired about the child before coming into his/her final adoption placement. Such information includes, but is not limited to, foster care placements, childhood photos, information about siblings, number of moves before adoption, reason for entering foster care, details of school history and related school documents and any early history of development which may includes pertinent medical records.

Approved by the Board of Directors - June 15, 2000

NACAC Policy Statements:

http://www.nacac.org/about_policystatements.html

Access to Original Birth Certificates

NACAC supports access to original birth certificates to any adult adoptee at age of majority. (December 5, 1986)

Access to Original Birth Certificates

Recognizing that many adult adoptees have a need for more complete information about their birth families, NACAC supports their right to this information and supports access to original birth certificates to any adult adoptee at age of majority. (April 11, 1992)

Full Disclosure of Background Information

We believe that foster and adoptive families have a right to full disclosure of background information from agency, court, school, mental health and medical files. Such information is critical to the success of placements. (December 7, 1991)



Social Work Speaks, Volume 5, p. 131

"The need and right of adoptees to know their birth origin should be recognized and respected. This right extends to requests by adult adoptees for identifying information. If a reunion is requested by a birth relative, the service providers should attempt to provide counseling and intermediary services, being fully cognizant of the sensitivities of all parties involved. Both adoptive parents and birth parents should be informed of the limits of confidentiality."

Policy Statement approved by the NASW Delegate Committee, November 1987, and reconfirmed by the Delegate Committee, August 1993. Social Work Speaks

"Ethica believes that every American citizen should have complete and unencumbered access to information about his or her identity, including access to his or her original birth certificate, medical records, and social history. Ethica believes that limits on such access are a violation of a person's basic human rights, and that equality demands that adult adoptees be afforded the same freedom of access granted to every other American citizen today."

Approved by the Board of Directors 3/17/2004