

CONNECTICUT PROFESSIONAL GENEALOGISTS COUNCIL
P. O. Box 4273
Hartford, Connecticut 06147-4273
March 31, 1995

Mr. Stephen Lewis
Committee Administrator
Public Health Committee
Room 300
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

Subject: Connecticut Vital Records

Dear Mr. Lewis:

Thousands of individuals in Connecticut undertake genealogical research, as hobbyists, as historians for family groups of several hundred, and as professional researchers who perform these searches for others. We are well aware of the need to balance protection of the records themselves and the information on the records from misuse with the needs of legitimate researchers to use them.

The Connecticut Professional Genealogists Council and its members seek to foster excellence in genealogical work in Connecticut by supporting those researching professionally and those Connecticut repositories which serve as their primary resources. Our members belong to several other societies which are legally incorporated in Connecticut and include genealogy as part of their statement of purpose who have encouraged us to put our mutual concerns before your committee. These societies include the Connecticut Society of Genealogists, with a membership of over 4500, Connecticut Ancestry, also a statewide society for genealogical research, and the Polish, French-Canadian, and Jewish Genealogical Societies, along with the Descendants of the Founders of Ancient Windsor, all with memberships of several hundred to a thousand. Our members, reflecting the cultural diversity of our state, are keenly interested in the regulations which concern the handling of vital records in the State of Connecticut, as these are the lifeline to every individual who seeks to discover his or her heritage. Those of us who perform these services for others according to professional standards are acutely affected by these regulations as we serve thousands of others from across the nation who trace their roots to a Connecticut heritage.

Policy concerning who may see and obtain copies of vital records currently governed by Section 7-51 and 7-51a of the Connecticut General Statutes. As your committee is in the final stages of processing Committee Bill No. 5971, the Council and the Incorporated Societies named above wish to make a number of

recommendations. We are sorry to be so late in the process, but we were not aware of the situation until earlier this week. We exclude from our observations and recommendations the Department of Health and Addiction Services who understand the intent of the law and provide fair and consistent access under its provisions.

OBSERVATIONS:

If a member of the Committee on Public Health were to visit ten Town Clerks or Vital Record Registrars in this state, he or she would surely get at least five and perhaps more different interpretations of what the current Connecticut General Statutes concerning access to vital records actually mean! Agents who handle these records (excluding the officials at the Department of Health and Addiction Services, as noted above) are confused and differ upon:

1. Who may obtain copies of birth, marriage, and death records.
2. What the words "have access" mean.
3. What "examine" means.
4. Whether some birth, marriage, and/or death records over a certain number of years old are exempt from the statutes regarding access.
5. What a "copy" is.
6. Whether each town or city sets its own "copy costs" for vital records.
7. Which genealogical societies qualify under the law.
8. What hours of access they must allow for those meeting the criteria of access.
9. Whether professional historians such as municipal historians, the State Historian, professors of history, and other professional historians and archivists may examine the records as historians without membership in a genealogical society.

Because of these many points of confusion we are making the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That Sections 7-51 and 7-51 a both be repealed.
2. That these sections be replaced with one all-encompassing statute concerning Connecticut Vital records including factors discussed in these recommendations.
3. That "immediate family" as defined in Committee Bill No. 5791,

professional historians as defined by representatives of that community of scholars, and the other persons/groups specified in lines 20 through 24 of 5971 be entitled to purchase certified copies of any birth record of any person born in Connecticut.

4. That any adult person be entitled to purchase a certified copy of record of any marriage or death which occurred in Connecticut.
5. That in addition to having the clear right to purchase certified copies of any birth, marriage, or death record that members of legally incorporated genealogical societies be permitted to physically examine and make notes from all birth, marriage, and death records maintained by any Town Clerk or Registrar of Vital records at no cost. The examination of the actual records is necessary to the scholarly pursuit of family relationships because of variant spellings, connections unknown to the searcher, discovery of the context of an event, and so forth.
6. That the Secretary of the State and/or the Attorney General be instructed to provide Town/City Clerks and Registrars of Vital Records with an annual listing of genealogical societies registered to do business in Connecticut.
7. That Town/City Clerks and/or Registrars of Vital Records be enabled to provide non-certified copied of birth, marriage, and death records marked "for reference only...not for official usage" to any person, provided that for birth records the qualifications noted in Recommendation #3 are met.
8. That all certified copies, whether purchased at the Department Public Health and Addiction Services or in the municipality cost \$5.00 and have be embossed with the raised seal, and that non-certified copies cost \$2.50. The fee of \$15 at the Department of Public Health and Addiction Services is a hardship for many new parents, and caused confusion with the lower fee in the municipalities. Some portion of the fees generated from the issue of non-certified copies should be designated to remain in a fund in the municipality for the conservation of records in that municipality.
9. That access to any birth, marriage, or death record be completely independent of its age. This point is consistent with current law but has been complicated by the provisions in 7-51a.
10. That, in view of the fact that many of the vital records not contained in the Barbour Collection have already been copied on microfilm by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and copies provided to the State Library, that this process of microfilming by the LDS be continued to cover years

consistent with the access to the United States census.

11. That access to birth records filed by the natural parents prior to an adoption be the subject of a separate statute.
12. That examination of vital records by those meeting the criteria in Recommendation #3 be permitted during the hours which the clerk or registrar's office is open to the public. Clerks and registrars may wish to limit the number of searchers at any given time by prior scheduling.
13. That this omnibus act be entitled: AN ACT CONCERNING ACCESS TO CONNECTICUT VITAL RECORDS.

We thank you for this opportunity to make our observations and recommendations known. We would also like to discuss records involving parents and children involved in adoptions at a future time.

Please contact us if we can be of further help in working out a public policy involving access to Connecticut Vital Records. Thank you for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,

Donna Holt Siemiatkoski,
President, CT Professional Genealogists Council,
Board of Governors, CT Society of Genealogists
Board of Directors, Descendants of the Founders of Ancient Windsor

Warren D. Buchannan.
Vice-president, CT Professional Genealogists Council