

Sen. Cowles: Constituent idea eases ancestry research

Posted on Friday, Mar 4, 2022

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MADISON– Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement after 2021 Senate Bill 524, which he authored with Representative David Steffen (R-Green Bay), was signed into law today as 2021 Wisconsin Act 150:

“Under current law, only the person put up for adoption may request to learn more about their biological birth parents through the Adoption Record Search Program. But with the growing interest in genealogy research and growing accessibility of ancestry records, descendants of the adoptee often have an interest in tracing back their lineage and seeking out information about the generations that came before them, whether they’re looking into the past for medical, social, cultural, or emotional reasons. Unfortunately, with an adoptee as a parent, this could be difficult, particularly if the adult child’s adopted parent is deceased.”

Prior to Act 150, for an adult to receive information about their adopted parent’s birth parents, they typically must have sought relief from the court system, and a court order would typically only be granted if ‘good cause’ is shown for the release of this information. [2021 Wisconsin Act 150](#) allows the adult child of an adoptee to access the original birth certificate and information about their parent’s birth parents through the Department of Children and Families’ (DCF) Adoption Record Search Program if the adult child’s parent and both birth parents of the adoptee are known to be deceased. If the adoptee and birth parents are not deceased, DCF may not disclose those records without a court order in an effort to protect their privacy.

“Drafted after hearing from a constituent that works professionally in the genealogy field, Act 150 is a simple, common-sense law that creates an avenue for the adult offspring of a person who was adopted to learn more about their genetic family history while still ensuring the privacy of the adoptee’s birth parents throughout

their lifespan. Access to this information can allow Wisconsinites to learn more about where they're from and provides a connection to their genealogical past - all while saving the hassle, expense, and time of petitioning the court system. I want to thank DCF for their support of Act 150 in the drafting and legislative process."