



Rudolf Owens <rudysdownens@gmail.com>

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## Request to interview Glenn Copeland regarding story I'm writing on vital records requests by adoptees

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Eisner, Jennifer (DHHS) <EisnerJ@michigan.gov>  
To: Rudolf Owens <rudysdownens@gmail.com>

Wed, Jul 27, 2016 at 12:53 PM

Mr. Owens:

We believe that the following statement addresses the majority of the questions provided. The statement, as well as the subsequent responses, can be attributed either to the department or me as a spokesperson for the department.

Thank you, and best,

Jennifer

Jennifer Eisner

Public Information Officer

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

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### MDHHS Statement

The Vital Records Office for the state of Michigan makes every effort to provide the best service to our customers. The work of the Vital Records Office includes receiving, filing, and preserving vital statistics information and making that information available to eligible parties in a form that best meets their needs. In doing this work, it our responsibility to carefully adhere to any and all laws of the state of Michigan.

Michigan law includes specific provisions on the sealing of birth certificates in certain circumstances, such as following an adoption. There are several sections of the Public Health Code that deal with the release of records that have been sealed by law. The key sections of law that would relate to a sealed original birth record following an adoption are MCL 710.68 and MCL 333.2282.

The vital records office is required to adhere to the law regarding the release of original records. In particular, the law requires the receipt of a court order from a court of competent jurisdiction, or a copy of a central adoption registry clearance reply form in order to release a sealed original record of birth. Adult adoptees who obtain and provide the documentation required by law are provided with their sealed records.

MDHHS is required to follow the Public Health Code and as such, any change in practice regarding the release of sealed documents would have to be preceded by a change in the law.

**In addition to the above statement, below we've addressed the request for data about birth certificate requests, your question about Mr. Copeland's position, and a statement about the role of our Vital Records office:**

***How many original birth certificates are requested by adult adoptees born in Michigan each year?***

The exact number is not known. There will be instances where the office is contacted by an adult adoptee by phone or mail and they are advised of the process for gaining access to original birth records. These communications are not tracked. Only when an official request with a fee payment is received would the request be tracked.

The total number of these official requests would not be known but is believed to be very close to the number released. This is because not releasing a record is very rare. Generally, when an application is received that does not have the appropriate release documents, the applicant is sent the requirements and told what might be missing or deficient in the request. The correspondence is then placed in a pending file, which includes hundreds of other pending issues. The exact number of adoption requests that end up not being successful is unknown.

***How many are released?***

A log of the releases of sealed original records under the adoption law which was created in the fall of 2009 indicates there have been 549 original records of birth released through to present. This count would include any release of a sealed original birth record whether due to court order or central adoption

registry release. This figure would also include requests from adult adoptees, confidential intermediaries, or relatives of the adoptee.

***Do we track birth records requests?***

All requests for vital records are now tracked through a computer request application. The application records information on the record(s) requested, the applicant and the type record requested, namely whether a birth, a death, a marriage or a divorce record. This tracking mechanism does not specifically identify requests from adult adoptees requesting an original birth record, however.

***How many adoptees in Michigan would be required to get a court order to get their original birth certificate?***

It would not be possible to determine this number.

For adoptions before May 28, 1945 or after September 12, 1980, a court order would be required if a birth parent has filed a denial of consent to release the information.

For adoptions finalized between the dates of May 28, 1945 and September 12, 1980, a court order is required unless the birth parent(s) have filed a consent to release the information. A court order would not be required if the deaths of both birth parents could be documented.

***How long has Glenn been the head of vital records?***

Appointed as state registrar in 2003

***How does vital records support good public health practices?***

Vital records documents serve to provide people with documentation on the legally established facts concerning key life events including birth, death, marriage and divorce. Certified copies of these records are the accepted standard for the public to establish and confirm these facts. With regard to public health practice, birth and death data are used in statistical form to monitor the health of the population at the local, state and federal level, to track progress in efforts to improve public health and can assist in monitoring disease outbreaks.

**From:** Rudolf Owens [mailto:[rudysdowens@gmail.com](mailto:rudysdowens@gmail.com)]

**Sent:** Tuesday, July 26, 2016 4:51 PM

**To:** Eisner, Jennifer (DHHS) <[EisnerJ@michigan.gov](mailto:EisnerJ@michigan.gov)>

**Cc:** Rudolf Owens <[rudysdowens@gmail.com](mailto:rudysdowens@gmail.com)>

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