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PRESS RELEASE

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Michigan Releases Detroit Adoptee's Birth Certificate Following Court Order

Portland, Oregon: After 27 years of being denied equal treatment by Michigan's public health officials, Detroit native and adoptee Rudy Owens finally received his original birth record. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services refused to give Owens his record in 1989 after he found his birth mother and the state received her legal consent to surrender vital records to him. The state refused to surrender a copy of Owens' original birth certificate solely because of his status as an adult adoptee born between 1945 and 1980.

The state refused another request in March 2016, when Owens submitted a request with the legal proof showing his birth name and that relations with his birth families was public knowledge. It finally took a court order by the Third Circuit Court of Michigan, signed on June 17 and submitted to the MDHSS on July 1, to force state vital records officials to release Owens' birth certificate to him.

"This is a critical legal document that marks my entrance into this world as a human being, with genetic kin and family histories and family members who wanted to know me," said Owens. "It was registered as my original birth certificate about four weeks after my birth. This single sheet of paper was deemed a state secret. All my life, I was classified by law as being undeserving of this record, unlike all-non-adopted state residents, simply because I was relinquished as an infant to become an adoptee. That is and always has been legalized discrimination, and it's shameful the state treats adoptees as second-class people who have to literally get court orders to get what others receive as a basic records request."

As part of his efforts to secure his birth record, Owens filed a FOIA request that generated more than 230 pages of emails involving 19 officials from the MDHHS and Gov. Rick Snyder's office. Some were state health officials copied on email chains that revealed systemic failures to manage the Flint water crisis.

The documents show Owens and his request were called "the problem" by a senior vital records official and one asked for him to be "tagged" in their system because he had requested his record. A forensic analysis of state emails reveals a pattern of fear and a bunker mentality at MDHHS. High-level agency officials expressed uncertainty and confusion over their limited legal authority and the state's poorly crafted adoption statutes.

- A copy of the email records and analysis of the state's handling of my request can be found on my web site at: www.rudyowens.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Summary-Michigan-FOIA-Comments-V3.pdf.
- A timeline and analysis of my efforts to win my original birth record can be found on my web page at: www.rudyowens.com/birth-certificate/.
- A copy of Owens' original birth certificate, which is no longer a state secret, can be found at: www.rudyowens.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Birth-Cert-Copy.pdf.
- A summary of key facts describing the state's refusal to show leadership and exercise discretion in managing state vital records of an adult adoptee when no rational existed can be found on my web page at: www.rudyowens.com/key-facts-michigan-discrimination-adoptees/.
- An [excellent article](#) by adoption law scholar Elizabeth Samuels, JD, that highlights how adoptee records were once public and then became secretive starting in the 1950s; Samuels' [numerous articles](#) on the secretive nature of adoptee birth records.
- A long-form essay by Owens on systemic discrimination against adoptees that denies them equal treatment under the law can be found at: <https://iwonderandwander.rudyfoto.com/2016/01/15/how-legalized-discrimination-against-adoptees-and-birth-parents-took-root-in-post-war-america/>.
- For more information on Owens' efforts to receive equal treatment under the law for his adoption records, go to his web site at: www.rudyowens.com/adoption/.

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