



## 1997 ASSEMBLY BILL 52

February 3, 1997 - Introduced by Representatives NOTESTEIN, FREESE, LADWIG, WILLIAMS, GOETSCH, RILEY, MUSSER, R. YOUNG, POWERS, BOYLE, GUNDERSON, RYBA and BALDWIN, cosponsored by Senators PLACHE, BUETTNER and BRESKE. Referred to Committee on Children and Families.

1     **AN ACT** *to amend* 20.435 (3) (jj), 48.427 (6) (a), 48.433 (3) (intro.), 48.78 (2) (a),  
2           48.93 (1d) and 69.15 (6) (b); and *to create* 48.434 of the statutes; **relating to:**  
3           disclosure of identifying information about birth parents and birth siblings,  
4           granting rule-making authority and making an appropriation.

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### ***Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau***

Current law provides a procedure by which a person whose birth parent's rights have been terminated, or who has been adopted, in this state may require the department of health and family services (DHFS) or an agency such as a county department of human services or social services or a child welfare agency that has contracted with DHFS to administer the adoption search program (agency) to provide the person, after the person reaches 21 years of age, with any information that is available to DHFS or the agency regarding the identity and location of the person's birth parents. DHFS or the agency may provide the identity and location of a birth parent only if DHFS or the agency has on file an unrevoked affidavit from the birth parent authorizing DHFS or the agency to disclose that information. If DHFS or the agency does not have on file an unrevoked affidavit from each known birth parent, DHFS or the agency must search for each birth parent who has not filed an affidavit. Upon locating a birth parent, DHFS or the agency must give the birth parent an opportunity to file an affidavit. If a known birth parent cannot be located, DHFS or the agency may disclose identifying information concerning that birth parent if the other birth parent has filed an unrevoked affidavit. If a birth parent who has not filed an affidavit is known to be deceased, DHFS or the agency may not

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provide the identity of that birth parent but may provide the identity and location of the other birth parent if the other birth parent has filed an unrevoked affidavit and if one year has elapsed since the death of the birth parent.

This bill lowers from 21 to 18 the age at which a person may require the DHFS or an agency to provide the person with information about the person's birth parents. The bill also establishes a procedure similar to the procedure for obtaining information about a person's birth parents under which a person may require DHFS or an agency to provide the person, after the person reaches 18 years of age, with any information that is available to DHFS or the agency regarding the identity and location of the person's brothers, sisters, half brothers and half sisters by birth (birth siblings). DHFS or the agency may provide that information with respect to a birth sibling only if DHFS or the agency has on file an unrevoked affidavit from that birth sibling. To file an affidavit, a birth sibling must be 18 years of age or over and must have been adopted or have had his or her birth parent's rights over him or her terminated.

If DHFS or an agency does not have on file unrevoked affidavits from each birth sibling, DHFS or the agency must search for each birth sibling who has not filed an affidavit. Upon locating a birth sibling, DHFS or the agency must give that birth sibling an opportunity to file an affidavit. If a known birth sibling cannot be located, DHFS or the agency may not disclose identifying information concerning that birth sibling. If a birth sibling who has not filed an affidavit is known to be deceased, DHFS or the agency must so inform the requester and provide the requester with the identity of that birth sibling.

For further information see the *state and local* fiscal estimate, which will be printed as an appendix to this bill.

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***The people of the state of Wisconsin, represented in senate and assembly, do enact as follows:***

1           **SECTION 1.** 20.435 (3) (jj) of the statutes is amended to read:  
2           20.435 (3) (jj) (title) *Searches for birth parents and birth siblings and adoption*  
3 *record information; foreign adoptions.* The amounts in the schedule for paying the  
4 cost of searches for birth parents under ss. 48.432 (4) and 48.433 (6), for paying the  
5 cost of searches for birth siblings under s. 48.434 (6) and for paying the costs of  
6 reviewing, certifying and approving foreign adoption documents under s. 48.838 (2)  
7 and (3). All moneys received as fees paid by persons requesting a search under s.  
8 48.432 (3) (c) or (4), 48.433 (6), 48.434 (6) or 48.93 (1r) and paid by persons for the

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1 review, certification and approval of foreign adoption documents under s. 48.838 (2)  
2 and (3) shall be credited to this appropriation.

3 **SECTION 2.** 48.427 (6) (a) of the statutes is amended to read:

4 48.427 **(6)** (a) Inform each birth parent, as defined under s. 48.432 (1) (am),  
5 whose rights have been terminated of the provisions of ss. 48.432 ~~and~~, 48.433 ~~and~~  
6 48.434.

7 **SECTION 3.** 48.433 (3) (intro.) of the statutes is amended to read:

8 48.433 **(3)** (intro.) Any person ~~21~~ 18 years of age or over whose birth parent's  
9 rights have been terminated in this state or who has been adopted in this state with  
10 the consent of his or her birth parent or parents before February 1, 1982, may request  
11 the department, or agency contracted with under sub. (11), to provide the person  
12 with the following:

13 **SECTION 4.** 48.434 of the statutes is created to read:

14 **48.434 Access to identifying information about siblings.** **(1)** In this  
15 section:

16 (a) "Agency" has the meaning given under s. 48.432 (1) (ag).

17 (b) "Birth parent" has the meaning given under s. 48.432 (1) (am).

18 (c) "Birth sibling" means a brother or sister by birth or a half brother or half  
19 sister by birth.

20 **(2)** (a) Any birth sibling 18 years of age or over whose birth parent's rights have  
21 been terminated in this state at any time, or who was adopted in this state with the  
22 consent of his or her birth parent or parents before February 1, 1982, may file with  
23 the department or agency contracted with under sub. (11) an affidavit authorizing  
24 the department or agency to provide any available information about the birth

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1 sibling's identity and location to any person who requests that information and who  
2 meets all of the following criteria:

3 1. The person is a brother or sister by birth or a half brother or half sister by  
4 birth of the birth sibling.

5 2. The person is 18 years of age or over at the time of the request.

6 (b) An affidavit filed under par. (a) may be revoked at any time by notifying the  
7 department or agency in writing.

8 **(3)** Any person 18 years of age or over may request the department or agency  
9 contracted with under sub. (11) to provide the person with any available information  
10 about the identity and location of any of that person's birth siblings who meets all  
11 of the following criteria:

12 (a) The birth sibling is 18 years of age or over at the time of the request.

13 (b) The birth parent's rights over the birth sibling have been terminated in this  
14 state at any time or the birth parent or parents consented to the adoption of the birth  
15 sibling in this state before February 1, 1982.

16 **(4)** Before acting on the request, the department or agency contracted with  
17 under sub. (11) shall require the requester to provide adequate identification.

18 **(5)** The department or agency contracted with under sub. (11) shall disclose to  
19 the requester any information available concerning the identity and location of any  
20 of the requester's birth siblings who meets the criteria specified under sub. (3) (a) and  
21 (b) and who has filed an unrevoked affidavit under sub. (2).

22 **(6)** (a) If the department or agency contracted with under sub. (11) does not  
23 have on file an affidavit from each of the requester's known birth siblings who meet  
24 the criteria specified under sub. (3) (a) and (b), the department or agency shall,  
25 within 3 months after the date of the original request, undertake a diligent search

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1 for each birth sibling who meets the criteria specified under sub. (3) (a) and (b) and  
2 who has not filed an affidavit under sub. (2). The search shall be completed within  
3 6 months after the date of the request, unless the search falls within one of the  
4 exceptions established by the department by rule. If any information has been  
5 provided under sub. (5) about a particular birth sibling, the department or agency  
6 is not required to conduct a search for that birth sibling.

7 (b) Employees of the department and any agency conducting a search under this  
8 subsection may not inform any person other than the birth sibling who is the subject  
9 of the search of the purpose of the search.

10 (c) The department or agency conducting the search shall charge the requester  
11 a reasonable fee for the cost of the search. When the department or agency  
12 determines that the fee will exceed \$100 for any birth sibling, the department or  
13 agency shall notify the requester. No fee in excess of \$100 per birth sibling may be  
14 charged unless the requester, after receiving notification under this paragraph, has  
15 given consent to proceed with the search.

16 **(7)** (a) The department or agency conducting the search shall, upon locating a  
17 birth sibling, make at least one verbal contact and notify the birth sibling of all of the  
18 following:

19 1. The nature of the information requested.

20 2. The date of the request.

21 3. The fact that the birth sibling has the right to file with the department the  
22 affidavit under sub. (2).

23 (b) Within 3 working days after contacting a birth sibling, the department or  
24 agency conducting the search shall send the birth sibling a written copy of the  
25 information specified under par. (a) and a blank copy of the affidavit.

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1 (c) If the birth sibling files the affidavit, the department or agency conducting  
2 the search shall disclose the requested information if permitted under sub. (5).

3 (d) If the department or agency conducting the search has contacted a birth  
4 sibling under this subsection, and the birth sibling does not file the affidavit, the  
5 department or agency may not disclose the requested information.

6 (e) If, after a search under sub. (6) (a), a known birth sibling cannot be located,  
7 the department or agency conducting the search may not disclose the requested  
8 information regarding that birth sibling.

9 (f) The department or agency conducting a search under sub. (6) (a) may not  
10 contact a birth sibling again on behalf of the same requester until at least 12 months  
11 after the date of the previous contact. Further contacts with a birth sibling under  
12 this subsection on behalf of the same requester may be made only if 5 years have  
13 elapsed since the date of the last contact.

14 **(8)** If a birth sibling is known to be deceased, the department or agency  
15 contracted with under sub. (11) shall so inform the requester and shall provide the  
16 requester with the identity of that birth sibling.

17 **(8m)** If the department or agency contracted with under sub. (11) may not  
18 disclose the information requested under sub. (3), it shall provide the requester with  
19 any nonidentifying social history information about any of the requester's birth  
20 siblings that the department or agency has on file.

21 **(9)** The requester may petition the circuit court to order the department or  
22 agency contracted with under sub. (11) to disclose any information that may not be  
23 disclosed under this section. The court shall grant the petition for good cause shown.

24 **(10)** Any person, including this state or any political subdivision of this state,  
25 who participates in good faith in any requirement of this section shall have immunity

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1 from any liability, civil or criminal, that results from that person's actions. In any  
2 proceeding, civil or criminal, the good faith of any person participating in the  
3 requirements of this section shall be presumed.

4 (11) The department shall promulgate rules to implement this section and may  
5 contract with an agency to administer this section.

6 **SECTION 5.** 48.78 (2) (a) of the statutes is amended to read:

7 48.78 (2) (a) No agency may make available for inspection or disclose the  
8 contents of any record kept or information received about an individual in its care  
9 or legal custody, except as provided under s. 48.371, 48.38 (5) (b) or (d), 48.432,  
10 48.433, 48.434, 48.93 or 48.981 (7) or by order of the court.

11 **SECTION 6.** 48.93 (1d) of the statutes is amended to read:

12 48.93 (1d) All records and papers pertaining to an adoption proceeding shall  
13 be kept in a separate locked file and may not be disclosed except under sub. (1g) or  
14 (1r), s. 46.03 (29), 48.432, 48.433, 48.434 or 48.57 (1) (j), or by order of the court for  
15 good cause shown.

16 **SECTION 7.** 69.15 (6) (b) of the statutes is amended to read:

17 69.15 (6) (b) The state registrar shall register a new certificate created under  
18 this section and shall impound the original certificate or the certificate registered  
19 under sub. (5) and all correspondence, affidavits, court orders and other related  
20 materials and prohibit access except by court order or except by the state registrar  
21 for processing purposes or except when authorized under ss. s. 48.432 and, 48.433  
22 or 48.434. The state registrar shall send a copy of any new certificate registered  
23 under this section to the local registrar who filed the original of the replaced  
24 certificate. Upon receipt of the copy, the local registrar shall destroy his or her copy  
25 of the replaced certificate and file the new certificate.

**ASSEMBLY BILL 52****1 SECTION 8. Nonstatutory provisions; health and family services.**

2 (1) The authorized FTE positions for the department of health and family  
3 services are increased by 1.0 PR position, to be funded from the appropriation under  
4 section 20.435 (3) (jj) of the statutes, as affected by this act, for the purpose of  
5 performing searches for birth siblings, as defined in section 48.434 (1) (c) of the  
6 statutes, as created by this act, under section 48.434 (6) of the statutes, as created  
7 by this act.

**8 SECTION 9. Initial applicability.**

9 (1) The treatment of sections 48.433 (3) (intro.) and 48.434 of the statutes first  
10 applies to requests for access to identifying information about birth parents, as  
11 defined in section 48.433 (1) (b) of the statutes, or birth siblings, as defined in section  
12 48.434 (1) (c) of the statutes, as created by this act, that are received by the  
13 department of health and family services on the effective date of this subsection.

14 (END)