

Senate studies bills to open adoption files

By Tim Richard
staff writer

A state Senate committee is studying House-passed bills to open up more adoption records. But Judiciary chairman Rudy Nichols, R-Waterford, is unsure whether the panel will report them out for passage this year.

"I'm for nine-tenths" of the main

bill, Nichols said this week after holding a public hearing. But the panel has problems with other bills.

House Bill 5601-7 would open adoption records even further than a 1980 law. Adopted children generally support them.

BUT ONE area man, Don Marengere, opposed the bills, saying

"they will further reduce the number of adoptions in Michigan. The woman choosing adoption for her child no longer has the option of remaining anonymous."

National studies have shown the percentage of children born to single mothers who are given up for adoption has steadily shriveled in the last 15 years and is barely 3 percent, he said.

"It defeats the principle of mutuality in the adoption process by denying the birthmother the opportunity to choose to remain anonymous. (It is) another obstacle for a birth mother to overcome in making an adoption plan for her child," said Marengere, a Bloomfield Township resident. He is a representative for a Livonia supply firm.

"I have more information on my (adopted) children's maternal and paternal grandparents than I do on my own," Marengere said.

THE FOUR BILLS are sponsored by House Judiciary chairman Perry Ballard, D-An Arbor, Rep. David Honigman, R-West Bloomfield, and others.

They are supported by the state Office of Children and Youth Services. Testifying for them was Rosemary Strohpaul of Grand Rapids, representing the Adoption Rights Movement, composed of

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many who seek their biological "roots."

The 1980 law gives an adoptee, at age 18, access to "non-identifying" information if a natural parent doesn't deny access.

Before 1980, adoptees said they had little right to learn about their

biological "roots." A staff analysis notes that "time is important for those who have an interest in astrology."

The original birth name would be maintained. "This is the most controversial change," said the staff analysis. Adoptees say it's their right to know their original identities. Opponents say it would defeat the policy that a natural parent who withdraws consent should not be identified.

• An adult adoptee, biological parent and adult biological sibling would have the right to know the identity of the court and agency that arranged and approved the adoption.

ored or denied in 63 days. Adoptees complain they face long delays and their requests are ignored.

• For adoptions occurring before passage of the 1980 law, identifying information would have to be released if a parent has filed a consent to release the information or if the parent has died. A second parent could not refuse consent. This section is controversial because it would "change the rules of the game" long after an adoption has occurred.

Nichols said that section "will be difficult to resolve. We told the birthmothers at the time (1980) that their identities would remain undisclosed."

• A request for information from courts, state agencies or child-placing agencies would have to be honored.

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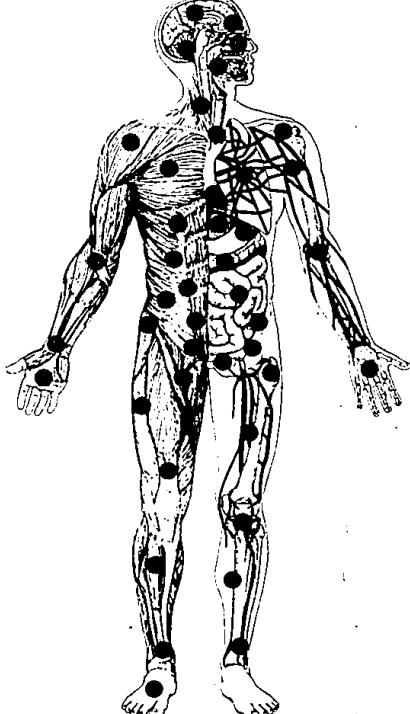
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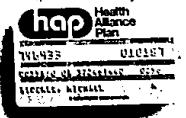
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