



RI Department of Health
Three Capitol Hill
Providence, RI 02908-5097

TTY: 771
www.health.ri.gov

March 6, 2025

The Honorable Evan P. Shanley, Chair
House Committee on State Government and Elections
State House
82 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H 5871 – An Act Relating to Health and Safety – Vital Records

Dear Chair Shanley:

Please accept this letter of support for H 5871, legislation that would prohibit public historical vital records maintained by the State Archives from being amended. This legislation was introduced at the request of the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH).

Historical vital records should be preserved in their original format. Altering these records may cause harm not only to the records being changed but also to adjacent ones, as the ink used for amendments can bleed through and damage both the amended record and those nearby. The proposed legislation would not have a negative impact on Rhode Islanders.

H 5871 would cease the current practice of amending historical documents held at the State Archives to preserve the integrity of these delicate paper records. Approximately 20 amendments are made each year. State Archives, which is overseen by the Rhode Island Secretary of State, concurs that historical vital records should be preserved in their original format.

A letter will be issued by RIDOH to the consumer upon request for an amendment to a historical record, stating that changes to historical records are not permitted. The consumer can submit supporting documentation directly to the relevant foreign country. This procedure is intended to enable customers to pursue their right to obtain dual citizenship, as similar practices exist in other states. This letter issued by RIDOH is acceptable evidentiary documentation for genealogical requests that support dual citizenship.

At the end of each calendar year, records of births and marriages which have occurred 100 years or more from the date of transfer and deaths which have occurred 50 years or more from the date of transfer, shall be permanently transferred by the State Registrar of Vital Records to the custody of the State Archives under control of the Secretary of State who may promulgate rules and regulations pertaining to these public historical documents.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jerome M. Larkin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jerome M. Larkin, MD
Director

CC: The Honorable Terri Cortvriend
The Honorable Members of the House Committee on State Government & Elections
Nicole McCarty, Chief Legal Counsel
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy