



31 January 2008

Honorable William J. Lippert
Chairman, Committee on Judiciary
Vermont State Legislature
State Capitol
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Re: HB 397 – Support if Amended

Dear Chairman Lippert and Vermont House Judiciary Committee Members,

The nation's genealogists support your efforts to enhance and strengthen legislation that protects individuals and companies from identity theft. This ongoing battle is worthy of your attention and that of your colleagues to protect the citizens of the great State of Vermont.

As chairman of the Record Preservation and Access Committee, I am writing on behalf of the Federation of Genealogical Societies with six-hundred fifty member societies, representing over one million genealogists nationwide. The federation's membership includes two genealogical societies in the State of Vermont, namely the Genealogical Society of Vermont in Randolph and the Welsh-American Genealogical Society in Poultney. The committee is also sponsored by the National Genealogical Society with over ten-thousand five-hundred individual and organizational members. Many of these genealogists live in the State of Vermont and/or have ancestry from there and thus need the information contained on the state vital records.

Our primary concerns center around the proposed redaction of the information in the fields on the death certificate containing: 1) cause of death, and 2) social security number. The cause of death information is used by genealogists, epidemiologists, geneticists and other researchers to construct pedigrees that can be used by the medical community to determine appropriate treatments and tests for genetically inherited diseases and conditions. The redaction of this information will adversely affect the people of the State of Vermont whom you are striving to serve.

The social security numbers of deceased individuals are readily available on a number of nationwide indexes through the Social Security Death Master Index (SSDI). This file is provided by the Social Security Administration and was made available a number of years ago through the Freedom of Information Act. Anyone may access the database for

free on the Internet at anyone of a number of sites. For a sample, go to www.familysearch.org and click on the “Search” tab at the top, and then select U.S. Social Security Death Index. Type in any name and you will see the result set, complete with the social security number of the deceased – all at no charge.

The administrative overhead HB 397 will impose on the Vermont Department of Vital Records to redact the social security number of deceased individuals will be wasted resources since the numbers are readily available elsewhere. You may ask, “Why is this information so readily available to the public?” The best answer is so that it may be used as an identity theft tool to alert businesses, banks and other entities when someone is fraudulently trying to use the social security number of a deceased individual.

Again, the genealogical community supports the responsible actions of state legislatures nationwide to protect citizens from the misuse of data for fraudulent purposes. The intent of HB 397 is in line with protecting the citizens of Vermont, but in our opinion would better serve their interests through educating businesses to use the SSDI as a fraud prevention tool and to examine the actual needs to redact critical cause of death information that may be used to assist medical professionals to either save or extend the lives of the citizens of Vermont.

Respectfully,

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