



Records Preservation & Access Committee

Federation of Genealogical Societies, National Genealogical Society,
International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies

Vital Statistics Registrars We REALLY Need to Talk!

1. The interests of the genealogical community are not hard to understand. Preservation of and access to records are our pivotal issues. Without documentation, our family histories are more legend than history.
2. Genealogists share the same vulnerabilities to identity theft and privacy concerns as any citizen. Be assured that the genealogical community supports measures that protect us from identity theft. We fervently wish that various proposals at the state and federal level limiting access to death records would have the effect of identity theft prevention. Our analysis has suggested that they limit records access without providing the desired benefit of identity theft reduction.
3. We are concerned generally with embargoes on birth, marriage, divorce, and death records and indexes. In particular, we have been compelled to challenge the appropriateness of the 75-year embargo of death certificates and indexes found in the 2011 Version of the Model State Vital Statistics Act whenever it has been proposed for adoption. On access to death records, we believe we can first achieve common ground with vital statistics registrars.
4. Our two communities share many interests. Vital records officers are custodians of records of life and death of value to the public and to genealogists. RPAC does not accept that an essentially adversarial relationship between genealogists and vital statistics registrars is desirable or necessary. How can we best bridge the existing gap in our respective postures?
5. We endorse the theme of the presentation made by Patricia W. Potrzebowski, then Executive Director of NAPHSIS, at the 2014 Annual Conference of the National Genealogical Society, that we begin by encouraging a substantive dialogue between our two communities.
6. If that dialogue can lead to a coordinated posture that both communities can support, then genealogists can begin to function as allies to vital records officers not only on access to death records but be supportive of broader vital records interests as well.
7. As Ms. Potrzebowski said in her October 2015 response to our letter, "How long death records remain confidential and restricted to family members is a decision that is up to each state legislature." RPAC and state genealogical societies will continue to support open records in states where the records are open and to advocate lowering the embargo periods for birth, marriage, divorce, and death records in other states where possible.
8. RPAC is urging the leadership of each state genealogical community to reach out to their corresponding vital records registrars to start this dialogue in a meaningful way.
9. In coming months, many vital records registrars can expect to hear from their local genealogical leaders (some already have). Should issues arise before that happens, feel free to contact RPAC at access@fgs.org (or call Fred Moss at 972-679-5377) and allow us to help make the appropriate introductions.

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