

Ige signs adoption, gun measures

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By Sophie Cocke June 25, 2016

Adoptees who are at least 18 years old now have unfettered access to their original birth certificate and adoption records under legislation signed into law this week by Gov. David Ige.

With Act 80, Hawaii joins a growing number of states that are easing or eliminating restrictions to birth records — allowing adult adoptees greater access to information surrounding the circumstances of their birth, the names of their birth parents and information that could help them know more about their family medical history.

Hawaii, like states throughout the country, began sealing or restricting access to such records in the mid-20th century to protect adopted children and their mothers from the stigma of illegitimacy and to prevent birth mothers from interfering with the adopted family, according to local and national adoption groups that have advocated for open access to the records.

Since then stigmas about illegitimacy have waned, and adoptions are rarely shrouded in such secrecy.

Hawaii eased access to birth records in the 1990s, but information was still predicated on the consent of birth parents and adoptees sometimes had to pay a \$600 fee to a state investigator without any assurance that records would ultimately be released.

The legislation was championed by state Sen. Mike Gabbard (D, Kapolei-Makakilo) and state Rep. Chris Lee (D, Kailua-Lanikai-Waimanalo), who was adopted and has struggled to find his birth parents.

“I think like many adoptees, I love my parents, but I always wondered whether I had biological brothers or sisters,” said Lee. “This will help open up information and processes that will hopefully allow me and many others to find out who their family actually is.”

The measure is just one of about three dozen bills that the governor signed into law this week. He faces a Monday deadline to inform the Legislature of any bills that he intends to veto.

Ige also signed a bill this week that authorizes county police departments to enroll firearm applicants and individuals registering their firearms into a criminal record monitoring service maintained by the FBI.

The FBI’s “Rap Back” system provides continuous criminal record monitoring, notifying law enforcement agencies when a firearm owner has been arrested for a criminal offense anywhere in the country.

Hawaii is the first state to authorize enrollment of gun applicants and owners into the FBI system.

“This is about our community’s safety and responsible gun ownership,” Ige said in a press release. “This system will better enable our law enforcement agencies to ensure the security of all Hawaii residents and visitors to our islands.”

Ige signed the measure into law as Congress erupted into chaos this week with House Democrats leading a daylong sit-in to protest Republican inaction on stricter gun laws.

Ige also signed two gun control bills into law in April. One disqualifies people who have been convicted of stalking and sexual assault from owning or possessing firearms. The other requires firearm owners to surrender their guns if they have been involuntarily hospitalized at a psychiatric facility or diagnosed with a significant behavioral, emotional or mental disorder.

Ige also signed a measure into law this week that allows him to circumvent the state procurement code and directly negotiate with a contractor to build a new forensic facility at the state mental hospital in Kaneohe. The Hawaii State Hospital suffers from lax security that has led to hundreds of assaults or attempted assaults by patients against staff in recent years. The bill is aimed at expediting the development of a new, much more secure facility with more bed space.

In addition, Ige signed bills that help farmers comply with the federal Food Safety Modernization Act; clarify that publicly owned energy cooperatives can apply for special-purpose revenue bonds; and require that applicants for state nursing licenses undergo criminal background checks.