

**Testimony of Lisa Goodwin, Bangor City Clerk, Before the
Judiciary Committee
In Opposition to LD 1695 – An Act Regarding the Law Governing the Disclosure of Vital Records
May 13, 2019**

**Senator Carpenter, Representative Bailey and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on
Judiciary**

My name is Lisa Goodwin, and I am the City Clerk for the City of Bangor. I am submitting testimony on behalf of the City of Bangor, which is in opposition to this bill. We do have a few concerns with this bill and that is the purpose of my testimony today.

First, current law provides protection of personal information contained on all vital records within the State of Maine. These protections were put in place after 9/11 to help prevent identity theft and fraud. Individuals with direct and legitimate interest in a vital record are able to access the record. This includes professional genealogists if they follow regulations. The proposed legislation would open access to all vital records to everyone. Birth, death and marriage records contain very personal information which should not be available to everyone. Information includes birth dates, legal names, parents' names, addresses, causes of death and even social security numbers! Allowing access to everyone creates a great opportunity for identity theft and fraud as well as heartache to families who may have suffered a death through murder, suicide or drug overdose and may not want that cause of death to be made public.

Second, the proposed legislation requires vital records be available for inspection, both visually and physically. Municipal clerks are charged with preserving and protecting vital records. The City of Bangor spends thousands of dollars every year in order to preserve and protect these documents that have been placed in its care. Allowing everyone to look at and touch these records is counter-productive to preserving and protecting. The City of Bangor does not have adequate staffing levels to be able to watch over individuals who want to comb through the volumes of records in the City Clerk's office. Without additional staff, we will not be able to ensure that records are handled properly or that someone doesn't try to alter a record such as if they feel a name is not spelled correctly on the record and they write in a different spelling. This greatly jeopardizes the integrity of records we are charged with certifying as true and correct.

In conclusion, current law allows all individuals who have a legitimate interest in a vital record the opportunity to show proof of that legitimate interest and gain access to the record. The risk of very personal information being obtained by people with less than honorable intentions far outweighs the need for the general public to access all records. The additional burden on municipalities to administer the open access and the additional cost of preserving and protecting records that will be handled by the public creates an unfunded mandate.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on our concerns regarding this issue.

Lisa J. Goodwin, MMC, Bangor City Clerk
lisa.goodwin@bangormaine.gov
207-992-4218