

List of states issuing birth certificates for stillborn babies growing

Knappenberger

On March 30, 2006, Heidi Kauffman of Port Royal, Pa., didn't feel her baby moving, and the next day, he was delivered stillborn. Heartbroken, she and her husband held him and loved him, and they named him Kail Howard.

She later learned that there would be no birth certificate, only a death certificate, an unbearable revelation that compounded the grief of losing a child.

"I felt him move and I saw his heartbeat, and they were telling me that he didn't exist," she said. "I couldn't grasp that."

Kauffman refused to let the matter rest and sought ways to change the law.

Long-fought effort

States With Birth Certificates*
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Alabama	Alaska	Arkansas
Arizona	California	Florida
Georgia	Indiana	Louisiana
Maine	Massachusetts	Maryland
Minnesota	Mississippi	Missouri
Montana	Nebraska	N. Hampshire
New Jersey	North Carolina	North Dakota
Oklahoma	Pennsylvania	Rhode Island
So. Carolina	So. Dakota	Tennessee
Texas	Utah	Virginia
Wisconsin		
<p>*New York legislators passed legislation to provide birth certificates for stillborn babies, but it has yet to be signed into law.</p> <p>Source: MISS Foundation</p>		

Victory came five years later, when on July 7 Gov. Tom Corbett officially signed [state Senate Bill 326](#) into law, giving recognition to babies who lived and were stillborn. The act made Pennsylvania the [31st state](#) to issue “certificates of birth resulting in stillbirth,” and on Aug. 8, Kauffman became the first mother to receive one.

Her journey began on July 16, 2006, when she told her story to state Sen. Jake Corman. She asked if a bill could be introduced for that type of birth certificate but he said that similar legislation had failed to pass.

“He told me that he would do everything he could to get it accomplished, and he never wavered,” she said. “He introduced it three or four times, and it would go so far and fail. Then he would introduce it again.”

Meanwhile, on Jan. 4, 2007, Dorothy Knappenberger of Allentown was present when her granddaughter Mandy Mancini’s daughter

was stillborn.

“I was stunned when the funeral director told me that there would not be a birth certificate for Seneca, but only a death certificate,” she said.

She searched the Internet for support, found the MISS Foundation in Phoenix, Ariz., and soon became the state contact for advocating state legislation for the certificates.

Founding the MISS Foundation

Joanne Cacciatore loves her daughter Cheyenne just as much as she loves her other four children, she said, yet she has no home movies, no kindergarten scrawlings and no smiling school pictures of her. But she does have her birth certificate and a message on her back, tattooed with Cheyenne's ashes.

"I was devastated by her death in every way – socially, emotionally, physically and spiritually," said Cacciatore, who teaches death studies at Arizona State University. "I felt very alone and isolated and actively thought of ending my own life."

Cheyenne died 15 minutes before she was born on July 27, 1994, yet Arizona, like all states then, issued only death certificates for stillborn babies.

"How can you die if you never existed?" Cacciatore said. "It was an injustice."

In 1996, she channeled her grief into founding the MISS Foundation that supports families who lose children of any age, for any reason. The foundation also advocates MISSing Angels legislation with the goal of all 50 states adopting a version of a certificate for birth resulting in stillbirth.

On June 11, 2001, Arizona became the first state to sign such a bill into law and Cheyenne was the first stillborn baby in the United States to be issued that special birth certificate.

"It was a very emotional, beautiful and powerful moment for me," Cacciatore said. "I did this for the parents who will follow me."

Thirty more states adopted similar legislation and many women from across the country have contacted her about their losses from even 30, 50 or more years ago. One 86-year-old woman wrote that she could now die in peace knowing that her baby's life mattered.

"There are some people who just don't seem to get why the death of a baby is such a big deal," Cacciatore said. "It is a big deal. To lose a child at any age is surely one of life's greatest tragedies."

Cacciatore was an atheist when her baby died and has since become a Christian. The tattoo on her back is a quote from St. John of the Cross' "Dark Night of the Soul": "The soul still sings in the darkness telling of the beauty she found there; and daring us not to think that because she passed through such tortures of anguish, doubt, dread, and horror, as has been said, she ran any the more danger of being lost in the night. Nay, in the darkness did she, rather, find herself."

"I don't know how I would have survived if I hadn't turned my life to devotion to other survivors," she said. "I truly believe that the only way you can transcend that kind of suffering is to turn your heart outwards."

For information, visit missfoundation.org.

Kauffman and Knappenberger met on common ground and were instrumental in garnering interest and support for the bill, and were present at the ceremonial signing in Harrisburg on July 27.

“I never thought it would happen,” Kauffman said. “I sat there and cried and cried, and then I ended up smiling.”

Pro-abortion opposition

Like in many states, the bill in Pennsylvania had been stalled by opposition from the pro-abortion faction.

“They were concerned about using the term ‘baby’ throughout the certificate of birth resulting in stillbirth,” Scott Sikorski, Corman’s legislative director, told Our Sunday Visitor. “There was concern that if we used the term ‘baby’ that it would convey some sort of human status placed on this child, a wanted fetus, which in effect means the same as baby.”

The previous legislative session had been conducted under pro-choice Democrat Gov. Ed Rendell. “Then things changed in Pennsylvania because Gov. Corbett is truly pro-life,” Sikorski said.

But neither Kauffman, Knappenberger, nor anyone supporting the certificates ever wanted it to be a political issue.

“I’m Catholic, but this never had anything to do with abortion,” Knappenberger said. “We’re talking about babies.”

As the Pennsylvania contact for the MISS Foundation, she heard from many women who had stillborn babies, and the ones who suffered the losses decades ago had similar stories.

“She never got to hold her baby,” she said. “She was sedated and the baby was taken away and the funeral arrangements were made with a closed casket. There was some sort of stigma

attached, that there was something wrong, and it was never talked about. These mothers suffered in silence.”

Knappenberger was a nurse and had worked in a maternity ward. She had compassion for mothers who lost their babies but, she said, “I never realized the intense grief that’s felt by the parents and the family, and for so many generations.”

Kauffman attributes the long-sought victory to “the power of love.”

Maryann Gogniat Eidemiller writes from Pennsylvania.