

We applaud the efforts of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to expand the range of those to whom copies of birth and death records would be accessible. The newly established categories will help many individual genealogists access these important records.

However, these expansions still **unnecessarily limit** the ability for individuals to access these records for research purposes. A researcher often needs to view the information on an individual's birth or death record **before** being able to correctly assert their relationship to that individual. Genealogists are frequently beset by research questions that involve individuals with extremely common names, inconsistencies in biographical details, and other hurdles that make identifying a specific familial relationship difficult – if not impossible – to determine *without access to birth and death records*.

Furthermore, the categories exclude important familial elements that are becoming more prevalent today and will continue to do so over the next 125 years. The reality of New York's families today and in the immediate past is incongruent with the traditional approach proposed by the New York City Department of Mental Health and Hygiene. For example, the exclusion of step-relationships from the list discriminates against thousands of families living in New York City today. These omissions, alongside the inability for adoptees to access information regarding their family history, create an unfair barrier to access.

While an individual genealogist might focus on their specific family, this is not the only use of these materials for genealogical and historical research. The greatly expanded time periods (which are now amongst the most restrictive in the nation) **prohibit local and family historians from studying an incredibly large number of topics, such as:**

- Members of a community who served in World War II, the Korean Conflict, or the Vietnam War (as records pertaining to most World War II veterans fall within of the new timeframes). The stories of these heroic men and women, who sacrificed their lives for our freedom, will remain hidden for up to a century.
- Survivors of the Holocaust, as the records of family members who escaped to New York in the 1940s are now inaccessible to researchers until the mid-21st century.
- Biographical, genealogical, and cultural studies of any immigrant communities and their impact on the city of New York throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Those seeking research into family health history, as applicable information is needed from third and fourth cousins, categories not covered under the proposed expansions.

Therefore we ask that the Department of Health create an additional category for access – Researcher – that specifically allows researchers to access these records. The creation of this category would help to resolve the situations outlined above. This level of access could still require an appropriate level of identification (such as a driver's license, passport, or state ID) and clarify an individual's purpose in requesting a specific record.

Sincerely,

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