![pennsylvania DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH]

STATE REGISTRAR NOTICE

Subject: Revision to Applicant Eligibility for Birth Certificates; and Launch of Application for a Birth Certificate for an Individual Involved in Foster Care or Juvenile Justice	Type: ☒ Regular ☐ Transitory	Number: **2022-06**
Date Issued: September 16, 2022 Date Effective: September 16, 2022	Audience: All Birth Stakeholders	By Direction of: Lisa Hasselbrook State Registrar

Effective immediately, applicant eligibility to apply for a birth certificate shall be considered for individuals aged 16 years of age and older. This revision to the age requirement applies to the standard "Application for a Birth Certificate" and to the "Application for a Birth Certificate for an Individual Experiencing Homelessness" submitted through the mail to the Division of Vital Records or in person at Vital Records Public Offices.

By October 3, 2022, the Bureau of Health Statistics and Registries (BHSR) will begin offering an "Application for a Birth Certificate for Foster and Juvenile Justice-Involved Individuals." This application is designed for individuals aged 16 to 24 years of age who have been involved in the foster care system or juvenile justice system to apply for their own birth certificate and waives the fee.

Background

The birth certificate is the primary breeder document used to establish an individual's identity. The breeder document is necessary to engage in many aspects of society, including obtaining an education, participating in the workforce, accessing healthcare and other benefits, and obtaining government-issued identification such as a driver's license. Traditionally for minors, establishing one's identity is secured through the parents. For youth who are disassociated from their parents, this becomes a barrier to taking steps to better their future.

Education is a key mechanism for improving one's life and breaking cycles of poverty, homelessness, and justice involvement. 16 and 17 year-olds are old enough to apply for college. Parental consent is not required, but the college applicant must provide a copy of their birth certificate. This age group is also eligible to obtain a government issued ID or driver's license with permission of a person in loco parentis in the absence of a parent. Lowering the eligibility age enables these youth to apply for their own birth certificates and meet these requirements.

Considerations for Special Applications and Fee Waivers

The age eligibility requirement is also considered in the context of special applications and the impact on the population of youth aged 16 and 17 years. Vulnerable populations include individuals experiencing homelessness, and those who are, or recently were, involved in foster care or juvenile justice. PA's juvenile courts can retain jurisdiction over a youth until age 21 and this is the same threshold for aging out of foster care in many jurisdictions, including PA.

Barriers for these vulnerable populations to meeting the requirements to apply for a birth certificate include:

- Inability to pay the $20 fee
- Lack of a valid government-issued identification
- Lack of a valid mailing address
- Estrangement from parents or other family members who may be eligible to apply on behalf of the individual. Foster parents are not eligible applicants, as they do not hold legal custody of the child.

In the absence of a parent, guardian, or other eligible family member, the support structure for these young people may come from a community-based organization. Such organizations may provide physical, emotional, and social supports for these young people, but will often not be able to meet the direct interest requirement in order to apply on their behalf for a birth certificate. However, such an organization may be in a position to aid in establishing the identity of the individual and serve as an advocate and co-applicant.

Schools may provide another support system for vulnerable youth. Therefore, the principal or counselor of a school where the applicant is attending or recently attended may also serve as the advocate and co-applicant for individuals who are eligible under the Foster and Juvenile Justice-Involved application.

Information for Community-Based Organizations Supporting Youth

Community-based organizations may assist the youth they serve in applying for their birth certificates in three ways:

- For youth applying through the standard Application for a Birth Certificate, the organization may pay on behalf of the applicant. For mailed applications, payment may be in the form of a check or money order. To facilitate check processing, the name of the applicant should be provided in the memo field of the check. In-person applications may also be paid by credit card, provided an authorized representative of the organization is present with the applicant.

- For youth applying through the Application for a Birth Certificate for an Individual Experiencing Homelessness, the director of the organization may support as the advocate co-applicant as outlined in Part 6 of the application, including a letter under the director's signature. The applicant may authorize the advocate to receive the certificate on their behalf.

- For youth applying through the Application for a Birth Certificate for Foster and Juvenile Justice-Involved Individuals, organizations may support as the advocate co-applicant as outlined in Part 6 of the application. The director of a facility providing services to the individual, a juvenile justice case manager, or school official may serve as the advocate co-applicant and provide the supporting letter. The applicant may authorize the advocate to receive the certificate on their behalf.

Links to Birth Certificate Applications

[Application for a Birth Certificate](#)

[Application for a Birth Certificate with Fees Waived for an Individual Who is Experiencing Homelessness](#)

[Application for a Birth Certificate for an Individual Involved in Foster Care or Juvenile Justice](#)
(form will be available published, by 10/3/22)

Contact Information:

Consumer Support Hotline
Phone: 724-656-3100 or 844-228-3516 (toll-free)