



Case Study: Vital Records to Help Secure the Rights of Every Child

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Peter Rencsko is an attorney in the state's Department of Revenue, the single state agency in the Commonwealth tasked with establishing, modifying and enforcing court orders of child support. For DOR to establish and enforce court ordered child support, the agency needs to have access to timely and accurate birth records and the names of both parents.

In Massachusetts, the state's Registry of Vital Records and Statistics collects and manages millions of vital records, including the birth record of every child born in the Commonwealth. The vast majority of birth records for children born to unmarried parents includes both parents who have voluntarily acknowledged the child on a form completed at the hospital when the child is born. For other children, it takes a court order to legally recognize parentage.

"It is critically important to have accurate, reliable tracking of all the births in the state, as well as the acknowledgement of parenthood," says Peter. "These records benefit families who have the documentation they need to secure the rights of their child. And these records benefit the child, setting them up for life with two legal parents."

Determining parentage may require genetic testing to identify the father and filing a complaint in the Probate and Family Court as part of a case with the Department of Revenue. For all of these cases, the department relies on the Registry's comprehensive birth records and parentage information.

Massachusetts' success in establishing a child's parentage is also tracked by the federal government. If the success rate falls below 90 percent for two consecutive years, the federal government would reduce the amount of federal block grant funding for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. The child support program could also lose potential incentive funds.

Peter has nothing but praise for the helpful relationship between the Department of Revenue and the Registry. They frequently work together to iron out issues that arise during the process of certifying parentage and, ultimately, the rights and protections for each child born in the Commonwealth.

"It's about teamwork," he says. "Our work together on the parentage program is vital to establishing the links that end up supporting these children throughout their lives."