

## MEMORANDUM TO THE GENEALOGICAL COMMUNITY

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FROM: Peter E. Broadbent, Jr.  
DATE: November 1, 2011  
RE: Potential Changes in Virginia's Vital Records Laws –  
Legislative Commission to Act on November 22

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The Virginia Joint Commission on Health Care will meet on Tuesday, November 22 to vote on changes to Virginia's vital records. The changes under consideration (outlined in my September 20 memorandum) include possibly lengthening the "closed" periods for vital records by 25 years.

**Please write each of the individual Commission members (see attached draft letter and email addresses) urging them to improve public access to Virginia's vital records.**

Legislators have been hearing from genealogists, but the Virginia Department of Health ("VDH") is still pushing hard to shut off public access to vital records. VDH not only is still calling for lengthening access to public records by 25 years (increasing death and marriage records closed periods from 50 years to 75 years, and birth records closed periods from 100 years to 125 years), but refusing to expand the definition of "immediate family" who can access "closed" records. VDH also opposes placing digital copies of vital records online.

VDH has also announced that effective November 1, it will no longer allow Virginia's death records to be included in the Social Security Death Index, threatening this important national tool to avoid identity theft and credit fraud. You can see a copy of the VDH response (and staff summary of other responses) by going to [www.jchc.virginia.gov](http://www.jchc.virginia.gov), and looking under Meetings – October 17 JCHC – Public Comments Vital Records.

**You have three (3) weeks to write the legislators on the Commission.** VDH's paid staff will be lobbying these legislators hard to maintain VDH's financial and bureaucratic control over the vital records it holds, so unless legislators hear directly from a large segment of the public, VDH may very well prevail, and further restrict public access to these records, even for grandchildren.

**Please add your name and address to the attached letter, and feel free to add your own comments, bad VDH experiences, etc., but please write the legislators again – even if you have already written them once before. A block of email addresses for Commission members is on the cover sheet. Please send your messages to arrive before November 22.**

Please urge your friends and family members to also write, and if you are in Virginia, send a copy to your local legislators and ask them to support reform of VDH vital records' practices.

Respectfully,

Peter E. Broadbent, Jr.  
Former President, VGS