

**Virginia Department of Health
Division of Vital Records**

**Development of an Heirloom Birth Certificate -
Feasibility Study**

Study Mandate

Item 292 of the 2009 Appropriation Act requires the Department of Health to examine the feasibility of developing a mechanism to make available a birth certificate suitable for display, otherwise referred to as an “Heirloom” birth certificate (HBC). As part of the feasibility analysis, the Department shall determine the impact of imposing a fee for HBC orders which would cover all administrative costs to the Division of Vital Records for developing this program and processing HBC orders. The Division shall examine whether other states have implemented such a program, what fees are imposed, the costs of running such a program, and how much revenue other states collect from the program. The Department shall report its findings to the Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees by November 1, 2009.

Issuance of Heirloom Birth Certificates by Other States

Vital Records offices in 17 states currently issue a certificate referred to as either an “Heirloom” or “Commemorative” Birth Certificate (Table 1). HBCs are purchased for special occasions such as a newborn’s birth, birthdays, graduations, anniversaries, retirements, or recognition of family and genealogical history. States have had varied experiences with the development, marketing and sale of HBCs. According to the Texas State Registrar, “they are a hit and Texans love them”. However, some other states have not shared Texas success. For example, Minnesota discontinued the sale of the HBC because there was not much demand.

In some states (Alaska, Colorado, Oregon, Texas and Washington), the Heirloom Birth Certificates are as official as the standard issued birth certificate; in other states it is only a keepsake. It is anticipated that the National Association for Public Health Statistic and Information System (NAPHSIS) Security Committee may recommend that the HBC not be certified for legal use.

The design of state HBCs range from Alaska’s polar bear, Maryland’s blacked eyed susan and checkerspot butterfly, Oklahoma’s state capitol dome, New Hampshire’s patchwork quilt and West Virginia’s heritage quilt and majestic mountains. Ohio’s Heirloom Birth Certificate design focuses on the state’s history, it contains illustrations of the eight U. S. presidents from Ohio, the first flight of the Wright brothers, Neil Armstrong’s walk on the moon, the first state Capitol, state flag, state bird, state tree and state flower. The dimensions of HBCs also vary; including 8 1/2 x 11, 11 x 14, 9 x 20 and 12 x 18. Each certificate bears the signature of the Governor and State Registrar.

In order to perform this analysis, information concerning cost of developing HBCs, the demand for HBCs, and the use of the resulting revenue was obtained by surveying the Vital Records offices in the 17 states that issue HBCs, and from the websites of those offices. That data is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 – Heirloom Birth Certificates Issued by Other States

State	Development Cost	Implementation Date	Certificate Cost	Certificates Issued in 2008	Revenue	Funds Distribution
Alaska	>\$2,000	2001	\$45	600	\$27,000	\$20 – Vital Records \$25 – Children’s Trust Fund
Colorado	No available data	2007	\$50	47	\$2,350	\$40 – Vital Records \$10 – Immunization Fund
Delaware	No available data	1994	\$35	140	\$4,900	\$12.50 – Dept. of Health & Social Services \$22.50 – Health Statistic Center
Florida	\$21,500	1990’s	\$34	1,850	\$62,900	\$9 – Vital Records \$25 – Regional Prenatal Intensive Care Center
Illinois	No available data	1988	\$40	25	\$1,000	\$20 – Child Abuse Prevention Fund \$20 – Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Indiana	*	*	\$30	*		\$7 – Health Dept. \$23 – Infant Mortality Account
Iowa	<\$2,000	1997	\$35	33	\$1,155	\$35 – EMS
Maryland	No available data	1988	\$30	1,140	\$34,200	\$15 – Vital Records \$15 – Children Trust Fund

Table 1 - Continued

State	Development Cost	Implementation Date	Certificate Cost	Copies Issued in 2008	Revenue	Funds Distribution
Massachusetts	\$5,000	1996	\$50 – Service Counter \$60 – by mail	192	\$9,600	\$25 or \$30 – Vital Records \$25 or \$30 – General Fund
New Hampshire	*	*	\$25	*		\$15 Vital Records Improvement Fund \$10 – General Fund
Ohio	No available data	2000	\$25	<100	\$2,500	\$10 – Vital Records \$15 – Children’s Trust Charity
Oklahoma	No available data	2001	\$35	>1000	\$35,000	\$10 – Vital Records \$25 – Child Abuse Training and Coordination
Oregon	No available data	1985	\$45	141	\$6,345	\$5 – Vital Records \$40 – Children’s Trust Fund
Texas	No available data	1996	\$60	1,810	\$108,600	\$25 – General Funds \$25 – Childhood Immunization \$10 – Texas On-line
Utah	No available data	1992	\$28	250	\$7,000	\$21 – Vital Records \$7 – Children’s Trust Fund
Washington	No available data	1987	\$40	161	\$6,440	\$15 – Vital Records \$25 – Council for Children and Families

State	Development Cost	Implementation Date	Certificate Cost	Copies Issued in 2008	Revenue	Funds Distribution
West Virginia	\$11,000	2007	\$35	91	\$3,185	\$1 – Vital Records \$4 – General Revenue Fund \$15 – Special Revenue Account \$15 – Children’s Trust Fund
*Data was not received at the completion of this study.						
Source: VDH Division of Vital Records staff survey of other states.						

In other states, the fee for an HBC ranges from \$25.00 to \$60.00. The use of the sales revenue also varies, and is frequently dedicated to specific purposes. As shown in Table 1, the proceeds from the sale of HBCs are often shared with programs such as the Children’s Trust Fund, Regional Prenatal Intensive Care Center, Child Abuse Training and Coordination Program, Infant Mortality Prevention, and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect.

Analysis of Potential Demand and Estimated Cost

The feasibility of developing and implementing a Virginia HBC program will depend on the cost of developing the certificate and the demand for the certificate from the public. The design of the certificate should be appealing to everyone born in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The VDH Division of Vital Records estimates that 1,200 HBCs per year (or 100 per month) would be produced and sold in response to anticipated demand. While this number may seem ambitious considering the relatively low number of HBCs issue by many other states, the Division of Vital Records is confident that it can reach this goal.

The popularity of special/personalized license plates in Virginia may be considered as a potential indicator for the popularity of HBCs. The Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) offers more than 200 unique special/personalized plates. These plates represent colleges and universities, branches of the military, localities and special interest organizations. DMV has 7,693,654 active license plates in circulation and 1,668,137 (21.7%) are special/personalized license plates. In FY09 DMV issued 145,858 special/personalized plates.

The Division of Vital Records envisions that its HBC marketing strategy will include use of the internet, newspapers and brochures. In addition to posting information on the

Division of Vital Records web site, permission will be sought to add a link to various state government websites (i.e. Governor, Virginia Tourism Corporation, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, The Library of Virginia and Time Travelers).

It is estimated that one additional full-time employee (i.e., Office Services Specialist, Pay Band 2A) will be needed in the Division of Vital Records in order to develop, implement and administer an HBC program. The annual salary and benefits cost of this employee is estimated at \$46,851. Depending on the actual demand for HBCs, it may be necessary to hire additional staff.

It is estimated that an additional one-time expenditure of approximately \$29,000 will be needed for the development (design, change to the vital records electronic system, and software to produce the certificate) of the HBC. It is possible that this expense can be paid for out of the existing Vital Statistics Automation Fund.

Other estimated costs associated with development of an HBC in Virginia include:

- \$7,000 for vendor setup (i.e., the layout of the HBC design and text) and for the certification paper;
- \$1,500 for a color laser printer
- \$1,400 per order for toner cartridge;
- Postage (\$3.95 per certificate); and.
- \$1,055 for protective envelopes..

The Division of Vital Records is determining the extent to which these additional costs could be paid out of existing resources.

The average fee charged by the seventeen states issuing HBCs is approximately \$38.00. The recommended fee to be charged for a Virginia HBC would be \$50.00. At that fee amount, and assuming that 1,200 HBCs would be sold each year, the VDH Division of Vital Records would generate \$60,000 annually from the sale of HBCs. The level of revenue would cover the salary and benefit of the full time employee administering the HBC program, and would provide a modest level of additional revenue which VDH would recommend be used to support infant mortality prevention efforts, as well as other maternal and child health programs.