



Jewish Genealogy Society of Long Island
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February 10, 2026

Senator Liz Krueger
Senator Thomas F. O'Mara
Standing Committee on Finance
New York State Senate
financechair@nysenate.gov

Assemblyman J. Gary Pretlow
Assemblyman Edward P. Ra
Standing Committee on Ways and Means
New York State Assembly
wamchair@nyassembly.gov

Dear Chair Krueger, Chair Pretlow, Ranking Member O'Mara and Ranking Member Ra:

The Jewish Genealogy Society of Long Island has almost 400 members dedicated to researching their Jewish family roots, most of whom are residents of Long Island and New York State. We write today to provide testimony to support the Governor's proposal to invest \$7 million in improving the services of the Department of Health's Bureau of Vital Records and to urge continued focus on access to historical vital records for genealogical purposes.

Jewish genealogy can be especially challenging, given the decimation of our extended families in the Holocaust and heavy records loss in certain areas of Eastern Europe, where many of our families originate. This makes our members that much more reliant on the records of their families in the United States. While New York City has expanded historical vital records access, placing many records online, the rest of New York State lags behind. Many of our members are forced to wait for more than 5 years to get historical records from the Bureau of Vital Records in Albany, which is by far the worst response time across the entire United States. By comparison, even a recent death certificate from Florida can be obtained by anyone for \$6, with the order fulfilled in under a month.

Genealogists and family historians have benefited greatly from the digitization of vital records over the last several decades. We therefore strongly support the significant allocation within the \$7 million appropriation that will support contract services that appear to be for the continued digitization of vital records. We also support the additional funds to hire Bureau of Vital Records staff so that the backlog of genealogical

requests can be eliminated and that future requests can be processed in weeks or months instead of years.

While this investment is a start, we would also urge for open public access to public records. Throughout the United States, including in New York City and our neighbors, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Vermont, vital records regularly transfer to the respective city and state archives. New York State should also move its historical vital records to the New York State Archives, so that these unique historical records are safely preserved and easily available to all members of the public.

Finally, as a Jewish organization, we wish to call to your attention that access to a death certificate can be important for religious reasons – to determine place of burial and the person's yahrzeit (Hebrew date of death, on which family members say memorial prayers). Calculating this date depends on knowing the exact time of death, which can be found only on a death certificate. Anyone who seeks these pieces of information is reliant on timely access to vital records.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. We would welcome the opportunity to provide additional input and can be reached at the address above or at jgslongisland@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alexander Calzareth". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Alexander Calzareth, President
on behalf of the Board of Directors
of the Jewish Genealogy Society of Long Island