

# Vital Records during “NYS on Pause”

The year 2020 started out like any other year. New Local Registrar appointment forms were still trickling into the New York State Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Records (BVR) after the New Year, the vital event numbers were relatively consistent with past years, and we were all going about our business. A new executive order took effect in January – the *Pre-Adoption Birth Certificate* – where adoptees gained the right to original birth certificates, and requests for birth certificates continued to flow in anticipation of the Real ID requirements for airlines and borders.

Then it hit ... COVID-19 struck New York with a vengeance, and Governor Cuomo put the State on “PAUSE” to try to control the situation. For BVR, we could not “pause” as we support the ‘industries’ impacted so significantly by the pandemic: the medical professionals, funeral directors and local registrars. Data was needed daily to report deaths up to state and federal agencies, and the marriage solemnization period was suspended requiring additional notations on licenses issued just prior to and during the pandemic. NY on PAUSE and executive orders shifted protocols like no other time in recent history, and BVR didn’t skip a beat, with extended support hours and shared guidance to support our stakeholders.

Luckily, many BVR resources are available electronically to local registrars and other stakeholders. For example, the New York State Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS) is accessible via any Internet connection and the electronic workflow almost completely eliminates foot traffic in local filing offices, especially useful when trying to enforce social distancing or continuing work during building shutdowns. The system availability bolsters compliance with filing of death certificates within the 72-hour window per Public Health Law. This fall 2020, BVR will further enhance the electronic process by streamlining electronic amendment/correction filing through EDRS for all Funeral Directors directly to the State, for any case filed via EDRS. Medical Examiners and medically-licensed coroners are already using this process with excellent results. By taking the burden off of the local registrars and pushing the review of correction forms and supporting documentation to the state, local filing offices can refocus efforts on other job functions anytime, even during a “PAUSE.”

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