

ADOPTION 2002

**A Response to the Presidential Executive Memorandum
on Adoption**

Issued December 14, 1996



**U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services**

February 1997



THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

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The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On December 14, 1996, you called upon the Department of Health and Human Services to devise new ways to make adoption easier and to move more children, more quickly out of foster care into permanent homes. You challenged us to work with States, communities, and advocates to create a plan that could reach the goal of doubling the number of adoptions and permanent placements for 54,000 children by the year 2002.

The enclosed report, *Adoption 2002*, is the Department's response to your call to action. This report -- the culmination of an intensive 60-day consultation process with over 600 foster and adoptive parents, professionals, policy experts and advocates at the national, state and local levels -- outlines a series of policy and practice-related steps that will help us achieve our shared goal of giving more children in foster care what every child needs and deserves: loving parents and a safe and stable home. We are grateful for the support of the Domestic Policy Council, the First Lady and her staff, and each person with whom we consulted.

This report also outlines new steps that will help States set and meet urgent new adoption targets. It recommends sensible financial incentives for States to raise adoption rates, as well as a range of technical assistance to State child welfare agencies and courts to help achieve our goals. It calls for grants to States to help them remove the barriers to adoption. And, it challenges the Congress to pass legislation that will help move children through the child welfare system more quickly and protect them when they leave.

As a nation, we have before us an opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of our most vulnerable children by strengthening and improving the child welfare system. Our plan will focus critical attention and much needed resources toward improving the life chances of thousands of children who have been abused, neglected, and are languishing in foster care. We, at the Department of Health and Human Services, look forward to working with you to implement this critical initiative, and salute your dedication to helping more children grow up in safe and caring homes.

Sincerely,

Donna E. Shalala

Enclosure

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Adoption 2002 responds to President Clinton's Executive Memorandum and takes its name from one of its central goals -- to double by the year 2002 the number of children adopted or placed in other permanent homes each year. On December 14, 1996, the President directed the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct wide consultations and report to him with specific recommendations for strategies to move children more quickly from foster care to permanent homes and to meet the goal of at least doubling adoptions and other permanent placement over the next five years.

The Department developed *Adoption 2002* as a blueprint for bipartisan Federal leadership in adoption and other permanency planning for children in the public child welfare system. To prepare this report, the Department of Health and Human Services consulted with child welfare professionals, policy experts, advocates, and foster and adoptive parents at the national, State and local levels. *Adoption 2002* first examines the existing barriers to expediting the placement of children from foster care to permanent homes. Delays in making timely permanency decisions result from high caseloads for judges and caseworkers; incorrect beliefs and outdated assumptions about the adoptability of children; the limited pool of permanent families for children with special needs; and the varied interpretation of the "reasonable efforts" requirement to reunify a child in foster care with his or her birth family before another goal, such as adoption, can be pursued for the child.

Adoption 2002 outlines an agenda to help overcome these barriers and to accelerate the path to permanency for all waiting children in the public child welfare system. First, the report articulates a guiding set of principles centered on the needs of the child to give direction to the overall agenda. These principles include that every child deserves a safe, permanent family; that the child's health and safety should be the paramount considerations in all placement and permanency planning decisions; and that foster care is a temporary situation -- it is not an appropriate place for children to grow up. *Adoption 2002* establishes unequivocally that the Federal goals for children in the child welfare system are safety, permanency, and well-being.

The *Adoption 2002* agenda is multifaceted to address the range of barriers and challenges that exist in the child welfare system. The report presents strategies to establish, track, and meet State-by-State annual, numerical targets for adoptions and other permanent placements -- targets that will bring us to a national doubling of adoptions and permanent placements in the year 2002. To help States reach their targets, the Department commits to providing expanded technical assistance, rewarding States for incremental increases in adoption levels with per-child financial bonuses, and otherwise recognizing successful performance. The bonus system proposed in *Adoption 2002* is an example of common-sense government, as it not only provides an incentive for increasing the number of adoptions, but also pays for itself, with the cost of the bonuses offset by savings in foster care costs. *Adoption 2002* also includes a proposal to establish competitive grants available to States for dismantling barriers to permanency.

In addition to providing incentives to States to meet new targets, *Adoption 2002* outlines ways in which the Federal government can assume leadership in breaking down barriers to permanency for children in foster care. The Department will issue strong guidance on the implementation of the law signed by President Clinton which established penalties for denying or delaying the placement of a child based on race, color, or national origin.

Perhaps most important, while working with Congress on its legislative proposals that seek to define the "reasonable efforts" provision, the Department will issue guidance that clarifies its meaning. This guidance will make it clear that in determining whether and when to remove a child from his or her family and whether and when to reunify the family, Federal law requires that the child's health and safety shall be the paramount concern.

The Department also will issue model guidelines for State legislation to emphasize that the child's health and safety is the paramount concern in decisions to terminate parental rights. In addition, the Department commits to exploring alternative permanency options for children for whom adoption is not possible. Furthermore, the *Adoption 2002* report urges that the Administration seek legislation that shortens the time before a child's first dispositional hearing -- the hearing in which a permanency decision is first made -- from 18 months to 12 months and changes its name to a "permanency planning hearing."

Information gained by the Department in developing the details of the *Adoption 2002* agenda will form the basis of the public awareness campaign that the President directed the Secretary of Health and Human Services to undertake, in cooperation with other heads of Federal Departments or Agencies, as part of his Executive Memorandum. The strategies outlined in *Adoption 2002*, coupled with a strong public information campaign and joined by efforts by State and local officials and by community, business and religious leaders, will ensure that we live up to President Clinton's call that "no child should be trapped in the limbo of foster care; no child should be uncertain about what the word 'family' or 'parent' or 'home' means, particularly when there are open arms waiting to welcome these children into safe and strong households where they can build good, caring lives." (12/14/96)

I. INTRODUCTION

The President's Executive Memorandum on Adoption

On December 14 1996, President Clinton issued a Executive Memorandum to the Secretaries of Health and Human Services, Treasury, Labor, and Commerce and the Director of the Office of Personnel Management to promote efforts to increase the number of children who are adopted or permanently placed each year, to move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes, to increase awareness about the tens of thousands of children waiting for families, and to encourage all Americans to consider the rewards and responsibilities of adoption. (See Appendix A for the text of the Executive Memorandum.) The Executive Memorandum focuses most specifically on children in foster care who, often because of abuse or neglect, cannot return home safely. The President's attention to this issue reflects the urgent need to find safe, permanent, loving homes for our Nation's most vulnerable citizens.

The President directed the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, to report to him with specific recommendations for strategies that move children more quickly from foster care to permanent homes and at least double, by the year 2002, the number of children who are adopted or permanently placed each year. This goal translates into an increase in adoptions and permanent placements from 27,000 in 1996 to 54,000 in 2002. If we are successful at implementing these and other strategies at the Federal, State, and local levels, it may be possible for even more children to secure adoptive homes or other permanent placements.

The President identified key issues to be examined in meeting the goal, including working with Congress to make changes in Federal law; working with States to eliminate barriers to finding children permanent placements; setting annual numerical targets; rewarding successful performance; and raising public awareness. Recognizing the need to move quickly, the Executive Memorandum called upon the Department, in consultation with State and civic leaders, to prepare a report within 60 days. This report recommends actions to be taken to move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes and to meet the goal of placing 54,000 children from foster care, in the year 2002, in adoptive homes or other permanent placements.

The Department Responds to the Executive Memorandum

Consistent with the Executive Memorandum, the Department undertook an intensive consultation process, which included:

- Mailing copies of the Executive Memorandum to over 2,000 adoption and foster care professionals, placement agencies, child welfare advocates, adoptive and foster parents, and national organizations. Recipients were invited to submit comments on specific steps that can be taken to implement the Executive Memorandum. Over 200 thoughtful responses were received via mail, fax and the internet. (See Appendix B for a list of the respondents.)

- Conducting consultations with a wide range of organizations and individuals, including line workers, program managers, administrators from the eight States with the largest foster care populations, child welfare administrators and staff from large urban areas, representatives of Tribes and Tribal Organizations, and representatives from national child welfare and adoption-related organizations, advocacy groups, intergovernmental organizations, and several foundations. (The questions that guided the consultations and the list of individuals and organizations consulted appear in Appendix C.)
- Conducting consultations with key congressional staff and reviewing legislative proposals.

In addition, each of the ten Regional Offices conducted a series of focus groups with key State and local adoption advocates and child welfare professionals. Over 300 people were contacted through this regional outreach process.

This broad based consultation with a wide range of professionals, policy experts, advocates, foster and adoptive parents, and other interested individuals grounded the Department's examination of strategies and issues in the daily experiences of participants in the child welfare system. The Department gained many useful ideas and suggestions through this consultation process. Many of these ideas are reflected in the recommendations outlined in this report.

The consultations will greatly inform the public awareness campaign that the President also directed the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to undertake, forming the foundation of information upon which the campaign can be built. (A more complete summary of themes and issues raised during the Department's external consultation process appears in Appendix D.)

II. OVERVIEW

Subsequent sections of this report have been organized in the following manner:

III. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

A discussion of some of the issues and challenges in doubling the number of adoptions and in overcoming barriers to permanency.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

A restatement of each of the elements in the President's Executive Memorandum (in *italics* and preceded by a "♦") and the Department's recommended action steps. Recommendations include possible legislative or regulatory changes.

V. CONCLUSION

Final thoughts on the report and how the process of broad consultation has helped to energize and mobilize States, communities and private organizations around the shared goal of helping children find stable, permanent, nurturing families.

III. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

The President's Executive Memorandum focuses attention on a special group of children waiting to be adopted -- the approximately 100,000 children in the public foster care system who cannot return safely to their own parents and homes. These children waiting for adoption have often been in the foster care system for an extended period of time. They are often "children with special needs," which means that they have characteristics that make them more difficult to place. "Children with special needs" are older children (not infants), children of minority heritage¹, children who are part of a sibling group, or children who have physical, intellectual or emotional disabilities. Effective strategies to move these children to permanence must be grounded in an understanding of the broader child welfare system and the barriers that face children, especially children with special needs, waiting for permanent homes.

A Continuum of Child Welfare Services

The child welfare system is designed to keep children safe and to help them achieve permanence. The concept of permanence is best defined as a stable, legally-sanctioned relationship with caring, protective adults. This may be achieved in a child's birth family, but, for many children in foster care, it may occur through adoption or guardianship. Children attain permanence in a more timely manner when sound child welfare practices are deployed from the time the child initially comes to the attention of the child welfare system. In order to meet the individualized needs of children and families, a range of child welfare services are required, including:

- Community-based prevention programs that support adults in their roles as parents to help resolve problems before they lead to children being abused or neglected;
- Effective child abuse and neglect investigation and risk assessment procedures that allow for appropriate intervention;
- Services for families who are in crisis, but can be safely strengthened and maintained through the provision of intensive, but time-limited, services;
- Foster care services that provide a temporary safe home for children and services to their families, while parents resolve their crises and agencies and the courts decide in a prompt and timely manner whether the parents can care for their children safely; and

¹Children of minority heritage remain in care longer and are over-represented among the children in care who are seeking permanency and require special attention; therefore, they are included among children with special needs.

- Adoption and guardianship opportunities for children who cannot or should not be reunified with their parents and/or whose parents' rights to custody have been terminated.

The ability of child welfare agencies to make timely determinations about permanency is dependent upon the quality, availability and accessibility of services at any point on this continuum. The principal goal of the child welfare system is to protect children and provide a temporary safe haven for them while parents develop the ability to protect and care for their children themselves. Each year, about sixty percent of the children in foster care will safely return home, most within one year. However, some children will be unable to return to their birth families safely. For these children, adoption or guardianship can be the key to a permanent, loving family and the security necessary for healthy development.

Characteristics of Children Waiting for Adoption

The children waiting for adoption are primarily those whose parents have been unable or unwilling to resolve the issues that precipitated placement. Of the more than 450,000 children who were in the foster care system in 1994, 100,000 could not return home without jeopardizing their health, safety, and development. The majority of them had a goal of adoption, with 27,000 being legally free and immediately available for adoption.

Most foster children awaiting adoption are considered children with "special needs" which means they have characteristics that make them harder to place. The median age of children who are legally free and awaiting adoption is almost nine years old. Slightly over half of the children are of minority heritage. Two-thirds of the children in the special needs category have medical problems, developmental delays and disabilities, and/or behavioral and psychological problems. The most recent data, though preliminary, suggest that the proportion of legally free children who have special needs is increasing. One factor is the growing number of children orphaned by AIDS.

Barriers to Adoption and Permanence

In addition to the placement challenges posed by the characteristics of children with special needs, there are a number of barriers to permanence spanning the social service and judicial systems. Some of the most significant barriers that delay permanence include:

- **Delays in Child Welfare Agency Practices:** Federal statute requires States to provide "reasonable efforts" to make it possible for a child to return to his or her home. These efforts often take the form of actual services offered and/or provided to the family, such as family counseling, respite care, and substance abuse treatment. If an agency does not offer or provide these services in a timely fashion, the permanency plan for a child may be impeded.

Delays also can result from well-intended but misguided practices to preserve families through prolonged and extensive reunification services without adequate consideration of the permanency needs of children. In these situations, adoption or an alternate

permanency plan is rarely considered until the 18-month dispositional hearing. High caseloads and rapid staff turnover also causes delays.

Jurisdictional barriers between State child welfare systems may also result in delays in implementing permanent plans for children. At times, there is an unwillingness to effectively coordinate services to families and share limited resources across State agencies.

- **Delays in Court/Judicial Practices:** Delays throughout the judicial process, from the initial determination of abuse or neglect through the resolution of the dispositional hearing, often impede permanent placements. The courts' inability to attend to the permanency planning needs of children result from the backlog of cases on a court's calendar; strict evidentiary requirements established by State's Attorneys; and the extensive time and resources required for an agency to prepare cases for termination of parental rights. In addition, some States' adoption laws include timelines or other family reunification effort requirements that may preclude an appropriately early termination of parental rights.
- **Delays Related to Staff Beliefs and Attitudes:** A limited view of which children are adoptable may contribute to a reluctance to terminate parental rights outside that range. If no adoptive home has been identified, child welfare workers and judges may be reluctant to terminate the parental rights of the child's biological family because no permanent alternatives exist.

Also detrimental is the belief by some that children are not disadvantaged by remaining in foster care for long periods of time. Despite evidence that children in foster care frequently move between placements, some believe that foster families will be just as stable as adoptive homes.

Further, some workers and agencies have delayed or denied adoptive placements because their priority was to seek families with backgrounds similar to those of the children needing permanent homes, even though this practice is illegal.

- **Limited Pool of Permanent Families for Children with Special Needs:** Despite the requirement in title IV-B to recruit potential foster/adoptive families able to meet the needs of children requiring out-of-home placement, the pool of permanent families for children of minority heritage, older children, members of sibling groups, and children with emotional, developmental, or physical challenges remains insufficient.

This report outlines an agenda to help overcome these barriers to adoption and to accelerate the path to permanency for all waiting children.

Guiding Principles for the Adoption Initiative

Based on a firm understanding of the challenges that face children who await permanence in the child welfare system, the Department will pursue the President's goals in a manner which focuses on changing the outcomes for those children who are hardest to place; improves decision-making for children currently entering the system; and reinforces best practices throughout the system. The Federal goals for children in the child welfare system are safety, permanency and well-being. Based on the extensive consultation, a set of principles has emerged to provide a foundation for the important work of the Adoption 2002 Initiative.

- Every child deserves a safe, permanent family.
- The child's health and safety should be the paramount considerations in all placement and permanency planning decisions.
- Children in foster care deserve prompt, timely decision-making from the adults serving them. The timeframes for placement and permanency planning decisions must be respectful of the child's developmental needs and the child's sense of time.
- Permanency planning efforts for children should begin as soon as a child enters foster care and should be expedited by the provision of services to families.
- Foster care is a temporary situation -- it is not an appropriate place for children to grow up.
- Permanency cannot be achieved for children without the partnership of child welfare agencies, the courts and other service-providing agencies (e.g., housing, mental health care, and substance abuse treatment).
- Adoption is one of a number of pathways to permanency which also includes reunification, guardianship, and permanent placement with relatives.
- Adoptive families often require services and supports long after legalization to meet the ongoing challenges of caring for their children.
- Communication and information sharing about effective strategies, innovative programs, and collaboration opportunities is critical to the success of this initiative.
- The diversity and strengths of all communities must be tapped to create permanency for children.

The Department is committed to working with all sectors of the American community to implement the activities of the Adoption 2002 Initiative in a way that adheres to the principles of sound child welfare practice. The next section of this report presents a series of recommendations to help remove the barriers to permanency for children in foster care and support improvements throughout the child welfare system. The Adoption 2002 Initiative will be a powerful tool to help the Nation realize the goals of safety, permanency, and well-being for every child.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Today, therefore, I direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services, in consultation with State and civic leaders, to report to me within 60 days on actions to be taken to move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes and at least to double, by the year 2002, the number of children in foster care who are adopted or permanently placed out of the public foster care system.

-- President Clinton
December 14, 1996

President Clinton's Executive Memorandum requested recommendations from the Department in a number of specific areas. Many of the strategies highlighted in the President's Executive Memorandum focus on activities that the Federal government can undertake. However, the President also emphasized that placing children in nurturing families is a national priority and responsibility that requires efforts on the part of State and local governments as well as community, business, and religious groups. The Federal role in this initiative is largely one of supporting States and communities by providing financial incentives, technical assistance, policy and programmatic leadership, and recognition of successful efforts. In this section of the Department's report, each element of the President's Executive Memorandum is cited and specific proposed actions are outlined and discussed.

- ◆ **INCREASING THE NUMBER OF ADOPTIONS** - *To increase the number of children who are adopted or permanently placed each year, this report should include, but should not necessarily be limited to, recommendations in the following areas:*

Setting Goals (a) *Plans to work with States on setting and reaching State specific numerical targets, ...*

PROPOSED ACTION STEPS

To set numerical targets leading to a doubling in the number of children who are adopted or placed in alternative permanent homes by the year 2002:

- By September 30, 1997 the Department, through its Regional Offices and collaboratively with the States, will establish preliminary numerical targets for adoption and guardianship. All States will establish both preliminary baseline data for fiscal year 1997 on the number of adoptions and guardianships and proposed annual incremental targets for fiscal years 1998-2002, leading to a national doubling in the annual number of adoptions and guardianships completed by fiscal year 2002.

Discussion:

Establishing numerical targets with States, including annual benchmarks to move States to the goal of doubling the number of adoptions from the foster care system by the year 2002, provides an outcome-driven framework for the Adoption 2002 Initiative. This approach also offers a way to link adoption efforts at the Federal, State, and community levels in pursuit of specific results for children.

In order to establish baselines and targets, the Department will form partnership agreements with the States, building on the work already underway between the Department and the States. In December 1995, the Children's Bureau organized a national meeting of State adoption managers, national advocacy organizations, private non-profit organizations, adoptive parents and Federal staff. The participants produced an outcome-focused framework for adoption services for children with special needs. Because of its emphasis on results, this framework can be the foundation upon which to base results-oriented activities under the President's Executive Memorandum.

The Regional Offices of the Administration for Children and Families have launched discussions with the States about the President's Executive Memorandum and more goal-directed methods to increase the number of children who are permanently placed. Some States and local jurisdictions have already strongly endorsed the President's initiative with letters of support. (See Appendix E.)

- ♦ **Technical Assistance** (a) . . . using the technical assistance of the Department of Health and Human Services National Resource Centers to make information on best practices available to States and to engage community leaders, parents, and the business and faith communities;

PROPOSED ACTION STEPS

To assist States and communities to reach their targets for increased numbers of adoptions and alternative permanent placements for children in foster care:

- The Department will provide the best adoption expertise in the nation to State agencies, courts and communities to improve the timeliness of permanency decisions and to increase the number of adoptions and other permanent placements for children in foster care unable to be reunified with their families.
- Technical assistance will support the development of collaboratives that encourage placements across geographical boundaries; models to improve the recruitment of families for children with special needs; and the development and dissemination of model legislation, best practice guidelines, multi-disciplinary training curricula and implementation guides on the Multiethnic Placement Act (as amended) and the Indian Child Welfare Act.

- The President's fiscal year 1998 budget seeks \$10 million annually for three years (FY 1998-FY 2000) to support these efforts.
- The Department will also review and may revise the title IV-E training regulations to assure a comprehensive approach to child welfare training with a focus on the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve timely permanency planning.

Discussion:

The Department's proposed technical assistance strategy recognizes the need to provide the best information available to agencies, courts, institutions and professionals who make key decisions daily about children's futures. Respondents in the Department's consultation frequently cited the need for the Federal government to foster the sharing of information and best practices across the country.

Some of the specific activities the Department expects to undertake include:

- Providing technical assistance to child welfare agencies and to courts to implement an outcome-focused approach related to the best interests of the child, permanency, timeliness, and quality of care.
- Developing and disseminating materials such as:
 - model guidelines for family assessment;
 - guidelines for State legislation relating to terminating parental rights and guardianship;
 - legislative options for States developing stand-by guardianships for children with terminally ill parents;
 - curricula for collaborative training with agencies, attorneys, and judges;
 - effective judicial and agency practices;
 - recruitment and family development models;
 - information for courts and agencies related to the Multiethnic Placement Act (as amended) and the Indian Child Welfare Act;
 - guidelines for conducting administrative reviews; and
 - information on the adoption tax credit.
- Convening Regional forums to encourage peer-to-peer exchanges of information and successful strategies.
- Awarding grants to multi-State and intrastate collaboratives (operated by the States or other entities) that encourage placements across geographical boundaries; and to local collaboratives designed to recruit families for children with special needs.

- ♦ **Financial Incentives** *(b) Proposals to provide per child financial incentives to States for increases in the number of adoptions from the public welfare system. Options considered should have little to no net costs, as increases in the number of adoptions from the public system will reduce foster care costs, thereby offsetting much if not all of the incentive payments;*

PROPOSED ACTION STEPS

To encourage States to meet their adoption goals and to reward them when they do:

- The Department proposes a bonus for children adopted from the public foster care system. For each child adopted over the base number for that year a per child bonus would be awarded to the State. A higher bonus would be paid to the extent there are increases among children receiving title IV-E adoption assistance. The bonuses would be established as an amendment to the title IV-E Adoption Assistance program. States could use their bonus funds to improve or increase services, including post-legal adoption services, to children and families in the child welfare system.

Discussion:

The Department is proposing a system that would provide a per-child bonus to each State that increases its annual number of adoptions from the foster care system. This proposal places an emphasis on special needs children by providing an extra incentive for their adoption.

The bonuses would be paid beginning in 1999 to the States in the year following the year in which they were earned. The bonus money would be available for use by the State for any activity or service which is allowable under title IV-B, of the Social Security Act. These include a wide range of services to children and families, including post-legal adoption services.

The President's budget includes \$108 million for bonus payments to the States. Based on this proposal, each State would receive a bonus for every child adopted from the State foster care system above the baseline or the annual starting point. A supplemental bonus would be paid to the extent these increases were among children adopted from the State foster care agency who receive assistance under a title IV-E adoption subsidy agreement (i.e., a special needs child).

The baseline or starting point for determining each year's incentive funds will be determined based on data submitted by the States to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), the federally-mandated foster care and adoption data collection system. For the purposes of establishing baseline data in FY 1997 only, a State that has not yet submitted reliable AFCARS data may produce data from an alternative source, provided that it can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Secretary that the alternative data provided are reliable.

The Department's proposal provides a concrete reward to States for good performance, without increasing the expenditures of Federal dollars. The cost of bonuses paid will be offset by savings from reduced foster care costs.

- ♦ **Implementing the Multiethnic Placement Act** *"(c) A proposal to ensure continued aggressive implementation of the Multiethnic Placement Act, as amended by the Interethnic Adoption Provision of the Small Business Job Protection Act;..."*

PROPOSED ACTION STEPS

To continue the Department's aggressive implementation of the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA), as amended by the Interethnic Adoption Provision of the Small Business Job Protection Act:

- The Department will expedite the issuance of guidance regarding the amendments to MEPA contained in the Interethnic Adoption Provision to supplement information earlier disseminated to the States. This guidance will focus on the implications of the deletion of permissible consideration language, the new penalty structures, and the approach the Department will take to implementing systematic compliance review protocols.
- The Department's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) will expedite the revision and implementation of compliance reviews. In addition, the Department's Administration for Children and Families (ACF) will include in its monitoring review process a focus on MEPA compliance.
- The ACF and OCR will provide States with technical assistance over the next several months regarding compliance with MEPA.
- The OCR will continue its expeditious review of individual complaints.

Discussion

The Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA) was designed to decrease the length of time that children wait to be adopted, prevent discrimination in the placement of children on the basis of race, color, or national origin, and facilitate the identification and recruitment of foster and adoptive families who can meet children's needs. The MEPA, as amended by the Interethnic Adoption Provision of the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, prohibits delaying or denying the placement of any child on the basis of race, color or national origin; requires States to diligently recruit prospective adoptive and foster care families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed; and requires the Federal government to impose fiscal penalties for States not in compliance with the anti-discrimination prohibition.

After the passage of MEPA, the Department worked aggressively to ensure that State laws and policies conformed to the statute's provisions. The Department issued guidance in April 1995, notified States of their non-compliance, and worked with 27 States and the District of Columbia to achieve policy compliance. In fiscal year 1997, the OCR will begin reviewing agencies for practice compliance. Beginning in 1995, Regional Offices reviewed State title IV-B plans to ensure that child welfare services programs included recruitment plans for adoptive and foster care parents. The Department will undertake a similar course of action to ensure compliance with the Interethnic Adoption Provision.

Since the enactment of the Interethnic Adoption Provision, the Department has issued an Information Memorandum to the States and title IV-E agencies informing them of the changes to the MEPA. The Department is presently drafting guidance to address how the changes to the discrimination prohibition (particularly the repeal of the "permissible consideration" language that accommodated the consideration of cultural, ethnic, or racial background as one of a number of factors used to determine the best interests of a child) should be implemented. The Administration for Children and Families also is developing processes for assessing penalties, implementing corrective action plans, and conducting systematic monitoring of State practices. The Office for Civil Rights is revising its compliance review instrument that focuses specifically on transracial adoptive and foster care placements.

- ♦ **Tracking Progress of the States** *(d) Plans to compile and publish an annual State-by-State report on success in meeting the numerical targets;*

PROPOSED ACTION STEPS

To publicize the progress made by each State and the Nation as a whole in reaching numerical targets:

- The Department will issue an annual State-by-State report, beginning in the Spring of 1999, on the Nation's progress in meeting the goals of the President's Executive Memorandum. The annual report will provide State-by-State figures on key measures

of success including not only the number of children in foster care who are adopted or placed in guardianship, but measures that reflect the experience of children in the child welfare system, such as the length of time in care and the timeliness of permanency decisions.

- The report will be disseminated widely to national and State policymakers, advocates, State agencies and courts and other interested individuals through targeted mailings and distribution by the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse. The report will also be made available electronically through the Department's homepage on the World Wide Web.

Discussion:

The focus on collecting and using quality data in the area of adoption and permanency will advance our national efforts to strengthen the collection and availability of reliable child welfare data. To ensure that the public stays focused on how well the Nation and the individual States are meeting established goals, the Department is committed to disseminating timely information as widely as possible.

♦ Recognizing Success <i>(e) Plans to recognize successful States.</i>

PROPOSED ACTION STEPS

To foster public recognition of successful, innovative practices:

- The Department will work in collaboration with foundations and intergovernmental organizations to establish annual awards to be made each November during the commemoration of National Adoption Month. Beginning in 1997, these awards will recognize States, local agencies, courts, private organizations, employers and others who are making key contributions to national efforts to support adoption and to promote permanency for children in the child welfare system.

Discussion:

In addition to publishing annual findings on how the States are progressing toward numerical adoption and guardianship goals, the Department is enthusiastic about the prospect of recognizing innovations in adoption and permanency planning practices by States, and other public and private entities. This will be an opportunity to identify and publicly recognize outstanding practices and will help provide a means to publicize successful actions that can be replicated in other parts of the country.

- ♦ **MOVING CHILDREN WHO CANNOT RETURN HOME MORE QUICKLY TOWARD PERMANENT HOMES** - *To move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes, the report shall also recommend changes to Federal law and regulations and other actions needed to emphasize the importance of planning for permanency as soon as a child enters the foster care system. The Secretary's report should include, but should not necessarily be limited to, recommendations in the following areas:*

Removing Barriers to Permanency (a) *Plans to provide States with funding to identify barriers to permanency and to develop targeted strategies to find permanent homes for children who have been in foster care a particularly long time;*

PROPOSED ACTION STEPS

To assist State child welfare agencies, courts and nonprofit organizations to identify and overcome barriers to permanency:

- Through its existing annual discretionary grant award process, the Department will award new and continuing grants under the Adoption Opportunities Act to assist in overcoming barriers to adoption for special needs children. Grants made under the Adoption Opportunities Act address a variety of issues such as: improving the recruitment of minority families; encouraging collaboration to strengthen services to children with disabilities; developing non-adversarial options for permanency, such as concurrent planning, voluntary relinquishment of children and family mediation; and developing training and resource materials to help adoptive parents meet the needs of adopted children who are of a different race or ethnicity.
- For fiscal year 1998, the President's budget requests \$10 million in additional funds for the Adoption Opportunities Act to support a special cluster of barrier reduction grants to the States. These grants would be awarded competitively to State agencies to develop model strategies to reform permanency planning and adoption services, both for children currently in foster care who are unable to return to their families and for children just entering the foster care system. To be eligible to compete for these grants, applicant States would need to participate with the Department in the setting of numerical targets to double the number of adoptions and permanent placements by the year 2002, develop a goal-oriented plan for meeting their goals, and involve the courts in developing their applications and strategies. Up to 15 grants would be awarded.
- The Department will also continue to work with the States to fully implement the Court Improvement Program, authorized in conjunction with the Family Preservation and Support Act. This program provides a grant to the highest court in each participating State to assist in assessing and addressing barriers to permanency from the perspective of the courts. The program has helped to bring courts and agencies

together to examine barriers to permanency and to develop a plan to address these issues. States are now completing their assessments, and are ready to move forward in implementing changes in the court's handling of child welfare cases.

Discussion:

Identifying and addressing barriers is crucial in our national efforts to move children in foster care more quickly to permanent homes, whether this be through reunification, adoption, or placement in an alternative permanent home. Many different factors can serve as a barrier to permanency, ranging from worker decision-making, to the lack of availability of needed services for families, to court delays, to the supply of adoptive families. Addressing barriers to permanency, therefore, requires a multifaceted strategy where the Federal government can make a number of important contributions.

For example, during the Department's consultation, many individuals mentioned that the Court Improvement Program has been helpful both in focusing the judicial system's attention on child welfare issues and in bringing courts and child welfare agencies together to identify and address barriers to permanency. To augment the important work already begun, the Department is proposing the awarding of competitive grants to up to 15 States that form an effective collaboration between the State agency and the State court and that involve other key stakeholders, including Tribes, community representatives, and citizen review boards.

These grants will be used to develop model strategies to reform permanency planning and adoption services, i.e., concurrent planning, expanding court capacity, partnerships for recruitment, and modification of State law and policy. The focus will be on children waiting as well as children newly entering the foster care system, to ensure more timely decision-making. These decisions will reflect the best interest of the child and provide appropriate services to support moving children more quickly from foster care to permanent homes.

- ♦ **Addressing Permanency Planning Earlier Through Timely Hearings** (b) *Proposals to shorten the period of time between a child's placement in foster care and his or her initial hearing at which a permanency determination is made; (c) A proposal to clarify that the purpose of "dispositional hearings" is to plan for permanency and, as appropriate, to consider referrals for family mediation, termination of parental rights, adoption, legal guardianship, or other permanent placements;*

PROPOSED ACTION STEPS

To encourage more timely permanency planning and improved judicial decision-making for children in foster care:

- The Department recommends that the Federal statute requiring an 18-month dispositional hearing be amended to require that this hearing be held no later than 12

months after a child's placement in foster care and will work with Congress toward that goal.

- The Department further recommends amending the Federal statute to change the name of the "dispositional hearing" to "permanency planning hearing."
- The Department will provide guidance to the States to :
 - Clarify the purpose of the dispositional hearing;
 - Clarify the purpose of the 6-month administrative review; and
 - Clarify that States have the flexibility to increase the frequency of the dispositional hearing as well as the 6-month administrative review.
- The Department proposes several additional activities specifically addressing court-related barriers to permanency:
 - Convening a forum of leaders in the legal profession, judges, attorneys, agency administrators and advocates to develop strategies for adding to the courts' focus on improved outcomes for children.
 - Identifying and disseminating information about innovative reforms and model practices derived from the assessments of the Court Improvement Programs and other efforts.
- Finally, the Department encourages the President to communicate with State chief justices and national legal organizations to emphasize the importance of elevating the status of child welfare proceedings (including child protection, permanency planning, termination of parental rights and adoption proceedings) within the courts.

Discussion:

The President's Executive Memorandum called on the Department to examine issues around the timeliness of judicial hearings affecting the duration of a child's stay in foster care and his or her movement towards permanency. Specifically, the Executive Memorandum instructed the Department to examine ways to shorten the period of time between a child's placement in foster care and the initial dispositional hearing at which permanency planning issues are addressed.

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272) created the framework for existing Federal child welfare programs and requirements. Among the provisions of the law are requirements for administrative and court reviews to ensure that children's needs for permanent homes are addressed. The law requires that, within 18 months of placement, and every 12 months thereafter, a dispositional hearing must be held to determine the child's permanent placement and, specifically, whether:

- the child should be returned to the parent;
- the child should be continued in foster care for a specified period;
- the child should be placed for adoption; or
- the child should (because of the child's special needs or circumstances) be continued in foster care on a permanent or long-term basis.

This hearing was intended to be the time when a definitive permanent plan for the child would be set by the court. However, these permanent plans are not always set within the 18 month timeframe, sometimes because of the confusion surrounding the purpose of the dispositional hearing.

The Department's proposals reflect themes heard during the Department's outreach and consultation process. There was significant agreement that the permanent plan for a child should be set earlier than 18 months after a child's entry into foster care. We also heard support for providing guidance that would clarify the purpose of the dispositional hearings. While the Department believes that the changes outlined above will encourage more timely decisions regarding permanency planning for children, it must be emphasized that services must begin as soon as the child enters substitute care.

In addition to addressing the timeliness of hearings, there is widespread support for reviewing and strengthening court practices to achieve better outcomes for children in the child welfare system.

- ♦ **Clarifying "Reasonable Efforts"** *(d) A proposal to clarify the "reasonable efforts" requirement and other Federal policy as it relates to permanency and safety;*

PROPOSED ACTION STEPS

To ensure the protection of children by clarifying or proposing changes to legislation regarding "reasonable efforts," reunification of children with their families, and termination of parental rights:

- The Department will issue administrative guidance within 60 days that clarifies the "reasonable efforts" provision of title IV-E of the Social Security Act. This clarification will advance the goal of giving every child in our nation's public child welfare system a safe and permanent home by making it clear that in determining whether and when to remove a child from his or her family, whether and when to reunify the family, and whether and when to seek an alternative permanent plan, the child's health and safety shall be the paramount concern.
- Members of Congress have developed a number of proposals to address this issue and the Department will work with them to achieve statutory changes reinforcing this administrative clarification.

- The Department in particular will work with Congress to more clearly and appropriately illustrate the circumstances in which "reasonable efforts" to preserve or reunify a family may not be appropriate or required. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), as amended by the Congress in 1996, already requires that, as a condition for receiving funds under the Basic State Grant Program:
 - 1) the State may not mandate the reunification of a surviving child with parents found to have aided or abetted or committed murder, voluntary manslaughter, or serious bodily injury to their children; and
 - 2) conviction of any of the above mentioned felonies constitutes grounds for the termination of parental rights.

The Department will work towards amending the title IV-E provisions of the Social Security Act to similarly illustrate to States this list of circumstances in which reunification may not be appropriate.

- The Department will also issue model guidelines for State legislation that will advance the goal of giving every child in our Nation's public child welfare system a safe and permanent home by making it clear that in determining whether and when to terminate parental rights, the child's health and safety should be the paramount concern.

Discussion:

Since 1980, Federal law has required that "reasonable efforts" be made both: (1) to prevent the unnecessary removal of children from their families; and (2) to reunify children, when possible, who have been placed in foster care with their families. The goal of this provision was to reduce the phenomenon of children languishing unnecessarily in foster care and to avoid the unnecessary disruption of parental rights. The Federal "reasonable efforts" requirement has been both heralded as being essential to effective child welfare practice and criticized for being unclear and a barrier to child safety and permanence.

Consultation revealed that there is wide variation in how the current "reasonable efforts" law is interpreted by caseworkers, agencies, and judges around the country. There was a strong consensus that some clarification of the reasonable efforts requirements is needed to allow for better, more timely decision-making in individual cases, although there were divergent opinions on what degree of specificity would be useful from the Federal government.

The proposals outlined above will send a clear message that Federal law requires that the health and safety of children shall be the paramount concern in making decisions about whether and when to remove children from families, whether and when to reunify the families, and whether and when to seek alternative permanency plans. They also will make clear to the States the Administration's view that the child's health and safety should be paramount in determining whether and when to terminate parental rights.

- ♦ **Standards for Securing Permanency** *(e) Plans to ensure that States give appropriate weight to permanency planning by establishing standards for securing permanency through adoption or guardianship, once a decision has been made that a child cannot be returned home;*

PROPOSED ACTION STEPS

To ensure that States give appropriate attention to permanency planning for children in foster care who are unable to return home to their families:

- The Department recommends that title IV-E of the Social Security Act be amended to require "reasonable efforts" to secure a permanent home for children in foster care when adoption or another permanent placement is the goal for the child.
- The Department will propose regulatory changes to clarify that States may simultaneously work toward reunification and develop an alternative plan for children in the event that they are not able to be reunified. The Department will also disseminate effective models of practice.
- The Department will work with States to encourage use of the Federal Parent Locator Service at the time a child enters foster care to locate absent parents and other relatives who may be able to provide permanent homes for the child.

Discussion:

As discussed above, there is a Federal standard that requires States to make reasonable efforts to prevent the removal of children and to reunify families when consistent with child safety. However, there is currently no comparable standard or requirement to find alternative permanent homes for children once the decision has been made that they cannot safely be reunified with their families. Too often, children are made to wait in foster care for long periods of time, even after the decision has been made that adoption is the most appropriate permanency option for the child. Passage of legislation to require reasonable efforts to secure a permanent home for children will help to ensure that States give priority attention to the issue of permanency.

In addition to setting a standard for permanency in the law, the Department will clarify its policies to ensure that States understand that they may concurrently work with families to help them safely resume care of their children and develop an alternative plan for permanency in the event that the child and family cannot be reunified. This practice of concurrent planning was frequently endorsed during the Department's consultation as an effective means to ensure timely decision-making for children. In addition, the Department will share information and best practices with the States on how to conduct concurrent planning.

An additional step the Department proposes to assist States in making timely and informed decisions about permanency is to work with State child welfare and child support enforcement agencies to facilitate use of the Federal Parent Locator Service to identify and locate absent parents or other relatives who may be interested in providing a permanent home for a child in foster care. (The Federal Parent Locator Service is currently used by State child support enforcement officials.) Even if an absent parent or other relative is unable to provide a home for the child, ruling out this alternative early in a child's placement will allow the agency and court to move expeditiously towards adoption or another permanent alternative.

- ♦ **Alternative Forms of Permanency** *(f) Plans to examine alternative permanency arrangements, such as guardianship, when adoption is not possible.*

PROPOSED ACTION STEPS

To gain a better understanding of alternative permanency arrangements:

- The Department proposes to continue to study and evaluate guardianship as an alternative form of permanency when adoption is not possible. The Department will work with the States of Illinois, North Carolina, and Delaware in evaluating the assisted guardianship efforts being undertaken as part of these States' child welfare demonstration waivers.
- The Department may seek a limited expansion of the child welfare demonstration waiver authority to test additional approaches to permanency and timely decision-making if current authority is found to be insufficient.
- The Department will also continue to explore relative and/or kinship care as a means of ensuring permanency for children. Demonstration grants regarding kinship care are permitted under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, as reauthorized in 1996. The Department intends to fund projects in the future under this authority to improve our knowledge of the use of kinship care in ensuring children's safety and permanency. Examples of topics that might be addressed under this demonstration authority include the development of best practices for the licensing and approval of relatives' homes and the development of training curricula focused on permanency for children in relative care.

Discussion:

When adoption is not appropriate, children need stable, permanent living arrangements. Examples include some children placed in long-term kinship care arrangements and some older children with special needs without realistic adoption prospects. This is also an important issue for American Indian children under Tribal jurisdiction. Many Tribes consider kinship care the cultural equivalent of adoption.

Many people with whom the Department consulted recommended that the Federal government help pay for the cost of subsidized guardianship arrangements, as it does for adoption, under title IV-E of the Social Security Act. The Department does not recommend this step at this time. Because guardianships are easily revoked and, therefore, do not offer the legal protection of adoption, the criteria for the use of guardianship as a form of permanency must be carefully examined. There is limited understanding of the factors which shape decisions about adoption and guardianship by relatives. Premature changes in title IV-E reimbursement policies might result in unintentional incentives to shift children into guardianship arrangements when an adoption could be achieved.

Several current and proposed activities will expand our knowledge and experience regarding guardianship and its relationship to relative care. Using demonstration authority, the Department will work with the States to gain better information on how guardianships are currently used; the relationship between guardianships, relative care and adoption; and the important ways in which guardianships differ from adoption. Based on these demonstration efforts, the Department will consider whether criteria might be developed regarding when and for which children such alternatives are appropriate. Co-guardianships (which are being used in several places for children with incarcerated or terminally ill parents) and family mediation methods which emphasize permanency options for children will also be explored.

Under the child welfare waiver demonstrations, Illinois, North Carolina, and Delaware are currently exploring alternative permanency options that include support for subsidized guardianships (similar to adoption assistance agreements) primarily for kinship care providers. Several other States have applied for similar demonstrations. All waiver demonstrations will be rigorously evaluated. Because we believe that this approach allows for a careful and thorough examination of alternative permanency arrangements and other emerging topics in the field of child welfare, the Department may also seek a limited expansion in the number of child welfare demonstration waivers that may be granted if the existing authority is insufficient to fully examine alternative permanency arrangements.

Finally, it should be noted that the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-193) included a provision requiring the States to consider giving preference to relatives as caretakers for children eligible to receive foster care maintenance subsidies under title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Policy guidance for the States is currently under development. This is the first Federal legislative preference for placing children with relatives. We hope that it will lead to an earlier identification and location of relatives who are willing and able to provide permanent, nurturing homes for children in the child welfare system.

V. CONCLUSION

The *Adoption 2002* report to the President presents a number of recommendations for statutory, regulatory, and administrative actions necessary to double the number of children placed into permanent homes annually by the year 2002. Presidential attention to the needs of children who have been abused and neglected and are languishing in foster care has the potential to change the life experiences of thousands of children.

The Adoption 2002 Initiative builds on the concerns reflected in Congress and by States and communities in their efforts to increase adoption and permanency outcomes for children. Congress is considering important legislative changes in this arena. States are moving to reform their systems by streamlining administrative and judicial procedures to move children more quickly to permanence as well as by amending their laws governing the termination of parents' rights. Foundations are working with the States to ensure that the experience of children in foster care is time limited and results in stability for children. Innovations in the recruitment of adoptive families continue in both community efforts, such as One Church, One Child, and the development of internet listing services for waiting children.

As a Nation, we have an important opportunity to focus the energy of Federal, State and local governments with that of professional organizations, faith communities, and neighborhood leadership to make a difference for our most vulnerable children.

The time is now. The chance is ours.

Appendix A

Text of Presidential Directive on Adoption

WASHINGTON, Dec. 14 /U.S. Newswire/ -- Following is a memorandum from President Clinton to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Secretary of the Treasury, Secretary of Labor, Secretary of Commerce and the director of the Office of Personnel Management:

During this Holiday Season, as we reflect on the importance of family in our own lives, let us remember the tens of thousands of our Nation's children in the public child welfare system who live without permanent and caring families. Foster care provides temporary shelter and relief for children who have been abused or neglected.

I am committed to giving the children waiting in our Nation's foster care system what every child in America deserves -- loving parents and a healthy, stable home. The goal for every child in our Nation's public welfare system is permanency in a safe and stable home, whether it be returning home, adoption, legal guardianship, or another permanent placement. While the great majority of children in foster care will return home, for about one in five, returning home is not an option, and they will need another home, one that is caring and safe. These children wait far too long -- typically over 3 years, but for many children much longer -- to be placed in permanent homes. Each year, State child welfare agencies secure homes for less than one-third of the children whose goal is adoption or an alternate permanent placement. I know we can do better.

I believe we should increase the number of children who are adopted or permanently placed from the public foster care system each year toward the goal of at least doubling that number by the year 2002. Returning home is not an option for about 100,000 of the over 450,000 children in the Nation's foster care system, yet only approximately 20,000 were adopted last year and approximately 7,000 were permanently placed in legal guardianships. While the number of adoptions each year has been constant for many years, I believe that by working with States to identify and break down barriers to permanent placements, setting annual numerical targets, rewarding successful performance, and raising public awareness, we can meet the target of at least 54,000 children adopted or permanently placed from the public foster care system by the year 2002.

Today, therefore, I direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services, in consultation with State and civic leaders, to report to me within 60 days on actions to be taken to move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes and at least to double, by the year 2002, the number of children in foster care who are adopted or permanently placed out of the public foster care system.

- I. To increase the number of children who are adopted or permanently placed each year, this report should include, but should not necessarily be limited to, recommendations in the following areas:
 - (a) Plans to work with States on setting and reaching State specific numerical targets, using the technical assistance of the Department of Health and Human Services National Resource Centers to make information on best practices available to States and to engage community leaders, parents, and the business and faith communities;
 - (b) Proposals to provide per child financial incentives to States for increases in the number of adoptions from the public welfare system. Options considered should have little to no net costs, as increases in the number of adoptions from the public system will reduce foster care costs, thereby offsetting much if not all of the incentive payments;
 - (c) A proposal to ensure continued aggressive implementation of the Multi-ethnic Placement Act, as amended by the Inter-ethnic Adoption Provision of the Small Business Job Protection Act;
 - (d) Plans to compile and publish an annual State-by-State report on success in meeting the numerical targets; and
 - (e) Plans to recognize successful States.

II. To move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes, the report shall also recommend changes to Federal law and regulations and other actions needed to emphasize the importance of planning for permanency as soon as a child enters the foster care system. The Secretary's report should include, but should not necessarily be limited to, recommendations in the following areas:

(a) Plans to provide States with funding to identify barriers to permanency and to develop targeted strategies to find permanent homes for children who have been in foster care a particularly long time;

(b) Proposals to shorten the period of time between a child's placement in foster care and his or her initial hearing at which a permanency determination is made;

(c) A proposal to clarify that the purpose of "dispositional hearings" is to plan for permanency and, as appropriate, to consider referrals for family mediation, termination of parental rights, adoption, legal guardianship, or other permanent placements;

(d) A proposal to clarify the "reasonable efforts" requirement and other Federal policy as it relates to permanency and safety;

(e) Plans to ensure that States give appropriate weight to permanency planning by establishing standards for securing permanency through adoption or guardianship, once a decision has been made that a child cannot be returned home; and

(f) Plans to examine alternative permanency arrangements, such as guardianship, when adoption is not possible.

Last month, I signed a proclamation designating November as National Adoption Month -- a time to increase awareness about the tens of thousands of children waiting for families and to encourage all Americans to consider the rewards and responsibilities of adoption. However, adoption must be a national concern throughout the year. Therefore, I direct:

(a) The Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop and lead a public awareness effort, including use of public service announcements, print materials, and the Internet;

(b) The Secretaries of Health and Human Services and the Treasury in consultation with State, civic, and private sector leaders to develop and disseminate information about the new adoption tax credits and other adoption benefits;

(c) The Secretaries of Labor and Commerce, in consultation with State and civic leaders, to identify and recognize companies in the private sector with model policies to encourage and ease adoption among employees; and

(d) The Director of the Office of Personnel Management to direct all Federal agencies to provide information and support to Federal employees who are prospective adoptive parents.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON



Appendix B

Adoption Correspondents by Category:
January 15, 1997

A. Service Providers:

1. Hope for the Children, Rantoul, IL
2. Northeast Ohio Adoption Services, Warren, OH
3. Tressler Lutheran Services, York, PA
4. Tressler Lutheran Services, Baltimore, MD
5. Lutheran Adoption Service, Southfield, MI
6. Family Builders By Adoption, Oakland, CA
7. Children's Home Society of Florida, Jacksonville, FL
8. Common Sense Adoption Services, Mechanicsburg, PA
9. Maine Adoption Placement Service, Bangor, ME
10. Center for Family Connections, Inc., Cambridge, MA
11. Lutheran Social Service of Kansas and Oklahoma, Wichita, KS
12. Society for Seamen's Children, Staten Island, NY
13. Miami Valley Adoption Coalition, Inc. Dayton, OH
14. Marian Adoption Services, Plymouth Meeting, PA
15. Lutheran Social Services of Indiana, Fort Wayne, IN
16. Adoption by Gentle Care, Columbus, OH
17. Adoption Horizons and the Birth Parent Center, Eureka, CA
18. Catholic Charities, Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Fort Wayne, IN
19. Open Adoption and Family Services, Inc., Portland, OR
20. Boys and Girls Aid Society, Portland, OR
21. Welcome House Social Services of the Pearl S. Buck Foundation, Inc., Perkasie, PA
22. Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Albany, Albany, NY
23. Children's Adoption Network, Richboro, PA
24. Ennis Center for Children, Inc., Detroit, MI
25. Adopt a Special Kid/Texas, Inc., Hurst, TX
26. Children and Family Institute, Fort Worth, TX
27. Minnesota Adoption Resource Network, Minneapolis, MN
28. Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange, Inc., Boston, MA
29. Christian Cradle, Lansing, MI
30. Children's Hope International, Franklin TN
31. Los Ninos Children's International Adoption Center, The Woodlands, TX, (9 different letters)
32. Jewish Family Services, New Haven, CT
33. LDS Social Services, Ogden, UT
34. LDS Social Services, Amherst, NH
35. Community Maternity Services, Albany, NY
36. Lutheran Social Services of Indiana, Griffith IN
37. The Attachment Center, Evergreen, CO
38. Catholic Charities of Tennessee, Nashville, TN
39. Small World Ministries, Inc., Hermitage, TN
40. St. Christopher-Ottilie Services for Children and Families, Long Island, NY
41. Respond, St. Louis, MO
42. Families Are Special, North Little Rock, AR
43. Children Awaiting Parents, Rochester, NY
44. Dependent Care Connection, Westport, CT
45. Respond, St. Louis MO
46. Leake and Watts, Yonkers, NY

47. Spence-Chapin Services to Families and Children, New York, NY
48. Project STAR, The Rehabilitation Institute, Pittsburgh, PA
49. Heritage Adoption Services, Inc., Portland, OR
50. Urban League-Rhode Island, Providence, RI
51. Tarzana Treatment Center, Inc., Tarzana, CA
52. Daniel Memorial Adoption Information Center, Jacksonville, FL
53. Jewish Child Care Association of New York, New York, NY
54. Mentor Clinical Care, Indianapolis, IN
55. The Northwest Adoption Exchange, Seattle, WA
56. Placement Services Agency, Dallas, TX
57. New Beginnings, Adoption and Counseling Agency, Columbus GA
58. United Methodist Family Services, Virginia Beach, VA
59. Adoptions From the Heart
60. University of Chicago School of Social Work
61. Washington State Families for Kids, Seattle, WA
62. Child Development Unit, University of Kansas Medical Center, Kansas City, KS
63. Arlington Diocese Catholic Charities, Burke, VA

B. Government Agencies

1. Program Supervisor, Administrative Office of the Courts, Arizona Supreme Court, Phoenix, AZ
2. Franklin County Children Services
3. County of Los Angeles, Department of Children's Services, Peter Digre, Los Angeles, CA
4. Licking County Department of Human Services, Newark OH
5. Louisiana Department of Social Services, Assistant Secretary, Office of Community Services, Baton Rouge, LA
6. Minnesota Department of Human Services, St. Paul, MN
7. Missouri Department of Social Services, Director, Division of Family Services, Jefferson City, MO
8. Massachusetts Department of Social Services, Executive Office of HHS, Director of Public Relations, Boston, MA
9. Massachusetts Department of Social Services, Adoption Supervisor, Boston MA
10. Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, Director, Division of Family and Children, Indianapolis, IN
11. Secretary, Kansas Department of Social Services, Topeka, KS
12. Massachusetts HHS, Department of Social Services, Acting Commissioner, Boston, MA
13. Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, Secretary, Madison, WI
14. North Carolina Department of Human Resources, Director of Social Services, Raleigh, NC
15. Virginia Department of Social Services, FP/FC & Adoption Manager
16. Department of Health and Human Resources, Adoption-Homefinding Unit, Charleston, WV
17. New Jersey Department of Human Services, Director, Division of Youth and Family
18. Services Department of Social Services for Henry County, VA senior social worker, Collinsville, VA
19. Judge, San Ildefonso Pueblo Tribal Court
20. Administrator, Division of Family and Community Services, Idaho Department of Health and Welfare
21. Director, Family and Children's Services Division, Minnesota Department of Human Services
22. Commissioner, Social and Rehabilitation Services, Vermont Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services
23. Director, Division of Family Services, Delaware Department of Service for Children, Youth and Families, Wilmington, DE

24. Acting Commissioner, Bureau for Children and Families, West Virginia Department of HHR
25. Director, Iowa Department of Human Services
26. Isaac Palmer, Office of Family and Children's Services, Ohio Department of Human Services
27. Assistant Secretary for Children, Washington Department of Social and Health Services, Olympia, WA
28. Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island
29. Secretary, Maryland Department of Human Resources, Baltimore, MD
30. San Mateo County Youth and Family Services Agency, Belmont County
31. Director, Child Welfare Services, Colorado Department of Human Services, Denver CO
32. Chair, Adoption Development Outreach Planning Team, Department of Social Services, Chesterfield-Colonial Heights, Chesterfield. VA
33. Secretary, Florida Department Children and Families Tallahassee, FL
34. Director of Social Services, Alexandria City Department of Human Services, Alexandria, VA
35. Cabinet for Families and Children, Frankfort, KY
36. Chair, Black Adoption and Foster Care Advocacy Board, Louisiana Department of Social Services, Lafayette, LA
37. Acting Director, Michigan Family Independence Agency , Lansing, MI
38. Director, Wyoming Department of Family Services, Cheyenne, WY
39. Director, New Hampshire Division for Children, Youth and Families, Department of Health and Human Services, Concord, NH
40. Utah, Adoption Council, Utah Division of Child and Family Services, DHS, Salt Lake City, UT
41. Director, Loudoun County Department of Social Services, Leesburg, VA
42. Executive Director, Mississippi Department of Human Services, Jackson, MS
43. Director, Department of Children and Family Services, State of Illinois, Chicago, IL
44. Commissioner, Division of Family and Youth Services, Department of Health and Social Services, Juneau, AK
45. Chief, Adoptions Branch, California Department of Social Services, Sacramento, CA
46. Nebraska Director of Health and Human Resources, Omaha, NE
47. Director, Services to Children and Families, Oregon Department of Human Resources, Salem, OR
48. Project Director, Children Services Board of Summit County, Akron, OH
49. Regional Director, Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Providence, RI
50. Deputy State Director, Office of Program Policy and Oversight, South Carolina Department of Social Services, Columbia, SC
51. Deputy Commissioner, Division of Services and Community Development, New York State Department of Social Services, Albany, NY

C. Advocacy Groups

1. Coalition for Adoption Reform and Education, San Diego, CA
2. National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association, Seattle, WA
3. The Adoption Institute, New York, NY
4. The Independent Women's Forum, Washington, DC
5. Independent Adoption Center, Pleasant Hill, CA
6. National Council for Single Adoptive Parents, Chevy Chase, MD
7. Children, Remembered, Inc., Northbrook, IL
8. Adoption Exchange Association, Denver, CO
9. National Child Welfare Association, Portland, OR
10. Family Builders Network, Boston, MA
11. Casey Family Program, Seattle, WA
12. National Association of Foster Care Reviewers, Atlanta, GA
13. Heritage Foundation, Washington, D.C.
14. National Adoption Center, Philadelphia, PA

15. New York State Citizens' Coalition for Children, Inc., Ithaca, NY
16. Voice for Adoption, Washington, DC
17. National Resource Center for Permanency Planning, New York, NY
18. Child Welfare League of America, Washington, DC
19. Generations United, Washington, DC
20. National Association of Social Workers, Washington, DC
21. Adoption Advocates, Minneapolis, MN
22. National Council for Adoption, Washington DC
23. American Academy of Pediatrics, Elk Grove Village, IL
24. Cooperative Adoption Consulting, San Anselmo, CA
25. Coalition for Family & Children's Services, Des Moines, IA
26. Institute for Children, Cambridge, MA
27. Common Ground Network for Life and Choice, Washington, DC
28. Family Research Council, Washington, DC
29. Child Welfare League of America, Washington DC
- 30.

Congressional:

1. Howard Metzenbaum, Retired Senator

D. Private Citizens/General Public/Adoptive Parents

1. Kathryn B. Creedy, adoptive parent
2. Betty Charmatz
3. Hector and Susan Badeau Family, adoptive parents
4. Carole Adlard, executive director, Adoption Option, Cincinnati, OH
5. Christopher Unger, Ph.D., psychologist
6. Adoree Blair, Child Advocate
7. Julie Jarrell Bailey, adoptive parent and birth mother
8. Dave Bushnell, adoptive parent
9. Allan Neustadt
10. Jack Marvin
11. David Wazdatskey, adoption supervisor
12. Kathy Casey, adoptive parent
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Appendix C

ADOPTION 2002 FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

ELIMINATING BARRIERS TO PERMANENCY & INCREASING ACCESS TO ADOPTION

- **Removing Barriers to Permanency**

What are the barriers to permanency?

What stands in the way of timely decision-making throughout the system?

- **Multiethnic Placement Act/Interethnic Placement provision**

The directive mandates that the Federal government ensure continued aggressive implementation of MEPA and the Interethnic Placement provision. In the context of this mandate, how can the Federal government best promote more rapid compliance with MEPA and the Interethnic Placement provision?

MOVING CHILDREN MORE PROMPTLY

- **Reasonable Efforts Requirements**

What ought to be the goals of the reasonable efforts requirements?

What are the concerns and issues surrounding the reasonable efforts requirements?

Should there be a reasonable efforts requirement related to permanency?

What principles or factors should the Federal government consider in an attempt to clarify the relationship between safety and reasonable efforts requirements?

- **Dispositional Hearings**

What should be accomplished with dispositional hearings?

What barriers, if any, stand in the way of accomplishing the goals with regard to dispositional hearings?

DOUBLING THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN WHO ACHIEVE PERMANENCY

- **State Numerical Adoption Targets**

What supports, other than monetary support, can the Federal government provide to States to help them reach the goal of doubling the number of children who achieve permanency?

More specifically, what kinds of technical assistance would be most helpful to States as they pursue the permanency goals?

- **Financial Incentives to States to Increase Adoptions**

Can financial performance incentives help States move toward the permanency goals? If so, how?

In addition to the per child financial incentive outlined in the directive, what other kinds of performance incentives could help States reach the targets?

PROMOTING INNOVATION IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

- **Alternative Permanency Arrangements**

What are effective alternative permanency arrangements for children? What concerns would you have about them?

- **Opportunities for Systemic Change**

How does the directive fit with efforts to promote systemic change in the child welfare system?

CROSS-CUTTING PRINCIPLES

What principles should guide the Federal planning for this initiative to help achieve the permanency goals?

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Appendix D

THEMES EMERGING FROM THE ADOPTION 2002 CONSULTATION PROCESS

ELIMINATING BARRIERS TO PERMANENCY

•The Elimination of Geographical Barriers

A number of geographical barriers to the placement of waiting children were identified, including the lack of dissemination of information on waiting families and children, a reluctance on the part of agencies to conduct home studies to place children who are outside of their jurisdictions, a reluctance of agencies to accept home studies conducted by agencies in other jurisdictions, difficulties in transferring Medicaid benefits, and issues with the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children.

•Lack of Adequate Services to Prevent Out-of-Home Placement, to Efficiently Serve Birth Parents, and to Support Adoptive Families

Participants and correspondents expressed concern that the supportive services required for good child welfare practice are unavailable or inadequate. The lack of substance abuse and mental health treatment was specified repeatedly as a major factor that delays permanency. If no services are made available to the family, caseworkers and judges cannot accurately assess parental progress and whether there have been reasonable efforts to prevent placement and/or reunify the family, thereby delaying placement decisions for the child.

Participants also strongly felt that a lack of post-legal adoption services jeopardized many adoptions. In addition, potential adoptive parents may be deterred from adopting by the fact that they cannot be assured post-legal adoptive services, which are particularly critical to facilitate the placement of special needs children.

•Current Funding Streams

Some participants stressed a need to provide more flexibility to spend money in the front end of the service continuum for better family assessment, placement prevention, and reunification activities. Some participants felt that the system currently provides rewards to States to keep children in foster care or reunify them, but not to place them in adoption. In addition, they felt that potential adoptive parents are often not informed about the availability of adoption subsidy which further impedes the movement of foster children into adoption. The funding stream problems are exacerbated by fragmentation and separation of foster care and adoption in the child welfare system.

•Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA)/Interethnic Adoption Provision

In discussions about MEPA and the Interethnic Adoption provision, groups repeatedly placed a strong emphasis on the recruitment provisions of MEPA. Most participants volunteered no information or opinions on how to better ensure compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions. One group of participants insisted that States continue to ignore MEPA/Interethnic Adoption Provision and that HHS needs only to enforce the current law.

MOVING CHILDREN TO PERMANENCE MORE PROMPTLY

•Reasonable Efforts Requirements

Participants indicated that the safety of the child was of paramount concern and that the child's best interests should be at the heart of all decisions. In general, participants felt that the reasonable efforts requirements need clarification. In general, the focus groups reacted positively to proposals to add a requirement that a reasonable effort for permanency standard is needed.

•Improvements in Court Processes

All focus groups and many correspondents emphasized that the courts are as crucial as the child welfare system to ensure timely decision-making. They repeatedly called for the education of attorneys and judges about the importance of permanency for children. They further suggested that the training of legal and child welfare staff be combined, when possible, in order to build a common knowledge base that would enable them to better work together. They cited the Court Improvement Projects, currently underway, as examples of the kind of technical assistance and leadership that the Federal government can undertake with the judiciary.

•Research, Training, and Technical Assistance to Develop New Child Welfare Tools

The groups offered specific proposals to develop new child welfare tools including family mediation, voluntary relinquishment counseling, and open adoption, particularly for relative placements. The most common suggestion was for more work in the area of concurrent planning. Participants in focus groups and correspondents advised that the Federal government should take a leading role in the areas of research, model development, and training and technical assistance.

•Support for Alternative Permanency Arrangements

The groups and correspondents widely agreed that adoption is the most legally secure and developmentally beneficial permanency arrangement. However, many tribal participants dissented from this view and cautioned that adoption is frequently culturally inappropriate for Indian children. In addition, even though participants generally recognized the superior benefits of adoption for children, they also felt that it was important to develop other permanency options including guardianship, kinship care, and even co-parenting. Particularly with regard to guardianship and kinship care, participants suggested that Federal and State governments provide more financial support and services to families. Tribal representatives were especially vocal regarding the need to explore other permanency options.

DOUBLING THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN WHO ACHIEVE PERMANENCY

•Focus on the Children who are Hardest to Place

The participants repeatedly expressed apprehension that numerical targets and financial incentives might drive States to focus on children who tend to be easier to place (e.g., very young children) and those who merely lack legal finalization (e.g., those in adoptive placements with foster parents). They cautioned that attention should not be diverted from the problems of children with special developmental needs, older children, or children in sibling groups, who are the least likely to find permanency in a timely manner.

•The Incentive Structure Inherent in Adoption 2002 Bonuses

Participants discussed their concerns that the Adoption 2002 financial bonuses may affect or distort the incentive structure in the child welfare system. The participants wanted to use the Adoption 2002 fiscal incentives to benefit the children who are hardest to place, without resulting in the separation of sibling groups, a disproportionate focus on younger children, or an increase in adoption disruptions. In addition, they indicated that the bonuses should be implemented in ways that are respectful of the rights of birth families and that improve the functioning of the entire child welfare system over the long-term. The groups also were concerned that fiscal penalties might accompany the bonuses, such as reductions in Title IV-E funds for children who remain in foster care for extended periods of time.

Appendix E

STATE OF COLORADO

EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS

136 State Capitol
Denver, Colorado 80203-1792
Phone (303) 866-2471



Roy Romer
Governor

February 12, 1997

Secretary Donna E. Shalala
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Shalala:

I am pleased to congratulate you on your adoption policy work, particularly on your efforts to expedite the placement of children with supportive families. This is an issue critically important to the State of Colorado and I support President Clinton's goal to double the number of adoptions by the year 2002.

I am eager to read your report to President Clinton on ways state and federal systems can better serve children and help to move them quickly out of foster care to permanent and supportive families. We are dedicated to minimizing disruption in the lives of these children and look forward to working with Congress and the Administration on this issue.

In Colorado, we are focusing intently on promoting adoptions and strengthening families. We are working with our state judicial system, with the assistance of the chief justice of the Colorado Supreme Court, with the Colorado General Assembly, and with representatives of county governments, private providers, and representatives of the juvenile corrections, mental health, substance abuse treatment and developmental disability systems to develop procedures. Our goals are to minimize disruption in the lives of children, assure their safety, and see that they do not languish in foster care. Your emphasis on strengthening and supporting adoptions for children who cannot be reunited with their families of origin is a most important effort.

Again, I support your national leadership on the issue of adoption and on the broad issue of helping children find and flourish in permanent, supportive families.

Sincerely,

Roy Romer
Governor



STATE OF DELAWARE
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

THOMAS R. CARPER
GOVERNOR

February 12, 1997

The Honorable Donna Shalala
Secretary of Health and Human Services
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Shalala:

I was pleased to learn of President Clinton's initiative to double the number of adoptions in this country by the year 2002. Finding permanent, stable, loving homes for our most vulnerable children is an important goal for all of us.

During the last year in Delaware we were able to return 177 children to their families with the assistance of intensive reunification services. In addition, a major component of our child welfare waiver is the establishment of an assisted guardianship program for children in foster care. This guardianship program offers one additional option to create permanency for children for whom adoption is not possible. In Delaware we will continue to work diligently with the Family Court and the Foster Care Review Board to encourage adoption for foster children when that is the appropriate means to achieve permanence.

I fully support the Administration's emphasis on permanency for children and look forward to your agency's recommendations in this area. I will gladly work with you and Congress to realize our President's goals in this area.

Sincerely,

Thomas R. Carper
Governor



THE GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA

LAWTON CHILES

February 11, 1997

Secretary Donna E. Shalala
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Shalala:

In his proposed budget and other initiatives, President Clinton has indicated his concern and commitment that adoption promotion be an important piece of our country's agenda. It is my understanding that you will soon forward a report to the President which will focus on the goal of doubling the adoptions of foster children throughout the United States by the year 2002.

I support that goal enthusiastically and know that it is truly realistic. In fact, in Florida we have increased adoption rates by more than 80 percent over the past five years and remain committed to that effort. Through a statewide public-private partnership as part of my Children's Initiative, we have developed a highly visible recruitment campaign which is successfully matching stable and loving adoptive parents with foster children.

Evidence tells us that there is an adoptive family for every child and that effective communication is the key that will open those doors. Florida's outreach tools have included partnering with churches and the media, an internet adoption home page, and our Waiting Children pamphlet featuring children in need of adoptive parents. These efforts have highlighted these children and stimulated inquiries leading to the formation of new families. At the creative center of this effort are the hearts of people who care deeply and dedicate their lives daily to the happy futures of these children.

The President's leadership on this issue will unite us as a nation in this important commitment. I look forward to studying your report and recommendations fully, and working with the Administration and Congress in surpassing the goal.

With best regards, I am

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lawton Chiles".
LAWTON CHILES



STATE OF ILLINOIS
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
SPRINGFIELD 62706

JIM EDGAR
GOVERNOR

February 13, 1997

The Honorable William J. Clinton
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Clinton:

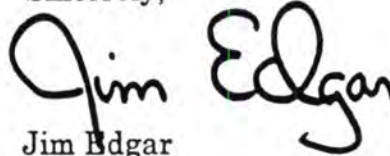
Within the week, the Department of Health and Human Services will be releasing its report on how to double the number of children in foster care who are adopted or placed in permanent homes by the year 2002. I am writing to express my support for this goal. I strongly encourage actions, such as financial incentives, that would help to move more children in foster care into safe, permanent homes.

Illinois has made adoption a top priority and is currently undertaking a variety of new initiatives that will give children a sense of permanency in their lives. For example, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is just beginning to implement a five-year test demonstration project called "subsidized guardianship" that has been approved by HHS under a federal waiver. The waiver permits Illinois to use federal funds in a statewide program to subsidize relatives and foster parents who will assume guardian responsibilities for children. This initiative provides children who live in situations where adoption is not an option with permanency.

In terms of other initiatives, the state is currently researching how it can provide adoption subsidies in a more equitable and cost effective manner. DCFS has instituted performance-based contracts in an effort to provide economic incentives for private agencies to move children to permanency. I have also recently signed a law that will make it easier to terminate parental rights in cases of extreme abuse and neglect.

Once again I would like to emphasize the importance of this issue. I look forward to working with Congress, HHS, and your Administration in finding an effective strategy to accomplish the goals outlined above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Edgar". The signature is written in a cursive style, with "Jim" and "Edgar" connected. The "J" is large and loops around the "i". The "E" is also large and loops around the "d".

Jim Edgar
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MARYLAND
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR



February 13, 1997

PARRIS N. GLENDENING
GOVERNOR

ANNAPOLIS OFFICE
STATE HOUSE
100 STATE CIRCLE
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401
(410) 874-3901

WASHINGTON OFFICE
SUITE 311
444 NORTH CAPITOL STREET, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20001
(202) 636-2215
TDD (410) 333-3035

The Honorable Donna E. Shalala
Secretary of Health and Human Services
Room 615-F
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington DC 20201

Dear Secretary Shalala:

Marylanders applaud President Clinton's objective of doubling the number of adoptions occurring throughout our nation by the Year 2002. There is no more important goal than ensuring that all our children, especially those with special needs, are raised by stable, loving families. When birth parents are unable to properly raise their children despite the provision of family preservation services, those children must join new families through adoption.

We are anxiously awaiting the Department of Health and Human Services report on the strategy for achieving this important goal. We look forward to receiving its recommendations. Maryland, through our Department of Human Resources, is enthusiastic about working with your Administration on increasing adoptions.

Improving the well being of children is a primary goal of my Administration. With assistance from the Child Welfare League of America, we have reviewed our entire continuum of child welfare services. We will be implementing recommendations to improve our efforts to preserve birth families when feasible and to move children to new permanent families through kinship guardianship or adoption when necessary.

Adoption has been a key interest of mine. Shortly after entering office, I appointed an Adoptions Task Force. Their recommendations have already resulted in new permanency planning legislation and an increased number of adoptions. While final figures are not yet available for 1996, the number of finalized adoptions increased by at least fifteen percent over 1995.

Again, I applaud the President's objective in increasing adoptions. Maryland stands ready to assist in achieving his goal for the year 2002.

Sincerely,

Parris N. Glendening
Governor

*Donna,
Best day on
Monday with the
President. Thanks!
P.*



STATE OF MICHIGAN
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
LANSING

JOHN ENGLER
GOVERNOR

February 12, 1997

The Honorable Donna E. Shalala
Secretary, U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services
615 F Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Madam Secretary:

I was pleased to see the President's support for doubling adoptions by the year 2002. I, too, believe that every child in America deserves to live in a safe and stable home, whether the child be returned home, adopted, placed in legal guardianship, or granted another safe, healthy and permanent placement. With this in mind, Michigan has carefully crafted a child welfare program that has seen tremendous results.

In Michigan, nearly 60 percent of the children in the child welfare system are age six and older, part of a sibling group that should be adopted together, minority race children or children who may have physical, mental or emotional impairments. Adoption subsidy is an effective tool to assist special needs children to achieve a permanent home instead of remaining in foster care. In fact, in Michigan, approximately 90 percent of children adopted were eligible for the adoption subsidy. Michigan's Adoption Subsidy program provides support and/or medical subsidy to adoptive families to encourage the placement of these special needs children. The support subsidy pays for basic support and care for the adopted children. Medical subsidy pays for necessary treatment for a physical, mental or emotional condition which existed prior to the adoption.

During fiscal year 1996, the Michigan Family Independence Agency and its private partners placed a record number 2,189 children in new permanent families. This is more than double the number of adoptions in 1989 and represents an 18 percent increase over 1995. The largest increases were in the six to nine-year-old age group (31.3 percent, up from 28.3 percent in 1995) and black children (53.0 percent, up from 48.3 percent in 1995). The number of children adopted by relatives increased from 26.2 percent in fiscal year 1995 to 29.5 percent in 1996 and approximately 50 percent were placed with their foster parents.

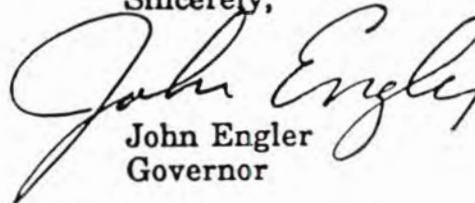
The Honorable Donna E. Shalala
Page 2
February 12, 1997

Despite Michigan's record-breaking success, I believe Michigan can move even more children into permanent placements in future years. To support this goal, adoption subsidies in Michigan's proposed fiscal year 1998 budget will total \$102.2 million.

In addition to promoting adoption, Michigan is currently addressing many aspects of Children's Services. Lieutenant Governor Connie Binsfeld, one of our state's strongest and most effective advocates on children's issues, headed the Binsfeld Children's Commission and issued a report that included various initiatives the state could take to improve the lives of children. Enhanced training of child welfare workers, the Children Safety Assessment project and other initiatives begun in recent months will be continued, and additional funds for the statewide implementation of child death review teams will be provided. The fiscal year 1998 budget provides a flexible pool of \$10 million to implement recommendations made in the Lieutenant Governor's report. The funds will be available to local multipurpose collaborative bodies to support locally developed plans that implement recommendations of the report and increase overall effectiveness of child welfare efforts.

I look forward to working with the Clinton Administration on initiatives that would help further the goals of moving more children into the safe, stable home that all children deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "John Engler".

John Engler
Governor

JE/elh

SUGGESTED FEDERAL ACTIONS TO INCREASE ADOPTION AND PERMANENT PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN

DOUBLE THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN ADOPTED OR PERMANENTLY PLACED BY THE YEAR 2002

A - De-link AFDC/ SSI requirement from eligibility for Federal participation in Adoption Assistance.

B- While recognizing the need for changes in the role of the federal government and the movement away from entitlement programs, there remain some areas where federal mandates are needed. It is extremely important that there be an assurance of necessary financial support to adoptive families of special needs children receiving adoption assistance. Thus it is important to amend PL 96-272 to require that states provide monthly adoption assistance. Currently the Federal Title IV-E Adoption Assistance program allows monthly assistance as a state option. Federal participation is considered an open ended entitlement program for those states that choose to provide monthly adoption assistance. Since the provision of monthly adoption assistance is optional, State Legislatures must approve Adoption Assistance budgets during each budget cycle. Consequently there is no assurance of continued financial support and the programs themselves are at risk of abrupt change. This lack of assurance of ongoing support to prospective adoptive families constitutes a barrier to adoption of children with special needs.

C - Amend PL 96-272 to allow needs based monthly adoption assistance and require that the maximum monthly grant be equal to the maximum foster care reimbursement allowed within the state. This proposal would assure the special needs of the child are met, would recognize the different functions of foster parenting and adoption, and would address the discrepancy between foster care reimbursements and adoption assistance payments.

D - Continue to require enrolling children receiving adoption assistance on Medical Assistance.

E - Allow federal participation for non medical reimbursements such as costs of alterations to home or van, reimbursements for child care, respite care etc. These reimbursements would not be subject to a means test.

E - Establish a guardianship assistance program with federal participation when it is determined that a child with special needs can not return home, could be cared for by relatives or kin but who don't wish to adopt or for whom adoption and TPR is not in their best interest. Simply expand the adoption assistance program to include otherwise eligible children for whom there is a transfer of guardianship vs. a TPR.

F - Create federal supports and incentives to assist states in addressing the directive to consider giving preference to placement of children with adult relatives contained in Section 505 of the

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, and the diligent recruitment of foster and adoptive families reflective of the ethnic and racial diversity of children for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed as required by Section 554 of the Multiethnic Placement Act. One option could be to eliminate competitive discretionary grants awarded under Adoption Opportunities. Allocate the dollars directly to states to invest in implementing these directives.

G - Offer federal incentives to states to establish regionally based programs for recruitment training and retention of adoptive families. We know recruitment is not the primary problem. The primary problem is developing an infrastructure to quickly provide necessary education, adoption and foster care studies, and on going support to persons responding to recruitment efforts. A Regionally based recruitment and retention program could pool the resources (public and private) of the identified region; provide quick response to inquiries; offer ongoing education and training programs; and provide ongoing support to families after the adoption.

H - Allow states to seek federal financial participation in meeting the costs of residential care for children receiving adoption assistance (or guardianship assistance if created). Currently states may not seek federal Title IV-E federal participation in meeting the costs of residential care unless the AFDC relatedness standard is met. This is seldom the case. Consequently the cost of care is financed principally through the state and the adoptive parent. The adoption assistance received by the parents may be used to contribute to the cost. A high percentage of the children requiring adoption assistance also need residential treatment in order to address their issues. Federal participation, along with that of the state and the adoptive parent will help ensure the child receives necessary treatment.

MOVE CHILDREN MORE RAPIDLY FROM FOSTER CARE TO PERMANENT HOMES

A - Enact federal legislation recognizing transfer of guardianship to relative or kin as a disposition equivalent to long term foster care or Termination of Parental Rights and adoption.

B - Amend P.L. 96-272 to require permanency decisions within 9 months of the out-of-home placement unless the court finds a basis for extending the time frame. Award financial incentives to states who meet the requirement.

C - Provide federal support (legislative and financial) encouraging concurrent planning for children in out-of-home care. Provide financial support for out-of-home placements where the foster parent would become the adoptive parent if reunification efforts are unsuccessful.

**INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS ABOUT CHILDREN WAITING FOR ADOPTION
AND ENCOURAGE AMERICANS TO CONSIDER ADOPTION**

A - Federal policy should formally recognize the child's relationship with relatives, biological family and foster parents. Policy should support adoptive families of children with special needs who try to maintain, and where appropriate, nurture these relationships.

B - Allow families receiving adoption assistance to receive the dependent child tax credit without having to declare the adoption assistance as income.

C - Provide financial incentives for states to develop and implement creative programs and services designed to support and encourage cross cultural involvement among families adopting children interracially.

D - Provide the same level of paid and unpaid parental leave for federal employees who adopt as is provided to those who give birth. Provide federal direction encouraging states to adopt similar policies.



STATE OF MINNESOTA

Washington Office
400 North Capitol Street, Suite 365
Washington, D.C. 20001
(202) 624-5308

ARNE H. CARLSON
GOVERNOR

February 12, 1997

KATHEE MCCRIGHT
DIRECTOR

The Honorable Donna Shalala
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Shalala:

On behalf of the State of Minnesota, I wish to express support for the Administration's goal to move children more quickly from foster care to safe, permanent homes. Minnesota shares this vision, and, over the years, has brought together public and private agencies to fashion a broad framework to support the adoption of children with special needs.

Our state framework includes several elements:

- A statewide Task Force on Permanence which meets monthly to address relevant adoption issues, and identify and recommend needed changes in practice and policy;
- Television and newspaper presentations of children in need of adoption;
- Recruitment of prospective adoptive families by public and private agencies from throughout Minnesota;
- A photo listing album with information about specific children in need of adoptive homes is published bi-monthly and distributed to counties, private agencies and libraries throughout the state;
- A computer-based statewide adoption exchange (with access to the national adoption exchange) capable of identifying potential matches between waiting children and waiting families;
- A requirement that all county social service agencies complete adoption home studies at no cost to families or individuals desiring to adopt a child with special needs; and
- A comprehensive Adoption Assistance program which not only helps adoptive parents meet the ongoing costs associated with parenting children with special needs, but recognizes the need to reimburse for special non-medical costs.

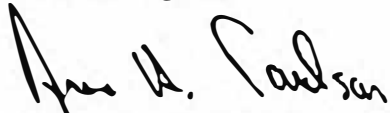
The Honorable Donna Shalala
February 12, 1997
page 2

This framework has been integral to the development of positive working relationships between county agencies and private child placing agencies. As a result, close to one-third of the children committed to the guardianship of the Commissioner of Human Services are in pre-adoptive homes at any point in time.

I appreciate your recent request for suggestions on federal actions which could be taken to encourage the adoption of children with special needs, and have attached a set of specific recommendations. I am convinced that further supportive actions on the federal level combined with planned enhancements to Minnesota's efforts will allow many more of our waiting children to find homes.

I look forward to reviewing your report to the President on adoption to be issued this week, and will continue to work with you on this very important issue.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Arne H. Carlson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Arne" being more prominent.

ARNE H. CARLSON
Governor



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
RALEIGH 27603-8001

JAMES B. HUNT JR.
GOVERNOR

February 12, 1997

The Honorable Donna Shalala
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W., Room 615F
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Shalala:

I applaud the President's goal to double the number of adoptions and reduce the time children are in foster care by the year 2002. All children need permanent, loving families.

In North Carolina, this is a priority for us. As a result of efforts we have already undertaken in the state, the number of foster children adopted in North Carolina is up 66 percent in the previous two years. Likewise, the number of children removed from their homes is down 3 percent since extra attention has been focused on keeping families together and on finding adoptive homes for eligible children.

Our efforts to increase adoptions in North Carolina include:

- implementation of the Families for Kids initiative sponsored by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation which emphasizes adoption of foster children who cannot return home;
- increase in financial adoption assistance effective July 1, 1994;
- strong partnerships between public and private adoption agencies;
- a federal Adoption Opportunities grant which provided \$100,000 to help find adoptive homes for 28 foster children with special needs; and
- an Adoption Media Campaign, started in July 1994, that has resulted through January 1997 in 90 children being placed into adoptive homes.

I look forward to working with you to better address the needs of these children. All children deserve to be reared in nurturing, loving homes.

My warmest personal regards.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jim Hunt".

James B. Hunt, Jr.

JBH:pjm



**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES**

500 WEST TEMPLE STREET, 866 KENNETH HAHN HALL OF ADMINISTRATION
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012
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SUPERVISOR, SECOND DISTRICT

February 11, 1997

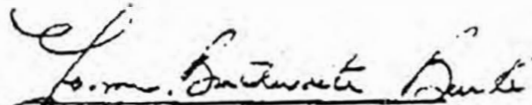
The Honorable Donna E. Shalala
Secretary of Health and Human Services
Washington, D.C. 20201

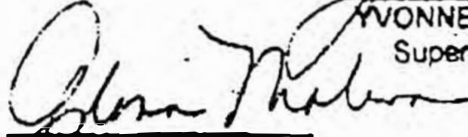
Dear Secretary Shalala:

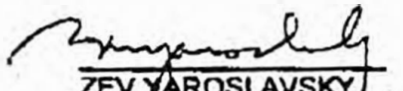
We are very pleased to learn about the President's adoption initiative. There is nothing more important for vulnerable children in our country and in Los Angeles County than to be permanently placed in loving homes as soon as possible.

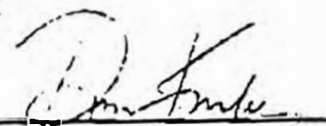
We applaud the President's commitment to double the number of adoptions in 5 years and look forward to reading the report being prepared by the Department of Health and Human Services on how this goal might be achieved. We are prepared to work with the Administration, the Congress, and our State leaders in helping California reach this important objective.

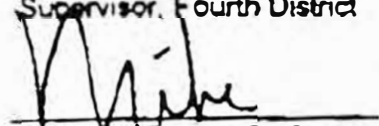
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YVONNE BRATHWAITE BURKE
Supervisor, Second District


GLORIA MOLINA
Supervisor, First District


ZEV YAROSLAVSKY
Supervisor, Third District


DON KNABE
Supervisor, Fourth District


MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH
Supervisor, Fifth District



Cuyahoga County

February 13, 1997

COMMISSIONERS
Jane L. Campbell
Timothy F. Hagan
Tim McCormack

The Honorable William J. Clinton
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The purpose of this letter is to commend you for your National Adoption Initiative. Here in Cuyahoga County we are very committed to finding permanency for our children who have entered the child welfare system. We have taken several steps to insure that effective decision making takes place starting on the first day of a child's involvement in our system to provide permanency as quickly as possible for each child.

In the past three years we have nearly tripled the number of adoptive placements that have taken place from 104 in 1994 to 303 in 1996. At the same time the number of children coming into permanent custody is growing at an ever faster rate. There were 382 children who came into permanent custody in our county in 1996. Today we have approximately 500 children waiting for an adoptive placement. There is a great need to find families for these waiting children in our community as there is across the nation.

We have added a significant number of staff to our adoption department and made significant investments in our community education and recruitment efforts. The primary focus of these efforts is to inform members of our community about the needs of our children who are waiting for permanent families and to ask them to help in recruiting families for these children. Your leadership in providing incentives to families to encourage them to adopt is very welcome as is your utilization of the national media to increase public awareness of the needs of these children who are waiting for permanent families.

We have been aided in this process by a Federal Minority Adoption grant, a grant from the Kellogg Foundation and a grant from the Casey Foundation. These grants have not only provided us with needed funding but they have also provided us with linkages to technical assistance that have helped us improve the quality of our adoption and recruitment programs.

The Honorable William J. Clinton

Page two

February 13, 1997

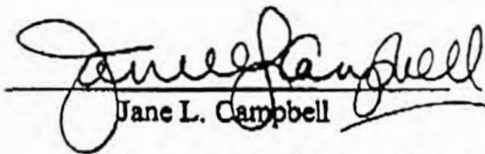
Your strong stand against reducing funds for child protection, foster care and adoption is critical to meeting the needs of these children. There is a very strong linkage between foster care and adoptions. In Cuyahoga County over sixty per cent of the adoption placements last year were with foster parents. Your efforts to support foster parents is critical to supporting the recruitment of adoptive parents.

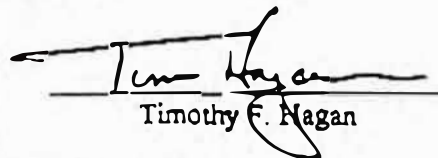
Through our Neighborhood Foster Care Initiative in Cuyahoga County we are significantly increasing the number of foster parents who live in the same neighborhoods as the families of the children who are in our custody. We believe that Neighborhood Foster Care has great potential for recruitment of adoptive families through the circles of support for foster children that are growing in these neighborhoods.

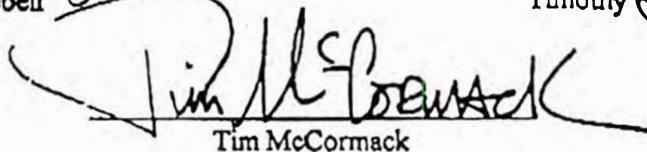
We commend you for your commitment to find permanent families for waiting children. We believe that your initiative will provide significant support for states and local communities to find and support permanent families for these children. We look forward to working with you and your administration to meet the critical goals of your National Adoption Initiative.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS


Jane L. Campbell


Timothy F. Nagan


Tim McCormack

/mj

Appendix F

Federal Programs to Support Adoption

With the passage of P.L. 96-272, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, the Federal government established a clear focus on the need for permanency for children in foster care and the importance of permanency planning and timely decision-making for these children. The law increased protections for children in foster care by requiring case plans that included a description of the placement and its appropriateness, and a plan for services to facilitate the child's return home or to another permanent placement. An 18 month initial dispositional hearing requirement was legislated and an administrative or judicial case review was required at least every six months.

Several important Federal laws and programs promote the adoption of children with special needs. These include:

- Title IV-E Adoption Assistance - Title IV-E of the Social Security Act provides funds to States to facilitate the adoption of children with special needs who were or would have been eligible for AFDC, thereby preventing long or inappropriate stays in foster care. Federal matching funds are available to States for a one time payment for the non-recurring costs of adopting a special needs child, and for monthly subsidies to adoptive families to assist them with caring for a child with special needs. Federal funds also are used to assist States with the administrative costs of managing the program (e.g., for the recruitment and assessment of adoptive families), and for staff training.
- Adoption Opportunities Program (Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment and Adoption Reform Act of 1978) - The Adoption Opportunities Program works to eliminate barriers to adoption and provide permanent homes for children who would benefit from adoption. It does so by: (1) promoting adoption legislation and procedures in the States and territories of the United States in order to eliminate jurisdictional and legal obstacles to adoption; (2) promoting quality standards for adoption services, pre-placement, post-placement, and post-legal adoption counseling, and standards to protect the rights of the children in need of adoption; and (3) demonstrating expeditious ways to free children for adoption for whom it has been determined that adoption is the appropriate plan. This discretionary program awards grants and contracts to public and private non-profit agencies.
- The Adoption Tax Credit - In August 1996, President Clinton signed into law the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996 which authorizes a \$5,000 tax credit (\$6,000 in the case of a child with special needs) for qualified adoption expenses. This tax credit is designed to help alleviate some of the financial barriers to adoption.

- Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA/IEP) - The MEPA, as amended by the Interethnic Adoption Provisions of the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, was designed to prohibit denial or delay in the foster or adoptive placement of children on the basis of race, color, or national origin; increase the number of adoptive and foster care families for children in foster care; and increase the number of children who are adopted. These laws seek to ensure that the adoption process is free from discrimination and delays on the basis of race, culture and ethnicity.
- The Court Improvement Program (CIP) - The CIP provides State courts with the opportunity to collaborate with the other organizations and individuals responsible for promoting and protecting the well-being of children and families to review laws and procedures designed to provide rights and protection to parents, families, and children. It provides State courts with the flexibility to design assessment tools which identify ineffective laws or procedures and barriers to effective decision-making, highlight practices which are not fully successful, examine areas found to be in need of correction or added attention, and then implement reforms which facilitate the timely execution of plans for permanency.
- The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) - ICWA established requirements and standards for child-placing agencies to follow in the placement of Indian Children for the purpose of protecting the cultural heritage of these children. These standards include: the provision of remedial, culturally appropriate services for Indian families before a placement occurs; notification of tribes regarding the placement of Indian children; and, when placement must occur, it requires that children be preferentially placed in Indian homes.