

Withdrawal/Redaction Sheet

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DOCUMENT NO. AND TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
001. letter	Micheal Reagan to Senator Carl Levin (partial) (1 page)	10/06/1997	P6/b(6)
002. letter	Janice Uible to Senator Carl Levin (partial) (2 pages)	10/07/1997	P6/b(6)
003. letter	Time Green to Senator Carl Levin (partial) (1 page)	01/26/1998	P6/b(6)

COLLECTION:

Clinton Presidential Records
First Lady's Office
Domestic Policy Council (Nicole Rabner)
OA/Box Number: 15410

FOLDER TITLE:

Levin Adoption Registry [1]

2012-1035-S

kc1001

RESTRICTION CODES

Presidential Records Act - [44 U.S.C. 2204(a)]

- P1 National Security Classified Information [(a)(1) of the PRA]
- P2 Relating to the appointment to Federal office [(a)(2) of the PRA]
- P3 Release would violate a Federal statute [(a)(3) of the PRA]
- P4 Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information [(a)(4) of the PRA]
- P5 Release would disclose confidential advice between the President and his advisors, or between such advisors [(a)(5) of the PRA]
- P6 Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(a)(6) of the PRA]

C. Closed in accordance with restrictions contained in donor's deed of gift.

PRM. Personal record misfile defined in accordance with 44 U.S.C. 2201(3).

RR. Document will be reviewed upon request.

Freedom of Information Act - [5 U.S.C. 552(b)]

- b(1) National security classified information [(b)(1) of the FOIA]
- b(2) Release would disclose internal personnel rules and practices of an agency [(b)(2) of the FOIA]
- b(3) Release would violate a Federal statute [(b)(3) of the FOIA]
- b(4) Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential or financial information [(b)(4) of the FOIA]
- b(6) Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(b)(6) of the FOIA]
- b(7) Release would disclose information compiled for law enforcement purposes [(b)(7) of the FOIA]
- b(8) Release would disclose information concerning the regulation of financial institutions [(b)(8) of the FOIA]
- b(9) Release would disclose geological or geophysical information concerning wells [(b)(9) of the FOIA]

October 8, 1998

MEMORANDUM

TO: Elena Kagan
Barbara Chow

FROM: Nicole Rabner

SUBJECT: Adoption Registry Attached to Omnibus Appropriations

As appropriations negotiations proceed, I want to alert you to a bill currently attached to omnibus appropriations. This bill, sponsored by Senators Levin and Craig, would give HHS authority to create a voluntary mutual reunion registry -- a centralized computer network to facilitate voluntary reunions of adopted persons with their birth parents and other members of their birth families. As you will recall, this bill had been attached last year to the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, and the controversy that surrounds it stalled the passage of the adoption legislation. In fact, it took the intervention of the First Lady to persuade Senator Levin to drop this measure and allow smooth passage of the bill. At that time, The First Lady promised to meet with Senator Levin to discuss this proposal.

In his meeting with the First Lady last Spring, Senator reminded the First Lady that in October of 1994, Secretary Shalala sent a letter to Congress signaling that the Administration had no objection to the Levin proposal (letter attached). The Senator urged that if the Administration could not publicly endorse the bill, that we not oppose it either. We have maintained an official neutral position ever since (although HHS internally opposes the bill because they think it inappropriately involves them in private adoptions.) There are, however, strong, vocal forces that have for years opposed this bill on privacy grounds, arguing that potential access between birth parent and adoptee will have a negative affect on adoption.

This issue is likely to generate a fight between the House and the Senate, with Lott supporting the bill and Gingrich opposed. My strong recommendation is that we maintain a "do not oppose" position (which I have conveyed to Senator Levin's staff, after receiving the attached note and materials). While the bill may not survive, we should play no role in helping to defeat it.



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

OCT 3 1994

The Honorable John Dingell, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I would like to take this opportunity to inform you of the Department's views on title VII of S. 1569, the "Disadvantaged Minority Health Improvement Act of 1994", as passed by the Senate. Title VII would authorize the Secretary of Health and Human Services, in her discretion and at no net expense to the Federal government, to use the resources of the Department to facilitate the voluntary, mutually requested reunion of an adult adopted child who is 21 years of age or older with any birth parent of the adult child or any adult adopted sibling, who is 21 years of age or older.

We support the objectives of title VII of S. 1569 to facilitate the voluntary reunion of an adopted child with a birth parent. If this provision is enacted into law, we will do all we can to implement the true spirit of this change, taking into account the highly sensitive and personal nature of information about parties to an adoption, the traditional role played by States in this area, and the requirement for no net cost to the Federal Government.

The Office of Management and Budget has advised that there is no objection to the presentation of this report from the standpoint of the Administration's program.

Sincerely,

Donna E. Shalala

LARRY E. CRAIG
IDAHO

HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
(202) 224-2752
TTY (202) 224-9377

CHAIRMAN
REPUBLICAN POLICY COMMITTEE

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1200

October 9, 1998

Dear Colleague:

RE: **NATIONAL VOLUNTARY MUTUAL REUNION REGISTRY**

We are writing to clarify the intent and need for the National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry currently under discussion by the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations. This humane legislation, at no net cost to the federal government, would reduce the hardship experienced by many birth parents, adult adoptees and separated adult siblings who, often for many years and at great expense, seek contact with one another.

Some are seeking closure or a deeper sense of identity, some need vital medical information which may affect their own mental and physical health and some are facing momentous family decisions that require more knowledge about their roots. For many elderly Americans, time is running out. Seventy three year old Jim Rockwell of Cornell, MI, adopted following the death of his mother, was reunited with 7 of his 13 surviving siblings in five states [MI, WI, OR, CA, TX] after a 60 year search for one another. Thousands of biological relatives between the ages of 70 and 90 are still seeking reunion with separated siblings or their adult children.

Earlier this week, the Associated Press reported the case of a Salem, Oregon woman and her birth mother who had spent many years seeking one another. The 52 year old adoptee, Barbara Casali Mingus, reunited with her birth mother as she was dying of cervical cancer. At the birth mother's urging, Ms. Mingus was tested and learned that she too had the same cancer. Ms. Mingus said the brief reunion with her birth mother saved her life since the cancer was caught in the early stages.

Michael E. Reagan, a strong and active supporter of the National Registry, has a most compelling true life story. He writes: *"I believe wholeheartedly in your humane approach to facilitating the desires of adult adopted persons, birth parents and separated siblings who seek to know one another. I am an adoptee who has had the great privilege of meeting my biological brother and sister and learning about the life-time of caring by my birth mother, who died several years prior to my reunion with my siblings. My adoptive father, Ronald Reagan, supported my desire to meet my birth mother and helped me in my early efforts. When my father helped me, it was the greatest gift he ever gave to me.....I would have used such a National Registry myself, and it has become apparent to me that my birth mother would have also."*

We would now like to tell you what this legislation does and what it does not do:

* The National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry is just what it says: voluntary and mutual. It only matches persons who seek to be matched by filing their own information with the National Registry. If a match occurs, the mutually requested phone number or address or referral is

RESOURCE CENTER
ROOM 134
304 NORTH 8TH STREET
BOISE, ID 83702

ROOM 140
304 NORTH 8TH STREET
BOISE, ID 83702

HARBOR PLAZA
810 HUBBARD, SUITE 121
COSUM D'ALENS, ID 83614

848 MAIN STREET
LEWISTON, ID 83501-1864

289 SOUTH 4TH AVENUE
POCAHELLO, ID 83201

1282 ADDISON AVENUE EAST
TWIN FALLS, ID 83301

2529 CHANNING WAY
IDAHO FALLS, ID 83404

larry_craig@senate.gov

<http://www.senate.gov/~craig>

APPROPRIATIONS
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION,
AND FORESTRY
ENERGY AND NATURAL
RESOURCES
SPECIAL COMMITTEE
ON AGING
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

facilitated.

* The legislation does not mandate, but simply gives the HHS Secretary the authority or discretion to facilitate voluntary, mutual reunions between adults who have, on their own, indicated their desire for such reunion;

* The legislation makes clear that no attempt will be made to make a match with parties who have not filed with the National Registry. Specific language in the legislation addresses this issue: "...the registry shall not attempt to make contact for the purpose of facilitating a reunion with any individual who is not entered into or participating in the Registry";

* The legislation specifically requires individuals who seek mutual contact with each other to: "...on their own initiative, consent by a signed notarized statement to the exchange of identifying information";

* The legislation does not require the participation of any state and would not preempt any State law related to this issue. The following language in the legislation makes this crystal clear: "Nothing in this section invalidates or limits any law of any state or of a political subdivision of a state concerning adoption and the confidentiality of that State's sealed adoption record policy";

* Information provided to the registry may only be used by the registry for a match. The legislation imposes a fine and imprisonment for any violation: "Any individual or entity that is found to have disclosed or used confidential information in violation of the provisions of this section shall be subject to a fine of \$5000 and imprisonment for a period not to exceed one year";

* The National Registry is patterned after the voluntary mutual consent registries currently being operated in 25 states. Each of these states allow for a match between the adult adoptee and one birth parent if only one birth parent has entered the registry. In other words, just as in the 25 states, a match would not be denied because both birth parents did not register. Surveys over the years of these 25 state registries consistently show that one-parent reunions have not caused a problem. States also report that 95% - 98% of the birth parents who register are birth mothers;

* The National Registry is needed because we live in a mobile society. People are born in one state and adopted in another, and may live in several states during their lifetime. Because of state boundary limitations, state registries report a low match rate of between 2% and 8%.

We hope that this letter answers your questions about the National Registry legislation.

Sincerely,



Larry Craig



Carl Levin

SOME ENDORSEMENTS -- NATIONAL VOLUNTARY MUTUAL REUNION REGISTRY

Child Welfare League of America
 Catholic Counseling Services of Catholic Charities Diocese of Dallas
 Catholic Conference [80 agencies that facilitate adoption]
 Catholic Human Services, Inc.
 Catholic Social Services of Cincinnati
 Children's Home Society of Florida
 Children's Home of Kentucky
 Catholic Community Services, Maternity & Adoption
 Associated Catholic Charities of New Orleans
 American Academy of Adoption Attorneys
 Methodist Mission Home of Texas
 Pennsylvania Adoption Legislation Coalition
 Holt International Children's Services
 Louisiana Adoption Advisory Board
 Adopt a Special Kid
 Adopt Older Kids
 Open Door Society of Massachusetts
 Adoption Rhode Island
 Adoption Knowledge Affiliates
 Adoptees' Birthrights Committee of Louisiana
 Volunteers of American Healing Hearts Support Group
 Volunteers of America Child Placing Adoption

Michael E. Reagan, Adoptee, Author, Talk Show Host, Sherman Oaks, CA
Joan Heifetz Hollinger, Adoption Expert/Author, Member, U.S. Children's Bureau Expert Work Group on Adoption & Safe Families Act of 1997; Member, U.S. State Dept Advisory Group on Inter-country Adoption, Visiting Prof of Law, Univ of CA, Berkeley
Jo Anne Swanson, Birth parent, Founder & Director, Post-Adoption Support Services of MI
Dr. Rickie Solinger, Historian, Author and Visiting Scholar, Univ of CO, Boulder
Mark T. McDermott, Adoptive Parent, Legislative Chair, American Academy of Adoption Attorneys
Nancy M. Newman, Esq., Adoptee, Child Welfare Advocate, Member Pennsylvania Adoption Reform Movement
Jamie Lee Curtis, Adoptive Parent, Author, Actress, Santa Monica, CA
David Wilson, Adoptee, Adoption Advocate, Principal, New Frontiers Communications, VA
Amy M. Silberberg, Adoptee, Adoptive Parent, Adoption Reform Movement of Afton, Minn
Dr. David Hodgson, Birth Father, Author, Adoption Support Group, Gaithersburg, MD

States with passive voluntary mutual reunion registries:

Alabama
Arkansas
California
Colorado
Delaware
Florida
Idaho
Illinois
Indiana
Iowa
Louisiana
Maine
Maryland
Massachusetts
Mississippi
Nevada
New Hampshire
New Mexico
New York
Ohio
Oregon
South Carolina
South Dakota
Texas
Utah

NATIONAL VOLUNTARY MUTUAL REUNION REGISTRY

What the legislation does and does not do.....

The National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry permits the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, at no net expense to the federal government, to facilitate the voluntary, mutually requested exchange of identifying information that has been mutually consented to in a signed notarized statement, by the birth parent, adult adoptee 21 years or older or adult sibling.

The National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry is just what it says. It is voluntary and it is mutual. It only matches persons who seek to be matched by filing their information with the National Registry.

- * The bill does not mandate, but simply gives the secretary the discretion to facilitate voluntary, mutual reunions between consenting adults, if she so chooses;
- * The bill does not call for the opening of sealed records;
- * The bill makes clear that no attempt will be made to make a match with parties who have not, on their own, filed with the National Registry. Specific language in the bill addresses this issue: "...the registry shall not attempt to make contact for the purpose of facilitating a reunion with any individual who is not entered into or participating in the Registry.
- * The bill specifically requires individuals who seek mutual contact with each other to: "...on their own initiative, consent by a signed notarized statement to the exchange of identifying information".
- * The bill does not require the participation of any state and is not intended to nullify or impede the progress of any State activity relative to this issue. The following language in the bill makes this crystal clear: "Nothing in this section invalidates or limits any law of a State or of a political subdivision of a State concerning adoption and the confidentiality of that State's sealed adoption record policy"

CWLA Adoption News

Summer 1998

CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF AMERICA

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 4

CWLA Endorses Mutual Reunion Registry

After considerable deliberation, CWLA has reached a decision to endorse S. 1487, federal legislation to create a national reunion registry for adopted adults, siblings, and birth parents. The bill was introduced by Senator Carl Levin (D-MI) and cosponsored by Senators Larry Craig (R-ID), John McCain (R-AZ), and Mary Landrieu (D-LA).

This bill was most recently approved by the Senate in November 1997. The House recently conducted a hearing on the bill, but has not yet scheduled a vote. The legislation would establish a national voluntary mutual reunion registry that would increase the opportunity for adopted adults, birth parents, and siblings who want to find each other to do so. The bill calls for HHS to establish a computerized national reunion registry to facilitate the voluntary, mutually requested exchange of identifying information that has been mutually consented to in a signed, notarized statement by the birth parent, adult adoptee 21 years or older, or adult sibling. The registry only matches persons who seek to be matched by filing their information with the national registry.

In testimony presented to the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources on June 11, 1998, Senator Levin summarized what the bill is intended and not intended to do: "There are millions of people who are adopted in this country, and a significant number of them are searching for their biological parent, usually the mother. We have a significant number of biological mothers who gave up their child[ren] for adoption who are seeking to find those children...and this bill only addresses people who are trying to find each other. Its only purpose is to facilitate [the reunion of] people who are searching for each other, sometimes desperately searching to find each other. It does not seek anybody out who does not want to be found. It is a passive registry based on two adults searching for each other, helping to find each other. It does not open records; it specifically prohibits that. It does not in any way preempt state registries or in any way override or affect state registries. It explicitly says it does not do that."

Senator Levin summarized the crux of the issue eloquently when he stated: "The haunting question seems to me, the humane question is, why would we not want to facilitate such reunions?"

Opposed by those who staunchly support prohibition of any contact between birth parents and adopted adults as being the "foot in the door" to open records, and equally opposed by those who advocate for open records for all adopted individuals, this legislation attempts to find a middle ground. It is a logical adjunct to the many passive "mutual consent" registries that are currently in operation, and is more conservative than those states that operate active consent registries. In these states, an active search is conducted for other triad members at the request of one party. However, a national voluntary registry is still needed because so many individuals were born in one state and adopted in another, or simply don't know the state of their birth.

Others have opposed the bill because of the lack of detail with regard to implementation, including ensuring adequate funding for operation of the registry and for informing the public on an ongoing basis about its existence; the question of whether counseling would be offered to parties before releasing matches; the small number of matches that are currently accomplished through existing state exchanges; and other issues. While these are valid concerns, operational details are rarely

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spelled out in legislation. As Senator Levin explained, the legislation simply instructs HHS to establish such a registry and provides that agency the authority and flexibility to implement the legislation effectively, as is customary with most legislation.

Interestingly, the three Senate cosponsors of this bill are all adoptive parents. Indeed, adoptive parents are increasingly encouraging their adult adopted children to search because they realize how essential this knowledge is to their child's mental health. A poignant letter from Michael E. Reagan, son of President Reagan, to Senator Levin and included in his written testimony, brings home the importance of such adoptive parent support. In part, the letter says "I believe wholeheartedly in your humane approach to facilitating the desires of adult adopted persons, birth parents, and separated siblings who seek to know one another...As we discussed during our meeting at your home a few years ago, my adoptive father, Ronald Reagan, supported my desire to meet my birth mother and helped me in my early efforts. When my father helped me, it was the greatest gift he ever gave to me."

Research confirms that the great majority of adoptive parents support their adult children's efforts to know more about and meet members of their birth families. Similarly, it confirms that birth parents and adult adoptees often wish to be found by one another (see article on page 4).

Action is now needed by the House of Representatives.

While the Senate approved this bill in 1989, 1991, 1994, and 1997, it has never been voted on in the House.

To access a copy of S. 1487, An Act to Establish a National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry, go to Thomas, Congress' Legislative Information Site, at <http://thomas.loc.gov>. In Thomas use the Quick Search Text of Bills 105th Congress function and search by bill number (S.1487).

To obtain a copy of the testimony from the June 11, 1998 House Subcommittee on Human Resources of the Committee on Ways and Means Hearing on Adoption Reunion Registries and Screening of Adults Working with Children, go to http://www.house.gov/ways_means/humres/hr-13wit.htm and click on the name of the witness whose testimony you would like to read.

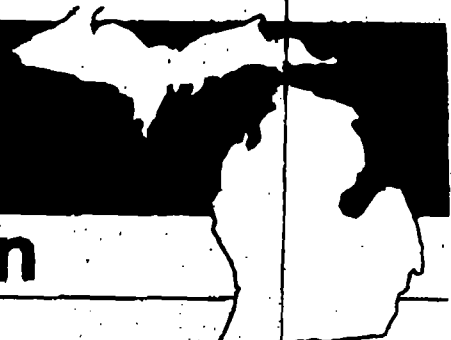
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members of the adoptee's birth family. These findings of Avery, the Maine Task Force on Adoption, and Feigleman and Silverman are consistent with the practice-based literature. As pointed out by Gritter (1989) and Chapman, Dorner, Silber & Winterberg (1987) as well as others, many adoptive parents feel a sense of helplessness because of their inability to help their adopted children connect with their biological origins.

The research makes evident that birth parents and adopted adults want access to identifying information, and that adoptive families support that access rather than feeling threatened by their children's needs and interest in their birth families. Other research, including that done by McRoy, Grotevant, and Ayers-Lopez (1994), demonstrates that benefits flow to all members of the triad when information is more freely shared and there is greater openness in relationships. Policies that facilitate connections between birth families and adopted adults and access to information have strong empirical and practice support.

References

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- McRoy, R. G., Grotevant, H. D. & Ayers-Lopez S. (1994). *Changing practices in adoption*. Austin, TX: Hogg Foundation for Mental Health.
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Carl Levin

U.S. Senator, Michigan

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 11, 1998

Contact: Tara Andringa 202-224-1471

tara_andringa@levin.senate.gov

Levin Testifies on Adoption Registry Bill Before House Committee
Bill facilitates voluntary, mutual contact between adult adoptees and birth parents

WASHINGTON — Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., will testify before the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources on Thursday in support of legislation which would facilitate voluntary, mutually desired contact between birth parents and adult adoptees. The Senate passed the legislation last November.

"I am deeply touched by the difficulties experienced by adult adoptees, birth parents and separated siblings who, often for many years and at great expense, have been seeking one another," Levin said today. "I am hopeful that the House will follow the Senate's lead in supporting this legislation which, at no expense to taxpayers, humanizes the process through which adult biological relatives who are looking for each other and who were separated by adoption, can make contact."

The National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry, which was co-authored by Levin and Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, in the Senate, permits the Secretary of Health and Human Services, at no net expense to the federal government, to facilitate voluntary, mutually sought contact between birth parents, adult adoptees over the age of 21, and adult siblings who, on their own initiative, both seek such contact.

Currently, over half of the states provide voluntary, mutually sought reunion facilitation. However, due to geographic restrictions, state-based systems have limited utility in cases of interstate adoption or with family members who have moved between states during the course of their lifetime. This legislation does not provide for the unsealing of adoption records. It gives the HHS Secretary the discretion to facilitate reunions only when both parties seek it and initiate contact with the registry.

Jo Anne Swanson, the Director of Post-Adoption Support Services in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and a birth mother who was reunited with her child 14 years ago, will testify before the Committee that "the National Mutual Voluntary Reunion Registry is reasonable, non-intrusive and uncomplicated. The Registry would provide a secure, discreet vehicle for siblings to be possibly matched with one another at a minimal cost emotionally and financially. If you don't want to participate, you simply will not register."

In a letter, Jim Rockwell, a 72 year-old adopted adult in Cornell, Michigan, praises the legislation: "The National Voluntary Reunion Registry creates a true registry in which two people, related by birth, may consent to know one another. Millions of people live with the pain and the harm of how adoptions were carried out in the past. This gives them an avenue." Rockwell was reunited with his birth family in 1986 after searching for 61 years. He was able to locate seven siblings across five states: Michigan, Wisconsin, Oregon, California and Texas.

Further praise comes from James Gritter, Child Welfare Supervisor for Catholic Charities, an adoption agency. "I believe the future of the institution of adoption is clearly tied to its handling of the past. If we are cavalier about the pain of our past clients, how can we gain their trust for the future? Clearly, decency demands that we bring relief to those hurting people whose reasonable pursuit of self-knowledge is thwarted by the vagaries of an antiquated system."

NATIONAL VOLUNTARY MUTUAL REUNION REGISTRY [OCT. 12, 1998]
Senate sponsors respond to Ways and Means Subc on Human Resources "talking points"

* The bipartisan National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry has been the subject of several hearings in the Senate and one in the House. It has passed the Senate 3 times.

* ***State passive reunion registries report that they cannot accommodate the overwhelming majority of biological relatives who are looking for one another because they are limited to the geographic boundaries of the state, including the different requirements of the state. People are born in one state and adopted in another and only half the states have a voluntary mutual consent registry. In New York, for example, their voluntary mutual consent registry is only available to persons who were both born and adopted in that state. Over the years, the 25 passive state registries have reported a match rate of between 2% - 8%. The congressionally authorized National Adoption Information Clearinghouse reports a passive registry match rate up to 10%.***

* ***One-parent reunions are allowed by all 25 passive state registries. All report that such reunions have not caused a problem and that they intend to continue such reunions. These states, including FL, LA, CA, ILL, SC, MD say their laws do not permit them to deny the consenting birth parent (95-98% of whom are birth mothers) the chance for mutual contact with an adult adoptee.***

* ***Abortions do not increase because of the existence of a registry or one-parent reunions. For example, the state of Utah has a passive voluntary mutual reunion registry almost identical to the National Registry; according to a proclamation issued by the Governor of Utah in 1997, Utah had the highest adoption rate and the lowest abortion rate. Studies show that the abortion rate is also low in many other registry states, as well in states with active search systems.***

* ***The National Registry, as is the case with many of the state registries, would not have to have access to sealed or closed records to make a match. According to the directors of the Florida Voluntary Mutual Registry and the Louisiana Voluntary Mutual Registry, sealed information is not accessed in order to make a match. Louisiana specifies that matches have been made since 1982 without the use of any sealed adoption information". Florida's registry director testified at the June 11th Subcommittee hearing that "We do not unseal records in Florida to determine if there is a match".***

The attached sample Soundex reunion registry application is what registrants are generally asked to provide, along with any supplemental information they may have about themselves and the other party. For example, according to the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, almost all states provide the adult adopted person "unidentifying" information about the birth parents such as social, ethnic, religious, educational, physical and other characteristics. This supplemental information is attached to the application along with ***proof of identity and a certified copy of the adoptees' amended and/or original birth certificate***. If sufficient matching information is not available to the registry, a match is not made.

* Adoptions in Great Britain ~~did not~~ decline due to changes in their adoption information laws. According to Social Work Professor John Triseliotis of the University of Edinburgh, the transfer of all step-parent adoptions to the Matrimonial court reduced the adoption count, ***on paper only***, by 50 percent. This information was included in testimony submitted to the Human Resources Subcommittee in connection with the June 11, 1998 hearing on the National Registry.

* State registries and adoption agencies say, due to limitations, they would refer their applicants to a National Registry to increase the chances of a match.

INTERNATIONAL SOUNDEX REUNION REGISTRY*Official Registration Form - Confidential*

MAIL TO: ISRR, P.O. BOX 2312, CARSON CITY, NV 89702

FOR OFFICE USE ONLYFILE _____ I
ENTRY _____ II

SN	S	DOB	DT	CN	BN	AN

PLEASE TYPE or PRINT LEGIBLY WITH BLACK INK

This registration is my FIRST ENTRY ☐ or an UPDATE ☐I AM THE: CHILD ☐ BIRTH PARENT ☐ SIBLING ☐ OTHER (explain) _____

PRESENT NAME _____

ADDRESS _____ CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

TELEPHONE HOME () _____ SOCIAL SECURITY # _____
NUMBER(S) WORK () _____ REFERRED BY _____**Information about the CHILD**Child is MALE ☐ FEMALE ☐

BIRTH DATE (Month/Day/Year) _____ TIME _____ AM PM BIRTHWEIGHT _____ lb _____ oz

HOSPITAL (Birth Place) _____ ATTENDING PHYSICIAN (or other) _____

CITY OF BIRTH _____ COUNTY _____ STATE _____

NAME GIVEN AT BIRTH _____

NAME GIVEN AT ADOPTION _____

ADOPTIVE PARENT'S NAMES _____

BIRTH CERTIFICATE #'S -- File # _____ Registrar # _____

IF THIS WAS A PLURAL BIRTH (Twins/Triplets, etc.), How many MALES? _____ How many FEMALES? _____

Were they separated by adoption? YES ☐ NO ☐ Their name(s) _____

COURT OF JURISDICTION _____ CITY _____ STATE _____

ATTORNEY OF RECORD _____ DATE OF FINAL DECREE _____

This Adoption was -- PRIVATE ☐ BY AN AGENCY ☐ SOCIAL WORKER/INTERMEDIARY _____

NAME OF PLACEMENT AGENCY _____ CITY _____ STATE _____

Information About the BIRTH PARENTS (at time of separation)**Birth Mother****Birth Father**

NAME(S)								
Maiden Name								
Used at time of birth								
Signed on Relinquishment/Consent								
BIRTH DATE	Age				Age			
BIRTH PLACE								
MARITAL STATUS								
RELIGION								
EDUCATION								
OCCUPATION								
MILITARY BRANCH								
ANCESTRY								
DESCRIPTION	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	HAIR	EYES	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	HAIR	EYES
OTHER CHILDREN								
PARENT'S NAMES								

REMARKS: (use separate sheet if needed)

I, the undersigned hereby give my permission to the International Soundex Reunion Registry to release this vital information to the person(s) for whom this search is conducted. I understand this permission is necessary for verification of identity, and my relationship to the missing person.

SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

ALTERNATIVE ADDRESS AND/OR PHONE _____

"THIS IS YOUR REGISTRY - YOUR CONTRIBUTION IS TAX DEDUCTIBLE"

THANK YOU!

Remarks by Senator Carl Levin

The U.S. Senate has demonstrated that it would like to help in alleviating the pain and struggle that adult birth relatives, separated by adoption, endure in their efforts to make contact with one another. It did so when it unanimously cleared and passed S. 1487, which authorizes the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to establish a National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry.

Passage of the National Registry would not have been possible without the steadfast leadership of Senator Larry Craig, an adoptive parent. Senator Craig's sensitivity, his commitment, his compassion and his clear understanding of this issue has enlightened all of the members of the Senate. Special thanks are also owed to Senator Mary Landrieu and Senator John McCain, also adoptive parents, for their unyielding support of this bill and their bipartisan spirit throughout the discussions on this issue.

We are all deeply touched by the difficulties experienced by adult adopted persons, birth parents and separated siblings who, often for many years and at great expense, have been seeking one another. Aside from the natural human desire to know one's roots and genetic heritage, there are other important reasons why many birth relatives seek to make contact with each other. Some are seeking a deeper sense of identity, some need vital information which may affect their own mental and physical health and some are facing momentous family decisions that require more knowledge about their heritage. Additionally, studies show that a substantial percentage of birth parents say they want to be available to their adult children, many relinquished at birth during a very different time, should they mutually desire to make contact. These sentiments have been expressed to my office over many, many years by individuals from all across America and during earlier Senate hearings on this issue.

We believe that the National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry, deals with these needs and emotions in a careful and sensitive way. The legislation permits the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, at no net expense to the federal government, to facilitate the voluntary, mutually requested exchange of identifying information that has been mutually consented to in a signed notarized statement, by the birth parent, adult adoptee 21 years or older or adult siblings.

Reasonable fees, established by taking into consideration, and not to exceed, the average charge of comparable services offered by States, may be collected for services provided under this proposal. Currently, over half the States provide for voluntary and mutual reunion facilitation. However, State-based systems are restricted, by nature, to the geographic boundaries of the State. Since we are a mobile society, that limitation reduces the utility of State-based systems. Adoptions are often started in one State but finalized in another. Additionally, the adoptee, birth parent or sibling may be a resident of several different States during their lifetimes.

This legislation does not address the issue of sealed adoption records; and, it is not intended to nullify or impede the progress of any related State activity relative to this issue. Finally, this legislation does not mandate, but simply gives the Secretary the discretion to facilitate voluntary, mutual reunions, if she so chooses.

Statement by Senator John McCain

This legislation would permit the Secretary of Health and Human Services, at no net expense to the Federal government, to facilitate the voluntary, mutually requested reunions of biological relatives who have been separated by adoption.

The National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry is intended to help reunite the hundreds of thousands of adult adoptees, birth parents and siblings who are searching for each other. Currently, the search can be very costly, cumbersome and futile. The national registry would help many individuals who were separated by adoption and are now searching for each other.

Some concerns have been raised that this legislation would infringe upon an individual's privacy, and that a National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry could result in the inappropriate disclosure of private, sensitive information. This is completely inaccurate. I and the other sponsors of this proposal, along with the Finance Committee have worked tirelessly to ensure that all the necessary safeguards have been included in this proposal to ensure that an individual's personal privacy is not violated in any manner.

Under the guidelines for the National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry established in this bill, one party could not search out another individual unless both parties were searching for one another. All parties involved would have to, on their own accord, voluntarily decide to participate in the registry. This proposal specifically requires that the registry only contain information necessary to facilitate a match, that the confidentiality of all consenting participants be protected and that no information be disclosed without prior, written consent from the individual.

The bill specifically requires that any computerized system created to implement this registry must not intrude on any existing data systems at the Department of Health and Human Services and must utilize appropriate methods to protect the privacy of information contained in the registry. In addition, it establishes criminal and financial penalties for potential abusers of the national registry.

Finally, the measure specifically states that this registry does not preempt any state laws relating to adoption and the confidentiality of adoption records. This legislation is not a mandate, has absolutely no cost to the federal government or taxpayers, and is completely voluntary. This important legislation will help thousands of Americans who want to learn about themselves and their birth relatives.

CARL LEVIN
MICHIGAN

RUSH!!!**United States Senate**

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2209

October 8, 1998

TO: Nicole Rabner, Office of the First Lady
FR: Jackie Parker, Office of Senator Carl Levin (224-9112)
RE: Follow-up to March 9, 1998 meeting with the First Lady regarding the
National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry

I wanted to alert you to the fact that Senator Levin will be calling the First Lady this afternoon to briefly discuss the National Registry. As you may know, Senator Specter, Chairman of the Labor, HHS, Education Subcommittee on Appropriations, included the National Registry in his manager's package.

I have attached for your perusal a 1-page summary and copy of the bill; the Child Welfare League of America endorsement; the compelling testimony of a distinguished member of the U.S. HHS Children's Bureau Expert Work Group and the U.S. State Department's Advisory Group on Intercountry Adoption, Professor Joan Hollinger, and a copy of Senator Levin's press release announcing the June 11, 1998 hearing on the National Registry before the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources.

As you will recall, the First Lady expressed her support of the National Registry during the March 9th White House discussions. The Senator is hopeful that HHS is on board as well.

Enclosures

New from

Carl Levin**U.S. Senator, Michigan**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 11, 1998

Contact: Tara Andringa 202-224-1471
tara_andringa@levin.senate.gov**Levin Testifies on Adoption Registry Bill Before House Committee***Bill facilitates voluntary, mutual contact between adult adoptees and birth parents*

WASHINGTON — Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., will testify before the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources on Thursday in support of legislation which would facilitate voluntary, mutually desired contact between birth parents and adult adoptees. The Senate passed the legislation last November.

"I am deeply touched by the difficulties experienced by adult adoptees, birth parents and separated siblings who, often for many years and at great expense, have been seeking one another," Levin said today. "I am hopeful that the House will follow the Senate's lead in supporting this legislation which, at no expense to taxpayers, humanizes the process through which adult biological relatives who are looking for each other and who were separated by adoption, can make contact."

The National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry, which was co-authored by Levin and Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, in the Senate, permits the Secretary of Health and Human Services, at no net expense to the federal government, to facilitate voluntary, mutually sought contact between birth parents, adult adoptees over the age of 21, and adult siblings who, on their own initiative, both seek such contact.

Currently, over half of the states provide voluntary, mutually sought reunion facilitation. However, due to geographic restrictions, state-based systems have limited utility in cases of interstate adoption or with family members who have moved between states during the course of their lifetime. This legislation does not provide for the unsealing of adoption records. It gives the HHS Secretary the discretion to facilitate reunions only when both parties seek it and initiate contact with the registry.

Jo Anne Swanson, the Director of Post-Adoption Support Services in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and a birth mother who was reunited with her child 14 years ago, will testify before the Committee that "the National Mutual Voluntary Reunion Registry is reasonable, non-intrusive and uncomplicated. The Registry would provide a secure, discreet vehicle for siblings to be possibly matched with one another at a minimal cost emotionally and financially. If you don't want to participate, you simply will not register."

In a letter, Jim Rockwell, a 72 year-old adopted adult in Cornell, Michigan, praises the legislation: "The National Voluntary Reunion Registry creates a true registry in which two people, related by birth, may consent to know one another. Millions of people live with the pain and the harm of how adoptions were carried out in the past. This gives them an avenue." Rockwell was reunited with his birth family in 1986 after searching for 61 years. He was able to locate seven siblings across five states: Michigan, Wisconsin, Oregon, California and Texas.

Further praise comes from James Gritter, Child Welfare Supervisor for Catholic Charities, an adoption agency: "I believe the future of the institution of adoption is clearly tied to its handling of the past. If we are cavalier about the pain of our past clients, how can we gain their trust for the future? Clearly, decency demands that we bring relief to those hurting people whose reasonable pursuit of self-knowledge is thwarted by the vagaries of an antiquated system."

Access to Identifying Information: What the Research Tells Us

*By Madelyn Freundlich, Executive Director
The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute*

One of the key adoption policy issues over the past several years has been the extent to which members of the adoption triad should have access to identifying information. The debate has raged both nationally—with the proposal currently pending in Congress for a National Voluntary Reunion Registry—and at the state level, where bills are being introduced to allow adopted adults to obtain their original birth certificates. Two arguments have frequently been raised to defeat such efforts: first, that birth parents and adopted adults do not need to have such information because they do not wish to be found by one another; and second, that adoptive parents adamantly oppose access by their adopted children to identifying information. The research clearly refutes the rhetoric of both of these arguments. The following summarizes this body of research and provides a solid basis for responding to efforts to mischaracterize the interests and desires of all members of the adoption triad.

1. The research is clear that birth parents and adopted adults do wish to be found by one another. In a comprehensive study of the issues involved in adoption, the Maine Department of Human Resources Task Force on Adoption found in 1989 that adoptees and birth parents wish, in overwhelming percentages, to be found by one another. Noting that it was "startled...to learn...how few people did not wish to be found," the Task Force reported that every birth parent who was surveyed [130 birth parents] wanted to be found by the child/adult they had placed for adoption and 95% of the adoptees [164 adoptees] who were surveyed expressed a desire to be found by their birth parents. Similarly, Paul Sachdev's 1991 study found that a substantial majority of birth mothers (85.5%) and adoptees (81.1%) supported access by adult adoptees to identifying information on their birth parents.

Practice-based knowledge further validates that birth parents and adoptees want to be found by

one another. Contrary to the assertion that birth parents move on with their lives and live in fear that the children they relinquished for adoption will intrude upon them, research and work with birth parents undertaken by Beck (1989), Demick and Wapner (1988) and Baran, Pannor and Sorosky (1976) uniformly find that birth parents do not forget the children they placed for adoption and express strong desires to be found by them; wonder whether they are alive and healthy; and find that the grief they experienced in having relinquished their children for adoption was intensified by the secrecy surrounding adoption and the walls the adoption system has erected against any contact.

2. Research demonstrates that adoptive parents support the exchange of information and contact between their adult adopted children and their birth families.

Rosemary Avery's 1996 research on the attitudes of adoptive parents in New York regarding access to identifying information found that 84% of the adoptive mothers and 73% of the adoptive fathers agreed or strongly agreed that an adult adoptee should be able to obtain identifying information on his or her birth parents. This result reflects higher levels of support than that found in Feigleman and Silverman's 1986 research on the attitudes of adoptive parents. That study—more than 10 years old—nevertheless found that 55% of the adoptive parents of American-born children supported legislation easing restriction on their children learning about their birth families and 66% of adoptive parents of internationally adopted children expressed their support. The Maine Department of Human Resources Task Force on Adoption found an even higher percentage of adoptive family support than did Avery. In its 1989 study, the Task Force found that 98% of the adoptive parents supported reunions between their adopted children and

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spelled out in legislation. As Senator Levin explained, the legislation simply instructs HHS to establish such a registry and provides that agency the authority and flexibility to implement the legislation effectively, as is customary with most legislation.

Interestingly, the three Senate cosponsors of this bill are all adoptive parents. Indeed, adoptive parents are increasingly encouraging their adult adopted children to search because they realize how essential this knowledge is to their child's mental health. A poignant letter from Michael E. Reagan, son of President Reagan, to Senator Levin and included in his written testimony, brings home the importance of such adoptive parent support. In part, the letter says "I believe wholeheartedly in your humane approach to facilitating the desires of adult adopted persons, birth parents, and separated siblings who seek to know one another...As we discussed during our meeting at your home a few years ago, my adoptive father, Ronald Reagan, supported my desire to meet my birth mother and helped me in my early efforts. When my father helped me, it was the greatest gift he ever gave to me."

Research confirms that the great majority of adoptive parents support their adult children's efforts to know more about and meet members of their birth families. Similarly, it confirms that birth parents and adult adoptees often wish to be found by one another (see article on page 4).

Action is now needed by the House of Representatives.

While the Senate approved this bill in 1989, 1991, 1994, and 1997, it has never been voted on in the House.

To access a copy of S. 1487, An Act to Establish a National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry, go to Thomas, Congress' Legislative Information Site, at <http://thomas.loc.gov>. In Thomas use the Quick Search Text of Bills 105th Congress function and search by bill number (S.1487).

To obtain a copy of the testimony from the June 11, 1998 House Subcommittee on Human Resources of the Committee on Ways and Means Hearing on Adoption Reunion Registries and Screening of Adults Working with Children, go to http://www.house.gov/ways_means/humres/hr-13wit.htm and click on the name of the witness whose testimony you would like to read.

continued from page 4

members of the adoptee's birth family. These findings of Avery, the Maine Task Force on Adoption, and Feigleman and Silverman are consistent with the practice-based literature. As pointed out by Gritter (1989) and Chapman, Dornier, Silber & Winterberg (1987) as well as others, many adoptive parents feel a sense of helplessness because of their inability to help their adopted children connect with their biological origins.

The research makes evident that birth parents and adopted adults want access to identifying information, and that adoptive families support that access rather than feeling threatened by their children's needs and interest in their birth families. Other research, including that done by McRoy, Grotevant, and Ayers-Lopez (1994), demonstrates that benefits flow to all members of the triad when information is more freely shared and there is greater openness in relationships. Policies that facilitate connections between birth families and adopted adults and access to information have strong empirical and practice support.

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Statement Submitted by
JOAN HEIFETZ HOLLINGER
Visiting Professor of Law, University of California, Berkeley
Editor & Principal Author, Adoption Law and Practice (1988-98)
Reporter, Uniform Adoption Act (NCCUSL 1994)

For the
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Human Resources

Concerning Support for S. 1487, National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry

June 11, 1998

Chairman Shaw and Members of the Subcommittee on Human Resources:

I am Joan Heifetz Hollinger, Visiting Professor of Law at the University of California, Berkeley since 1993 and, before that, Professor of Law at the University of Detroit in Michigan. Since 1989, I have served as the Reporter - academic consultant and drafter - for the Uniform Adoption Act approved for submission to the states in 1994 by the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws (NCCUSL) and endorsed in 1995 by the American Bar Association. As the author of many articles concerning the legal and psychosocial aspects of the parent-child relationship, and as the editor and principal author of the two volume treatise Adoption Law & Practice (1988-98), I am familiar with the legal and social history of adoption in this country, and especially with past and present policies on access to nonidentifying as well as identifying information about the parties to an adoption. I serve on the U.S. Children's Bureau Expert Work Group to draft Guidelines for Achieving Permanency for Children subject to the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 and on the U.S. State Department's Advisory Group on Intercountry Adoption. I am an active member of a number of children's advocacy organizations, an Honorary Member of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys, and a participant in the Donaldson Adoption Institute's multi-disciplinary study of ethical issues in adoption.

I appreciate this opportunity to present my views on S.1487, the National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry (NVMRR), a proposal that I have long-supported and whose enactment is long overdue. The proposed Voluntary Registry is a modest, uncomplicated, sensible and fair way to facilitate the voluntary and consensual sharing of identifying information between adult adoptees age 21 or older and their birth parents or between adult adoptees and their adult siblings. The Registry does not conflict with, but complements, existing state and federal adoption laws and policies. It is a humane response to the expressed desire of tens of thousands, and perhaps, hundreds of thousands of adopted individuals, who, increasingly with the support of their adoptive families, are eager to meet those birth parents and siblings who have expressed an interest in meeting them. As the growing body of research on the multiple benefits of post-adoption contact between members of adoptive and birth

families indicates (See research cited in Testimony of Madelyn Freundlich), the Registry will strengthen adoption by enabling many adopted individuals to fulfill what in our society is an understandable, pervasive, and normal desire to fill in the missing pieces in our personal histories.

The proposed Voluntary Registry is consistent with existing state laws and procedures that similarly allow the consensual release of identifying information, but are not uniform or national in scope, and are generally more cumbersome. These laws and procedures are analyzed in Chapter 13 of Adoption Law and Practice. The need for a national Registry to compensate for their deficiencies is discussed in the testimony of other supporters of S. 1487, including Professor Naomi Cahn of George Washington Law School. I simply want to emphasize that, because participation in the proposed federal Registry is purely voluntary and consensual, the Registry is not subject to the criticism that is often directed -- in my view, without justification -- at the confidential intermediary "search and consent" procedures that are now available in half the states.

The proposed Registry does not intrude on anyone's privacy because only those who want to know each other's identity can participate. Moreover, the Registry does not interfere with existing state laws concerning the confidentiality and sealing of adoption records. Contrary to what William Pierce of the NCPA suggests in his tirades against S. 1487, the proposed Registry does not require the unsealing of adoption records, the release of original birth certificates, or the distribution of personal information contained in social worker evaluations of birth or adoptive parents. The proposed Registry is no more "intrusive" on anyone's privacy than are the so-called "passive" registries that the vast majority of states have already enacted. However, because the proposed Registry is simpler to access and national in scope, it is likely to be more user-friendly than either the passive registries or the confidential intermediary services now found in many different versions in most states.

The proposed Registry is consistent with, and in many respects, more conservative than the provisions of the NCCUSL 1994 Uniform Adoption Act (UAA). The UAA protects confidentiality and individual desires for privacy. It is also responsive to the interests of those birth parents, adoptees, and adoptive parents who are eager to reveal their identities to each other. Upon mutual consent, a birth parent and an adoptive parent may learn each other's identity at the time of the adoptive placement, or at a later time, and may determine for themselves the extent to which they wish to maintain contact after the adoption is final. The Act does not prohibit post-adoption contact between birth and adoptive families, and explicitly provides that the validity of an adoption is not subject to challenge because of the existence of any agreement for post-adoption contact. A Mutual Consent Registry is established by Article 6 of the UAA. It provides that an adoptee who is 18 or older and a birth parent may mutually consent to share identifying information or to otherwise have contact with each other. *Consent is not required from both parents; the consent of an adoptee over 18, or of the adoptive parent of an adoptee under age 18, and the consent of ONE birth parent is sufficient to authorize the release of identifying information.* The UAA also provides for the mutual release of identifying information to siblings. Unless there is mutual consent by the relevant individuals OR a court finding that a

"compelling reason" warrants the disclosure, identifying information within confidential or sealed records is not to be disclosed. *As with the proposed federal Registry, however, there is no prohibition against sharing information that is available from a source other than a record or report deemed "confidential" by the UAA, even if that information is also contained within a confidential or sealed record or report.* In other words, if two adults - 18 or older under the UAA; 21 or older under the more conservative S.1487 - register their mutual willingness to know each other's identity, a "match" occurs and the parties can then decide on their own whether or not to meet or otherwise communicate with each other.

Although I continue to advocate for the enactment of the UAA by the states, I am not sanguine about the prospects for its widespread enactment during my lifetime. This is largely because of the difficulty of achieving consensus on the many different and controversial aspects of adoption which are addressed by the lengthy UAA. Among the many advantages of the proposed federal Registry is that it addresses a discrete and severable issue -- the consensual sharing of identifying information -- and does not become enmeshed in the dozens of other issues, including procedures governing a birth parent's consent to adoption and the rights of children to have their de facto family relationships recognize, that make it difficult for the comprehensive UAA to survive state legislative debates.

As indicated, the proposed federal Registry is a modest approach to a discrete adoption-related issue that deserves national attention. Yet, the Registry is by no means an isolated or single example of federal involvement in adoption policy. To the contrary, it is part of an ongoing history of federal child welfare policies that have influenced adoption practices since the earliest years of this century (e.g. the 1909 White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children; the creation of the Children's Bureau in 1912) and that, in the 1990s, have increasingly emphasized the importance of adoption as the best way to provide a permanent family for children who would otherwise not experience the benefits of growing up in a stable, loving home.

It is totally disingenuous for Mr. Pierce and others to characterize S.1487 as an "intrusion" upon the states' "exclusive" authority to enact their own adoption laws when federal involvement in adoption policy is expanding rapidly. Consider: (1) the inclusion of adoptive families within the Family and Medical Leave Act, (2) the authorization of tax credits for adoption-related expenses, (3) the expansion of medical and other kinds of assistance for adopted children with special needs, (4) the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) (1994, amended 1996) prohibition against delaying or denying the placement of a child for adoption on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the child or the prospective adoptive parent, (5) President Clinton's Adoption 2002 Initiative intended to double by the year 2002 the number of adoptions of children now languishing in foster care, (6) the recent amendments to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), (7) the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA), (8) the Adoption Opportunities Act, and (9) the continuing effort to ratify and implement the 1993 Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption. In this context, a proposal that respects the wishes of parties to an adoption and that promotes the long term well-being of the many children and families whose lives have been and will continue to

be altered by federal, as well as state, adoption policies, is a proposal that deserves your support.

The proposed federal Registry is humane because it is based on an understanding that the interests of the parties to an adoption are not static. They are likely to change over time. A birth parent who prefers confidentiality when he or she relinquishes a child may want to waive confidentiality 5, 10, or 20 years thereafter. Alternatively, a birth parent who, at the time of placement, wants to maintain contact with adoptive parents or an adoptee may later prefer to sever all contact with them. Adoptive parents who want to establish their new family's autonomy when the petition for adoption is approved may subsequently want to have contact with a birth parent or other members of their adopted child's birth family. Adoptees who were too young to express their preferences when they were adopted may be curious about their backgrounds, but never seek to learn their birth parents' identities. Other adoptees, as they grow older, may develop a keen desire to meet or know more about their birth parents. The proposed federal Registry, like many other laws that touch upon personal and familial relationships, wisely refrains from freezing people into any specific mold. Instead, it provides a simple procedure for those who wish to locate each other to do so.

The proposed Registry is also humane because it is consistent with increasingly well-established contemporary adoption practices, which, in many respects, are profoundly different from past practices. We may be on the verge of reversing the general decline in the number of adoptions which began twenty-five years ago. Among the many reasons for this anticipated increase in the rate and number of adoptions is the recognition that many, if not most birth parents, as well as a growing number of prospective adoptive parents, want to participate in the adoption process, want to share all kinds of information at the time of an adoptive placement, want to maintain some kind of contact with each other's families well after the formal adoption is approved by a court. We have much to learn about the long range effects of greater openness in adoptions, particularly on the children whose interests adoptions are intended to serve. Nonetheless, we cannot overlook the fact that the vast majority of public and private adoption agencies, as well as the vast majority of lawyers who specialize in adoption (See, for example, Statement of Mark McDermott on behalf of Academy of Adoption Attorneys), as well as a growing and increasingly articulate number of birth and adoptive parents and adopted individuals, are supportive of voluntary sharing of information -- identifying and nonidentifying.

An advantage of the proposed Registry is that it does not require any individual to "buy into" a particular view of adoption. It offers a choice that, until recently, has not been widely enough available. Moreover, it offers a choice that does not suppress the views of Mr. Pierce and the NCFA. Although the NCFA "speaks" for an ever smaller minority of adoption service providers, as others have demonstrated in their testimony, that minority view can easily coexist with a more humane approach to the desire of so many others to participate in and affirm a greater range of adoption options.

The ultimate value of the proposed Registry is that it is a balanced approach to the creation of reasonable and feasible national standards for the consensual release of information

by those whose lives are shaped by past and present adoption laws and policies. I am pleased to join the many individuals and organizations who have asked that you act favorably in support of the proposed National Voluntary Reunion Registry, as already approved by the Senate.

Excerpts from June 11, 1998 testimony and submitted statements to the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources regarding the National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry:

Jo Anne Swanson, reunited birth mother and Director of Post-Adoption Support Services in Michigan's Upper Peninsula told the Committee: "Not all adoptions in the 30's, 40's and 50's in the United States involved the happy, consensual, voluntary placement...while we tend to think of birth mothers as all being young, single mothers, many were older married mothers who lost children to adoption simply because of poverty, abandonment by their husbands, or even widowhood. Due to shoddy and inhumane policies, vast numbers of otherwise viable families were literally torn asunder, their children scattered to the four winds. Parents went to their graves not knowing what became of their children, and thousands of siblings were forever denied contact with their parents and even with one another...the National Registry would provide a secure, discreet vehicle for siblings to be possibly matched with one another at a minimal cost emotionally and financially. If you don't want to participate, you simply will not register."

Joan Heifetz Hollinger, Author, Adoption Expert and Visiting Professor of Law, University of California wrote: "The National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry is a proposal that I have long-supported and whose enactment is long overdue. It is modest, uncomplicated, sensible and a fair way to facilitate the voluntary and consensual sharing of identifying information.... The Registry does not conflict with, but complements, existing state and federal adoption laws and policies. It is a humane response to the expressed desire of tens of thousands, and perhaps, hundreds of thousands of adopted individuals, who, increasingly with the support of their adoptive families are eager to meet those birth parents and siblings who have expressed an interest in meeting them. As the growing body of research on the multiple benefits of post-adoption contact between members of the adoptive and birth families indicates {See research cited in Testimony of Madelyn Freundlich of the Evan B. Donaldson Institute}, the Registry will strengthen adoption by enabling many adopted individuals to fulfill what in our society is an understandable, pervasive, and normal desire to fill in the missing pieces in our personal histories."

Michael E. Reagan, Adoptee, Author, Talk Show Host of Sherman Oaks, California wrote: "....I am an adoptee who has had the great privilege of meeting my biological brother and sister and learning about the life-time of loving and caring by my birth mother, who died several years prior to my reunion with my siblings. As discussed with Senator Levin during a meeting at his home a few years ago, my adoptive father, Ronald Reagan, supported my desire to meet my birth mother and helped me in my early efforts. When my father helped me, it was the greatest gift he ever gave to me. It is my hope that the National Registry will become law. I would have used such a registry myself, and it has become apparent to me that my birth mother would have also."

Dr. Rickie Solinger, Historian, Author and Visiting Scholar, University of Colorado wrote to the Committee: "....the federal government took a vibrant role in establishing and enforcing

adoption practices -- in fact, in creating the adoption arena -- in the late 1940s and early 1950s in the United States. Not surprisingly, many adoptees and birth parents of that era now support the establishment of a Federal registry to facilitate their desire for contact with one another. One can surely argue that since the federal government was so crucially instrumental in constructing the adoption experience of this cohort, the federal government has a role to play in facilitating the voluntary, mutually requested exchange of identifying information for the purpose of achieving reunions".

Naomi Cahn, Associate Professor of Family Law, George Washington University School of Law: My husband had maintained for the first thirteen years that he and I knew each other that he had no interest in finding out about his biological parents. He loves his family, and felt no need to find out more about his past. Then, when I was pregnant with our first child, he searched and found out the name of his birth mother, Dorothy Louise Simpson; but he also found out that she had died of a brain tumor while searching for him. She had registered with one organization's registry, but, of course, since my husband had not registered, they never found each other. She had also written to the agency which had handled the adoption, but again, had received no information about my husband. My husband was stunned to discover that his birth mother had searched unsuccessfully for him. The National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry very likely would have facilitated my husband and his birth mother in their search for one another prior to her passing."

Amy M. Silberberg, Adoptee and Adoptive Parent of Afton, Minnesota wrote: "There are thousands of adoption triad members in my home state of Minnesota and across this Nation whose hearts are hopeful because of this hearing on a measure which speaks to our need to address certain compelling and unknown aspects of our lives. As an adoptive parent, a lawyer practicing in the area of adoption, and reunited adoptee, I have a unique perspective. I strongly support the National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry. I urge the members of the Subcommittee to look beyond the rhetoric and actively support the passage of the National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry. To the members of the U.S. Senate who crafted this compassionate and life-saving legislation, thank you for looking beyond the rhetoric."

James Gitter, Author and Child Welfare and Adoption Supervisor for Catholic Human Services of Traverse City, MI wrote the Committee: "If we want adoption to thrive, it must have the flexibility to meet individual needs. The need that is being addressed in the National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry is formidable. Although we are a modest-sized agency, hardly a week goes by without a call from a birth parent or adopted person expressing interest in the people on the other side of the adoption equation. Rest assured these are not peculiar people on the brink of bizarre behavior. Hardly, I find that they are well-meaning, average people expressing a normal, understandable interest in the people who are part of their life stories. I am pretty sure that if you or I wore their shoes, we would have the same sort of reasonable curiosity and concern about our genetic relatives. Although the issues of adoption seem to have remarkable powers to stir the emotions, the National Registry strikes me as one of those pleasing situations where inflammatory politics can be put aside and common sense can prevail. Earlier I called the idea of a National Registry "modest," and I mean that. As you well realize, the National Registry

bill is far from a radical proposal. The fact that the registry idea draws criticism from very conservative and very liberal groups suggests to me that it resides right in the sweet spot of effective compromise."

Jim Rockwell, 72 year old adoptee residing in Cornell, MI and cofounder of adoption support groups in Texas and Michigan wrote: The National Registry creates a true registry in which people, related by birth, may consent to know one another, many of whom live in pain because of how adoptions were carried out in the past. I was adopted into a loving family in Michigan very long ago. In 1986 I found the family to whom I was born after being separated from them for 61 years. I found six sisters and a brother still living who were located in five different states, Michigan, Wisconsin, Oregon, California and Texas. I subsequently learned I was the last born of 14 children. One of my sisters told me that she had searched for me, her little brother, for over forty years, and that my mother died of TB about one year after my birth."

Helen C. Ervin, Senior Social Worker for Adoptions, Children's Home Society of Florida: "The Children's Home Society of Florida serves all 67 counties in Florida and has been in existence continuously since 1902. During that time, over 30,000 children have been placed in adoptive homes by the Children's Home Society. Many of them return each year as adults seeking assistance in establishing contact with their biological family. Even though we are able to assist most of these individuals, there are many others we are unable to help because of the mobility of their birth family throughout the country. We also receive calls almost weekly from persons whose adoption was not handled by our agency or even in Florida, seeking our help in locating biological family members because they do not know where else to turn. We attempt to assist these people, but often there is little we can do..... The existence of a National Registry would make reunion feasible for more people. The rights of individuals would be protected by making reunions possible only with the mutual consent of both parties. It is clear that state adoption registries are only reaching a few people. The establishment of a national registry would provide for a uniform program available to everyone."

Ann Sullivan, Director of Adoption Services of the Child Welfare League of America, which has formally endorsed the National Registry, said: "I would urge members of Congress to look at the research that has been summarized by Madeleine Freundlich of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. It shows overwhelmingly that large numbers of adult adoptees, birth parents, and an increasing number of adoptive parents really do want and need to find each other. I get calls literally every week in my office from people who have been tortured, it seems, throughout their whole lives. They have struggled with this lack of information about their backgrounds, and I would hope that the committee would be guided by the research that's available for the record on this issue."

Jamie Lee Curtis, Adoptive parent, Author on adoption, Actress wrote: I support the National Registry. I have always believed that my children's birth heritage is an integral part of

their lives, and one that in adulthood should be explored if they so desire."

Robert E. Kerns [Adoptee, Foster Child], Chairman, Louisiana Adoption Advisory Board, comprised of adoption professionals, adoption agencies, adopters, birth parents, adoptive parents and adoption support groups said to the Committee: It is our view that the National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry will effectively facilitate a process for adults separated by adoption to address issues of search and reunion and to share the medical and genetic information to which there birthright entitles them. Current statutes preventing exchange of information among adults in the adoption triad were enacted years ago within a social and moral content that was far different than the one that prevails today. Presently, over half of the states have voluntary mutual reunion registries with a match rate that ranges from 2% - 10%. These rates are low because of the limitations and restrictions of state-based registries. The National Registry resolves this problem and it does so without preempting any state activity in this area.

David Wilson wrote: Adoptee, Principal, New Frontiers Communications Consulting, Arlington, Virginia: I sincerely hope that sharing my personal experience will help illustrate the importance of establishing a national voluntary reunion registry Nearly 31 years go to this day, I was adopted by my parents Roy and Ruth Ann Wilson. I have always known I was adopted and have never questioned that the Wilsons -- including my three sisters, Liz, Tabi, and Teresa -- are my real family. In fact, when my dad suffered a heart attack last year, my sisters urged me to have MY heart checked out because I may have inherited his congenital heart problem. Momentary lapses like this one exemplify how close my family is, even though we don't share a similar genetic code. When I decided to seek out my birth parents eight years ago, I never intended to meet them face to face, let alone establish a relationship. I merely wanted to thank them for giving me a chance by bringing me into this world. To some people a simple "thank you" might seem silly. But to me, my birth parents gave me the greatest and most precious gift - the gift of life.

4.

SOME ENDORSEMENTS — NATIONAL VOLUNTARY MUTUAL REUNION REGISTRY

Child Welfare League of America
 Catholic Counseling Services of Catholic Charities Diocese of Dallas
 Catholic Conference [80 agencies that facilitate adoption]
 Catholic Human Services, Inc.
 Catholic Social Services of Cincinnati
 Children's Home Society of Florida
 Children's Home of Kentucky
 Catholic Community Services, Maternity & Adoption
 Associated Catholic Charities of New Orleans
 American Academy of Adoption Attorneys
 Methodist Mission Home of Texas
 Pennsylvania Adoption Legislation Coalition
 Holt International Children's Services
 Louisiana Adoption Advisory Board
 Adopt a Special Kid
 Adopt Older Kids
 Open Door Society of Massachusetts
 Adoption Rhode Island
 Adoption Knowledge Affiliates
 Adoptees' Birthrights Committee of Louisiana
 Volunteers of American Healing Hearts Support Group
 Volunteers of America Child Placing Adoption

Michael E. Reagan, Adoptee, Author, Talk Show Host, Sherman Oaks, CA
Joan Heifetz Hollinger, Adoption Expert/Author, Member, U.S. Children's Bureau Expert Work Group on Adoption & Safe Families Act of 1997; Member, U.S. State Dept Advisory Group on Intercountry Adoption, Visiting Prof of Law, Univ of CA, Berkeley
Jo Anne Swanson, Birth parent, Founder & Director, Post-Adoption Support Services of MI
Dr. Rickie Solinger, Historian, Author and Visiting Scholar, Univ of CO, Boulder
Mark T. McDermott, Adoptive Parent, Legislative Chair, American Academy of Adoption Attorneys
Nancy M. Newman, Esq., Adoptee, Child Welfare Advocate, Member Pennsylvania Adoption Reform Movement
Jamie Lee Curtis, Adoptive Parent, Author, Actress, Santa Monica, CA
David Wilson, Adoptee, Adoption Advocate, Principal, New Frontiers Communications, VA
Amy M. Silberberg, Adoptee, Adoptive Parent, Adoption Reform Movement of Afton, Minn
Dr. David Hodgson, Birth Father, Author, Adoption Support Group, Gaithersburg, MD

States with passive voluntary mutual reunion registries:

Alabama
Arkansas
California
Colorado
Delaware
Florida
Idaho
Illinois
Indiana
Iowa
Louisiana
Maine
Maryland
Massachusetts
Nevada
New Hampshire
New Mexico
New York
Ohio
Oregon
South Carolina
South Dakota
Texas
Utah

Adoptees seek national search registry

State programs called inadequate, but critics fear privacy would be violated

By Cheryl Wetzstein
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Adoptee Jim Rockwell first learned of his 13 birth siblings at the age of 61 through what he calls "pure dumb luck."

"I walked into the county clerk's office, asked for my [birth] information and the dear, dear lady ... gave me everything," recalls Mr. Rockwell, of Cornell, Mich., of the incident more than a decade ago. "She said she thought at my age, I had the right to know."

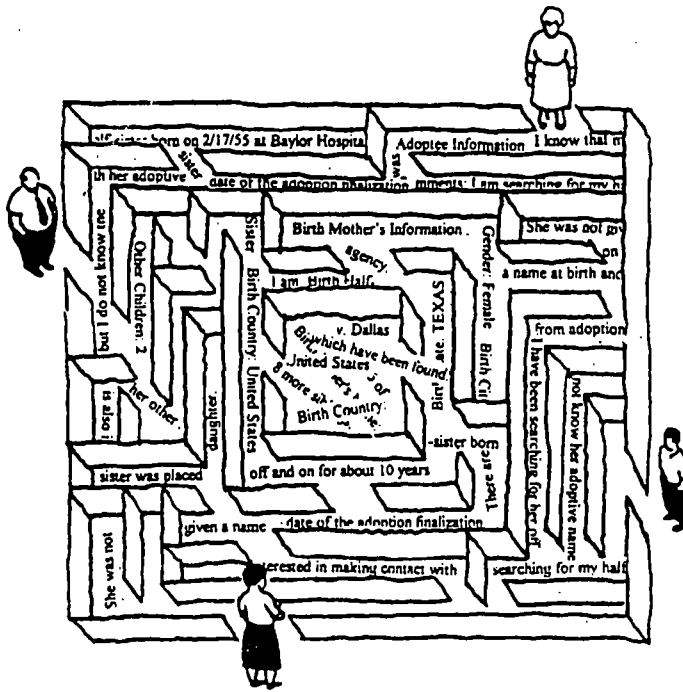
Without the clerk's extraordinary decision to hand him his birth data, Mr. Rockwell is sure he would never have found his siblings, who live in four other states. His adoptive parents had died before he decided to search for his birth family, and he later learned that a birth sister had hunted in vain for him for 40 years.

Mr. Rockwell, 72, supports a National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry, proposed by Sen. Carl Levin, Michigan Democrat. It would create a way for "two people related by birth" to learn of one another if both parties consent, Mr. Rockwell says.

No one knows for sure how many adoptees are in the United States, but the best estimates put the number at about 6 million. Between 15 percent and 25 percent of adoptees and birth parents are believed to actively "search" for family members at some point in their lives, says a spokeswoman at the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse.

Most searches are hampered, however, by gaps in basic information about the birth and adoption.

Twenty-eight states now run their own registries to help searchers find each other, according to the nonprofit National Council for Adoption (NCA). Eleven other states, including Virginia, offer alternate search options such as talking to a "confidential intermediary," who can search records



A national registry "would help with the unimaginable challenge of searching the entire nation for a relative."

—Sen. Larry E. Craig

for someone. The District opens records only by court order.

But many adoptees and birth parents complain that registry rules and the lack of available information make matches nearly impossible. Florida's registry, for instance, has made 125 matches in 16 years—fewer than eight a year.

Mr. Levin says the proposed national registry would collect notarized data filed by adult adoptees, birth parents and birth siblings from all states. When information matched, the registry would notify the registered parties.

The registry would be supported by "reasonable" user fees and be handled by the Department of Health and Human Services at "no net cost" to the federal government, Mr. Levin adds. It wouldn't open sealed records, wouldn't match people who aren't registered and would punish anyone who misused confidential data.

A national registry would "help with the unimaginable challenge of searching the entire nation for a relative," adds Sen. Larry E. Craig, Idaho Republican and co-sponsor of the registry bill, which passed

the Senate in November. Rep. Charles E. Schumer, New York Democrat, has introduced a similar bill in the House.

But Mr. Levin, who has been promoting a registry for 19 years, has always met with resistance:

• Some adoption experts say the system would be unnecessary. Most state registries "work rather well," lawyer Robert C. Robinson told a House subcommittee hearing in June on the bill.

• Rep. Thomas J. Bliley Jr., Virginia Republican, and Rep. James L. Oberstar, Minnesota Democrat—both adoptive parents—insist that the registry would lead to privacy violations and unsolicited reunions. If one birth parent was found, he or she could "out" the other parent, says Mr. Bliley.

• Mr. Oberstar also warns that by weakening "the fundamental right of privacy for birth parents," a national registry could "lead to an increase in abortion."

Registry supporters say no one can guarantee birth parents that they'll never be found, and the idea that a registry would drive pregnant women to abortion hasn't been backed by hard data.

Women are likely to choose abortion over a "closed" adoption, but not over an "open" adoption, says Jo Anne Swanson, a registry supporter who runs a post-adoption support service in Wetmore, Mich.

This is because open adoption creates an avenue for future communication between the birth mother and the adoptee, she says.

Maureen Hogan, executive director of Adopt a Special Kid, notes that Kansas and Alaska, the nation's only open-records states, have higher-than-average adoption rates, but lower-than-average abortion rates. "It would appear that a culture of openness around adoption may encourage people to choose adoption," she says.

Mrs. Swanson says some registry critics worry it would unearth

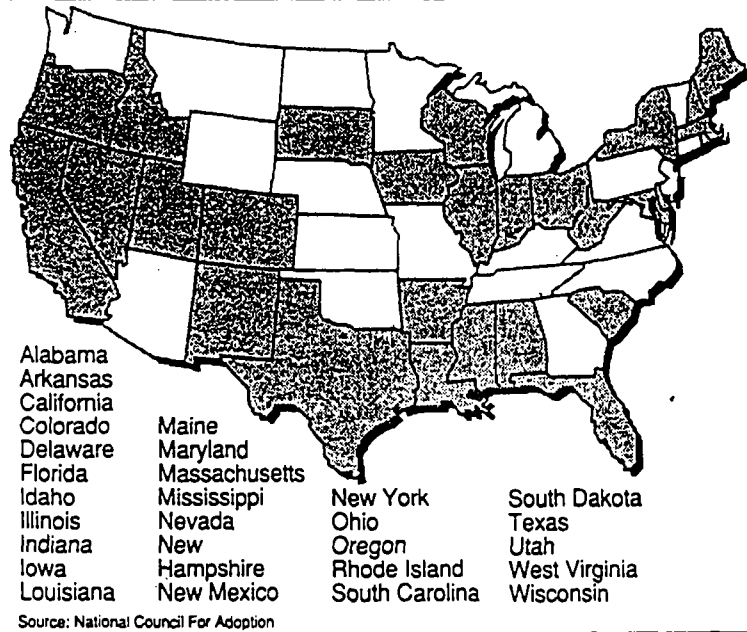
The Washington Times

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19, 1998

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REGISTRY ROSTER

Twenty-eight states run "mutual consent" reunion registries to help adoptees and birth parents find each other.



Alabama
Arkansas
California
Colorado
Delaware
Florida
Idaho
Illinois
Indiana
Iowa
Louisiana

Maine
Maryland
Massachusetts
Mississippi
Nevada
New
Hampshire
New Mexico

New York
Ohio
Oregon
Rhode Island
South Carolina

South Dakota
Texas
Utah
West Virginia
Wisconsin

Source: National Council For Adoption

The Washington Times

Rep. James L. Oberstar says a national registry could weaken the "fundamental right of privacy for birth parents," leading to more abortions.

unethical and illegal acts committed by agencies and others, especially in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.

"Many children were literally sold like chattel to the highest bidders," Mrs. Swanson told the House subcommittee hearing.

One "notorious Tennessee baby seller," who was investigated by the Senate in 1955, admitted selling more than 1,000 babies across the nation between 1939 and 1950, she said. A national registry could help these searchers find each other.

Privacy and confidentiality rules "may indeed have covered up crimes," says Bill Pierce, president of the NCFA, a longtime opponent of a national registry.

But the registry's "No. 1" problem would be its erosion of the privacy that birth mothers have been promised, he says.

During World War II, explains Mr. Pierce, "many married women got pregnant while their husbands were overseas." These women, who gave the children up for adoption, "want to keep their privacy from their husbands," he says, adding that there are other personal reasons why birth mothers would not want to be found by adopted offspring.

Mr. Levin's registry is also opposed by adoptees who believe it would subvert their efforts to get adoption records opened.

"We're just pretty sure that [the national registry] is going to be

used, as it has on the state level; to beat open-records advocates over the head and say 'This is enough, back off,'" says Shea Grimm, a leader of Bastard Nation, an adoptee group working for open records.

Some adoptees suggest that Congress help searchers by publicizing the nonprofit, volunteer-run International Soundex Reunion Registry (ISRR), which was founded in 1975 by an adoptee searching for her birth family.

The number of people registered in the ISRR is "in the six figures" and more than 1,000 new applications are processed each month, says a volunteer in the registry's Carson City, Nevada, office.

In 1997, the ISRR had 603 confirmed matches, says the volunteer, adding: "We have some birth moms who are in their 90s — they just won't give up."

But while the policy debates rage, the time for searching is coming to a close, especially for anyone adopted before 1950.

Brooklyn executive and adoptee Jonathan Marin, 54, recently ended a 30-year search for his birth parents. "It's probably too late," he says. "People would be in their 70s and 80s. If they're alive, they're probably ... in Florida," he says half-jokingly.

Mr. Marin prefers opening adoption records over a federal national registry. However, if such a registry existed today, he says he would sign up — immediately.

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The Washington Times

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19, 1998

URGENT

Total Pages: 4

LRM ID: MNB72

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET
Washington, D.C. 20503-0001

Monday, November 10, 1997

LEGISLATIVE REFERRAL MEMORANDUM

TO: Legislative Liaison Officer - See Distribution below
FROM: Janet R. Forsgren (for) Assistant Director for Legislative Reference
OMB CONTACT: Melissa N. Benton
PHONE: (202)395-7887 FAX: (202)395-6148
SUBJECT: OMB Request for Views on S1487 A bill to establish a National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry
DEADLINE: 3:00 p.m. Monday, November 10, 1997

In accordance with OMB Circular A-19, OMB requests the views of your agency on the above subject before advising on its relationship to the program of the President. Please advise us if this item will affect direct spending or receipts for purposes of the "Pay-As-You-Go" provisions of Title XIII of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990.

COMMENTS: The Senate passed S. 1487 on Saturday, November 8, by Unanimous Consent. Please advise by the deadline if you have any problems with the bill.

DISTRIBUTION LIST

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RESPONSE TO LEGISLATIVE REFERRAL MEMORANDUM

If your response to this request for views is short (e.g., concur/no comment), we prefer that you respond by e-mail or by faxing us this response sheet. If the response is short and you prefer to call, please call the branch-wide line shown below (NOT the analyst's line) to leave a message with a legislative assistant.

You may also respond by:

- (1) calling the analyst/attorney's direct line (you will be connected to voice mail if the analyst does not answer); or
- (2) sending us a memo or letter

Please include the LRM number shown above, and the subject shown below.

TO: Melissa N. Benton Phone: 395-7887 Fax: 395-6148
Office of Management and Budget
Branch-Wide Line (to reach legislative assistant): 395-7362

FROM: _____ (Date)
 _____ (Name)
 _____ (Agency)
 _____ (Telephone)

The following is the response of our agency to your request for views on the above-captioned subject:

_____ Concur

_____ No Objection

_____ No Comment

_____ See proposed edits on pages _____

_____ Other: _____

_____ FAX RETURN of _____ pages, attached to this response sheet

FILE s1487.es

S 1487 ES
105th CONGRESS
1st Session

AN ACT

To establish a National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry.
[Italic->] Be it enacted by the Senate and House of
Representatives of the United States of America in Congress
assembled, (<-Italic]

SECTION. 1. NATIONAL VOLUNTARY MUTUAL REUNION REGISTRY.

Part E of title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 670 et
seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

SEC. 479A. NATIONAL VOLUNTARY MUTUAL REUNION REGISTRY.

(a) EXCHANGE OF MUTUALLY REQUESTED IDENTIFYING INFORMATION- The
Secretary, in the discretion of the Secretary and provided that
there is no net cost to the Federal Government, may use the
facilities of the Department of Health and Human Services to
facilitate the voluntary, mutually requested exchange of
identifying information that has been mutually consented to, by an
adult adopted individual who is 21 years of age or older with--
(1) any birth parent of the adult adopted individual; or
(2) any adult sibling who is 21 years of age or older, of
the adult adopted individual,

if all such persons involved have, on their own initiative,
consented by a signed notarized statement to the exchange of such
identifying information.

(b) REQUIREMENTS- The Secretary shall ensure that a National
Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry established under this section
(in this section referred to as the 'Registry') meets the following
requirements:

(1) CENTRALIZED CAPACITY- The Registry provides a
centralized nationwide capacity for the information described
in subsection (a) and utilizes appropriately designed computer
and data processing methods to protect the privacy of the
information contained in the Registry, and does not intrude on
any other data system maintained by the Department of Health
and Human Services.

(2) ESTABLISHMENT OF PROCEDURES- The Registry complies with
procedures established by the Secretary that provide that--

(A) only information necessary to facilitate a match
shall be contained in the Registry and the Registry shall
not attempt to make contact for the purpose of facilitating
a reunion with any individual who is not entered into or
participating in the Registry;

(B) to the maximum extent feasible, the confidentiality
and privacy rights and interests of all parties
participating in the Registry are protected; and

(C) information pertaining to any individual that is
maintained in connection with any activity carried out
under this section shall be confidential and not be
disclosed for any purpose without the prior, written,
informed consent of the individual with respect to whom
such information applies or is maintained.

(c) REASONABLE FEES- Reasonable fees, established by taking into
consideration, and not to exceed, the average charge of comparable
services offered by States, may be collected for services provided
under this section.

(d) PENALTY FOR VIOLATION-

(1) FINE AND IMPRISONMENT- Any individual or entity that is
found to have disclosed or used confidential information in
violation of the provisions of this section shall be subject to
a fine of \$5000 and imprisonment for a period not to exceed 1
year.

(2) NONAPPLICABILITY OF SECTION 3571 OF TITLE 18, UNITED
STATES CODE- The provisions of section 3571 of title 18, United

(e) NO PREEMPTION- Nothing in this section invalidates or limits any law of a State or of a political subdivision of a State concerning adoption and the confidentiality of that State's sealed adoption record policy.'

Passed the Senate November 8, 1997.

Attest:

Secretary.

105th CONGRESS

1st Session

AN ACT

To establish a National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry.

March 5, 1998

MEMORANDUM FOR HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

RE: Meeting with Senator Carl Levin
FROM: Nicole Rabner

You are scheduled to meet with Senator Carl Levin to discuss his proposal to create an adoption registry -- a centralized computer network to facilitate voluntary reunions of adopted persons with their birth parents and other members of their birth families. As you will recall, you spoke with Senator Levin about this issue in the context the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. Senator Levin had attached this controversial proposal to the Senate bill, thereby stalling congressional action. After his conversation with you, he removed his proposal as an obstacle to the overall passage of the bill.

As you know, Bill Pierce of the National Council for Adoption is a primary opponent of this measure, arguing that such a registry would raise serious issues surrounding privacy in adoption. He believes -- and various Members of Congress have agreed -- that potential access between birth parent and adoptee will have a negative affect on adoption. Senator Levin argues that during the two decades in which he has been trying to pass this legislation, Bill Pierce has waged a smear campaign on him personally and has misrepresented the intent of the registry he proposes.

In late December of 1997, Senator Levin met with Secretary Shalala and other HHS staff on this issue. HHS reports that it was a very cordial meeting, in which the Senator plead his case, arguing for strong Administration support, and the Secretary listened. Shalala promised at the time that HHS would conduct a review of this issue and report back. This review is still underway. No formal Administration has been taken on this issue recently; in October of 1994, however, Secretary Shalala sent a letter to Congress signaling that the Administration had no objection to the Levin proposal, and that, if enacted, HHS would do its best to ensure that the privacy concerns were addressed. A hearing in the House of Representatives -- where the opposition is strongest -- is scheduled for this spring.

The goal for this meeting is to listen to Senator Levin and to signal that we will keep abreast of the review at HHS. Senator Levin will underscore the bipartisan support that this bill enjoys. Please note that Senator Levin -- through his congressional career -- has been an adoption advocate, advancing, for example, tax credits, Medicaid coverage, and subsidies for special needs adoptions.

Attached please find: (1) the HHS briefing for Secretary Shalala for her recent meeting with Senator Levin; (2) a letter from Secretary Shalala to Senator Dingell on this issue; (3) remarks by Senators Levin and McCain; (3) a position paper from Bill Pierce; and (4) the legislation.

Meeting Participants

The First Lady
Senator Levin
Jackie Parker, Senator Levin's Office
Melanne Verveer
Nicole Rabner
Carol Williams, HHS

**BRIEFING FOR SECRETARY SHALALA,****12/30/97****DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES****Office of the Assistant Secretary
for Legislation**

Washington, D.C. 20201

December 18, 1997

TO: The Secretary
Through: DS ____
COS ____
ES ____

FROM: Richard J. Tarplin *RT by MB*
Assistant Secretary for Legislation

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH SENATOR LEVIN
Tuesday, December 30, 1997
11:00 AM to 11:30 AM

CONGRESSIONAL PARTICIPANTS

Senator Carl Levin (D-MI)

DEPARTMENT PARTICIPANTS

Olivia Golden, Assistant Secretary for Children and Families
Carol Williams, Associate Commissioner, Children's Bureau
Mary Bourdette, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Legislation

BACKGROUND

Senator Levin has requested this meeting to discuss his proposal for an adoption registry. For nearly two decades, Senator Levin has been trying to pass legislation to create a National Voluntary Reunion Registry. The legislation is intended to establish, at HHS, a national program to facilitate voluntary reunions of adopted persons with their birth parents and other members of their birth families through a centralized computer network. This is a very controversial measure centering on the complex issues surrounding privacy in adoption. While the provisions do not open sealed adoption records, some adoption advocates believe that potential

access between birth parent and adoptees will have a negative affect on adoption.

Most recently, Senator Levin's provisions were incorporated into the adoption bill introduced by Senators Chafee and Rockefeller. There has always been strong opposition to this measure, however, and several Senators threatened to hold up the adoption bill unless the Levin provisions were dropped. In order to help secure Senate passage of the adoption bill, the Administration joined others in requesting that Senator Levin remove his provisions from the bill. After a call from the First Lady, and an agreement that the Senate would consider the measure separately and the House would hold hearings on it, Senator Levin agreed to remove the adoption registry provisions from the Adoption and Safe Families Act. The adoption bill then was passed by both houses and signed by the President and Senator Levin's bill, S. 1487, was passed by the Senate by unanimous consent.

The House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources also agreed to schedule a hearing early next year on S. 1487. Subcommittee Chairman Shaw opposes S. 1487 and several other members, including Representatives Bliley (R-VA) and Oberstar (D-MN), the co-chairs of the House Adoption Caucus, plan to testify against the Levin measure.

You should know that similar negotiations have occurred on the Levin provisions in the context of other legislative battles. In 1994, for example, he attached his provisions to several other bills and sparked similar controversies as a result. It was in the context of the Disadvantaged Minority Health Improvement Act in 1994, that we sent a letter (Attachment A) to Chairman Dingell (D-MI) indicating our general support for the objectives of Senator Levin's bill.

Nevertheless, ACF has had the following long-standing concerns about the Levin measure.

ACF CONCERNS ABOUT THE ADOPTION REGISTRY PROPOSAL

- o The decision to facilitate contact between adoptees and their birth parents is one that requires careful consideration by and emotional preparation of all parties. This process should be supported by appropriate clinical staff. HHS lacks appropriate staff, facilities and infrastructure to be able to support this proposal. This is, and should remain, a State function.
- o Federal law does not govern adoptions. Forty-six States have adoption registries that facilitate voluntary location of birth families and adoptees. These registries facilitate information exchange among persons where the adoption has occurred within a State. The type and amount of information varies greatly from State to State. Federal involvement in a voluntary registry would place the federal government in a new role in an area that has traditionally been governed by the States

- o Finally, the proposal states that the Department, "at no net expense to the Federal Government, may use the facilities...to facilitate the voluntary, mutually requested reunion...." It is doubtful that this can be done "at no net expense."

DISCUSSION:

Senator Levin recognizes that States operate registries, but he is concerned about the ability to facilitate reunions where the placement has been made across State lines or where the parties have moved from the area with original jurisdiction over the adoption.

Senator Levin will push you to support House passage of his legislation, even though it is unlikely to gain the approval of the Ways and Means Subcommittee. It may be helpful to have a frank discussion with the Senator about our concerns with his legislation, and offer suggestions about other activities that we could do to address this difficult issue. There needs to be a dialogue among States and advocates regarding the best approach to achieving the Senator's goal. Possible actions include a consultation process, convening a meeting among experts to develop recommendations, and a pilot among States which are willing to participate. Each activity would allow us to identify positive efforts that could be taken by the federal government in this area.

ATTACHMENTS

Tab A: S. 1487, National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry
Tab B: Letter to Representative Dingell, October 3, 1994



FROM BILL PIERCE

TALKING POINTS ON LEVIN-CRAIG NATIONAL ADOPTION REGISTRY

Section 205 of S. 1195 would create a national adoption registry under the control of the Department of Health and Human Services. NCFA opposes the intent of this provision for a number of reasons.

1. This a matter reserved to the states. Adoption records and proceedings are part of family law which is reserved very clearly to the states.
2. It is unnecessary. At last count, 48 states had already taken legislative or regulatory action to allow access to state adoption records under mechanisms and terms the states have deemed appropriate.
3. This could undermine privacy. This provision could lead to the federal government undermining the confidentiality of women who have made the difficult decision to plan an adoption, of families who have adopted and of adult adoptees.
4. Who pays the expenses? Many previous versions of this provision were unfunded mandates on the states where these records are kept.
5. Even HHS has opposed this provision in the past. In a Nov. 12, 1991 letter to Sen. Edward Kennedy, Secretary of HHS Louis Sullivan opposed the idea of a national registry because it was a matter best left to the states and fears of violating confidentiality. We have seen no evidence that the current Secretary of HHS or the Administration support this.
6. There has been no open and fair debate. The Senate has not held open hearings on this issue since the early 1980s and the House has never held any hearings. No provision of this type has ever been debated or passed by the House.

For more information please contact Bill Pierce or Patrick Purtill at 202-328-1200.

1

105TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1487

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NOVEMBER 9, 1997

Referred to the Committee on Ways and Means

AN ACT

To establish a National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

Sponsors: Senator Carl Levin (D-MI)
Senator Larry Craig (R-ID) [Adoptive Parent]
Senator John McCain (R-AZ) [Adoptive Parent]
Senator Mary Landrieu (D-La) [Adoptive Parent]

2

1 **SECTION. 1. NATIONAL VOLUNTARY MUTUAL REUNION**
2 **REGISTRY.**

3 Part E of title IV of the Social Security Act (42
4 U.S.C. 670 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the
5 following:

6 **"SEC. 479A. NATIONAL VOLUNTARY MUTUAL REUNION REG-**
7 **ISTRY.**

8 **"(a) EXCHANGE OF MUTUALLY REQUESTED IDENTI-**
9 **FYING INFORMATION.**—The Secretary, in the discretion of
10 the Secretary and provided that there is no net cost to
11 the Federal Government, may use the facilities of the De-
12 partment of Health and Human Services to facilitate the
13 voluntary, mutually requested exchange of identifying in-
14 formation that has been mutually consented to, by an
15 adult adopted individual who is 21 years of age or older
16 with—

17 **"(1) any birth parent of the adult adopted indi-**
18 **vidual; or**

19 **"(2) any adult sibling who is 21 years of age**
20 **or older, of the adult adopted individual,**

21 **if all such persons involved have, on their own initiative,**
22 **consented by a signed notarized statement to the exchange**
23 **of such identifying information.**

24 **"(b) REQUIREMENTS.**—The Secretary shall ensure
25 **that a National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry estab-**

3

1 lished under this section (in this section referred to as the
2 "Registry") meets the following requirements:

3 “(1) CENTRALIZED CAPACITY.—The Registry
4 provides a centralized nationwide capacity for the in-
5 formation described in subsection (a) and utilizes
6 appropriately designed computer and data process-
7 ing methods to protect the privacy of the informa-
8 tion contained in the Registry, and does not intrude
9 on any other data system maintained by the Depart-
10 ment of Health and Human Services.

11 “(2) ESTABLISHMENT OF PROCEDURES.—The
12 Registry complies with procedures established by the
13 Secretary that provide that—

14 “(A) only information necessary to facili-
15 tate a match shall be contained in the Registry
16 and the Registry shall not attempt to make con-
17 tact for the purpose of facilitating a reunion
18 with any individual who is not entered into or
19 participating in the Registry;

20 “(B) to the maximum extent feasible, the
21 confidentiality and privacy rights and interests
22 of all parties participating in the Registry are
23 protected; and

24 “(C) information pertaining to any individ-
25 ual that is maintained in connection with any

4

1 activity carried out under this section shall be
2 confidential and not be disclosed for any pur-
3 pose without the prior, written, informed con-
4 sent of the individual with respect to whom
5 such information applies or is maintained.

6 “(c) REASONABLE FEES.—Reasonable fees, estab-
7 lished by taking into consideration, and not to exceed, the
8 average charge of comparable services offered by States,
9 may be collected for services provided under this section.

10 “(d) PENALTY FOR VIOLATION.—

11 “(1) FINE AND IMPRISONMENT.—Any individ-
12 ual or entity that is found to have disclosed or used
13 confidential information in violation of the provisions
14 of this section shall be subject to a fine of \$5000
15 and imprisonment for a period not to exceed 1 year.

16 “(2) NONAPPLICABILITY OF SECTION 3571 OF
17 TITLE 18, UNITED STATES CODE.—The provisions of
18 section 3571 of title 18, United States Code, shall
19 not apply to a violation described in paragraph (1).

20 “(e) NO PREEMPTION.—Nothing in this section in-
21 validates or limits any law of a State or of a political sub-
22 division of a State concerning adoption and the confiden-
23 tiality of that State’s sealed adoption record policy.”

Passed the Senate November 8, 1997.

Attest:

GARY SISCO,

Secretary.

Adoption Committee For Adoption, Inc.
100 Seventeenth Street, N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20009
phone: 202-328-1200 telefax: 202-332-0935

Adopted Children Adoptive Parents Birth Parents

Your rights of privacy, confidentiality and your right to make your own decisions could be jeopardized by legislation being proposed in the United States Senate.

This new legislation could force you to go to court to defend your rights for nondisclosure of confidential adoption information. The Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee is scheduled to consider a bill which claims to be a "National Voluntary Reunion Registry Bill" (S. 1863) on November 13. In fact, the bill will allow for unauthorized confrontations by representatives of the "registry" creating a system that is anything but voluntary.

Hurry!
Your voices
must be heard!

Various versions of this bill have failed for the past 12 years. But, advocates of this legislation are gathering their significant resources to mount another campaign to drive this bill through. If passed into law, S. 1863 would:

■ Threaten adopted children by allowing an unclear system to be set up, with details decided by the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

1. ■ Endanger the confidentiality of women and men who have placed children for adoption in the past by allowing bureaucrats to contact their parents and children requesting meetings with the children they placed for adoption.

2. ■ Invasde your privacy by allowing bureaucrats and "search" group zealots to use your tax dollars to snoop into sealed state, agency and attorney adoption records and make attempts to track you down, speaking with whomever they need to to find you.

3. ■ Waste federal resources by duplicating existing registries and approaches at the state level which are already in place and which already serve over 80% of the country.

4. ■ Bankroll "search" groups and private investigators who snoop and confront people who want to be left alone.

Please Help Fight S. 1863.

5. Time is short. Please mail the attached statement to your Senator and also contact us at the Adoption Defense Fund.

Dear Senator _____

I urge you to vote against Bill S. 1863 which does not adequately protect the rights of all parties in the adoption process and is a waste of taxpayer money by duplicating existing state services. Please inform yourself of the serious ramifications this bill could have on all individuals who support adoption.

Signature: _____

Name (Please Print): _____

Address: _____

TO: Adoption Defense Fund
Suite B
1930 Seventeenth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009

Dear Adoption Defense Fund:

Please send me more information about how I can help fight this impending legislation.

Name (Please Print): _____

Address: _____

105TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1487

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NOVEMBER 9, 1997

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Passed the Senate November 8, 1997.

Attest:

GARY SISCO,
Secretary.

Withdrawal/Redaction Marker

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DOCUMENT NO. AND TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
001. letter	Micheal Reagan to Senator Carl Levin (partial) (1 page)	10/06/1997	P6/b(6)

COLLECTION:

Clinton Presidential Records
First Lady's Office
Domestic Policy Council (Nicole Rabner)
OA/Box Number: 15410

FOLDER TITLE:

Levin Adoption Registry [1]

2012-1035-S
kc1001

RESTRICTION CODES

Presidential Records Act - [44 U.S.C. 2204(a)]

- P1 National Security Classified Information [(a)(1) of the PRA]
- P2 Relating to the appointment to Federal office [(a)(2) of the PRA]
- P3 Release would violate a Federal statute [(a)(3) of the PRA]
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- P5 Release would disclose confidential advice between the President and his advisors, or between such advisors [(a)(5) of the PRA]
- P6 Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(a)(6) of the PRA]

C. Closed in accordance with restrictions contained in donor's deed of gift.

PRM. Personal record misfile defined in accordance with 44 U.S.C. 2201(3).

RR. Document will be reviewed upon request.

Freedom of Information Act - [5 U.S.C. 552(b)]

- b(1) National security classified information [(b)(1) of the FOIA]
- b(2) Release would disclose internal personnel rules and practices of an agency [(b)(2) of the FOIA]
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- b(7) Release would disclose information compiled for law enforcement purposes [(b)(7) of the FOIA]
- b(8) Release would disclose information concerning the regulation of financial institutions [(b)(8) of the FOIA]
- b(9) Release would disclose geological or geophysical information concerning wells [(b)(9) of the FOIA]

[001]

MICHAEL EDWARD REAGAN

October 6, 1997

P6/(b)(6)

Sherman Oaks, California 91402

The Honorable Carl Levin
U.S. Senate
Room 459 Russell Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Levin:

Once again, I would like to convey my strong support for the National Voluntary Reunion Registry which you are proposing along with Senators Craig, McCain and Landrieu. I believe wholeheartedly in your humane approach to facilitating the desires of adult adopted persons, birth parents and separated siblings who seek to know one another.

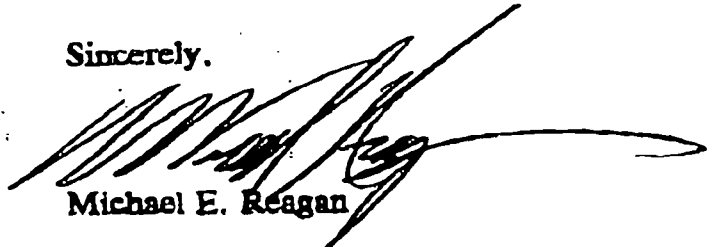
As you know, I am an adoptee who has had the great privilege of meeting my biological brother and sister and learning about the life-time of loving and caring by my birth mother, who died several years prior to my reunion with my siblings. As we discussed during our meeting at your home a few years ago, my adoptive father, Ronald Reagan, supported my desire to meet my birth mother and helped me in my early efforts. When my father helped me, it was the greatest gift he ever gave to me.

It is my hope that this compassionate legislation will be appropriately included in the final Foster Care and Adoption Promotion bill enacted into law. I would have used such a registry myself, and it has become apparent to me that my birth mother would have also.

In closing, I'd also like to commend you for your insightful efforts in all aspects of adoption, particularly, your co-authorship of the 1980 law establishing the Foster Care Adoption Subsidy and the 1981 law you authored creating the first ever adoption expense tax deduction for special needs adoptions.

With all good wishes.

Sincerely,



Michael E. Reagan

JAMIE LEE CURTIS

May 23, 1997

253A 26th Street Suite 300
Santa Monica, Ca. 90402

Senator Carl Levin
Russell Building , Office 459
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: National Voluntary Reunion Registry

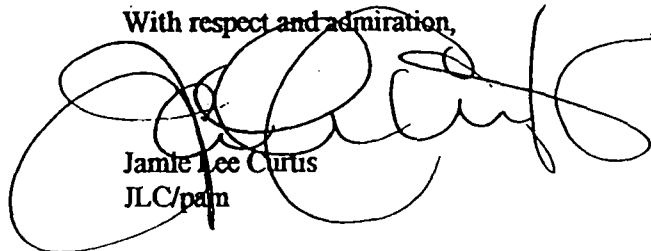
Dear Senator Levin,

As an adoptive mother as well as author on the subject of adoption, I am so thrilled to hear of your impending legislation.

I have always believed that my children's birth heritage is an integral part of their lives, and one that in adulthood should be explored if they so desire. Fortunately, both my adoptive experiences were open ones where a wealth of information was exchanged freely. The unanswerable questions that elude many closed adoptees will be answered by me to my children.

I support and applaud all your efforts to lift the veil of secrecy, and mystery that surround so many adoptive lives, and hope you receive the bipartisan support needed to help the birth parents and adoptees find one another.

With respect and admiration,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JLC', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jamie Lee Curtis
JLC/pam

Michigan Catholic Conference



505 North Capitol Avenue
Lansing, Michigan 48939
517 372-9310 • FAX 517 372-3940

January 12, 1998

Senator Carl Levin
459 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Levin:

Writing on behalf of the Social Services Committee of the Michigan Catholic Conference, which I staff, I would like to thank you for sponsoring a bill which would establish a National Voluntary Reunion Registry for adoptees and birth parents. The Committee is composed of the Social Service Directors of the seven dioceses of Michigan: Detroit, Gaylord, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Lansing, Marquette, and Saginaw. These people administer over 80 Catholic agencies, the majority of which facilitate adoptions.

As you know Senator Levin, Michigan is one of the states which has an adoption registry. The members of the Committee feel that the Michigan registry does not produce many favorable results and they indicated unanimously that they would favor a national registry.

The MCC Social Services Committee represents a statewide network of Catholic parishes and agencies. If there is any way we can help on promoting this legislation, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Sally R. Whalen
Associate for Public Policy

OFFICERS

His Eminence Adam Cardinal Malloy, Chairman, Archbishop of Detroit; Most Reverend Robert J. Rose, President, Bishop of Grand Rapids; Most Reverend Patrick R. Cooney, Secretary-Treasurer, Bishop of Gaylord.

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Msgr. James J. O'Connell, DCM, President and Chief Executive Officer.

August 10, 1997
Jim Rockwell
P. O. Box 19
Cornell, Michigan 49818

The Honorable Carl Levin
U.S. Senate
Russell Building - Room 459
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Levin:

I want to assure you of my strong and long-time support of the proposed National Voluntary Reunion Registry. I am the cofounder of "Adoption Knowledge Affiliates", an organization of adoption professionals, adopted persons, birth parents and adoptive parents.

I am an adopted person, seventy two years old, and adopted into a loving family in Michigan very long ago. In 1986 I found the family to whom I was born, after being separated from them for sixty-one years. I learned I was the last born of fourteen children. Both parents, born in the 1870s, were, of course, gone. My mother died of TB about one year after my birth.

I found six sisters and a brother still living. Two sisters and four brothers died before I found the family. I ache that I didn't know them, and it pains me that a sister searched for me for forty years, finding only barriers. A system which holds that people related by birth must never in their lifetimes know one another is fundamentally flawed. Adopted people have a human, primal need to know the truth of our own lives, to know the source of our being. Birth mothers have a deep, compelling need to one day say, "I didn't reject you. It was circumstance, not rejection." She needs to say that, and the adopted person needs to hear it. We need to know we weren't rejected, that it wasn't our fault we were separated. Separation has a profound affect on adopted people and birthmothers, for all of our lives. There can be healing for us both, but we need to speak to one another.

Many of the states have registries. None connected to any other, with little success. My siblings were in Michigan, Wisconsin, Oregon and California. I was in Texas. Most reunions reach across state lines. The National Voluntary Reunion Registry would create a true registry in which two people, related by birth, may consent to know one another. Millions of people live with the pain and the harm of how adoptions were carried out in the past. Give them an avenue. I beg the congress to support and pass the legislation to create a National Voluntary Reunion Registry.

Thank you, Senator Levin, for more than a decade of caring about the people affected by adoption. I would be happy to answer any questions or share any thinking that might help others to better understand the adoption experience.

Sincerely,

Jim Rockwell

Withdrawal/Redaction Marker

Clinton Library

DOCUMENT NO. AND TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
002. letter	Janice Uible to Senator Carl Levin (partial) (2 pages)	10/07/1997	P6/b(6)

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[002]

Janice Uible

P6/(b)(6)

Cincinnati, Ohio 45237

P6/(b)(6)

<http://visitweb.com/JANGEL>

Email : jangel@aol.com

October 7, 1997

The Honorable Carl Levin

SR-459, Russell Senate Office Building

U.S. Senate

Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Levin,

I heard that you are trying to make changes in the current way adoptees and birthfamilies can be reunited . Thank uou so much! As a 49 year old birthmother who has lived with and paid the price of being an unwed mother and then being reunited after 26 years, I can only say : Hooray! My search story is an example of why your suggestions would be such a good idea.

We live in a time when so many medical conditions have a genetic link; I know that I desperately wanted my son to know of past and continuing medical history. I also wanted to know that I made the right "choice" in relinquishing him so many years ago at birth ; Those Who Knew Best said it was but as time went by I wondered if it was and had no way to get any information. I got pregnant out of wedlock-YES ! I chose NOT to abort my child-YES ! I have suffered-YES ! I hope that in telling my truth, others will say : ENOUGH I thank you for encouraging the necessary steps so others can choose adoption in a positive way. My eyes were covered as I gave birth to my son ; I was lied to by Those Who Know Best. I signed papers with no understanding; I was told to " Forget the past". I can promise you: A Birthmother never forgets.....

In searching for him there were many obstacles. BUT In 1995 , I was not the scared 20 year old in a middle class family who had been railroaded into a decision that was made out of fear and shame. My thoughts were not clouded by alcohol ; I made the decision to find my son. It was for both of us. There were matters of the heart and mind he needed to know. I am his birthmother and yet I will never be his mother. Nature and Nurture are two separate forces.

[002]

In desperation, I hired a "private detective" , P6/(b)(6)

P6/(b)(6)

who tried his best but after exhausting my savings (over \$6000) I had to tell him to stop looking. I have only his bills I paid, no report or any documentation of his efforts. I want to believe he tried his best; that is what he told me.

I did not want to disrupt my son or his family's life; I had a mother's heart and wanted only the best for him. I FINALLY found him through an independent searcher ; I knew my son's name on December 6, 1995 . I can't describe the overwhelming feelings I felt to finally have the chance to meet but I believe every person has the right to know their heritage. I want him to KNOW the medical conditions that run in his family; when he has a family they will have this important information.

Life has come full circle for me. I have relinquished him again ; this time to Life itself. I know where he is. I am here for him. He has answers to questions then and now. He has one more person in his life to be there for him if he needs me.

Please explain that to Those Who Know Best.....for me and my Sister Birthmothers and Our Children who are searching.....

Sincerely,

Janice Uible

Janice Uible

P6/(b)(6)



December 22, 1997

10 JAN -5 PM 1998

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Executive Director

John L. Haines, Ed.D.

Associate Executive Director

Janice M. Kane, MSW

Honorable Carl Levin
United States Senate
Room SR 459
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: National Voluntary Adoption Registry

Dear Senator Levin:

Three years ago, I wrote to you regarding your support of the bill to create a national voluntary registry for biological families separated through adoption. I want to thank you again for your diligent work to bring about such a registry.

I feel even more strongly now that such a registry is needed on a national basis. We in Florida, have a statewide registry available to adoptees and biological families, but as in other states, many of those persons needing information or seeking to contact biological family do not know of its existence. Because of the mobility of our society, often persons who were adopted in Florida or who placed a child while living in Florida are no longer residents here and do not know that such a registry exists.

We also receive calls almost weekly from persons whose adoption was not handled by our agency or even in Florida, seeking our help in locating biological family members because they do not know where else to turn. We attempt to assist these people, but often there is little we can do because we do not have their original records. It would be helpful to be able to refer these individuals to a national registry where there would be a greater chance that they may be able to be reunited with biological family.

I have been working in the field of adoptions since 1968 and know how important it is for members of the adoption triad to be able to establish contact with members of their biological family. Whereas once the thinking was that adoption should be kept a secret and the family should proceed as if the child were born into their family, we now realize this is not best for anyone in the adoption triad - adoptee, birth parent or adoptive parents. All benefit when the adoptee knows something about his/her heritage and is not made to feel that they were totally uprooted from their biological family with

CHILDREN'S HOME SOCIETY

North Central Division
820 E. Park Avenue
Building E, Suite 100
Tallahassee, Florida 32301
Phone: (850) 921-0772
Fax: (850) 921-0726



CHILD WELFARE
LEAGUE OF
AMERICA



no chance of ever being able to learn "who they are", what genes they may carry and what the circumstances were surrounding their placement. Birth parents can feel more secure in making an adoption plan for their child if they know that the child will someday be able to contact them if they choose to do so. Adoptive parents whose children have searched for and been reunited with biological family, often comment on how much stronger their relationship is with that child after the reunion. They state their child now feels like a complete person and has come to a greater appreciation of the life they had in their adopted family.

The Children's Home Society of Florida serves all 67 counties in Florida and has been in existence continuously since 1902. During that time, over 30,000 children have been placed in adoptive homes by CHS. Many of these return each year as adults seeking assistance in establishing contact with their biological family. Even though we are able to assist most of these individuals, there are many others we are unable to help because of the mobility of their birth family throughout the country. The existence of a national registry to which we could refer them or utilize ourselves in searching for persons would be very beneficial. Every individual who wishes to contact biological family should have the opportunity to do so. A national registry would make this feasible for more people. The rights of individuals would always be protected by making reunions possible only with the mutual consent of both parties. It is clear that state adoption registries are only reaching a few people. The establishment of a national registry would provide for a uniform program available to everyone.

I will also be sharing my concerns with Rep. Clay Shaw as Chairman of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources and encouraging him to support the establishment of a national adoption registry. I will be happy to discuss this matter with you in more detail should you desire. Thank you again for your support.

Sincerely,



Helen C. Ervin, MSW
Senior Social Worker, Adoptions
North Central Division
Children's Home Society of Florida

cc: Honorable E. Clay Shaw, Jr.

December 22, 1997

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Honorable E. Clay Shaw, Jr.
Congressman, District 22, Florida
2408 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: NATIONAL VOLUNTARY MUTUAL REUNION REGISTRY

Dear Congressman Shaw:

As a long time worker in the field of adoptions, I am especially interested in the establishment of a national voluntary mutual reunion registry. For several years I have been advocating for such a registry based on my experience in working with members of the adoption triad- adoptees, adoptive parents and birth parents.

I strongly feel that individuals who wish to establish contact with members of their biological family, whether it be the child placed for adoption or a birth parent who felt adoption was best for their child, should have the opportunity to do so. Even though some states, including Florida, have registries for their residents, these are often ineffective because their existence is not widely known to those who could use them. With the mobility of our society, often persons are no longer living in the state where the adoption occurred and do not know the laws of that state. A national voluntary registry would allow them to make contact regardless of the state in which state they reside.

Adoption workers have come to realize the benefits of allowing biological family members separated through adoption to be reunited if that is their wish. The rights of all individuals would be protected by making reunions through the registry only by mutual consent of both parties.

Although I currently live in Tallahassee, I grew up in the Dania/Hollywood area of your district and share your affinity for that part of our state. Should you have any questions regarding the need for the national registry, I would be happy to discuss this matter with you. I would appreciate your support for this important initiative

Sincerely,

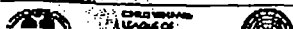


Helen C. Ervin, MSW
Senior Social Worker, Adoptions
Children's Home Society of Florida
North Central Division

cc: Honorable Carl Levin

CHILDREN'S HOME SOCIETY

North Central Division
820 E. Park Avenue
Building E, Suite 100
Tallahassee, Florida 32301
P: (850) 921-0772
Fax: (850) 921-0726





NAOMI R. CAHN
Associate Professor of Law

LAW SCHOOL

(202) 994-6025
(202) 994-9817 (FAX)
ncahn@main.nlc.gwu.edu

December 14, 1997

The Honorable Carl Levin
U.S. Senate
Room 459, Russell Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Levin:

I am writing to express my strong support for the recent passage of the Act to establish a National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry, and for your longstanding efforts to ensure enactment of the legislation.

My support for the legislation is based on my own experiences with adoption.

- First, as a family law professor, I teach about adoption, and the pain that adopted children, birth parents, and separated siblings feel when they are unable to find each other. I have read many books and articles over the past decade discussing the strong emotions experienced by all members of the adoption triangle as a result of laws that discourage contact between them.¹
- Second, when I practiced law as a legal services attorney, I frequently represented birth parents. Although these parents hoped for a better life for their children, they also wanted to ensure that the children could contact the birth parents if they so chose, and that siblings would be able to find each other.
- Third, and finally, as a wife -- my husband was adopted. He grew up in a warm and loving family. Only recently, as we contemplated starting a family ourselves, he searched for, and found, his birth mother's family, including his birth grandmother.

His birth mother had enrolled in an adoption registry. As she was dying of a brain tumor, she wrote to the agency which had arranged her son's adoption, seeking to learn

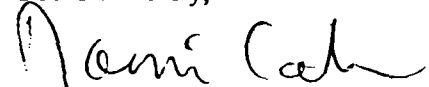
¹ A sampling includes: Margaret Moorman, *WAITING TO FORGET* (1996); Jan Waldron, *GIVING AWAY SIMONE: A MEMOIR OF DAUGHTERS, MOTHERS, ADOPTION, AND REUNION* (1995); Arthur Sorosky, et al., *THE ADOPTION TRIANGLE* (1978).

his whereabouts. The agency refused, and she died without ever meeting him as an adult. When my husband subsequently began searching for her, he was unaware of the adoption registry process. Through a combination of luck, skill, and good laws, my husband was able to find the family of his birth mother. He is still searching for his birth father.

The Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry provides a much-needed service. For birth parents searching for their children, and for adoptees searching for their birth parents, the Registry would provide them a centralized method for indicating their fervent interest in finding each other. A national registry would allow my husband, and others like him, to register in only one place, rather than with each of the numerous state, and countless on-line, registries that are currently in existence.

Thank you for all of your work in support of adoptive families! Please let me know if I can be of any help.

Yours sincerely,


Naomi Cahn

Withdrawal/Redaction Marker

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DOCUMENT NO. AND TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
003. letter	Time Green to Senator Carl Levin (partial) (1 page)	01/26/1998	P6/b(6)

COLLECTION:

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FOLDER TITLE:

Levin Adoption Registry [1]

2012-1035-S
kc1001

RESTRICTION CODES

Presidential Records Act - [44 U.S.C. 2204(a)]

P1 National Security Classified Information [(a)(1) of the PRA]
P2 Relating to the appointment to Federal office [(a)(2) of the PRA]
P3 Release would violate a Federal statute [(a)(3) of the PRA]
P4 Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information [(a)(4) of the PRA]
P5 Release would disclose confidential advice between the President and his advisors, or between such advisors [(a)(5) of the PRA]
P6 Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(a)(6) of the PRA]

C. Closed in accordance with restrictions contained in donor's deed of gift.

PRM. Personal record misfile defined in accordance with 44 U.S.C. 2201(3).

RR. Document will be reviewed upon request.

Freedom of Information Act - [5 U.S.C. 552(b)]

b(1) National security classified information [(b)(1) of the FOIA]
b(2) Release would disclose internal personnel rules and practices of an agency [(b)(2) of the FOIA]
b(3) Release would violate a Federal statute [(b)(3) of the FOIA]
b(4) Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential or financial information [(b)(4) of the FOIA]
b(6) Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(b)(6) of the FOIA]
b(7) Release would disclose information compiled for law enforcement purposes [(b)(7) of the FOIA]
b(8) Release would disclose information concerning the regulation of financial institutions [(b)(8) of the FOIA]
b(9) Release would disclose geological or geophysical information concerning wells [(b)(9) of the FOIA]

[003]

Tim Green

P6/(b)(6)

Skaneateles, N.Y. 13152

January 26, 1998

Senator Carl Levin
Russell Building, Office 459
Washington, D.C. 20510

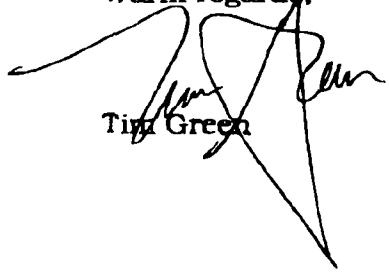
Dear Senator Levin,

I applaud your efforts to pass legislation that would make it easier for adopted children and their biological parents to be reunited. As an adopted child, and the author of a book about my own arduous search for my biological parents I know how valuable your proposed registry would be.

While I fully understand the desire to protect the legal rights of parents on both sides of an adoption, your voluntary registry would protect those rights while at the same time provide hope for children and parents consumed with the need to know. The intensity of that need, born of emotional or sometimes medical considerations, is impossible to measure.

During the years of my own search, I often wondered to myself why somewhere within our government there wasn't a voice of compassion and reason. You are that voice and I commend you.

Warm regards.


Tim Green



PENNSYLVANIA ADOPTION LEGISLATION COALITION

PENNSYLVANIA CHILDREN'S ADOPTION INFORMATION NETWORK



December 23, 1997

Dear Senator Levin,

I am an adult adoptee, attorney and child welfare advocate active in Pennsylvania statewide adoption law reform and child abuse prevention efforts. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to present testimony at future hearings regarding my support of the National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry, and if there is any way that I can assist you in your efforts to promote this legislation, I remain available to assist you.

By way of personal background, all things positive that are achieved by adoption I believe are evident in my own adoption story. I was adopted at birth and raised in a loving, caring family. I have always been thankful that my birth parents chose to bring me into this world, and that I was blessed with a wonderful, nurturing, supportive adoptive family. Despite the fact that I had nothing but positive feelings about my adoption, and knowing that I was indeed wanted and "chosen", I eventually embarked upon a search for my biological family when I reached the age of 30 and had children of my own. I was diagnosed with malignant melanoma, a genetically inherited predisposition, and I wanted to know my genealogical and medical background, as well as the true story surrounding my adoption. Even the most well-adjusted adoptees often feel the need to discover their biological "roots". I had been provided my "nonidentifying information" by the courts, which contained no medical information and erroneous statements about the reasons for my adoption and my genealogical background. The only way to gain the knowledge I sought about myself was to find and reunite with my birth parents. My search was a demeaning and torturous ordeal, with roadblocks at every step of the way. I eventually found my birth parents and several siblings, and have varying degrees of ongoing relationships with them. It was a challenging, emotional experience, but one that was necessary, ultimately healing and not at all unexpected.

I am dedicated to reforming the antiquated plethora of adoption laws that pervades our current system and to helping the children of Pennsylvania, and other states, who are languishing in foster care and waiting for loving, permanent adoptive families like the one I was so fortunate to be a part of. I am involved in many governmental, charitable, legal and legislative efforts aimed at improving our system of adoption. I feel very strongly that National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry of which you are a sponsor is a crucial and necessary step in the direction of improving our adoption system so that it meets the needs of adults and children who are involved in the adoption process.

I understand that on Nov. 8, 1997, the U.S. Senate passed a National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry (S. 1487) to permit the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to facilitate the voluntary and mutually requested reunion of birth parents, adult adopted persons, and adult siblings, that the Registry has now been referred to the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources, and that the Subcommittee is expected to hold a hearing on the bill in March of April of next year. I am ardently in favor of establishing such a Registry and would like to offer you my support and assistance.

I am faxing herewith a copy of my resume. Again, I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to testify at any future hearings. Thank you for your efforts and for your attention to this critical adoption and child welfare issue. Your endeavor to create this much-needed Registry is greatly appreciated by adult adoptees and adoption triad members across the nation.

Sincerely,

Nancy M. Newman, Esq.
PALC Director and Founder

1079 Baron Drive, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania 19010

(610) 520-2298 Fax: (610) 520-4552 Email: PAADOPTION@aol.com



"A Link for Those Touched by Adoption"

**Louisiana Adoption Advisory Board, Inc.
Post Office Box 3318
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70821**

Louise Bourne
Donna Breaux
Eddie Butler
Richard Caffarel
Karen Caldwell
Mabel Cooley
Rev. Becky Conner
Danna Cousins

Deborah R. Jacques
Bob Kerns
Mary Langhette
Janice Sapp
Brenda Valteau
Mabel Williams
Molly Womack
Linda Woods

October 31, 1997

FAX: 202-225-1388

TO: The Honorable Senator Carl Levin

FROM: Robert E. Kerns, Chair
Louisiana Adoption Advisory Board, Inc.

RE: The "Promotion of Adoption, Safety, and Support for Abused and
Neglected Children (PASS) Act

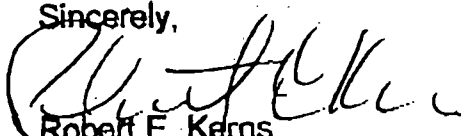
ATTN: Jackie B. Parker
Senior Legislative Assistant

The Louisiana Adoption Advisory Board, Inc. wishes to inform you that they strongly support the PASS act, specifically Section 205: The facilitation of voluntary mutual reunions between adopted adults and birth parents and siblings. As you may know Louisiana recently added siblings to their mutual consent registry.

A national registry is needed as there are instances where a birth mother may make an adoption plan with an instate agency, then the child is placed out of state. The birth mother does not know, when she attempts to register, what state to contact. Most birth mothers contact and register with the state of relinquishment. They never have the match as most registries are set up for adoptions that finalized in that state.

Again, we strongly support your bill.

Sincerely,


Robert E. Kerns
Chairman

REK/ck


ADOPTION GIVING A CHILD A CHANCE

A Coalition of Adoption Advocates Serving Louisiana Children With Special Needs



CATHOLIC HUMAN SERVICES, Inc.

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PROMOTING
THE SPIRIT OF LIFE

November 7, 1997

Rep. Dave Camp
Subcommittee on Human Resources
Washington DC 20515-6351

RE: PASS Act

Dear Representative Camp,

Greetings from a fellow Michigander! I am pleased that you in an influential position on an important subcommittee. It is good to see "our own" hang in there and work their way into positions where they can really make a difference. I am hoping you can make a very positive difference on this proposed bill which is of great interest to me and countless other citizens of our good state. In my opinion, it is of vital importance that Senator Levin's National Mutual Reunion Registry be included in the impending legislation.

Allow me to briefly introduce myself. I have worked in the field of Michigan for nearly 24 years and am presently the Child Welfare Supervisor for Catholic Human Services, Inc. I am the editor of *Adoption Without Fear* and am the author of a recently published book entitled *The Spirit of Open Adoption*. Over the years I have organized six national conferences on adoption which have been held in Traverse City. With the assistance of friends I am in the process of organizing the American Association of Open Adoption Agencies.

I view the registry as modest yet important and necessary step forward in the field of adoption. We who labor in this field need the help of our political leaders to improve the image of adoption. I am deeply saddened by the fact that many people—adoptive parents and birthparents alike—steer clear of adoption because they view it as bureaucratic and inflexible. If adoption is to be credible, it needs get serious about serving the "best interests of children." I have long marveled over the fact that, while the Michigan Adoption Code explicitly states that in the event of a conflict of interests among the parties involved the interests of the adoptee shall be



United Way



Catholic Charities USA



Catholic Services Appeal

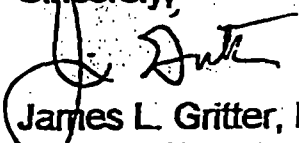
"paramount," we routinely deny their reasonable inquiries *even when they are adults!* That leads me to think that not only does the institution of adoption need a credibility boost, the laws themselves need a credibility boost. If we want adoption to thrive, it must have the flexibility to meet individual needs.

This seems to me like a situation where inflammatory politics can be put aside and common sense can prevail. Earlier I called the idea of a national registry "modest," and I mean that. This is far from a radical proposal. The fact that the registry idea draws criticism from very conservative and very liberal groups suggests to me that it resides right in the sweet spot of effective compromise.

I have dedicated all of my professional energy and creativity to making the adoption system fully responsive to the needs of the people it serves. I would be very disappointed if we lost this opportunity to serve people in need. I hope you will use your influence to include the national registry provision to the proposed legislation.

If you are interested in learning more about the opinions of people who do the actual everyday work of adoption (rather than so-called experts who have never done the work of adoption), I would be delighted to discuss the matter further. Thank you for considering my thoughts.

Sincerely,



James L. Gritter, MSW
Child Welfare Supervisor

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ADOPTION ATTORNEYS

P.O. BOX 33053
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20033-0053
(202) 832-2222

PLEASE REPLY TO:

Suite 400
1300 - 19th St., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 331-1955
FAX 202-293-2309

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MARK T. McDERMOTT (1991-92)
STEVEN M. KIRSH (1992-93)
DALE R. JOHNSON (1993-94)
RITA A. MEISER (1994-95)
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February 18, 1998

Rep. E. Clay Shaw
Chairman, Subcommittee on Human Resources
House Committee on Ways & Means
2408 Rayburn HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515-0922

Re: S. 1487 National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry

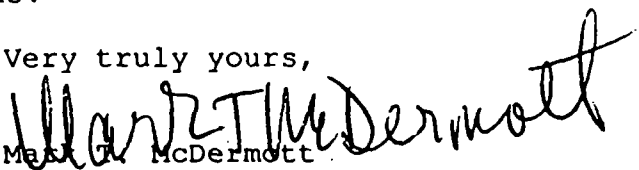
Dear Congressman Shaw:

The American Academy of Adoption Attorneys strongly supports passage of S. 1487 which would establish a national voluntary mutual reunion registry. We respectfully urge you and your colleagues to pass this much-needed legislation.

The Academy is a national association of attorneys who practice in the field of adoption law. There are more than 300 members of the Academy from around the country. The Academy's work includes promoting the reform of adoption laws. As such, the Academy supports legislation which is of benefit to those whose lives have been touched by adoption. S. 1487 is such legislation.

If the Academy can assist you and your colleagues by serving as a resource during your consideration of this important legislation, please call upon us.

Very truly yours,


Mark T. McDermott
Legislative Chair

cc: Sen. Carl Levin
Sen. Larry E. Craig
Sen. John McCain
Sen. Mary L. Landrieu

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2202

U.S. SENATE SHOWS COMPASSION FOR BIRTH PARENTS, ADOPTEES AND SIBLINGS WHO ARE SEEKING ONE ANOTHER

SPONSORS OF FEDERAL LEGISLATION INCLUDE SENATORS WHO ARE ADOPTIVE PARENTS

-
- On Nov. 8, 1997, the U.S. Senate passed a *National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry* {S. 1487} to permit the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to facilitate the voluntary and mutually requested reunion of birth parents, adult adopted persons, and adult siblings.
 - **SPONSORS OF THE NATIONAL REGISTRY INCLUDE:**
 - Senator Carl Levin (Democrat of Michigan)
 - Senator Larry Craig (Republican-Idaho) Adoptive Parent
 - Senator Mary Landrieu (Democrat-Louisiana) Adoptive Parent
 - Senator John McCain (Republican-Arizona) Adoptive Parent
 - **CURRENT STATUS OF THE BILL**
 - **Remarks by Senator Carl Levin**
 - **Statement by Senator John McCain**

Status of Bill

* The National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry has now been referred to the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources Chaired by U.S. Representative Clay Shaw of Florida (R-Florida). I expect the Subcommittee to hold a hearing on the bill in March or April of next year, and then hopefully report the bill favorably to the full Committee on Ways and Means. The Senate has passed similar legislation three times in the past nine years, but the House of Representatives has never taken it up. With some luck and hard work, maybe this time will be different.

* If the National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry is passed by the full House, the next step would be to forward the legislation to the President to be signed into law.

* If the legislation is signed into law, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services would not implement the National Registry until after comments are solicited and received from the Adoption community. Final regulations to govern the operation of the National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry would be issued after taking such views into consideration.

* The Registry would humanize the process through which adult biological relatives separated by adoption, who are looking for each other can make contact.

Remarks by Senator Carl Levin

The U.S. Senate has demonstrated that it would like to help in alleviating the pain and struggle that adult birth relatives, separated by adoption, endure in their efforts to make contact with one another. It did so when it unanimously cleared and passed S. 1487, which authorizes the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to establish a National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry.

Passage of the National Registry would not have been possible without the steadfast leadership of Senator Larry Craig, an adoptive parent. Senator Craig's sensitivity, his commitment, his compassion and his clear understanding of this issue has enlightened all of the members of the Senate. Special thanks are also owed to Senator Mary Landrieu and Senator John McCain, also adoptive parents, for their unyielding support of this bill and their bipartisan spirit throughout the discussions on this issue.

We are all deeply touched by the difficulties experienced by adult adopted persons, birth parents and separated siblings who, often for many years and at great expense, have been seeking one another. Aside from the natural human desire to know one's roots and genetic heritage, there are other important reasons why many birth relatives seek to make contact with each other. Some are seeking a deeper sense of identity, some need vital information which may affect their own mental and physical health and some are facing momentous family decisions that require more knowledge about their heritage. Additionally, studies show that a substantial percentage of birth parents say they want to be available to their adult children, many relinquished at birth during a very different time, should they mutually desire to make contact. These sentiments have been expressed to my office over many, many years by individuals from all across America and during earlier Senate hearings on this issue.

We believe that the National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry, deals with these needs and emotions in a careful and sensitive way. The legislation permits the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, at no net expense to the federal government, to facilitate the voluntary, mutually requested exchange of identifying information that has been mutually consented to in a signed notarized statement, by the birth parent, adult adoptee 21 years or older or adult siblings.

Reasonable fees, established by taking into consideration, and not to exceed, the average charge of comparable services offered by States, may be collected for services provided under this proposal. Currently, over half the States provide for voluntary and mutual reunion facilitation. However, State-based systems are restricted, by nature, to the geographic boundaries of the State. Since we are a mobile society, that limitation reduces the utility of State-based systems. Adoptions are often started in one State but finalized in another. Additionally, the adoptee, birth parent or sibling may be a resident of several different States during their lifetimes.

This legislation does not address the issue of sealed adoption records; and, it is not intended to nullify or impede the progress of any related State activity relative to this issue. Finally, this legislation does not mandate, but simply gives the Secretary the discretion to facilitate voluntary, mutual reunions, if she so chooses.

Statement by Senator John McCain

This legislation would permit the Secretary of Health and Human Services, at no net expense to the Federal government, to facilitate the voluntary, mutually requested reunions of biological relatives who have been separated by adoption.

The National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry is intended to help reunite the hundreds of thousands of adult adoptees, birth parents and siblings who are searching for each other. Currently, the search can be very costly, cumbersome and futile. The national registry would help many individuals who were separated by adoption and are now searching for each other.

Some concerns have been raised that this legislation would infringe upon an individual's privacy, and that a National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry could result in the inappropriate disclosure of private, sensitive information. This is completely inaccurate. I and the other sponsors of this proposal, along with the Finance Committee have worked tirelessly to ensure that all the necessary safeguards have been included in this proposal to ensure that an individual's personal privacy is not violated in any manner.

Under the guidelines for the National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry established in this bill, one party could not search out another individual unless both parties were searching for one another. All parties involved would have to, on their own accord, voluntarily decide to participate in the registry. This proposal specifically requires that the registry only contain information necessary to facilitate a match, that the confidentiality of all consenting participants be protected and that no information be disclosed without prior, written consent from the individual.

The bill specifically requires that any computerized system created to implement this registry must not intrude on any existing data systems at the Department of Health and Human Services and must utilize appropriate methods to protect the privacy of information contained in the registry. In addition, it establishes criminal and financial penalties for potential abusers of the national registry.

Finally, the measure specifically states that this registry does not preempt any state laws relating to adoption and the confidentiality of adoption records. This legislation is not a mandate, has absolutely no cost to the federal government or taxpayers, and is completely voluntary. This important legislation will help thousands of Americans who want to learn about themselves and their birth relatives.

105TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1487

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NOVEMBER 9, 1997

Referred to the Committee on Ways and Means

AN ACT

To establish a National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

Sponsors: Senator Carl Levin (D-MI)
 Senator Larry Craig (R-ID) [Adoptive Parent]
 Senator John McCain (R-AZ) [Adoptive Parent]
 Senator Mary Landrieu (D-La) [Adoptive Parent]

1 SECTION. 1. NATIONAL VOLUNTARY MUTUAL REUNION
2 REGISTRY.

3 Part E of title IV of the Social Security Act (42
4 U.S.C. 670 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the
5 following:

6 "SEC. 479A. NATIONAL VOLUNTARY MUTUAL REUNION REG-
7 ISTRY.

8 "(a) EXCHANGE OF MUTUALLY REQUESTED IDENTI-
9 FYING INFORMATION.—The Secretary, in the discretion of
10 the Secretary and provided that there is no net cost to
11 the Federal Government, may use the facilities of the De-
12 partment of Health and Human Services to facilitate the
13 voluntary, mutually requested exchange of identifying in-
14 formation that has been mutually consented to, by an
15 adult adopted individual who is 21 years of age or older
16 with—

17 "(1) any birth parent of the adult adopted indi-
18 vidual; or

19 "(2) any adult sibling who is 21 years of age
20 or older, of the adult adopted individual,
21 if all such persons involved have, on their own initiative,
22 consented by a signed notarized statement to the exchange
23 of such identifying information.

24 "(b) REQUIREMENTS.—The Secretary shall ensure
25 that a National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry estab-

1 lished under this section (in this section referred to as the
2 "Registry") meets the following requirements:

3 “(1) CENTRALIZED CAPACITY.—The Registry
4 provides a centralized nationwide capacity for the in-
5 formation described in subsection (a) and utilizes
6 appropriately designed computer and data process-
7 ing methods to protect the privacy of the informa-
8 tion contained in the Registry, and does not intrude
9 on any other data system maintained by the Depart-
10 ment of Health and Human Services.

11 “(2) ESTABLISHMENT OF PROCEDURES.—The
12 Registry complies with procedures established by the
13 Secretary that provide that—

14 “(A) only information necessary to facili-
15 tate a match shall be contained in the Registry
16 and the Registry shall not attempt to make con-
17 tact for the purpose of facilitating a reunion
18 with any individual who is not entered into or
19 participating in the Registry;

20 “(B) to the maximum extent feasible, the
21 confidentiality and privacy rights and interests
22 of all parties participating in the Registry are
23 protected; and

24 “(C) information pertaining to any individ-
25 ual that is maintained in connection with any

1 activity carried out under this section shall be
 2 confidential and not be disclosed for any pur-
 3 pose without the prior, written, informed con-
 4 sent of the individual with respect to whom
 5 such information applies or is maintained.

6 “(c) REASONABLE FEES.—Reasonable fees, estab-
 7 lished by taking into consideration, and not to exceed, the
 8 average charge of comparable services offered by States,
 9 may be collected for services provided under this section.

10 “(d) PENALTY FOR VIOLATION.—

11 “(1) FINE AND IMPRISONMENT.—Any individ-
 12 ual or entity that is found to have disclosed or used
 13 confidential information in violation of the provisions
 14 of this section shall be subject to a fine of \$5000
 15 and imprisonment for a period not to exceed 1 year.

16 “(2) NONAPPLICABILITY OF SECTION 3571 OF
 17 TITLE 18, UNITED STATES CODE.—The provisions of
 18 section 3571 of title 18, United States Code, shall
 19 not apply to a violation described in paragraph (1).

20 “(e) NO PREEMPTION.—Nothing in this section in-
 21 validates or limits any law of a State or of a political sub-
 22 division of a State concerning adoption and the confiden-
 23 tiality of that State’s sealed adoption record policy.”

Passed the Senate November 8, 1997.

Attest:

GARY SISCO,
Secretary.

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NEW FRONTIERS COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTING

626 South 25th Street
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January 7, 1998

The Honorable Carl Levin
United States Senate
Russell Office Building, Room 459
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Levin:

Thank you for your long campaign to establish a National Voluntary Mutual Reunion Registry. I hope 1998 will bring with it the success you deserve.

I support your legislation for a number of reasons. As an adopted child who was fortunate enough to find his birth parents, I have experienced the rewards of reunification. Additionally, as a former aide to Senator Dole, I can appreciate the complexity, and the frustration, of the legislative process. Your decade-long fight is both admirable and gallant.

On a personal level, I would like to share with you the first letter I wrote to my biological mother, Mary. It was difficult to write, but it changed my life for the better. At that time, my only desire was to thank her for her courageous choice. She had many other options back then, and yet she selflessly chose me. Mary gave me a chance and I hope I have honored this privilege.

Since finding my birth parents, I have become quite interested in promoting adoption. Using my past experience as Senator Dole's aide for telecommunications, I have secured commitments from some in the Cable TV and Broadcast industries to help launch an aggressive pro-adoption Public Service Announcement (PSA) campaign. This project will present adoption as a positive option by highlighting noteworthy and respected adopted Americans. I will keep you posted as it develops.

In closing, adoption is one issue that erases party lines. This is clearly evident through your past efforts with Senator Dole and now with Senators Craig, McCain and Landrieu.

Once again, thank you for your hard work and I wish you all the best in the coming year.

Sincerely,

R. DAVID WILSON
Principal

Enclosure