



Information, Support and Advocacy for Foster and Adoptive Families

*"No one understands what we face as adoptive parents.
We are often ridiculed and treated as the "bad guy"
rather than our child receiving the much needed help."
-Adoptive Parent**

Thank you for giving the NYS Citizens' Coalition for Children the opportunity to submit testimony to the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources in response to the recent hearing on Increasing Adoptions from Foster Care (February 27, 2013).

When a little boy was sent back to Russia by his American adoptive mother last year, many people were incredulous and outraged. Although the vast majority of adoptions (whether private infant adoptions or through the United States or international child welfare systems) work out well – with parents who enjoy their children and children who grow up into happy, functioning adults – some adoptive parents run into overwhelming problems parenting their children.

The research tells us that children who were exposed to drugs or alcohol in-utero, abuse and neglect, lived in orphanages, and were adopted at older ages are more likely to need help, especially through developmental stages in life. Parents tell us that they need help with their children's emotional challenges, which usually manifest themselves as behavioral problems within homes, at school or in society. Sometimes parents get so overwhelmed by children who, have trouble in school, lie, steal, abuse drugs and/or alcohol, act sexually inappropriate or are violent that they reach their breaking point having often exhausted their resources searching for help that they feel forced to place their children in or back into foster care. Adoptive parents adopt because they want to parent a child – when their family falls apart, it is a tragic loss for an already traumatized child and a painful (and humiliating) loss for the parents and remaining siblings as well.

Placing a child into foster care isn't always a willing choice. In New York State, when a child needs temporary institutional care (at a cost of \$80,000/year or more) because they are likely to hurt themselves or others and a parent can't afford the services privately, the Office of Children and Family Services requires the parents to place the child in foster care to access the help. This policy is destructive to keeping families together. This further damages the relationship between the parent and child and costs the State even more money as they pay for administrative and court costs associated with foster care.

In the last few decades, we have learned a lot about how to help families – specialized therapists can help the parents and child develop a bond and teach the parents to deal with challenging behaviors in a constructive, healing way. It is time our federal, state, and local governments invest in the practices we know work and embed them into widespread improved policy and practice, to improve the lives of these children and families. Support groups can give parents perspective and advice from parents who have been there. A few states have implemented services for families – such as Ohio, which provides \$10,000 annually so that the parents of each child who has been adopted can pay for therapy. Or Connecticut which has a statewide hotline number that adoptive parents can call for support, an evaluation of their needs and referrals for services. Others states such as New York have yet to provide statewide services. Even though we know that hundreds of New York children enter foster care each year after adoption for the reasons shared above – torn once again from a family

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with even more dismal prospects for a happy and functional future. It is estimated that not providing post adoption services costs the State millions of dollars and discourages prospective adoptive parents from making the commitment to adopt children who are waiting in foster care because they aren't prepared or well enough equipped to do it alone.

In 2011, 451 NYS adoptive parents and professionals responded to a NYSCCC survey assessing the needs of NYS adoptive families. Significant problems were noted by participants in accessing services, especially therapists who were knowledgeable about adoption and the impact of abuse and neglect on development. Many of the parents expressed that they felt abandoned at a time when they were desperate for help. It is a tragedy for the child, family and community when parents can't keep their children safely at home. It is also an international embarrassment!

Post adoption services in New York State alone would save more than \$30,000,000 **by increasing the numbers of children who are adopted¹, decreasing the numbers of children who enter or re-enter foster care² and decreasing the number of children who enter residential treatment³.**

We urge the Subcommittee to take a close examination of funding and accessibility of quality post-adoption support services offered to children and families nationally, to ensure increased access and adequate funding is available for such services post-finalization as a way to increase stable healthy adoptions from foster care.

Respectfully submitted,

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¹ The Bridges to Health program (B2H) is a very good example of how when services are provided to children and their families the rate of adoption from foster care to adoption increases. B2H ensures that children with significant medical and psychological needs receive services after an adoption. Data from B2H shows that by providing better supports, the percentage of children with a goal of adoption in NYS increases from 26% to 35.5%. If we provided supports to families adopting children with fewer challenges and assumed the same increase in the percentage of children with a goal of adoption (and the achievement of that goal), \$19,593,930 would be saved each year!

² Children are entering foster care (foster care, international & domestic private adoption) **after** being adopted because they could not be maintained in their families. The federal child welfare reporting system (AFCARS) now requires states to report on whether children in foster care were previously adopted. Although not all NYS counties have complied with this reporting requirement, for the 59.1% of cases where the data was entered, 609 children now in foster care were previously adopted (personal communication with OCFS 12/12/12). An additional, 2050 children NYC children in foster care were previously adopted.

³ One example is the Post Adoption Resource Center (PARC) at Parsons Child and Family Center in Albany serves six surrounding counties. Based on family reports and conservative estimates, 58 families had a child at risk of placement in 2009. However, only six of the children entered a residential treatment center. Post adoption services kept 52 children out of residential care at an annual savings of more \$4 million dollars for only 6 counties – and at a cost of only \$225,000 to operate PARC.

* A quote from an adoptive parent in a recent survey (<http://nysccc.org/adoption/post-adoption-services/postadoptsurvey/>) by the NYS Citizens' Coalition of Children of post adoption services needs of parents and professionals in New York State.