

**NLWJC - Kagan**

**DPC - Box 023 - Folder 018**

**Family - Adoption: Registries**

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

November 21, 1998

ADOPTION EVENT

DATE: November 24, 1998  
TIME: 1:45 pm - 2:15 pm  
LOCATION: East Room  
FROM: Bruce Reed

**I. PURPOSE:**

To mark National Adoption Month by announcing a new directive to facilitate adoptions by creating an Internet registry.

**II. BACKGROUND:**

You will be joining the First Lady in hosting a ceremony in honor of 24 new adoptions in D.C. The families will be present, along with 50 leading adoption and children's advocates and the eight recipients of this year's HHS Adoption 2002 Excellence Awards - including Illinois Governor and Mrs. Jim Edgar.

You set a goal in 1996 of doubling adoptions and other permanent placements from the child welfare system by the year 2002. Adoptions increased by 10 percent in the next year, from 28,000 to 31,000. But there are still about 100,000 children in our nation's foster care system awaiting adoption.

**National Internet Registry:**

In order to help meet your adoption goals and to facilitate adoptions, you will announce that you are issuing a directive to HHS to expand the use of the Internet as a tool to find homes for children waiting to be adopted from foster care. Specifically, you will direct Secretary Shalala to work with the States and others to develop a plan within 60 days for expanding the use of the Internet to share information about children who are legally free for adoption while ensuring appropriate confidentiality safeguards. An effective national registry will help break down geographic barriers to adoption and shorten the time needed to find adoptive families for children. (Draft directive is attached.)

**III. PARTICIPANTS:**

YOU  
The First Lady  
Secretary Donna Shalala

D.C. Superior Court Chief Judge Eugene Hamilton

Mayor-Elect Anthony Williams

Charday Mays, officially adopted immediately prior to event by Edward and Rochelle Mays of Prince Georges County, Maryland. She is 12 years old.

Dave Thomas, Founder of Wendy's Corp. and the Dave Thomas Foundation on Adoption

**IV. SEQUENCE OF EVENTS:**

- Secretary Shalala will make brief opening remarks and introduce Dave Thomas.
- Dave Thomas will make opening remarks and introduce the First Lady.
- The First Lady will make remarks and introduce Chief Eugene Hamilton.
- Chief Judge Eugene Hamilton will make remarks and introduce Mayor-Elect Anthony Williams.
- Mayor-Elect Anthony Williams will make remarks and introduce Charday Mays, a newly adopted 12-year old.
- Charday Mays will make remarks and introduce **YOU**.
- **YOU** will make remarks, and invite guests to a reception in the State Dining Room.

**V. PRESS COVERAGE:**

Open Press.

**VI. REMARKS:**

Remarks prepared by Speechwriting.

**VII. ATTACHMENTS:**

- Record of Accomplishment on Adoption.
- Directive to the Department of Health and Human Services.

## PRESIDENT CLINTON'S RECORD OF ACCOMPLISHMENT ON ADOPTION

- ✓ **Achieving Landmark Legislative Reform.** On November 19, 1997, the President signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act, reforming our nation's child welfare system and making it clear that the health and safety of children must be the paramount concerns of state child welfare services. This landmark legislation was based in large part on the recommendations of the Clinton Administration's *Adoption 2002* report, -- which the President requested by executive memorandum on December 14, 1996, to meet his goals of doubling adoptions and permanent placements by the year 2002 and moving children more quickly from foster care to permanent homes. The Act tightened time frames for making permanent placement decisions for children, and ensured health insurance coverage for all special needs children in subsidized adoptions. Also, it created new financial incentives for States to increase adoptions, and continued funding for services to keep families together when it is appropriate and safe.
- ✓ **Making Adoption Affordable for Families.** In 1996, President Clinton signed into law the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, which provides a \$5,000 tax credit to families adopting children, and a \$6,000 tax credit for families adopting children with special needs. This provision has alleviated a significant barrier to adoption, helping middle class families for whom adoption may be prohibitively expensive and making it easier for families to adopt children with special needs. Since President Clinton took office, the number of children with special needs who were adopted with Federal adoption assistance has risen by over 60 percent. In the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, President Clinton ensured more support for families who adopt children with the \$500 per-child tax credit.
- ✓ **Giving States Flexibility and Support.** To test innovative strategies to improve State child welfare systems, the Clinton Administration has granted waivers to 18 States, giving them more flexibility in tailoring services to meet the needs of children and families. In addition, the Administration has provided States with enhanced technical support and helped improve court operations. The President secured \$10 million in FY 1999 in new funds to support State efforts to implement the new adoption law, and has, through the Adoption Opportunities program, supported State and local innovative demonstration projects to promote adoption, provide post-adoptive services, and build new public-private partnerships. To prevent children from entering foster care in the first place, in 1993 the Clinton Administration enacted and secured federal funding for the Family Preservation and Support Program to help States, local governments, and service providers develop effective programs to serve children and families at risk.
- ✓ **Breaking Down Racial and Ethnic Barriers to Adoption.** New inter-ethnic adoption provisions, passed as a part of the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, ensure that the adoption process is free from discrimination and delays on the basis of race, culture and ethnicity by strengthening the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act which the President signed in 1994.
- ✓ **Providing Supports for Child Protection and Adoption.** In 1993, President Clinton signed into law the Family and Medical Leave Act, enabling parents to take time off to

adopt a child without losing their jobs or health insurance. In addition, the welfare reform legislation signed by the President maintained the guarantee of child protection and adoption, and did not reduce funds for child welfare, child abuse, and foster care and adoption services.

**PRESIDENT CLINTON ANNOUNCES EXPANSION OF THE INTERNET  
TO INCREASE ADOPTIONS  
November 24, 1998**

Today, the President will issue a new directive to the Department of Health and Human Services to expand the use of the Internet as a tool to find homes for children waiting to be adopted from foster care. The President will make the announcement with the First Lady at a White House ceremony marking National Adoption Month and celebrating new adoptions in the District of Columbia.

**Creating an Internet Registry to Meet the President's Goals for Adoption.** In 1996, President Clinton set a goal of doubling, by the year 2002, adoptions and other permanent placements from the public child welfare system. Since then, adoptions have increased; from 1996 to 1997 alone, adoptions increased by over 10 percent, from 28,000 to 31,000. Today, the President is directing the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to develop a plan to expand use of the Internet to share information about children who are legally free for adoption in order to shorten the time needed to find them adoptive families. HHS estimates that approximately 100,000 children in our nation's foster care system cannot return to their birth families and need families to adopt them. An effective national registry will help to break down geographic barriers to adoption and assist in meeting the President's adoption goal. HHS Secretary Donna Shalala will report to the President within 60 days on a plan to work with the States and other leaders to carry out this effort.

**Building on a Strong Record.** Today's announcement builds on a deep commitment by the President, the First Lady, and the Administration to facilitate adoptions and improve the child welfare system. Since taking office, President Clinton has championed efforts to make foster care work better for the children it serves, to find and assist adoptive families, and to break down barriers, including high adoption costs and complex regulations:

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**NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH EVENT  
INTERNAL Q & A  
November 24, 1998**

**Q: What is the President announcing today?**

A: The President will issue a directive to the Secretary of Health and Human Services to work with the states, courts, private agencies and others to develop a plan to expand the use of the Internet as a tool to find homes for children waiting to be adopted from the foster care system. There are approximately 100,000 children in our country who everyday wait in foster care for a permanent, adoptive home. Sharing information about children who are legally free for adoption on a national Internet registry will help break down geographic barriers to adoption and shorten the time needed to find adoptive families. The Secretary will report to the President within 60 days with a plan to consult closely with the States, ensure appropriate confidentiality safeguards, identify important issues and strategies for addressing them, and examine ways to build on promising existing efforts.

**Q: Isn't the Internet already being used in this way? Is this executive memorandum duplicative of existing efforts?**

A: No. Today, the Internet is not being used to its fullest potential to break down geographic barriers to adoption and help us to meet our national goal to double adoptions from the foster care system by the year 2002. There are some efforts underway by private organizations, States, and local governments to use the Internet to facilitate adoptions, but even the largest site now in operation lists the photos of only 1,000 children. The President is directing HHS to develop a plan to use the Internet to its fullest capability to help the more than 100,000 children awaiting a permanent home. The executive memorandum asks HHS to build on promising existing efforts by States and private organizations.

**Q: Will you meet the President's goal of doubling the number of children adopted or permanently placed from foster care by 2002? How close are you?**

A: We are confident that we will meet the President's goal -- set in 1996 -- to double the number of children adopted or permanently placed from foster care by the year 2002. We now know that from 1996 to 1997 alone, States increased adoptions by over 10 percent -- from 28,000 to 31,000. And, we have been very pleased with the positive work of States to meeting the President's goal -- States are investing resources, training staff, expanding outreach and recruitment efforts, and setting tough year-by-year goals.

**Q: What is happening at the White House with the D.C. Court?**

A: Today, the White House will for the first time host D.C. Adoption Day, an annual event in



which the D.C. Superior Court finalizes a number of adoptions to mark National Adoption Month. This year is the 12th annual event, and a record 24 families will adopt 30 children. The D.C. Court invited the First Lady to participate in the ceremony at the D.C. Court House, and she offered to host it at the White House. D.C. Superior Court Chief Judge Eugene Hamilton will preside over this portion of the White House ceremony, and will introduce each of the participating families. Also, Mayor-elect Tony Williams -- who himself was adopted from foster care -- will participate in the program at the Court's request. The Court selected for its theme this year "Adoption: Creating Loving Families for the Twenty-First Century."

**Q: What is the Adoption and Safe Families Act?**

A: On November 19, 1997, the President signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act, reforming our nation's child welfare system and making it clear that the health and safety of children must be the paramount concerns of state child welfare services. The Act tightened time frames for making permanent placement decisions for children, and ensured health insurance coverage for all special needs children in subsidized adoptions. Also, it created new financial incentives for States to increase adoptions, and continued funding for services to keep families together when it is appropriate and safe. This landmark legislation was based in large part on the recommendations of the Clinton Administration's *Adoption 2002* report, which was requested by the President by executive memorandum on December 14, 1996 to meet his adoption and foster care goals.

**Q: What was the "Adoption 2002" report?**

A: In response to a 1996 Presidential directive, HHS developed the "Adoption 2002" report, an administrative and legislative blueprint to strengthen our nation's child welfare system. The report took its name from of the President's central goals -- to at least double by the year 2002 the number of children adopted or permanently placed each year. "Adoption 2002" outlined a new action plan to set and meet urgent new adoption targets. We were very pleased that the Adoption and Safe Families Act was based in large part on the recommendations of this report, including clarifications to the reasonable efforts standard, new financial incentives for States to increase adoptions, and increased technical assistance to states, courts and communities to help move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes.

**Q: What else has the Administration done to promote adoption?**

A: The Clinton Administration has taken several important steps to encourage and increase adoptions and to support families that choose to open their hearts and their homes to these children. Since taking office in 1993, the President has championed programs that find and assist adopting families, and has committed his Administration to breaking down barriers, including high adoption costs and complex regulations.

These steps include (1) signing into law a \$5,000 tax credit to families that adopt and a

\$6000 tax credit for families that adopt children with special needs; (2) ensuring that the adoption process is free from discrimination and delays on the basis of race, culture and ethnicity through the Inter-Ethnic provisions of the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996; and (3) signing into law the Family Medical Leave Act, enabling parents to take time off to adopt a child without losing their jobs or health insurance.

**Q: What are the adoption awards being given out?**

A: The "Adoption 2002" report recommended that the Department of Health and Human Services work in collaboration with foundations and intergovernmental organizations to establish annual awards to recognize states, local agencies, courts, private organizations, employers and others who are making key contributions to the national effort to support adoption and promote permanency for children in foster care. This is the second year of these awards and they are being announced to celebrate National Adoption Month. HHS is giving out the awards in a private ceremony, and the awardees will be guests at the White House event. This year's 8 awardees are: (1) the Georgia Department of Human Services Office of Adoptions; (2) the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services; (3) Hope for the Children, Inc., Rantoul, IL; (4) Three Rivers Adoption Council, Pittsburgh, PA; (5) Tim O'Hanlon, Ohio North American Council on Adoptable Children; (6) Governor and Mrs. Jim Edgar, IL; (7) Kansas Association of Broadcasters; and (8) Judge Max Baer, Allegheny Juvenile Court, PA.

**Q: What does our nation's child welfare system look like today? How many children are in it and how long do they stay in foster care on average?**

A: Today, approximately 520,000 of America's children live in our nation's foster care system. More than 100,000 of those children cannot return safely to their homes and need adoptive families. Our most recent data indicate that nearly 60 percent have been in care 24 months or longer. Of the children in care, the average age is 7; 35 percent are white, 45 percent are black, and 14 percent are Hispanic; and 5 percent of children turn 18 and leave the foster care system without having a permanent home.

**Q: How much funding does the federal government invest in foster care and adoption services?**

A: The federal government provides over \$5.5 billion to States to run their foster care, adoption and child welfare programs. The funding provides a variety of supports to States which include: preventive services, investigations of child abuse and neglect, caseworkers and administrators, foster care adoption benefits to families, training, recruitment of foster and adoptive families, demonstration grants to test innovative programs, services for teenagers who are leaving foster care to be on their own, and supports for children with special needs. States must provide matching funds in order to access a majority of these funds.

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

CARL LEVIN  
MICHIGAN

**United States Senate**

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2208

**RUSH!!!**

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 9<sup>th</sup> White House discussions. The Senator is hopeful that HHS is on board as well.

Enclosures

## 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](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, 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.

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News 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."

**Nicole R. Rabner**

10/28/98 07:51:40 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Bruce N. Reed/OPD/EOP

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Subject: Adoption Registry

Good news on the internet-based national adoption registry -- we can both call for it and create it with existing authority and resources (it would cost between \$1-2 million). In the FY 1999 budget, HHS/ACF secured \$10 million of additional discretionary funding for our Adoption 2002 initiative, targeted to "removing barriers to adoption." (Not incidentally, DPC and OFL fought for this funding.) I must have caught a rare HHS moment of responsiveness, as HHS believes it can announce the RFP as early as November. I suggest that we add to our list of FY 2000 budget items an increase in the Adoption Opportunities discretionary grant dollars that could be targeted to the upkeep of the internet site.

Also important to note is that such an internet exists today -- the PA-based National Adoption Center (with whom we work closely) runs an internet site called "Faces of Adoption" that is doing on a small scale what we envision nationally (www.adopt.org). This site has placed over 300 children in adoptive homes -- for instance, a couple in Alaska found a special needs child in Philadelphia, PA. The National Adoption Center reports, however, that the growth of this site is slow because of lack of resources, commitment, and public awareness (which, of course, a Presidential announcement would easily cure).

Next month is National Adoption Month -- we could announce the vision and RFP for this site. Also, we will have new adoption numbers to announce (while we haven't seen the specifics yet, we understand that they will show a significant increase in adoptions last year over a relatively stagnant figure for many years). Also, the First Lady is very interested in holding a White House event to mark National Adoption Month.

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