



ACADEMY RESPONSE CONCERNING THE CHILD RECENTLY RETURNED TO RUSSIA BY HIS ADOPTIVE MOTHER

Positive adoption stories rarely make the news media. Yet, each year, thousands of domestic and international adoptions are successful in uniting families and children throughout the world. Adoption is a loving alternative for creating forever families for thousands of children in the United States and abroad. In fact, for many children living in institutions or without permanent or adequate care, adoption may be the only chance at a life full of love and the opportunity for a family.

However, as in most endeavors, there are times when adoption may not work out as planned. In response to the current story about the adoptive mother who returned her son to Russia, the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys (the “Academy”) recognizes that there are occasional failures in adoption. The system is not perfect and there is certainly room for improvement in many areas of adoption law and practice. In the aftermath of the recent incident involving the abandonment of an adopted child from Russia, suggestions, opinions, analysis, and recommendations have been plentiful. There are many areas where improvement in regulations and practices could be made for the benefit of families and children while not losing sight of the fact that children should always remain the primary focus in adoption practice. Just a few examples of areas for possible improvements include:

- ✓ Preventing incidents of abandonment and appropriately punishing actions of abuse in an effort to provide better protection to children;
- ✓ Ensuring that international adoption programs do not cease and harm even more children because of an isolated and rare incident that is not typical of most adoptions;
- ✓ Better screening and training of pre-adoptive families to ensure that families are capable and adequately prepared for parenting, including awareness of risks and outcomes for adopted children, especially children who have been institutionalized, older children, and children who suffer from prior maltreatment;
- ✓ Improving support for families after an adoption has been completed and offering easier access to mental health services for adoptive families and children;
- ✓ Promoting and encouraging the use of existing and available resources to help strengthen and preserve families;
- ✓ Ensuring that any person who is in a care-giving capacity has a responsibility to keep a child safe and adequately and appropriately meet a child’s physical, emotional, and mental health needs.

- ✓ Improving awareness and access to counseling services, parenting classes, and support networks designed to emphasize common issues and problems encountered with an emotionally damaged child;
- ✓ Requiring more complete evaluations and health information of children prior to adoption while also requiring more thorough supervision of families and children following an adoption; and
- ✓ Emphasizing the need to free children for adoption at younger ages in an effort to reduce the destructive impact of institutionalization on children's mental, physical, and emotional health.

The Academy constantly works with state legislatures, courts, Congress, the Federal government, and the adoption community to promote and recommend effective procedures to protect all participants in the adoption triad - adoptive parents, birth parents and children. While the task is often overwhelming, the results for the most part have been very successful as evidenced by the thousands of successful adoptions each year. As a group of professionals committed to building families through adoption, we will continue our efforts to improve adoption practice.

The Academy has many members throughout the U.S. that are available to assist in understanding the adoption process, including laws, regulations, and procedures associated with both domestic and international adoptions. A knowledgeable adoption attorney can help identify resources in the community to strengthen and preserve families, or if necessary, present appropriate legal alternatives and assistance to allow families to make an alternative plan for a child while ensuring that the plan will be in the best interests of the child.

For more information, visit the Academy Website at: www.adoptionattorneys.org