

National Adoption and Child Welfare Organizations, Responding to ‘Re-homing’ Reports, Call on Congress and Public Officials to Protect Children, Support Adoptive Families

The [recent reports](#) about the “re-homing” of adopted children and youth are heartbreaking and appalling. No child should go through agony like this. We know the vast majority of adoptive families are committed to their sons and daughters, and do all they can to keep their children safe and sound and to help them overcome early losses or traumas. But the practice of parents – of any sort – giving their children away to unapproved, unlicensed strangers is anathema to us and must be prevented and prosecuted.

As a society, we must make children’s needs paramount; they are not commodities that can be traded or discarded. We call on federal and state policymakers to take immediate actions to prevent the terrible and unregulated activity that is being called “re-homing,” in which parents privately transfer custody of their adopted children.

Parents who adopt must understand they are making a lifelong commitment to a child. But forcing families to struggle without support, trying to raise children they feel unable to parent, is also unacceptable and harmful to children. The recent news coverage of “re-homing” calls attention to critically important questions about the circumstances that lead to adoptive parents transferring custody, the intentions of those who are seeking children to parent through these practices, and the effects on children. Some parents who seek new homes for their children may be callous and uncaring. Others may not have been properly trained about the core issues of adoption – about the specific issues their child is facing – or may have chosen to adopt through an agency more interested in fees than in vetting and preparation. We must improve processes and require training in the unique challenges of parenting children who have experienced early adversity or have special needs. Agencies that place children for adoption must properly assess families’ abilities, prepare families for a lifetime commitment, and commit to providing ongoing support.

Other parents, however, are good people who are feeling desperately unable to care for their children—children who have been traumatized by adverse experiences in their early lives, who have brain damage from alcohol or drug exposure in utero, or who have serious mental health and behavioral challenges. We strongly believe children benefit when all adoptive families have access to ongoing services, whether their adoptions were of children from foster care, from other countries, or as infants in the U.S. While many states offer some such services, they are rarely comprehensive. Many known supports do not serve families who adopt internationally, while others may be available in cities, but not in smaller towns. Some offer basic information and referral, but not adoption-competent, trauma-informed family care. Adoptive families need a continuum of support – from information about core adoption issues, to training on special needs, to clinical services that address mental health and behavior challenges. They also need connections with experienced adoptive parents, who can encourage them to hang in there, show them how children can heal, and remind them that adoption is a lifelong commitment.

A coalition of adoption and child welfare partners have been raising visibility about the critical needs of some adoptive families; in recent years, the coalition has called on Congress to implement changes to ensure adopted children and their parents get the services they need to keep their families safe and stable. In a briefing on Capitol Hill, coalition members shared [joint policy](#)

[recommendations](#) to encourage federal policy makers to help shift the paradigm away from simply placing children for adoption to providing the ongoing supports families need to raise children to healthy adulthood. We should wait no longer to implement these recommendations, which include:

- Establish a reliable, comprehensive, and flexible federal funding source for post-adoption services
- Ensure services offered to adopted children and their families embrace best practices, are trauma-informed, and are provided by professionals who are trained in supporting children and their adoptive families
- Invest in research and evaluation to identify and promote the most effective post-adoption services
- Address the significant gaps in the service delivery system and state policies which too often present parents with the impossible choice of giving up custody to receive state-funded services for their children
- Provide access to post-adoption services regardless of the type of adoption

We can't think of a more critical time to pass legislation that extends greater federal support for post-adoption services for children and their families. We applaud the [House Ways and Means Committee draft proposal](#) that establishes some designation to support such services, but it is not enough. As Congress sets its sights on adoption legislation [reauthorizing the federal Adoption Incentives Program] this fall, we call for broader action to pursue policies that will put an end to trading children and will create a network of support services that help children and their adoptive families, beginning before a child is adopted and throughout their subsequent journey.

In addition to the above recommendations, we strongly urge legislators and policymakers to protect children from unregulated custody transfers, whether or not they cross state lines. Congress should act immediately, beginning by holding oversight hearings, initiating a comprehensive GAO investigation of the practice of "re-homing" and adoption dissolution, and passing legislation to strengthen the policies and practices that will prevent harm to adopted children. We believe any such investigation should review legal practices and the need for prosecution of wrong-doers in the re-homing of children.

In the meantime, we call on Congress to immediately convene a meeting of senior leadership from the State Department, SAMSHA, ACYF, CMS, and states to examine state-by-state policy implications for this population, with the intended goal of developing better coordination of funding and services and providing technical assistance, training, and strategies to address the needs of adopted children and their families.

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