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MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

SUBJECT: Using the Internet to Increase Adoptions

Technology will be an ever more important partner in achieving our national goals as we approach the new millennium. New technological tools mean new opportunities for progress -- helping us to strengthen the global economy, bolster public education, and improve the health of American families. Technology can also assist our continuing efforts to increase the number of adoptions from our nation's foster care system.

As we celebrate National Adoption Month, it is fitting that we reflect on the important steps we have taken to strengthen our child welfare system and, specifically, to improve the process of adoption. We have made it easier for families to adopt through the Family and Medical Leave Act and tax credits. We have eliminated discrimination and delay based on race and ethnicity. And, last year, we enacted the Adoption and Safe Families Act, tightening the time frame for decision-making and affirming that the health and safety of children in foster care must always come first.

progress, but...

We are making progress, but know that there is more work to be done. We know that geographic and other barriers to adoption still exist. We also know that we must do a better job in informing America's families about the nearly 100,000 children that wait in foster care for permanent, adoptive homes. To give those children the future they deserve, to give our families the opportunity to provide them with happy, healthy homes, we must infuse the public child welfare system with the power of technology.

Proposal - tech

Therefore, today I am directing the Secretary of Health and Human Services to work with the States, courts, private agencies and other leaders to develop a plan for expanding use of the Internet as a tool to find homes for children waiting to be adopted from the public child welfare 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 legally free for adoption through a national Internet service could shorten the time needed to find them adoptive families. Close consultation with the States will be necessary to take full advantage of the Internet's potential to promote adoptions. The Secretary will report to me within 60 days with a plan to carry out this consultation, identify important issues and strategies to address them, and build on promising existing efforts.

TALKING IT OVER
BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bill and I get a lot of letters. Some ask me for advice on hairstyles. Others ask him for golf tips. But the best letters are always from kids. I'll never forget the letter he got from a young boy in Iowa. It said, "Dear Mr. President, My name is Rollie. I like to play football and basketball. I've been waiting eight years for an adoptive family. I'm hoping for a family with pets, a brother and a sister, and nice parents."

Thanks to a new law Bill signed this week, the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, more children like Rollie will have their hopes fulfilled. This law holds out the promise that all children in our foster care system will have a chance to find what every child deserves -- loving parents and a safe, permanent home.

Right now, there are half a million children in foster care. For most of them, foster care is a safe haven on the road to a permanent home. Too many, however, make countless detours along the way, shuffling from family to family, without much hope that they'll ever find parents to love and take care of them.

This new law will come to their aid. It is the direct result of the President's commitment to improving the lives of all children. And it will help meet his goal of doubling by the year 2002 the number of kids who are adopted or placed in permanent homes each year.

Here's what this legislation will do:

-- With this law, the health and safety of children will always be the first priority. The best chance children have in this life is with parents who love them -- and we must always do our best to give them that. But we cannot ever leave children in unsafe homes. Under this law, states will no longer be required to try to keep children with parents who tortured, abandoned or chronically abused a child. When this happens, a child will be on a fast track to a safe, permanent home. Furthermore, states will conduct criminal background checks of prospective foster and adoptive parents.

-- With this new law, foster care will become what it was always meant to be -- a temporary refuge en route to a permanent home -- not a place to grow up. For kids in foster care, hearings determining their future will be sped up by at least six months. For children who have been in foster care for 15 of the last 22 months, states must move forward to terminate parental rights except in narrowly specified circumstances. For children who cannot be safely returned to their families, states must do all they can to find a permanent place to call home. And states now will receive financial incentives to

increase the number of foster care children who are adopted each year -- especially those with special needs.

This new law removes another barrier -- it gets rid of the obstacles that keep families from adopting children across state and county lines. It also tells children with special needs: You will continue to have health insurance under Medicaid or the new State Child Health Insurance Program. And it tells parents that our government will work harder to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect.

-- With this new law, we are going to demand accountability by basing state performance on the only yardstick that matters: results. The Department of Health and Human Services will develop an annual report card to show how states are measuring up -- including the number of adoptions they've completed and the amount of time children are staying in foster care.

Regardless of age, religion or race, all the children I've met over the years have had one important thing in common: All of them needed parents in their lives. Someone to pick them up when they've fallen. Someone to teach them right from wrong. Someone to tuck them into bed at night. Someone simply to love them.

It is for this reason that, for more than 25 years, I've done my best to call attention to children in foster care and to see to it these children are not lost in the system and that those who cannot ever go home are freed for adoption.

Foster +
foster
care

The landmark bill my husband signed will go a long way toward making sure this happens. It's a historic opportunity -- one that couldn't have happened without extraordinary bipartisan work from members of Congress in both houses.

But this new law will not solve all that ails our child welfare system. Businesses can make it easier for their employees to adopt a child. Religious leaders can help spread the word about the joys of adoption. Parents thinking about adoption can expand their search to reach out to kids in foster care.

That's what Bernell and Della Neal did -- again and again and again. This week, the government honored them with a 1997 Adoption 2002 Excellence Award. These parents have adopted 11 children, many with severe physical and emotional needs. Though the Neals have faced tough challenges, they have shown that nothing is impossible. Their family motto is "There's always room for one more."

Because of this new law, that will be the motto for other families as well.

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November 18, 1997

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

November 4, 1997

NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH, 1997

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

A PROCLAMATION

Most American children are blessed with loving, stable families. But, tragically, in our country today there are too many children whose parents are unwilling or unable to care for them. While foster care offers these children a safe and nurturing temporary haven in their time of greatest need, as many as 100,000 foster care kids will need permanent homes in the next few years. Many of these children have special needs and require the security and stability of an adoptive family to develop their full potential. Adoption allows these and other children to have the permanent homes they deserve, and it enables many dedicated adults to experience the joys and rewards of parenting.

My Administration is working hard to find ways to help encourage adoption. On December 14, 1996, I issued a Memorandum to the Secretaries of Health and Human Services, the Treasury, Labor, and Commerce and to the Director of the Office of Personnel Management, directing them to promote efforts to both increase the number of children who are adopted or permanently placed each year and to move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes. I also urged them to increase public awareness about the children waiting for permanent families and to encourage all Americans to consider the rewards of adoption.

I challenged the members of my Administration to work with States, communities, and civic leaders to create a plan for doubling the number of adoptions and permanent placements for children to 54,000 by the year 2002. And on February 14, 1997, the *Adoption 2002* report, outlining changes in policies and practices necessary to reach this goal, was released. Since then, we have been actively implementing the recommendations included in the report, and States are reviewing data and submitting numerical targets for adoption and guardianships to be completed by the year 2002. The Office of Personnel Management has published a guide for Federal workers interested in adopting, and the Department of Health and Human Services is preparing to make the first annual Adoption 2002 Excellence awards later this year. Finally, the Congress is considering historic legislation that would provide the resources and statutory authority for financial incentives, technical assistance, and improved judicial decision-making for

children in foster care.

As a Nation, we have before us an opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of our most vulnerable children. We must continue to promote public awareness of the need for adoptive families and to help families make the choice to provide loving, permanent homes for the many children who otherwise must continue to wait. We must also strengthen our support of those families who do choose to adopt. As we observe National Adoption Month, we reaffirm our commitment to adoption as a new beginning for thousands of children, and we celebrate the many American families who have embraced these children by accepting the rewards and responsibilities of adoption.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim November 1997 as National Adoption Month. I urge all Americans to observe this month with appropriate programs and activities to honor adoptive families and to participate in efforts to find permanent homes for waiting children.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this third day of November, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-second.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

AS PREPARED

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS FOR THE W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION
FAMILIES FOR KIDS BY 2002 CONFERENCE
WASHINGTON, DC
JUNE 26, 1997**

It is a pleasure to be in the company of so many men and women who have contributed their talents and energies to the critical issue of adoption. Over the years, the Kellogg Foundation has made an unparalleled commitment to improving our foster care and adoption systems, and I am particularly grateful for the Foundation's participation in a discussion I held at the White House last summer about this subject.

Let me thank all of you involved with Kellogg and *Families for Kids* for your leadership in drawing attention to the plight of hundreds of thousands of children across our country who are needlessly languishing in foster care -- and for serving as models of what can be done to improve the child welfare system and bring more hope and security to children so desperately in need of both.

Not only are you heroes to countless children who have benefited from your efforts, you are breaking new ground for elected officials and policy makers -- in Washington and elsewhere -- who have much to learn from your example.

This conference could not be more timely. After years of inattention and partisan politics, we are finally forging a bipartisan consensus on Capitol Hill that could correct some of the most glaring flaws in the adoption process. Today we are within reach of bringing some common sense and compassion to an overburdened, understaffed and outdated foster care system.

Those of you who have worked on children's welfare issues -- as I have for the last 25 years -- have heard no shortage of stories about children who are shuttled from one foster home to another during their formative years.

I will never forget a case I handled about 15 years ago in Arkansas.

I represented a couple who wanted to adopt a four-year-old boy who had been in their foster care for three years. The boy had been badly neglected as a baby by his biological mother, who had psychological problems. When he was less than a year old, she turned him over to the local social service agency so she could follow a boyfriend to another state. At that point, the baby showed all the symptoms of severe mistreatment: he had gained little weight, he was unresponsive and he shied away from human contact.

But in his foster family, he began to thrive. And his foster parents fell in love with him. Even though they had signed the customary state contract prohibiting them from adopting him, they wanted to make him a permanent member of their family.

The state adoption agency refused their request. So the boy was going to be taken from the security of the family he knew and turned over to strangers on some adoption list. Meanwhile, the boy's birth mother filed suit to get him back, claiming she had overcome her problems.

I argued on behalf of the boy's foster parents that the best interests of the child should take precedence over both the birth mother's claims of her biological rights and the state's claims to its contractual agreement. I asked the judge to allow testimony from a child psychologist about the boy's progress in his foster family and about the possible consequences to his physical, intellectual and emotional development if he was separated from them. The judge, who had children and grandchildren of his own, didn't think he had much to learn from these witnesses, but he allowed them nonetheless. In the end, the psychologist's testimony weighed heavily in the judge's determination to allow the foster parents to adopt the boy.

Just as often, however, the child's best interests do not take precedence. And this sad reality is repeated throughout our nation. Antiquated rules and rigid presumptions continue to deny countless children the lasting family connections that can influence whether a child does well in school, stays away from drugs, and goes on to become a responsible, law-abiding adult.

Only recently have we begun to view issues regarding the health and safety of children in foster care through a clear lens -- instead of a fog of distortions and political rhetoric over what constitutes real "family values."

Clearly, no one wants children to be in situations where they are subjected to abuse, torture, starvation or neglect. In 1973, when I was just entering the world of children's advocacy and the law, I wrote an article about children's rights in family situations -- particularly those that pose a threat to their health and safety. As recently as a few years ago, some critics suggested that by supporting a child's right to a loving family, I favored giving government more power to break up biological families and giving children the right to bring trivial disputes with their parents -- like curfews or who takes out the garbage -- to court.

Thankfully, those erroneous interpretations have given way to a clearer consensus about which children should be placed back with their biological parents -- and which should not.

We are beginning to recognize that some parents simply are not capable of taking care of their own children -- and likely never will be. Think about Elisa Izquierdo, the four-year-old girl in New York City who was found starved to death in her family's home last year; or five-year-old Richard Holmes who was discovered earlier this year to have been tortured and abused in his own home in a Maryland suburb.

Clearly, these children and others like them would be better off growing up with the love and support of an adoptive family than with biological parents who put them in harm's way.

At the same time, we have to recognize that some parents who have had problems with their children can learn to be responsible but need help in coping with the stresses of parenthood and child-rearing. In these cases we must make sure that parents have the support and counseling they need.

Today, the House and Senate are considering bills that would bring more order, logic and compassion to the process.

Under both bills, "reasonable efforts" to return a child to his or her family would not be required in extreme cases such as torture, abandonment, physical or sexual abuse. Court hearings to determine the permanent placement of a child would be required within 12 months of his or her arrival in the foster care system, instead of the current 18 months. The hearings would be called "permanency planning hearings" to make clear the goal of the proceedings.

There are also provisions in the legislation to provide financial incentives to states to increase the number of adoptions from the public child welfare system -- and particularly to increase the number of adoptions of special needs children.

These are important steps toward ensuring that children no longer languish indefinitely in foster care. They are particularly critical for children who are traditionally hard to place: those with disabilities, who are medically frail, have siblings, or are minorities. As we embark on a national discussion about race relations, which the President called for earlier this month, let us take special note that a disproportionate number of children in foster care are African-American. These children can bring boundless joy to families, and families can bring boundless joy to them. But we have to work harder to ensure that these unions happen.

Let me be clear: The President is committed to working with Congress to achieve the goals you and the Administration share and to find the funding necessary to achieve the strongest adoption bill possible.

Many provisions in the House and Senate bills incorporate recommendations made in *Adoption 2002*, a report prepared by the Department of Health and Human Services in response to the President's directive to identify barriers to adoption and double the number of children placed annually in permanent homes by the year 2002.

Giving states flexibility to shorten the adoption process, highlighting strategies that are working, and providing incentives to meet adoption goals -- all part of the President's action plan -- build on other Administration efforts.

To break down financial, cultural and social barriers to adoption, the Administration has made it illegal to deny or delay an adoption on the basis of race. And the President has signed into law a \$5,000 tax credit for families who adopt, with an increase to \$6,000 for families who adopt children with special needs.

The President's chief concern has been -- and continues to be -- that no child is deprived of a safe and permanent home for one day longer than necessary. As he has said, he wants every state, every family court, every case worker in the country to understand that children's health and safety must be paramount in resolving these cases.

He is determined to work across party lines, at every level of government and with every sector of society, to give every child in America the security of a loving, nurturing and permanent home.

Yet while we all know that federal leadership is crucial, we also know that it is not enough to bring about the sweeping change our child welfare system requires.

That's where you come in.

I want to commend the Kellogg Foundation for bringing together policy makers, business and religious leaders, elected officials, judges, child advocates, and foster and adoptive families here to discuss strategies to reduce the number of children waiting to be adopted and to speed up the adoption process so that no child lingers in foster care for more than one year.

I also want to commend you for launching the *Families for Kids* initiative, which has already produced tangible results in eleven sites around the country, including:

- providing counseling for adoptive parents
- modernizing computer data
- bringing together churches to find permanent homes for foster children -- particularly special needs children
- making changes in the judicial system to address the needs of children in foster care.

As a result of these and other efforts undertaken as part of *Families for Kids*, 7,000 children were placed in permanent families last year. Many promising new partnerships are underway. And there are important lessons that can be replicated in every community and state across our country.

Today, we understand even more about the urgency of this mission. As the White House Conference on Early Childhood Development and Learning in April made clear, children need love, nurturing, stimulation and security from the moment they enter this world. Depriving them of consistency and permanence is depriving them of the chance to achieve their God-given potential.

At the same time, we must not overlook the critical difference that loving parents can make in the lives of older children as well. Children of all ages can benefit from the care and attention of a stable, loving family. And that's why your efforts are so crucial to bringing the best out in all of America's children, whether they are infants or adolescents.

I hope you will continue to lead our nation as we continue this important work. As Americans, we live in the most prosperous country in the world. Our economy is flourishing. We are known the world over for our compassion and generous spirit.

So let's meet this test and show that we really do stand for children. Let's give every child the gift of love that he or she deserves.

Thank you.

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**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
COLUMN FOR RELEASE JUNE 25, 1997
TALKING IT OVER/CREATORS SYNDICATE**

The reality of foster care was brought home to Bill and me when we met a teenage boy at the White House this winter. Bill asked him where he was from. "Fairfax County," the boy said. When Bill asked where in the county, the boy shrugged and answered, "All over."

*Foster
care*

Unfortunately, thousands of children in our foster care system today have similar stories to tell. Because of the complex regulations, outdated assumptions, understaffed and overwhelmed agencies of our child welfare system, too many children spend their formative years shuttling from one foster home to another. Today, even children lucky enough to find adoptive families will have waited an average of three years or more in a series of temporary homes.

But that can change. The Senate and the House of Representatives are both considering bills that will take important steps toward making sure that no child languishes in foster care.

Currently, a child's case can drag on for years in the foster care system as authorities make repeated attempts to reunite a child with his or her biological parents. Often these parents, for a variety of reasons, are unable to change the behavior that caused them to lose their child in the first place. If either bill becomes law, "reasonable efforts" to return a child to his or her family would not be required in extreme cases such as torture, abandonment, physical or sexual abuse. Court hearings to determine the placement of a child would be required within 12 months -- instead of the current 18 months -- of his or her arrival in the foster care system. To make clear their purpose, these hearings would be renamed "permanency planning hearings."

As a children's advocate and lawyer who has represented parents and children in their struggles with the foster care system for more than 25 years, I believe these steps are long overdue. In 1973, I wrote an article about children's rights under the law, specifically their

rights in family situations that pose serious threats to their health and safety. Even a few years ago, some considered this view controversial. Critics suggested that by supporting a child's right to a loving family, I advocated giving government more power to break up biological families and giving children the right to bring trivial disputes with their parents -- such as bed time or who takes out the garbage -- to court.

Thankfully, that erroneous interpretation of my views has given way to a new bipartisan consensus around the idea that protecting our children from harm and working to provide them with permanent, loving families-- even when that may entail separating them from their biological parents -- should be a priority of our child welfare system. Finally, we are recognizing that there are parents who will never be able to care for their children. And, in order to secure a foster child's well-being and stable development, we as a society have the responsibility to decide as quickly as possible whether a child can return home safely.

Many of the provisions in the House and Senate bills reflect recommendations made in *Adoption 2002*, a report prepared by the Department of Health and Human Services in response to the President's directive to identify the barriers to adoption and double the number of children placed annually in permanent homes by the year 2002.

Over the years, my husband has dedicated a great deal of time and energy to improving foster care and promoting adoption. As a result of the Administration's efforts, it is now illegal to deny or delay an adoption simply because the prospective parents and child are not of the same race. And last year, the President signed into law a \$5,000 tax credit to help families adopt children.

Federal leadership is crucial, but it will take the commitment of people from all corners of our country to bring about the sweeping change our child welfare system requires. This week, I'll be speaking at a national conference on adoption and child welfare reform sponsored by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The conference will bring together business and religious leaders,

policy makers, elected officials, judges, child advocates, and foster and adoptive families to discuss strategies to reduce the number of waiting children and limit the time a child spends in foster care to no more than one year.

The Kellogg Foundation has been working to reform child welfare systems in eleven states and localities. Last year alone, the foundation helped find permanent families for 7,000 children. This was possible because the foundation worked with churches and mounted aggressive media campaigns to recruit prospective adoptive families. And they helped child welfare agencies reform case work procedures, consolidate records, and modernize data collection methods so that no child becomes lost in the system.

Now we must build on their work. With thousands of children leading transient lives in foster care, we cannot afford any more delays. We need to encourage Congress to pass the best adoption bill possible. Thousands of innocent children are counting on us.

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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

February 14, 1997

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AND THE FIRST LADY
AT PRESENTATION OF ADOPTION 2002 REPORT

The Oval Office

12:51 P.M. EST

MRS. CLINTON: I want to welcome all of you to the White House and wish you a happy Valentine's Day. I am delighted that we are holding this event on a day when we think about all kinds of love, and we are gathered to announce a plan that we hope can bring the love of a permanent family to the hundreds of thousands of children waiting in our foster care system.

Two months ago the President directed Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala to investigate the barriers that keep so many of our children in the limbo of foster care. He asked the Secretary to report to him with specific recommendations on how best to move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes, and how to meet a national goal of doubling the number of children placed annually in permanent homes by the year 2002.

In a few minutes, Olivia Golden, Acting Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services, will present her department's findings to the President. I'm very impressed by the hard work that went into this report. It is based on extensive interviews, surveys and consultations with placement agencies, adoption and child welfare advocates, and social workers nationwide. I'm particularly pleased that careful attention was paid to the thoughts and observations of adoptive and foster parents because they know better than anyone the strengths and shortcomings of our system.

This report makes it very clear that foster care should never be a permanent solution. No child should grow up in foster care. Children deserve prompt, efficient decision-making from the adults who serve them. They deserve schedules for permanent placement that respect their developmental needs. And they deserve federal leadership to make that happen.

Ensuring the safety and timely placement of a child with a permanent loving family should be the mission of our foster care system. But for too many years this mission has been obscured as too many children have literally grown up or spent the majority of their childhoods in the system. They have led transient lives, moving from one foster family to the next, experiencing few constants but growing case files and dreams for permanent families. We can no longer afford these delays.

In recent years we have learned much about the tremendous influence that adults caring for children in their earliest years can have on their intellectual, neurological, and emotional development. Children who have adults to talk to them, read to them, make them feel secure and loved throughout their earliest years will thrive. And we cannot afford to let any child who could be in such a loving situation go without it.

That is why steps to secure permanent, safe, and loving homes for children, whether they are with their biological families

or others, should begin as soon as a child enters the foster care system, not after four days or five months or six years of shuttling from placement to placement.

We have already witnessed important steps to remedy the situation. Two years ago, the President and Congress made it illegal to deny or delay an adoption simply because the adoptive parents and children were not of the same race. Last year, the administration and Congress strengthened that legislation. The President also signed a \$5,000 tax credit for families who adopt. And families who adopt children with special needs can receive \$6,000.

Decorating the Oval Office today are valentines created by some of the 600 children waiting in Iowa in foster care. Each valentine, sponsored by the Iowa Citizens Foster Care Review Board, tells the story of a child waiting to be adopted. The paper hearts list the age the child came into the foster care system, the age the child became free for adoption, and the number of days they have been waiting for a family.

Every year these valentines are placed on trees at the Iowa State Capitol. This Valentine's Day, the children decided to send their valentines to the White House, as well. Some of them sent letters to accompany their valentines -- letters such as this one: "Dear President, my name is Rollie. I am 12. I live in Iowa. I like to play football and basketball. I've been waiting eight years for an adoptive family. I'm hoping for a family with pets, a brother and a sister, and nice parents."

Let's all work together so that Rollie and thousands of other children waiting in foster care can see their dreams come true.

Now, it is my great pleasure to introduce the acting Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services, Olivia Golden, who will tell us more about today's report.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY GOLDEN: Mrs. Clinton, thank you for that introduction and for your leadership. And thank you, Mr. President, for giving us the opportunity to be here today. Secretary Shalala wished she could be here, and it's an honor for me to be here in her place.

Mr. President, in December you told us that you wanted

to double the number of children who are adopted or permanently placed from foster care by the year 2002. You wanted to move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes, and you told us to come back in 60 days with a plan for how to do it. Let me tell you what we've done.

To prepare our report to you we consulted with leaders in Congress, in state and local governments, child welfare experts, community leaders and foster and adoptive parents. Hundreds of people talked with us; 200 sent us letters. It was an enormously exciting process, because what we heard was a sense of joy and excitement from all over the country that under the leadership of the President and the First Lady the nation was ready to join together to address this issue. And we learned a tremendous amount from this process. What we learned from this consultation will guide our work on this initiative and on all of our work with children in the child welfare system.

So again, I want to thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to do this work.

The report, Adoption 2002, that I have the honor to present today is an action plan to make sure that all of the 450,000 children in foster care have a real chance for a loving, permanent home, and that we're able to meet the President's goal of doubling by the year 2002 the number of children adopted or placed in permanent homes.

Let me give you just a few highlights of the report. The report begins with the 10 principles that we learned from our consultations and that will guide our work. The first, as the First Lady said, is that every child deserves a safe, permanent family. The report commits us to setting goals with every state to double adoptions by the year 2002. And for the first time that we know of in federal child welfare spending, we've put dollars behind results, paying for performance to make sure that states receive incentives if they in fact move ahead on adoption.

The report proposes several major changes in federal legislation to help more children find permanent homes and remove procedural barriers. And it proposes targeted funding for states to help them dismantle procedural and other barriers to permanency. And it proposes activities to break down racial and ethnic barriers to adoption. And finally, the report proposes a comprehensive technical assistance plan to bring the best talent in the nation to help the

courts, state child welfare agencies, community leaders to work together to ensure that children move promptly to a loving permanent home.

What we believe makes this exciting agenda possible is the excitement we've heard from community leaders across the country the partnership and commitment we've received from state and local leaders -- we have support from seven governors for our goals described in the report and we expect many more.

What makes it possible is bipartisan congressional commitment; and, most of all, what makes it possible is the leadership that we've experienced and the nation has experienced from the President and the First Lady. So it's a tremendous honor to be able today to present to you Adoption 2002.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Thank you very much, Olivia. Ladies and gentlemen and boys and girls, thank you all for being here. I also want to say a special word of thanks to some members of Congress who are not here today but who have done an enormous amount of work on this issue, including Senators Rockefeller, Chafee and DeWine, and Congresswoman Kennelly and Congressman Camp.

Let me begin by also saying happy Valentine's Day. All the kids look wonderful. The rest of us look all right, too -- (laughter) -- but the kids look especially wonderful.

I want to thank you, Olivia, for the work you've done. And I want to thank the First Lady for the work she has done on this issue over more than 20 years now. I'll never forget the first conversation we had, shortly we were married, about a case that she had involving a child in foster care who wanted to become an adopted child. I didn't know very much about it before then, and ever since then this issue has been of consuming interest to me because of what I learned through her. And I thank her for that.

We know that our children's fundamental well-being depends upon safety and stability; that without these, children have a very hard time in this complicated, challenging world of ours. We know that far too many of our own children are indeed now in danger in the homes in which they live. The public child welfare system was created to provide a temporary haven for those children, but not to let them languish forever in foster care.

As you heard Olivia say, we have nearly half a million of our children in foster care today. Nearly 100,000 will never return to their original homes. Many of those children still will never know what it's like to live in a real home until they grow up and start their own families. But it does not have to be that way. We can find adoptive and other permanent families for waiting children like these fine children who have joined us today and the children whose valentines you see hanging behind me and here in front.

In December I asked the Department of Health and Human Services to come up with an aggressive legislative and administrative strategy to double the number of children we move from foster care to permanent homes annually by the year 2002, and to move them there much more quickly. I'm proud to say that the Department went to work to produce this blueprint for achieving our goal.

Now we have to move quickly to put this plan into action, so that no child is deprived of a safe and permanent home for even one day longer than necessary. Every agency of every state, every family court, every case worker in the country must understand that children's health and safety are the paramount concerns of the child welfare system, especially when determining whether to remove a child from his or her home, or return them there.

We'll work with Congress to make sure the law explicitly reflects this priority. We'll issue guidelines to the states so there will be no question as to the law's meaning.

Second, to meet the goal of moving 54,000 children into permanent homes in 2002, we'll work with states and set yearly targets. We'll give them, as my balanced budget does, \$10 million a year for the next three years to give them the assistance they need to state agencies, courts and communities to devise such a system. We'll also have \$10 million to establish competitive grants for states to develop model strategies for moving children from foster care to permanent families.

Third, we'll propose legislation to give states bonuses, as Olivia said, for every child that is adopted over the prior year's total, with even larger bonuses when the child has special needs. The balanced budget will start paying for these bonuses, but we know they'll pay for themselves, since foster care costs far more than adoption. This isn't just cost effective -- of course, it's the

right thing to do.

Fourth, to achieve our goal of moving children more quickly, we'll work with Congress to shorten from 18 to 12 months the time a child waits for the first hearing. And we're going to call it a permanency planning hearing, so that there's no mistake as to its purpose.

Fifth, to give credit for model strategies that are working, we'll give national awards for excellence every year in November, National Adoption Month.

Finally, we'll redouble our efforts to make sure no child of one race is deprived of a loving home when a family of another race is prepared to give it. That is illegal and wrong and often hurts our very neediest children. The Department of Health and Human Services will continue to ensure that states are meeting their obligations under this law.

Putting this plan into action today will mean that we are ensuring that no child will languish in foster care when loving families are out there ready, willing and able to open their hearts and their homes. This is just one part of our strategy to guarantee the well-being of our most vulnerable children. By giving states the flexibility to develop their own strategies, we're moving closer to achieving that goal.

I'm proud to announce that we have approved Ohio's request for a waiver in dealing with their child welfare system. This is the fifth of its kind, and there will be more to come. It gives Ohio the authority to design and to test a managed care approach to improve child welfare services and move children out of foster care more quickly.

By working together across party lines at every level of government, in businesses, religious groups, communities, and in our homes, we can make sure that every child in America grows up in a safe and nurturing home. That is a goal every American should be proud to support. That is a gift of love we can make to all of our children. And if you look at the children here today, it's hard to think of anything more important we could be doing to say, Happy Valentine's Day.

Thank you. (Applause.)

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

December 14, 1996

Radio Address By The President

The Oval Office

10:06 A.M. EST

Good morning. Today we're taking important new steps to make adoption easier and to move children out of foster care faster. These efforts will help to give even more children what every child needs and deserves, loving parents, and a strong and stable home.

I'm delighted to be joined in the Oval Office today by a remarkable group of children and parents who know firsthand the tremendous possibilities of adoption; and by the First Lady who has worked so long and hard on this issue and whose efforts have made today possible.

I'm especially pleased to be able to take this action now, in this season of hope and light. The holidays we celebrate this month teach us that through faith and love we can truly repair the world. I can think of no better way to fulfill the promise of this season than to bring a child into a family and a family to a child.

There are more than 450,000 children in the nation's foster care system. They are placed there because of abuse, neglect or a home life that is neither safe, nor secure. While most of these children eventually return to their original homes, nearly 100,000 of them simply don't have that option. Those children wait far too long, typically three years or more, to find permanent homes and families to love them.

Promoting adoption has been at the heart of our administration's efforts to protect our children and strengthen our families. Earlier this year I was proud to sign a \$5,000 tax credit to help families adopt children. We put an end to racial preferences for adoption. No longer can laws keep children of one race from nurturing arms of adoptive parents of another. This is a good start, but we must do more.

That is why I have just signed a presidential directive with a clear goal: We will double the number of children we move from foster care to permanent homes, from 27,000 a year today, to 54,000 a year by the year 2002. With this effort we're saying no child should be trapped in the limbo of foster care; no child should be

uncertain about what the word 'family' or 'parents' or 'home' mean, particularly when there are open arms waiting to welcome these children into safe and strong households where they can build good, caring lives.

As part of this initiative, I'm directing the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, who is also with us today, to launch an extensive effort to determine what steps we must take to meet our goal. I want the Secretary to report back to me with her recommendations in 60 days. This report must tell us how we can help states set and meet urgent new adoption targets. It must describe how we can improve coordination among local, state and federal authorities so that every community has access to the best ways to encourage adoption. And it must outline what sensible financial incentives we can provide states to raise adoption rates.

I also want the Secretary to determine what additional changes we can make in federal laws and regulations to ensure that children won't get trapped in foster care. And I want to know if there are any new provisions we can put in place to move children through the system faster and to protect them when they leave.

There are other steps we are taking immediately. I'm instructing the Departments of Treasury, Labor, Commerce, and Health and Human Services to launch an all-out effort to heighten public awareness about adoption and to recognize those in the private sector who are committing themselves to this important cause.

Let me also say how grateful I am to those in Congress of both parties who are working so hard to make adoption a reality for America's most vulnerable children. I want to thank especially Senators Rockefeller and DeWine, and Representatives Kennelly and Camp for their efforts.

The fact that we are commemorating the birth of a child that began life in a manger and became the Prince of Peace should remind us that the promise of God has been placed in every child. We must work tirelessly to make sure that every boy and girl in America who is up for adoption has a family waiting up to reach him or her. No child should be in foster care for one day longer than he or she needs to be.

This is a season of miracles, and perhaps there is no greater miracle than finding a loving home for a child who needs one.

Thanks for listening.

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

December 14, 1996

RADIO ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT
AND THE FIRST LADY
TO THE NATION

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This is a season of miracles, and perhaps there is no greater miracle than finding a loving home for a child who needs one.

Thanks for listening.

MRS. CLINTON: We are so happy to have all of you here in the Oval Office with us today. And I know that the families that are here and the children and teenagers who are here all have a story to tell about how your families were created. And I would like to ask if I could -- I know that several of you actually were united with the children who are here because of television shows that you saw the children on. And perhaps you could tell us what happened and how that came to be.

Would you like to start? And maybe you should tell everyone who you are and introduce yourself.

Yes.

MR. BORIE: My name is Glenn Borie. My wife is Carolyn, and these are our four children -- John, Crystal, Charity and Dawn.

MRS. BORIE: We had been foster parents and were looking to adopt and knew that there were a lot of options. But seeing how children often get lost in the system, our hearts went towards them, knowing that -- very desirable and young and end up in the system for a long time and are less desirable to people at that point when they are available.

So we have been, by chance, by God's will, had the television on on a particular day when there was a talk show about adoption. And for a brief 20 seconds we saw Crystal on TV and just caught in our heart at that time. And as we saw the number for the National Adoption Center we found out she had three siblings.

Within a month the two older ones, John and Crystal, had moved in. We started visits with Charity and Dawn and two months later they moved in as well. Before they were separated in two foster homes for five years, so when the two younger ones moved in the week before

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Thanksgiving it was the first time in five years that they'd spent that together. And we just had a very thankful time to just thank God for an incredible family.

MRS. CLINTON: We're glad you're here today.

Did you also have a television?

MS. GRAY: Actually, no. I had adopted Michael when he was only eight years old -- I was 44 at the time, a divorced woman, wanted a child, and I was totally lost. This is the most amazing thing that I've ever experienced in my life, is having the gift of this beautiful child here.

And work for a company, Phoenix Insurance Company, which is an incredibly supportive company. And we have a subsidy for people up to \$2,000 for adoption of children. And the company has been supportive in a lot of ways. Me, as a single parent -- so it's just -- I'm delighted that you're doing this. Because as I go around and I tell people I adopted a child and I was 44 and he came from the state, I get all of these surprised looks -- how could you get him as a single parent, you know, are there children in the system. I think we have a huge job ahead of us in terms of educating people about getting children out of the public system. Kids are there and they need us.

MRS. CLINTON: I absolutely agree.

MS. GRAY: And they need companies like mine to support us.

MRS. CLINTON: And what about your family story.

MR. INGLESE: Hi, my name is Larry Inglese, and we were a foster family to start off with. I always loved children and wanted to have a lot of children. I saw this commercial on TV to open up your heart and your home to a special needs child. So I responded to that commercial and, of course, being a foster parent who liked having children in Pennsylvania, St. Joseph's called about adopting. And I went through with adoption of -- they set us up in a match party. And I met Jason there, who was 13 at the time.

THE PRESIDENT: How old are you now, Jason?

JASON INGLESE: I'm 15.

MR. INGLESE: He's going to be 16 next month.

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And him and I, we just, like, made eye contact. We sat down, we had lunch, we looked at each other in the eye and we both knew at that minute I was his father and he was my son. There was no doubt, no doubt whatsoever. But they had another family that had wanted Jason with two parent -- I'm a single parent, and they had a two-parent home. But that lady there kept changing her mind back and forth, so I said -- the two of us came to -- you know, this isn't for sure with her, I think I should get first choice over Jason because I'm willing to make a commitment now. And she agreed.

He was sure and I was sure, and through adoption got him. And then sometime later I was ready for the next one, and the caseworker was calling around, trying to find a home for Michael. Michael has got cerebral palsy and he's got mild mental retardation. He has a lot of problems with -- he came out, it was hard to find him a home. Anyway, finally, I accepted, I said I would take him.

But there were some race issues at the time, but they wouldn't let me have him right away. It took about -- it was about five or six months. They contacted me back and they couldn't get another family to take him so they accepted us. But I was kind of upset at the time because we were ready to give him a loving home and it didn't happen -- because of one caseworker, it didn't happen as fast as it should have. But we finally got him.

MRS. CLINTON: Great.

MR. INGLESE: And we finalized with him in November, November 15th of this year.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, that's wonderful -- in time for Thanksgiving. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: You have -- how many kids do you have now?

MR. INGLESE: I have three biological children, two adopted, and I've had 23 foster children.

MRS. CLINTON: That's great.

And what about your story?

MRS. BRYANT: My name is Frances Bryant. This is my husband, Michael Bryant. And we also saw Trey on the television program. We were watching the news one night, and normally I don't actually watch this particular channel, and for some reason I was just glued to this news. And I had never seen a commercial with children on

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it asking for a home. And then I saw Trey and he was on there and just touched my heart so much. And I wrote down the number and it was 1-800-KIDS hotline -- and I got up right after it went off and I told my husband about it. I said, you wouldn't believe what I just saw on TV. You know, I had never seen a child asking for a home.

There was no way that I could refuse this. I mean, it just touched my heart so. And we called the very next day and found out the information, and we went through the process and it only took about two months and we got Trey in our home. And what the amazing thing is that I realized how many children are out there waiting to be adopted. And I encourage anyone who can open up their heart and their home to a child -- it's a wonderful, rewarding experience. And I'm also going to do it again.

MRS. CLINTON: Well, we have some children here who are waiting for homes, and maybe you could introduce yourself. Which ones -- who wants to go first? Anybody want to say anything?

THE PRESIDENT: Go ahead.

DANIEL: My name is Daniel, and I've been waiting for a family for quite a long time. And hopefully, in a short amount of time I will probably get what I'm looking for in a family. My brother has already been adopted, and hopefully I'll get adopted by his family at one point of time. And if not, I'll still be able to get in contact with him.

THE PRESIDENT: How old are you?

DANIEL: Thirteen.

THE PRESIDENT: How old is your brother?

DANIEL: Seventeen.

MRS. CLINTON: How long have you been in foster care?

DANIEL: About two, three years.

MRS. CLINTON: Two or three years?

DANIEL: I'm not sure, but --

THE PRESIDENT: Where's your home? Where do you live?

DANIEL: Where do I live now? Alexandria.

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THE PRESIDENT: Anybody else want to talk?

MRS. CLINTON: What's your name? I'm glad you're here this morning.

One of the goals that we have with trying to do this and, as you say, talk more about education of people about adoption, and something the Secretary and the President and all of us are committed to, is so that more people know what your experience has been like. And anytime you raise a child, it is not all easy. We know that. I mean, there are going to be ups and downs no matter what. But I think that your stories about the emotional feeling that you had when you met your children is something that if we can get more people to see, we'll have more response. Do you agree with that, too?

MS. GRAY: Absolutely. I saw Michael the first time, he was four weeks old, and, as you say, I knew that this is my little boy. I was all pumped up thinking, oh, I'm going to adopt a little girl because I know about girls -- then I saw this little boy and it was all over.

But it has been an enormous blessing for me and for my family. He's just an incredible, an incredible gift. And I just wish that more and more people could have that experience. There is such a mythology about adoption, and if we could just get the word out and just get people to go and see and talk to these beautiful children, we could find them all homes, and have stable, loving parents who care about them and will raise them as strong citizens. And it's the greatest thing I've ever done in my whole entire life.

MRS. CLINTON: That's what we're going to try to do. And you all are experts because you've been through the system. What are some of the changes that we need to make in the system that each of you has dealt with so that we can perhaps encourage more people to be involved? Any thoughts about that?

MS. BORIE: Just the length of time that it takes. In my situation, I'm thankful that it took longer only because I would not have had them otherwise. But it breaks my heart to know that -- these are my children and to know that they were separated from each other for that long. It's heart-wrenching. And I may not have been their parent at that time, but having them now, in my heart I was their parent all that time. And to think that they had to go without each other, as a parent, it's just very sad. And it shouldn't have taken that long.

MRS. CLINTON: How long did it take?

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MRS. BORIE: They were in care for about five years. Our experience -- happened more quickly than usual. It was very speedy, thankfully. But to know that they were apart for that long was unnecessary.

MS. GRAY: I'd like to see us do a lot more with companies. I'm sure that -- I'm speaking on behalf my company because it's very supportive getting started, Phoenix Insurance. And anybody who wants to talk to me about it, please call because I want to help other companies do the same thing. If we could just get companies to tell their employees about these kinds of opportunities -- to do more through their newsletters and to say we're offering a benefit -- that would be great.

MRS. CLINTON: And the new legislation that the President signed to give people the \$5,000 tax credit -- that's something we need to make sure people know about, too, because you obviously don't do these things because of that, but there are expenses associated with taking a child into your home, especially a child with medical problems. Have you found that?

MR. INGLESE: Well, I'm lucky as far as my problems because Michael's medication alone comes to about \$800 a month and I could never afford that on my own. But I have a Pennsylvania Medical Access Card which covers his medical, and he needs many operations that he's been in even before I got him and he still -- he just got an operation, I think it was last month. They cover everything, totally. All his needs are met and paid for by the state. And I think it would be, like, impossible for me to adopt him if the state didn't pay for his needs and medical care because it's a tremendous amount and it's a tremendous expense.

Also what I want to say to others who are thinking about adopting, I think it's -- from what I find with some of the children, that they gave the parents too many years, they keep the children in foster care too many years. Jason was first in foster care from an infant. And he didn't get put up for adoption until he was 13 years old. It went so many years back and forth that he went back to the birth family and then taken away and back and forth. And Michael was also five years. His mother abandoned him at birth. He was put in foster care right from the hospital when he was born. And he's been in through foster homes in the five years before I adopted him.

I think it should be a lesser amount of time a child -- don't give the parents that long to try to get their children back. I think a year should be good

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enough. If a parent don't clean up their act within the year, then that child should be put in a loving home where he will get all the love that his natural parents can't give him.

MRS. CLINTON: How do you feel about that, Jason? Do you have an opinion about that?

JASON: Yes. Basically, I agree on the same. It shouldn't take that much time because with a child, of course, he's going to think that it should because he's going to want to go back with his biological parents, but to sit here and think about it, I would have liked it that way than to keep going back, keep taken away, keep going back -- for it to keep happening like that.

MR. INGLESE: Each time a new foster home. The other foster homes, they fill up. So he was like in, I think, about 12 or 13 foster homes and it was new one each time. He couldn't even go back to the same foster home where he knew the people. So he had to go through that struggle of trying to fit in with new family all over again and over and over and over again.

THE PRESIDENT: How many foster homes have you lived with?

DANIEL: About three.

THE PRESIDENT: Do you feel it's hard when you change?

DANIEL: It's a bit. After a while, you get sort of used to it, but it's still hard.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very much. Thank you.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you for what you're doing and thank you for the example.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

END

10:26 A.M. EST

A CHALLENGE TO THE NATION: SAFE AND PERMANENT HOMES FOR ALL CHILDREN

Today, President Clinton issued a challenge to the nation and signed a directive to members of his Cabinet to take new actions to move children more rapidly from foster care to safe, permanent homes. The goal of the President's ambitious new initiative is to at least double, by the year 2002, the number of children in foster care who are adopted or permanently placed each year. The directive focuses on securing homes for the tens of thousands of children in foster care who cannot return safely to their homes and for whom adoption is a goal. After consulting with Congressional, state and civic leaders, agencies will report back to the President within 60 days on steps to reach the directive's goals, which include:

I. Doubling the Number of Children Adopted or Permanently Placed by 2002:

Create Incentives for States: To shift the focus from paperwork to successful outcomes, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will work with states to set specific targets for increases in the number of children adopted or found permanent placement. In return, the federal government will provide a new per child financial incentive to states to increase the number of adoptions from the public welfare system. This action should nearly pay for itself, as increasing the number of adoptions will reduce expenditures in the foster care system. Progress in meeting the numerical targets will be compiled and published in a state-by-state annual report. Successful states will be recognized for their accomplishments.

Breakdown Racial and Ethnic Barriers to Adoption: HHS will continue to aggressively implement the laws signed by President Clinton in 1994 and 1996, which prohibit adoption agencies from denying or delaying placement of a waiting child based on race, color, or national origin, and encourage recruitment of adoptive parents.

II. Moving Children More Rapidly From Foster Care to Permanent Homes:

Decrease Procedural Delays: President Clinton is directing HHS to consult with Congress, states and civic leaders to propose changes to federal laws, policies and regulations and clarification of the "reasonable effort" requirement, to help states focus on finding permanent homes for children from the moment they enter the foster care system.

Help States Identify and Address Barriers to Permanency: As part of his budget proposal in February, the President will propose financial assistance for states to identify barriers to permanency and to develop strategies for children who have been waiting for a particularly long time. The President's initiative also directs HHS to encourage alternative permanency arrangements, such as guardianship and kinship care, for children for whom adoption is not a viable option.

III. Increasing Public Awareness:

Call to American Families, Communities and Business: The Clinton Administration will launch a new campaign in partnership with state, civic and business leaders, to increase public awareness about children waiting for adoption and to encourage all Americans to consider the rewards and responsibilities of adoption -- in new public service announcements, print materials, and on the Internet.

Provide Information on the Benefits of Adoption: Federal agencies will form partnerships to inform people of the new adoption tax credits, the Family and Medical Leave Act benefits, and other supports for adoptive parents, as well as recognize private sector companies with model policies to encourage adoption. The Office of Personnel Management will provide support and information to federal employees who are interested in becoming adoptive parents.

THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION RECORD ON ADOPTION

Our Nation has no greater responsibility than to ensure that every child has the chance to live up to his or her God-given potential. We can help meet that challenge by identifying a permanent, loving family for every child waiting in the foster care system.

-- President Clinton, National Adoption Month Proclamation, November 1996

President Clinton is committed to giving the over 450,000 children in foster care what every child in America deserves -- loving parents and a healthy, stable home. The Clinton Administration has taken several important steps to encourage and increase adoptions and to support the families that choose to open their hearts and their homes to these children. 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.

Today the President announced a new directive to the Departments of Health and Human Services, Treasury, Labor and Commerce and the Office of Personnel Management to develop a plan to: increase the number of children who are adopted or permanently placed each year, move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes, and create a new public awareness campaign on the importance of adoption. These actions build on previous initiatives, including:

MAKING ADOPTION AFFORDABLE FOR FAMILIES

In August, President Clinton signed into law the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996 which provides a \$5000 tax credit to families adopting children, and a \$6,000 tax credit for families adopting children with special needs. This policy will alleviate 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.

BREAKING DOWN RACIAL AND ETHNIC BARRIERS TO ADOPTION

Strengthening the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act which the President signed in 1994, the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996 also ensures that the adoption process is free from discrimination and delays on the basis of race, culture and ethnicity.

PROVIDING SUPPORTS FOR CHILD PROTECTION AND ADOPTION

In 1993, President Clinton signed into law the Family and Medical Leave Act which enables parents to take time off to adopt a child without losing their jobs or health insurance. In addition, the welfare reform bill that the President signed into law maintains the guarantee of child protection and adoption, and does not reduce funds for child welfare, child abuse, foster care and adoption services.

GIVING STATES FLEXIBILITY AND SUPPORT

The Clinton Administration has granted child protection waivers to Delaware, Illinois, North Carolina, and Oregon, giving the states more flexibility in tailoring services to meet the needs of children and families. Up to six more states will receive approval for waivers. In addition, this administration has provided states with enhanced technical support and helped improve court operations so they can focus on successful outcomes. To prevent children from entering foster care in the first place, in 1993 the Clinton Administration secured federal funding to work with states, local governments and service providers to develop effective programs to serve children and families at risk.

RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS

Through speeches, writings, events and public service announcements, the President and First Lady have promoted the importance and benefits of adoption.

Text of Presidential Directive on Adoption

WASHINGTON, Dec. 14 /U.S. Newswire/ -- Following is a memorandum from President Clinton to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Secretary of the Treasury, Secretary of Labor, Secretary of Commerce and the director of the Office of Personnel Management:

During this Holiday Season, as we reflect on the importance of family in our own lives, let us remember the tens of thousands of our Nation's children in the public child welfare system who live without permanent and caring families. Foster care provides temporary shelter and relief for children who have been abused or neglected.

I am committed to giving the children waiting in our Nation's foster care system what every child in America deserves -- loving parents and a healthy, stable home. The goal for every child in our Nation's public welfare system is permanency in a safe and stable home, whether it be returning home, adoption, legal guardianship, or another permanent placement. While the great majority of children in foster care will return home, for about one in five, returning home is not an option, and they will need another home, one that is caring and safe. These children wait far too long -- typically over 3 years, but for many children much longer -- to be placed in permanent homes. Each year, State child welfare agencies secure homes for less than one-third of the children whose goal is adoption or an alternate permanent placement. I know we can do better.

I believe we should increase the number of children who are adopted or permanently placed from the public foster care system each year toward the goal of at least doubling that number by the year 2002. Returning home is not an option for about 100,000 of the over 450,000 children in the Nation's foster care system, yet only approximately 20,000 were adopted last year and approximately 7,000 were permanently placed in legal guardianships. While the number of adoptions each year has been constant for many years, I believe that by working with States to identify and break down barriers to permanent placements, setting annual numerical targets, rewarding successful performance, and raising public awareness, we can meet the target of at least 54,000 children adopted or permanently placed from the public foster care system by the year 2002.

Today, therefore, I direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services, in consultation with State and civic leaders, to report to me within 60 days on actions to be taken to move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes and at least to double, by the year 2002, the number of children in foster care who are adopted or permanently placed out of the public foster care system.

I. To increase the number of children who are adopted or permanently placed each year, this report should include, but should not necessarily be limited to, recommendations in the following areas:

(a) Plans to work with States on setting and reaching State specific numerical targets, using the technical assistance of the Department of Health and Human Services National Resource Centers to make information on best practices available to States and to engage community leaders, parents, and the business and faith communities;

(b) Proposals to provide per child financial incentives to States for increases in the number of adoptions from the public welfare system. Options considered should have little to no net costs, as increases in the number of adoptions from the public system will reduce foster care costs, thereby offsetting much if not all of the incentive payments;

(c) A proposal to ensure continued aggressive implementation of the Multi-ethnic Placement Act, as amended by the Inter-ethnic Adoption Provision of the Small Business Job Protection Act;

(d) Plans to compile and publish an annual State-by-State report on success in meeting the numerical targets; and

(e) Plans to recognize successful States.

II. To move children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes, the report shall also recommend changes to Federal law and regulations and other actions needed to emphasize the importance of planning for permanency as soon as a child enters the foster care system. The Secretary's report should include, but should not necessarily be limited to, recommendations in the following areas:

(a) Plans to provide States with funding to identify barriers to permanency and to develop targeted strategies to find permanent homes for children who have been in foster care a particularly long time;

(b) Proposals to shorten the period of time between a child's placement in foster care and his or her initial hearing at which a permanency determination is made;

(c) A proposal to clarify that the purpose of "dispositional hearings" is to plan for permanency and, as appropriate, to consider referrals for family mediation, termination of parental rights, adoption, legal guardianship, or other permanent placements;

(d) A proposal to clarify the "reasonable efforts" requirement and other Federal policy as it relates to permanency and safety;

(e) Plans to ensure that States give appropriate weight to permanency planning by establishing standards for securing permanency through adoption or guardianship, once a decision has been made that a child cannot be returned home; and

(f) Plans to examine alternative permanency arrangements, such as guardianship, when adoption is not possible.

Last month, I signed a proclamation designating November as National Adoption Month -- a time to increase awareness about the tens of thousands of children waiting for families and to encourage all Americans to consider the rewards and responsibilities of adoption. However, adoption must be a national concern throughout the year. Therefore, I direct:

(a) The Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop and lead a public awareness effort, including use of public service announcements, print materials, and the Internet;

(b) The Secretaries of Health and Human Services and the Treasury in consultation with State, civic, and private sector leaders to develop and disseminate information about the new adoption tax credits and other adoption benefits;

(c) The Secretaries of Labor and Commerce, in consultation with State and civic leaders, to identify and recognize companies in the private sector with model policies to encourage and ease adoption among employees; and

(d) The Director of the Office of Personnel Management to direct all Federal agencies to provide information and support to Federal employees who are prospective adoptive parents.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Questions and Answers on Adoption
• DO NOT DISTRIBUTE - FOR BACKGROUND ONLY •

Q. What is the purpose of the President's directive?

A. The purpose of the President's directive is to develop a new plan to move children more rapidly from foster care to safe, permanent homes, and to at least double, by the year 2002, the number of children in foster care who are adopted or permanently placed each year. The directive focuses on securing homes for the tens of thousands of children in the foster care system who cannot return safely to their homes and for whom adoption is a goal. It also will increase public awareness on the importance and benefits of adoption.

Since 1993, the Clinton Administration has taken several important steps to promote and encourage adoption. President Clinton is committed to giving the 450,000 children in foster care what every child in America deserves -- loving parents and a healthy, stable home. This directive builds on these commitments and accomplishments.

Q. Now that the President signed the directive, what will happen?

A. The Department of Health and Human Services, working with the Departments of Treasury, Commerce and Labor and the Office of Personnel Management, will conduct an intensive consultation process on a bipartisan basis with Congress, states, civic and business leaders to develop a plan to meet the President's goals of moving children more rapidly from foster care to permanent homes and increasing the number of children adopted or permanently placed. The Secretary of Health and Human Services will report back to the President in sixty days on specific steps to reach the directive's goals. And many of their recommendations will be incorporated into the President's budget to be presented to Congress in February.

Q. Is this directive ambitious enough?

A. Today there are 450,000 children in the nation's foster care system. These children are placed there because of abuse, neglect or a home-life that is neither safe nor secure. While most of these children eventually return home, nearly 100,000 of them will not. These children that cannot be reunited with their parents wait typically 3 years or more to find permanent homes. More than half of waiting children have special needs, such as minorities, children with disabilities, sibling groups and older children.

Given these circumstances, the President's goal in this directive to at least double, by the year 2002, the number of children in foster care who are adopted or permanently placed from the foster care system is extremely ambitious and exciting. Of course, our ultimate goal is that all children in foster care find what every child in America deserves -- loving parents and a healthy, stable home.

Q. Why didn't the President take this step earlier?

A. Since taking office, President Clinton has made increasing adoption and improving the foster care system a priority. He has signed critical legislation that have removed significant financial and racial barriers to adoption. The Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996 provides a \$5,000 tax credit for families who adopt children and a \$6,000 tax credit for families who adopt children with special needs. Building on the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act which the President signed in 1994, the Small Business Job Protection Act also ensures that the adoption process is free from discrimination and delays on the basis of race, culture and ethnicity. He has championed programs like the Family and Medical Leave Act which supports adopting families and signed a welfare reform law that preserves the guarantee of and resources for child protection and adoption. The President and the First Lady have promoted and encouraged the importance and benefits of adoption through speeches, events and public service announcements. This directive builds on the President's strong commitment to and accomplishments on this issue.

Q. Are you trying to preempt Congress on adoption?

A. No. We are committed to working with Congress in a bipartisan manner to develop a plan to increase the number of children adopted or permanently placed from foster care and move children from foster care to permanent homes more quickly. Finding safe and permanent homes for all children is a goal to which we know everyone is committed and should be addressed in a bipartisan way. There is increasing consensus on this on a bipartisan level.

The President's directive presents an extraordinary opportunity for the Federal government, Congress, states, communities, and advocacy organizations to work together toward giving children in foster care what every child in America deserves -- loving parents and a healthy, stable home.

Q. How much will this initiative cost?

A. The directive does not carry any cost right now, as it simply directs members of the President's Cabinet to consult with Congress, states, and civic leaders to develop a plan to increase adoptions and move children from foster care to permanent homes more quickly. The President's FY 1998 budget will contain the necessary funding for this initiative.

The provision of offering financial incentives to states will nearly pay for itself, as increasing the number of adoptions will reduce expenditures in the foster care system.

Q. Which Cabinet agencies are involved in implementing the President's directive on adoption?

A. The Departments of Health and Human Services, Treasury, Commerce and Labor and the Office of Personnel Management were directed by the President to develop a new plan to move children more rapidly from foster care to safe, permanent homes, and to at least double, from 27,000 to 54,000, by the year 2002, the number of children in foster care who are adopted or permanently placed from the public foster care system.

Q. What role do you see for States in implementing the President's directive on Adoption?

A. States are the operators of the public welfare system and therefore are critical to ensuring the President's goals of moving children more rapidly from foster care to safe, permanent homes and doubling the number of children adopted and or permanently placed by the year 2002. We plan to work extremely closely with states, consulting with them on every aspect of the President's directive. We know that the states share the President's commitment to increasing adoption and improving the foster care system and we are counting on them to directly assist HHS in the formulation and implementation of the new action plan on adoption.

Q. What role do you see for advocacy groups and foundations in implementing the President's directive on adoption?

A. Today, before the radio address, Carol Rasco and Olivia Golden, Acting Assistant Secretary for Children and Families (HHS) will brief key advocacy groups and foundations on the directive. We have worked closely with advocacy groups and foundations on past adoption initiatives and we plan to consult with them on the President's new directive. We welcome advocacy groups and foundations' participation in developing and helping states implement new strategies on adoption, as they have immense knowledge and experience in this area.

Q. What were the adoption-related provisions in the Small Business Job Protection Act?

A. The Small Business Job Protection Act does three things:

- Strengthens the language of the 1994 Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) to make it even clearer that neither foster placements nor adoptions may be delayed or denied solely on the basis of the cultural, ethnic or racial background of the child or the prospective foster or adoptive parents;
- Imposes financial penalties for States (and other agencies receiving federal funds) which fail to comply with MEPA; and
- Provides a \$5,000 adoption tax credit for all adoptions, and a \$6,000 tax credit for special needs adoptions.

MEPA also included the State Plan requirement for States to provide for the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.

Q. What has HHS done to implement these new inter-ethnic provisions of the Small Business Job Protection Act?

A. On November 14, the Department issued an Information Memorandum to give the States and the public the details of the inter-ethnic adoption legislation. That issuance (which also announced the new kinship preference which Congress added to the child welfare laws) informed the public that the procedures for applying the penalty would be published at a later date.

The Department has taken or begun a number of other actions to implement the provisions of the Small Business Job Protection Act. These include meeting with the Internal Revenue Service to develop a public information strategy on the adoption tax credit, and establishing a working group of Children's Bureau and Office of Civil Rights staff to begin work on a procedure and protocol to ensure consistent application of the new penalty provisions.

Q: What is the Draft National Adoption Strategic Plan and how does it relate to the President's Directive?

A: Last year, HHS's Children's Bureau organized a national meeting, which included State adoption managers, representatives from national advocacy organizations and private non-profit organizations, adoptive parents and Federal staff to draft a strategic plan to increase the number of children adopted from the public child welfare system. This Plan was written as a draft or working document to provide an outcome-focused framework for all those involved with the adoption of special needs children from the public child welfare system. The President's directive will build on many ideas put forth in Draft Plan

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

LIVE WEEKLY RADIO ADDRESS

DATE: December 14, 1996
LOCATION: Oval Office
TIME: 10:06AM EDT
FROM: Nicole Rabner, Laura Schwartz

I. PURPOSE

To deliver your weekly radio address on the importance of adoption and announce a Presidential memorandum directing members of your Cabinet to take specific steps to increase adoptions and move children more quickly from foster care to safe, permanent homes.

II. BACKGROUND

Surrounded by adoptive families and children in local foster care, you and the First Lady will deliver the weekly radio address, in which you will announce a memorandum to members of your Cabinet.

Presidential Memorandum

The Presidential memorandum instructs the Secretaries of Health and Human Services, Treasury, Labor, Commerce and the Director of Personnel Management to undergo wide consultation and report to you in sixty days with a specific proposal to move children more quickly from foster care to safe, permanent homes and at least to double, by the year 2002, the number of children adopted or permanently placed each year. Specifically, the memorandum:

- calls for the creation of state-specific numerical targets and financial incentives to states to increase the number of adoptions. The bonus payments will be offset by decreases in foster care costs and will nearly pay for themselves.
- asks for proposed changes to federal regulations and legislation to emphasize permanency and decrease delays.
- calls for the Departments to take appropriate action to disseminate materials, challenge businesses to support adoptive parents, and raise public awareness on the importance of adoption.

Your FY98 budget proposal will include the necessary funding allocation for the memorandum.

You will sign the memorandum just prior to the radio address during the event briefing.

Discussion

Following the radio address, you and the First Lady will lead a brief discussion with the assembled families and waiting children (see attached bios).

Invited Guests

Approximately 70 leaders on adoption issues in the foundation and advocacy communities have been invited to the event. They will gather in the Roosevelt Room where, prior to the radio address, Carol Rasco and Olivia Golden, HHS, will conduct a briefing on the initiative you will announce. They will then watch your radio address on closed-circuit television, and, following your address and discussion, have an opportunity to meet you and the First Lady in the Oval Office.

Press Notes

The press pool will be in the Oval Office for your radio address. **You do NOT need to look at the camera while reading the radio address; please note that the cameras will start to roll as soon as you and the First Lady walk through the door.** There will be a cough button on the water table next to you should you need it.

PLEASE NOTE: the press pool will remain in the Oval Office for this discussion.

III. PARTICIPANTS

The President
The First Lady

Adoptive Families and Waiting Children (see attached bios)
Foundation and Advocacy Leaders (see attached list)

White House Communications Agency (WHCA) staff
White House Television(WHTV)
White House photographer
Special guests (See attached)

IV. PRESS PLAN

Your radio address and discussion following will be covered by the White House press pool. The networks will have the opportunity to take it LIVE.

The ABC, CNN, AP, C-SPAN, CBS, NBC, Mutual, UPI, USA, American Urban Radio Network, and Standard News radio networks will carry the address live in its entirety to their thousands of stations across the country Saturday at 10:06 AM EDT.

V. SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

9:45am Briefing (Oval study)
10:06am Live Radio Address with the First Lady (on camera in Oval)
Discussion with families and children (on camera in Oval)
App.10:30am Greet Guests (off camera in Oval)

VI. REMARKS

To be provided by David Shipley.

**ADOPTIVE FAMILIES AND CHILDREN
ATTENDING THE PRESIDENT'S RADIO ADDRESS
December 14, 1996**

The Bryant Family, Manhattan, KS

Francis Bryant first saw Trey on a regularly scheduled waiting child feature on a local television news station and told her husband, Michael, and birth son, Lydell, about him. The next day, the Bryants contacted Lutheran Social Services, and began the process to adopt him. Now 13, Trey had been in a foster care group home since he was 9, having been taken from his birth family because of abuse and neglect. In August 1996, Trey was formally placed with the Bryants. Vocal supporters of adoption from the foster care system, the Bryants plan to adopt again.

The Borié Family, Philadelphia, PA

Carolyn and Glenn Borié [Ba-ree] were looking for a child to adopt in 1994 when they saw Crystal, now 11 years old, on the Maury Povich Show. The show featured children from across the country who needed adoptive families. They quickly discovered that Crystal had three siblings, John, now 13, Charity, 9, and Dawn, age 8. For five years, the four children had been in foster care, in separate families because a family who could take all four children could not be found. When the Boriés met them, the two oldest children had not seen their two younger sisters in nine months. After meeting the four children, instead of adopting one child, the Boriés decided to adopt all four children. The Borié family's first Thanksgiving together was also the children's first Thanksgiving together in five years.

The Gray Family, Hartford, CT

A single mother, Ms. Fredrica Gray adopted Michael, now 6 years old, from the Connecticut Department of Children and Families when he was 2 months old. She works in the marketing division of Phoenix Mutual Life Insurance Company, which became part of the U.S. Department of Labor's Honor Roll of companies committed to making their workplaces more family-friendly as the result of its pledge to institute an ambitious Adoption Assistance Program. Ms. Gray is an advocate for adopting from the public child welfare system and feels that more people need to know that it is "a great place to find a child."

The Inglese Family, Tobyhanna, PA

Lawrence Inglese [pronounced In-glee-zey] is a retired, single parent of two adoptive children and three children by birth. Based on his experience as a foster parent, Mr. Inglese decided to adopt a child who had been in foster care for too long. He met Jason, then age 13, at a "match party," sponsored by the National Adoption Center, designed to bring potential adoptive parents and waiting children together. After consulting with his birth children, Mr. Inglese adopted Jason. For eight years, Jason had shuttled back and forth between his birth family and foster care. While in foster care, Jason did poorly in school and was often in trouble, but now that Jason has a loving, permanent home and a brother who is also his close friend, he is earning As and Bs and was recently voted 'Student of the Month' at the public school he attends.

Mr. Inglese's experience with Jason led him to adopt another child, Michael, now age 6. Michael has cerebral palsy and global developmental delays and was abandoned at birth by his mother who had used crack cocaine during her pregnancy. Mr. Inglese's enthusiasm and experience has led several other families also to adopt waiting children.

Mr. Inglese will be accompanied by his three youngest children: Jason and Nicholas, both age 15, and Michael, age 6.

Local Children in Foster Care Waiting for Adoption

Frank, 15 and Adam, 7

Caucasian brothers in foster care

Gail, 9

African American girl in foster care since May 1989

Daniel, 13

Hispanic boy in foster care since 1992 due to mother's terminal illness

DISCUSSION WITH FAMILIES AFTER THE RADIO ADDRESS

FLOTUS OPENS DISCUSSION: We have here in this room adoptive families and some children in foster care who are looking for permanent homes. I want to thank you each for coming here today. To the families. I want to say a special thank you for opening your hearts and your homes to children who needed and deserved one. I know first hand that raising a child is a huge responsibility.

Question #1 TELEVISION SHOWS (FOR EITHER POTUS OR FLOTUS)

Two of the families here today met their adoptive children through television programs highlighting children in foster care who were looking for permanent homes. Can the **Borié** [Ba-ree] and **Bryant Families** tell us a little bit about that?

POTUS FOLLOW-UP COMMENT: I hope that every local TV station will consider doing what the Bryant's local station and others across the nation are already doing -- regularly featuring children waiting for loving and safe, permanent homes.

Question #2 MOTIVATION TO ADOPT (FOR EITHER POTUS OR FLOTUS)

Can you tell us what motivated you personally to want to adopt a child in foster care?
[**Bryant and Gray families**; NOT the Ingleses if possible]

Question #3 CHANGES SINCE ADOPTED (FOR EITHER POTUS OR FLOTUS)

We have had the opportunity to know children both before and after they were adopted and have often been astonished by the difference it has made in their lives and how they have changed. Has that been true for any of you?

[**Mr. Ingleses's** [In-gee-zee's] son Jason has gone from doing poorly in school and often getting in trouble to being chosen at Student of the Month]

Question #4 FOR THE WAITING CHILDREN (EITHER POTUS OR FLOTUS)

With us today are some of the children who this event is really all about -- children in foster care who are waiting for permanent homes -- would any of you like to say something?

[Note: If no one immediately answers, you could ask **Daniel**, a 13 year old Hispanic boy who has been in foster care since 1992 because of his mother's terminal illness.]

Question #5 PRIVATE SECTOR ROLE (FOR EITHER POTUS OR FLOTUS)

We all have an opportunity and responsibility -- families, communities, government, religious organizations, and the private sector -- to do our part to help every child have the loving, permanent family they deserve. Businesses nationwide have established policies to support their employees who adopt children. **Fredrica Gray** works for such a company, the Phoenix Mutual Life Insurance Company in Hartford, CT, one of the company's on the Honor Roll of the Women's Bureau at the Labor Department. Fredrica is here with her adoptive son, Michael. Can you tell us about your employer's policies and the motivation behind those policies?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2/14/97

Adoption 2002 responds to President Clinton's Executive Memorandum and takes its name from one of its central goals -- to double by the year 2002 the number of children adopted or placed in other permanent homes each year. On December 14, 1996, the President directed the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct wide consultations and report to him with specific recommendations for strategies to move children more quickly from foster care to permanent homes and to meet the goal of at least doubling adoptions and other permanent placement over the next five years.

The Department developed *Adoption 2002* as a blueprint for bipartisan Federal leadership in adoption and other permanency planning for children in the public child welfare system. To prepare this report, the Department of Health and Human Services consulted with child welfare professionals, policy experts, advocates, and foster and adoptive parents at the national, State and local levels. *Adoption 2002* first examines the existing barriers to expediting the placement of children from foster care to permanent homes. Delays in making timely permanency decisions result from high caseloads for judges and caseworkers; incorrect beliefs and outdated assumptions about the adoptability of children; the limited pool of permanent families for children with special needs; and the varied interpretation of the "reasonable efforts" requirement to reunify a child in foster care with his or her birth family before another goal, such as adoption, can be pursued for the child.

Adoption 2002 outlines an agenda to help overcome these barriers and to accelerate the path to permanency for all waiting children in the public child welfare system. First, the report articulates a guiding set of principles centered on the needs of the child to give direction to the overall agenda. These principles include that every child deserves a safe, permanent family; that the child's health and safety should be the paramount considerations in all placement and permanency planning decisions; and that foster care is a temporary situation -- it is not an appropriate place for children to grow up. *Adoption 2002* establishes unequivocally that the Federal goals for children in the child welfare system are safety, permanency, and well-being.

The *Adoption 2002* agenda is multifaceted to address the range of barriers and challenges that exist in the child welfare system. The report presents strategies to establish, track, and meet State-by-State annual, numerical targets for adoptions and other permanent placements -- targets that will bring us to a national doubling of adoptions and permanent placements in the year 2002. To help States reach their targets, the Department commits to providing expanded technical assistance, rewarding States for incremental increases in adoption levels with per-child financial bonuses, and otherwise recognizing successful performance. The bonus system proposed in *Adoption 2002* is an example of common-sense government, as it not only provides an incentive for increasing the number of adoptions, but also pays for itself, with the cost of the bonuses offset by savings in foster care costs. *Adoption 2002* also includes a proposal to establish competitive grants available to States for dismantling barriers to permanency.

In addition to providing incentives to States to meet new targets, *Adoption 2002* outlines ways in which the Federal government can assume leadership in breaking down barriers to permanency for children in foster care. The Department will issue strong guidance on the implementation of the law signed by President Clinton which established penalties for denying or delaying the placement of a child based on race, color, or national origin.

Perhaps most important, while working with Congress on its legislative proposals that seek to define the "reasonable efforts" provision, the Department will issue guidance that clarifies its meaning. This guidance will make it clear that in determining whether and when to remove a child from his or her family and whether and when to reunify the family, Federal law requires that the child's health and safety shall be the paramount concern.

The Department also will issue model guidelines for State legislation to emphasize that the child's health and safety is the paramount concern in decisions to terminate parental rights. In addition, the Department commits to exploring alternative permanency options for children for whom adoption is not possible. Furthermore, the *Adoption 2002* report urges that the Administration seek legislation that shortens the time before a child's first dispositional hearing -- the hearing in which a permanency decision is first made -- from 18 months to 12 months and changes its name to a "permanency planning hearing."

Information gained by the Department in developing the details of the *Adoption 2002* agenda will form the basis of the public awareness campaign that the President directed the Secretary of Health and Human Services to undertake, in cooperation with other heads of Federal Departments or Agencies, as part of his Executive Memorandum. The strategies outlined in *Adoption 2002*, coupled with a strong public information campaign and joined by efforts by State and local officials and by community, business and religious leaders, will ensure that we live up to President Clinton's call that "no child should be trapped in the limbo of foster care; no child should be uncertain about what the word 'family' or 'parent' or 'home' means, particularly when there are open arms waiting to welcome these children into safe and strong households where they can build good, caring lives." (12/14/96)

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
VIDEO REMARKS FOR
THE NACAC NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH CELEBRATION
OCTOBER 29, 1996**

I am pleased to join all of you observing National Adoption Month -- a time to celebrate adoption as a way to build families and to raise public awareness about the tens of thousands of children across our nation who today wait in the foster care system for homes of their own.

In proclaiming November National Adoption Month, the President said, "Our Nation has no greater responsibility than to ensure that every child has the chance to live up to his or her God-given potential. We can help meet that challenge by identifying a permanent, loving family for every child waiting in the foster care system." My husband is committed to facilitating adoption, encouraging parents to adopt and using government as an active partner to meet this critical challenge.

I want to congratulate the North American Council on Adoptable Children for your ambitious Adoption Month Awareness campaign on behalf of waiting children. And I particularly want to thank the children who are here today to share their hopes and dreams of finding permanent homes. You and the thousands of children you represent remind us of the urgency of our mission.

Last year, I invited children from around the country to join me at the White House to celebrate National Adoption Month. I especially remember Deanna [dee-ann-ah], a young woman living in foster care in Kansas, who talked about her yearning to be adopted. I don't think there has ever been a more eloquent speaker in the East Room of the White House than Deanna. Seven months later, I met Deanna again in Kansas City; with her was her newly adoptive mother. Deanna was transformed, beaming as she told me about her new home, new contact lenses and, finally, her new-found sense of security.

I hope and pray that all waiting children will experience the joy and fulfillment I saw in Deanna's eyes and heard in her words. But it will take all of us -- from the individual family to the business sector to the faith community to our schools to the government -- working together to make it happen.

This Holiday season, as we all reflect on the importance of family in our own lives, I hope we will also think about adoption -- about the rewards of joining children in need with adults who want the responsibility and the joys of parenthood.

Thank you for doing your part in this campaign.

###

file adoption

**TALKING IT OVER
BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

The woman visited her new daughter in the hospital every day, reaching into the incubator to stroke her foot. The receiving blanket seemed heavier than the baby, who was being fed by a tube in her stomach.

The woman is not the baby's birth mother, but she is her mother in every way that matters.

She and her husband already had a 3-year-old adopted son when they heard about a premature 1-pound baby girl whose birth parents could not take care of her. The couple decided to adopt the tiny baby. Her start was rocky, but now the child is a healthy 3-year-old.

"She was just like a little flower that blossomed," the mother says. "She is a burst of energy."

Now, the couple, who are African-American, are in the process of adopting a 12-year-old girl who was abused. They also are encouraging more African-American families to open their homes to children in need.

Last summer, I wrote about this important issue. I'm writing about it again because so many children's lives would be better if they could only find a home. Today, 21,000 children are ready and waiting for families to nurture and care for them. Tens of thousands of others will be eligible for adoption in the coming months and years.

Not all these children are healthy, white babies. Many are physically and developmentally disabled. Many are minorities. Many suffer from emotional traumas wrought by abuse, neglect and unstable living arrangements. And many are teenagers who already have been shuffled from home to home.

Fortunately, some steps have been taken in recent years to make adoption easier. The Family and Medical Leave Act, which became law three years ago, ensures that parents can take time off when they adopt a child without fear of losing their jobs. The Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 prohibits adoption agencies from denying the placement of a child solely on the basis of the adoptive parents' race, color or national origin. Over the past three years, adoption subsidies have helped an increasing number of families cope with the costs of adopting and raising children with special needs.

TALKING IT OVER 5/14/96

Page 2

The President is supporting legislation in Congress that will give tax credits to families that adopt. The House, for example, just approved a bill that would give adoptive families a \$5,000 tax credit. The Senate, meanwhile, is considering a \$7,500 credit for families who adopt children with special needs. This may not be enough to cover medical and emotional health care costs for special-needs kids, or even education, but it's a step in the right direction.

Not only is adoption good for children, it saves taxpayers a lot of money. As one woman said at a recent adoption discussion at the White House her family has saved the state and the federal government in excess of \$1 million by adopting several special-needs children.

In addition to government, the private sector also has a role to play. Wendy's, the hamburger chain founded by adoption advocate Dave Thomas (who himself was adopted), gives workers paid leave and financial assistance with adoption costs.

Margaret Fitzgerald, who participated in our gathering, said her employer, AT&T, gave her six weeks of unpaid leave when she and her husband adopted a son four years ago. The company also reimbursed her legal fees.

But the most important thing of all is for more people to reach out and give every child, regardless of age, disability, race or ethnic origin, the chance to be part of a loving family.

Just ask Julie Stinger, a teacher with five adopted children -- four biracial and one white -- several of whom had health problems. She told us how, as a white woman, she had to fight to adopt her first two black children, even though the birth parents agreed to the adoption and she had cared for them as a foster parent for 18 months. "I fought tooth and nail," she said.

Later, she had similar trouble when she wanted to adopt her fifth child, who is white. Authorities were concerned about placing a white boy with four non-white brothers and sisters.

"Even though we went through some traumas in the adoptions, I would do it again, I would do it 10 times over," she said. "Adopting a child is the most gratifying thing that ever happened to me."

After Julie recounted her story, I asked her oldest son, Joey, if he had anything to add. He nodded.

"I just want to thank my mother," he said.

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May 14, 1996

**TALKING IT OVER
BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

The woman visited her new daughter in the hospital every day, reaching into the incubator to stroke her foot. The receiving blanket seemed heavier than the baby, who was being fed by a tube in her stomach.

The woman is not the baby's birth mother, but she is her mother in every way that matters.

She and her husband already had a 3-year-old adopted son when they heard about a premature 1-pound baby girl whose birth parents could not take care of her. The couple decided to adopt the tiny baby. Her start was rocky, but now the child is a healthy 3-year-old.

"She was just like a little flower that blossomed," the mother says. "She is a burst of energy."

Now, the couple, who are African-American, are in the process of adopting a 12-year-old girl who was abused. They also are encouraging more African-American families to open their homes to children in need.

Last summer, I wrote about this important issue. I'm writing about it again because so many children's lives would be better if they could only find a home. Today, 21,000 children are ready and waiting for families to nurture and care for them. Tens of thousands of others will be eligible for adoption in the coming months and years.

Not all these children are healthy, white babies. Many are physically and developmentally disabled. Many are minorities. Many suffer from emotional traumas wrought by abuse, neglect and unstable living arrangements. And many are teenagers who already have been shuffled from home to home.

Fortunately, some steps have been taken in recent years to make adoption easier. The Family and Medical Leave Act, which became law three years ago, ensures that parents can take time off when they adopt a child without fear of losing their jobs. The Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 prohibits adoption agencies from denying the placement of a child solely on the basis of the adoptive parents' race, color or national origin. Over the past three years, adoption subsidies have helped an increasing number of families cope with the costs of adopting and raising children with special needs.

The President is supporting legislation in Congress that will give tax credits to families that adopt. The House, for example, just approved a bill that would give adoptive families a \$5,000 tax credit. The Senate, meanwhile, is considering a \$7,500 credit for families who adopt children with special needs. This may not be enough to cover medical and emotional health care costs for special-needs kids, or even education, but it's a step in the right direction.

Not only is adoption good for children, it saves taxpayers a lot of money. As one woman said at a recent adoption discussion at the White House her family has saved the state and the federal government in excess of \$1 million by adopting several special-needs children.

In addition to government, the private sector also has a role to play. Wendy's, the hamburger chain founded by adoption advocate Dave Thomas (who himself was adopted), gives workers paid leave and financial assistance with adoption costs.

Margaret Fitzgerald, who participated in our gathering, said her employer, AT&T, gave her six weeks of unpaid leave when she and her husband adopted a son four years ago. The company also reimbursed her legal fees.

But the most important thing of all is for more people to reach out and give every child, regardless of age, disability, race or ethnic origin, the chance to be part of a loving family.

Just ask Julie Stinger, a teacher with five adopted children -- four biracial and one white -- several of whom had health problems. She told us how, as a white woman, she had to fight to adopt her first two black children, even though the birth parents agreed to the adoption and she had cared for them as a foster parent for 18 months. "I fought tooth and nail," she said.

Later, she had similar trouble when she wanted to adopt her fifth child, who is white. Authorities were concerned about placing a white boy with four non-white brothers and sisters.

"Even though we went through some traumas in the adoptions, I would do it again, I would do it 10 times over," she said. "Adopting a child is the most gratifying thing that ever happened to me."

After Julie recounted her story, I asked her oldest son, Joey, if he had anything to add. He nodded.

"I just want to thank my mother," he said.

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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the First Lady

For Immediate Release

November 13, 1995

REMARKS BY FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
AT NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH EVENT
WASHINGTON, D.C.

MRS. CLINTON: Good Afternoon. Thank you. Thank you. Please be seated and please be welcomed to the White House. This is a very special day for all of us. And there have been many very important events that have occurred here in the East Room of the White House, but I honestly don't believe there is any that is more important than what we are doing by celebrating National Adoption Month. And November is a particularly appropriate time to highlight the importance of adoption in this country.

It's hard to believe but Thanksgiving and the Holiday Season are a little more than a week away. And during this season we traditionally focus on family. And we recognize how much we need and depend on the love of our parents and spouses and children and other relatives. So for all of you who are gathered here to begin this celebration, that we hope will ignite a fire of enthusiasm throughout the country about adoption, I want to say thank you.

There are several members of Congress here and I am delighted that all of you could join us. Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, a long time advocate of family and children services is here with us because all of us believe that there isn't anything more important than our families and that the families formed by adoption are special and deserve the support of all the rest of us. Because we want to emphasize that there's a need in our country to bring the richness and love and support and guidance and discipline and attention of family life to every one of America's waiting children.

As we go into the Holiday Season, I hope every American will recognize that there are tens of thousands of children waiting for the love of a mother, a father, a sister, a brother, to have grandparents and aunts and uncles, to have a dog or a cat like Socks. Tens of thousands of those children, every single day, are growing up without mothers or fathers to help teach them, to nurture them and to tell them that they are special. We know

they are, but they need someone in their family to tell them that.

Often when we think of adoption, we have a picture in our mind of infants being welcomed into a family. But adoption today involves children and teenagers of all ages, backgrounds and circumstances. In this room today are adoptive families and waiting children who demonstrate the range of adoptive experiences. Adoption has provided a new beginning for school-aged children, for adolescents, for children with physical and emotional and educational disabilities, children of different races and cultures, and brothers and sisters who want to remain together.

Let me give you a picture of the children in America who are waiting. Six out of ten of them are school-aged children. Four out of ten are white. Four out of ten are African-American. The rest, Hispanic, Native American and every other race and color that you can imagine. Two out of three have special needs. Each one of these children has the capacity to love, to bring new joy and energy into a family. Most of you who are here, the families that already know that, are living proof of how adoption can be successful and emotionally rewarding. But we need more of you.

I recently met with Shane Salter, a young man who grew up in foster care without ever being placed in a permanent family. He described what that meant to him. He talked about his continued longing for parents who would not only care for him but who could be grandparents to his own children. Adoption can change lives, not only of those in the immediate family, but through generations.

I know that adoption in America today can be frustrating and emotionally draining and expensive. A newspaper column I wrote about adoption this summer generated more responses than any other I've written. I meet people throughout the country who come up and say they have read my column and they're an adoptive parent. Or they have read my column and they're a foster parent. Or they read my column, and they were adopted. Prospective parents have written to tell me of the immense obstacles, the red tape, and the costs, particularly the legal costs, that have led them to despair of ever being able to adopt a child.

I want you to know that the President is committed to easing and encouraging the adoption process. And I recently convened a group of experts to discuss how to make the government a better partner, and more responsive to the needs of prospective parents and children. In particular, the administration is working hard to ease the adoption of minority and special-needs children. The President is committed to enforcing the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act which prohibits adoption agencies from denying the placement

of a child solely on the basis of race, color, or national origin of a child or prospective adoptive parents.

The administration also championed -- and the first bill the President signed -- was the Family and Medical Leave Act which ensures that parents can take time off when they adopt a child without fearing the loss of their jobs. And the administration has launched a public education campaign about adoption. A campaign in which I am very honored to participate. These are just some of the many initiatives, both in the government and in the private sector, and in partnership between both the public and private sectors, that are designed to support the placement of children in loving homes.

But all of your efforts and all of the administration's efforts to strengthen our families and children could be jeopardized by actions in Congress. The government currently provides essential recruitment and training services for prospective adoptive parents. As well as subsidies to families who adopt special-needs children, those living with Cerebral Palsy, or HIV, or some other disability, since those children have large medical and educational expenses. Many of the children who are special-needs, when they are adopted into families, bring with them such large medical costs, that if Medicaid is cut back substantially, the medical insurance for many of those special-needs children will no longer be available after they are adopted. Which would be a great tragedy, because there are so many parents who just need a little bit of financial help with the costs. Need a little bit of subsidy but then do need continuing medical help to be able to open their lives to these children. So we must all who care about adoption know that putting our nation's economic house in order does not mean sweeping out compassion and caring for our neediest children and families, making it less likely they will ever have a house of their own.

We have to work together to improve our adoption system. In the Proclamation for National Adoption Month the President said that citizens from all communities and organizations from the public and private sectors must join together to renew our commitment to finding permanent homes for each one of America's children. Two of the private foundations doing this important work are the Ann E. Casey Foundation which is active in five states, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Families For Kids, active in ten states.

I wish we could re-double, re-triple our efforts. I believe that if we really put our minds to it, if we could recruit qualified volunteers out of our judicial system and our legal system and our social work system, to be assigned to each child who is waiting to be adopted. We could make it possible for thousands and thousands more children to be adopted by this time

next year. We have to put our minds to it but there is no more important task than trying to do everything in our power to ensure that every child has a family.

Perhaps no person has been a more effective advocate for children waiting to be adopted, than our next speaker. The founder of Wendy's, the star of T.V., Dave Thomas started speaking out on adoption in 1990 when he became the national spokesperson for the White House Initiative on Adoption. As an adopted child himself, he says he would not have become the successful father, husband and businessman he is today, had he not been able to grow up in a supportive family.

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption seeks to make adoption more affordable, streamline the adoption process, and educate the public about the potential joys of adoption. Mr. Thomas believes that no child is unadoptable and every child deserves a home and a loving family. But he knows, as we all do, that we have to overcome some misconceptions about adoption. We have to make it very clear that the children who are waiting are children just like yours and mine and every other child who goes to school and plays in playgrounds. They are America's children. And we have to make it clear to America that they would benefit greatly from having one of these children in their lives.

Mr. Thomas has also been a leader in the campaign to encourage corporations to extend maternity benefits to adoptive parents. This is so important. We do a terrible job in our country of ensuring maternity benefits in nearly every instance in most of the businesses in our country. It's important for new parents to be able to spend time with that child. Think how important it is for a new child coming into a strange home, filled with anticipation to have some time where he is the center of that family's attention, and that at least one parent gets a chance to spend that time with the child.

Within Wendy's, adoption benefits are paid leave and financial assistance with adoption costs. Available to employees who have been with the company for at least one year. All of us are very proud of Mr. Thomas' leadership and grateful to him for it.

Following him to the podium will be the Reverend Wayne Thompson, President of One Church-One Child. This is one of the great ideas in America. And I wish every church would join One Church-One Child. Because through One Church-One Child, we have seen literally hundreds of thousands of children being given homes who might otherwise not have been known to anyone. And the church serves as a back-up extended family for the members who adopt children. Through this work, thousands of African-American children have found loving homes and supportive church congregations.

You will also be hearing from the Marshall Family. The proud parents of two beautiful little girls, they have experienced so much love and happiness with their two daughters, that they have spent considerable time promoting adoption in their own community. In fact, they are the family featured in the posters supporting adoption that appear in Wendy's restaurants around the world.

And then finally, we will hear from a young woman who knows exactly what's at stake. Deanna is 13. She lived in a foster home for seven years before moving into a group home in Topeka, Kansas. Though she no longer lives with her two foster sisters, she is still close to them and she is still waiting. She is a cheerleader, an avid reader, and a budding poet -- and a lovely young woman based on my experience with her a few minutes ago.

So these people who will be speaking to you have the experience that we would like to see transmitted to every American. They know what it's like to form a family by choice. To be able to say, I choose you to be my son or daughter. And in return to know what it's like as a child to have the love and support that can only come from one's own family. So please join me in welcoming Mr. Dave Thomas."

Dave Thomas: "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I thank you Mrs. Clinton. I asked Mrs. Clinton about, something like about a year ago, if she would help. And she said, "I will." And that's the reason why we're here today so I just want everyone to know that Mrs. Clinton and the President are dedicated to adoption. So let's give them a big hand, because they did it.

Let me tell you why I'm interested in adoption. I was adopted as Mrs. Clinton said, and my mother, my foster mother died when I was about five years old. And I was born out of wedlock and I had nothing to do with it -- trust me. And I had nothing to do about being adopted, it wasn't my fault. But I was adopted and I had six, no not six, I had three more foster mothers and step-mothers and then I left when I was 15 years old. But I do know how important it is, a family. And all through my life I've always been envious of mothers and fathers. Because I've never seen my mother and father. And if you have never seen your mother and father and the nurturing, you know everyone deserves the love and nurturing, when you grow up. I never had it, and I've always been kind of jealous of it.

And my kids, I have five children, fourteen grandchildren, and I probably spoil them for that reason. Now whether that's good or bad, but it's one of the things that, I wasn't spoiled. But I know one thing, I did have a grandmother that did care for

me. She was my foster grandmother and I didn't find out until I was 13 years old that I was adopted, and I was really hurt. So I do know how important it is and I feel so sorry for these children today, in particular, parents who don't take care of their children. I mean I just think it's a crime. I think we need to have an education to educate these parents about responsibility. I don't know how you feel about it but I'm real strong on responsibility.

You know, in foster care, there is almost a half-million children in foster care right now. And there's about 100,000 waiting to be adopted. And when we started the foundation, we said, well, we need to have some goals. And our objective was to make adoption affordable and take the red tape out of adoption, and so that's what we've really been trying to do. And so the first thing we did, we put adoption benefits right with the maternity benefits. And I want everybody to understand it's kind of a no-brainer. If you have maternity benefits, add adoption benefits. And we've done that--

I'm even trying to get the federal government to do the same. Right Mrs. Clinton? Mrs. Clinton said she's going support me. Congressmen? -- Women? -- Senators? Don't forget now, because it's really important. But right now we have, in about thirty-five states, we have adoption benefits. And in cities and in corporations. We wrote all kinds of letters and it's really the right thing to do. We have not said how much, but just to help.

And we also have a bill in the Congress to a tax-credit. And I think it's something for -- adoption is expensive. And we need to help people to adopt as Mrs. Clinton said. And I hope this bill -- Debby -- is going to work out real well. I hope everybody supports it because it's really an important thing.

And then, I think that the next thing that we've been working on, is that we've tried something that we call a computer. Does everybody understand what computers are? And Jan Heffner is the Director of the Dave Thomas Foundation -- stand up Jan -- Jan has been working on this real, real hard.

You know what it is, it's really children with willing parents. Now the children need to be matched with willing parents. And what's happened is IBM, AT&T and Marriot have helped with some government agencies working to make this happen. And the first example case of adoption's waiting children on-line through the National Adoption Center, there was 100,000 inquiries. Am I right Jan? Over 100,000. So Internet is really something that we're really trying to work on.

We're trying to do everything we can to make it possible and remind people about adoption. Because, what happens, these kids are out there, and they go from foster home to foster home. I was in Chicago not too long ago and a little boy, six years old, was in sixteen foster homes. Can you imagine that? I mean that's not fair. So that's what we're really trying to do and if we can get the federal government -- that would really be a good example to put in for all the federal workers adoption benefits. Don't you think so?"

Mrs. Clinton: "I do."

Dave Thomas: "So, I'd just like to say this, I'd like to just say this. I think this is really a great event. I think it's something that we need to work on. And the more awareness and the more we talk about it. And I just keep talking about, and some people like to listen to me and some don't. But I'm going to keep talking because that -- every boy and every girl deserves a loving family. So thank you, and god bless you."

Wayne Thompson: "Thank you Mrs. Clinton for the opportunity to be a part of this historic day, and for your help in raising the awareness of the need for adoptions in our nation. The importance of adoption of children throughout our country can never be overstated. For these children are fortunate enough to have loving, permanent homes, in which they have been nurtured and cared for. They're led into adulthood with the support of parents which every child is entitled to and every child requires."

The family values are embodied by those parents who choose to bring children into their families and experience the joys of parenthood. The mission of the National One Church-One Child is to challenge each and every African-American congregation to adopt one African-American child. We believe that this furthers our need in our community for taking responsibility for our children. Believe me, this plan works.

In our church, we have had over sixteen adoptions since my involvement in this worthwhile program. In fact, there's one little boy who thinks he's pastor. When he was adopted I noticed that -- I always go to the door to greet the members as they leave -- I noticed that my line was shorter than usual, and I became a little bit concerned. I looked around and saw him shaking hands. And he had been adopted by a single-parent, a young woman who was an accountant, so I went over to him and I said, 'Now listen, there are some ground rules in this church. I'm the pastor -- and I shake everybody's hands so if you want to shake hands, come stand by me.' Well the brightness of his eyes

told the whole story. That where he had had no friends, no extended family, no church home, he was rejoicing, because now he had a new family and new friends.

We've had enormous success in placing children in our community in much needed adoptive homes. Many families, however, cannot adopt children without the help of the federal guarantee of financial assistance for every child and especially for special-needs children. This includes the children with Downs Syndrome and Cerebral Palsy and HIV AIDS and crack-cocaine addictive. These children are important too. And children are important to god and so our mission is one that we feel that we must continue to fight until the battle has been won.

The average family could not accept the responsibility for these children without the federal guarantee of financial assistance that is currently provided. This guarantee enables these families to care for children who would otherwise languish in the foster care system. And we are aware that there are welfare reform proposals that are pending now in Congress that would eliminate this much needed guarantee. And so our aim, and our struggle continues as we sound the alarm throughout our communities and from our pulpits, that there are children who are needed to be adopted, but that the government needs to accept the partnership which we offer. We offer it willingly. We offer it gladly.

Two out of three children who are waiting for adoption in this country have special-needs, making this federal guarantee more essential than ever before. In the history of One Church-One Child, since 1980, more than 90,000 children have found homes through our congregations across this nation.

We thank god for the vision of Father Clemence many years ago and we thank you, Mrs. Clinton, for the vision you've cast forth today, because with your support and the support of those who represent and make up our government, we know that the prayers of the righteous will be answered. And so we offer, in this partnership consortium, the prayers of many people who want children to have permanent loving homes. Many pastors who work in our programs have themselves, like me, become adoptive parents and so we know that we practice what we preach. And we know that the children are the ones who get the blessing.

Again, thank you for making this a special day for children across this nation. We know that they long and deserve permanent, loving homes. And so that the need for further guaranteed federal protection most come and we believe with the help of god it will come. Thank you."

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Mrs. Marshall: "First of all, I'd like to thank Mrs. Clinton, Mr. Thomas and all others involved, for inviting my family to be a part of this special event for a very important issue.

First of all, I would like to say that if only everyone out there knew, how much joy and happiness Kayla and Terry have brought into me and my husband's life, everyone would be lined up at all adoption agencies everywhere to adopt a child.

My husband and I have been married for 12 years. After being married 9 years, we decided we wanted children. I went to the doctor and found out that I wasn't able to have children. I used to always watch a local spot on our local news program called, 'Wednesday's Child'. They highlight on children that are up for adoption and need homes. So we decided to call Franklin County Children's Services and see how we could go through the adoption process.

They invited us to an adoption party in April of 1992. We were there for about an hour and there were hundreds of kids there from the ages of new-born to 7 years of age. We were there and we played with kids, we made balloons, we jumped rope and then all of a sudden, a little girl comes in. She was late. She came in and she had her little friend's hand and I looked at my husband and I said, 'Look at those jaws, I just love her.' When I first saw her, we knew that she was the one.

She talked to us at lunch, she asked for our fruit that we didn't want. She wasn't shy at all. And so we knew that she was the one and we called the next day and said that we wanted to start our class immediately, we wanted to get her as soon as possible. After we adopted Terry, she wanted sisters and brothers and so we said, 'Hey, we're willing to go and adopt another.' So then, Kayla comes into our life and there's not a day that doesn't go by that she just makes us smile and laugh so much. And if we had room in our home we would adopt 1,000 kids, no matter what race, what religion, color. We just love kids, because children are our future.

I remember when one day we didn't have kids, back when we didn't have kids, we adopted 15 children, nieces, nephews, neighbors' kids, and we went to the Ice Capades. We took up a whole row. We came back to our one bedroom apartment, we threw a big pajama party for 15 children. So, I mean, if we had room, we would adopt more, but we don't have the room in our home but we do have the room in our hearts. And we would like to let the kids know that are waiting for families and homes to keep the faith and with a little bit of help, hope and prayer, you'll all have a family and a home some day. Thank you."

Deanna Moppin: "My name is Deanna Lee Moppin. I have been in SRS custody ever since I was five years old. I was removed from my birth home because of sexual abuse. I was then placed in a new home where I remained for seven years, but then we seemed to have some problems so I was removed from that home along with two other of the girls that were in there.

We were placed in a shelter in Topeka, Kansas where we remained for a few nights before moving on to the villages. In the villages, I have two foster parents and there are nine other kids living with me. The foster parents try to help us feel good about ourselves and they try to help us with our problems and they do the best to find us all good homes that we will happy in.

Some of the kids have nowhere to go, so they just have to keep putting one foot in front of the other and hope for the best while making goals for themselves until they reach their destination.

For most of them their destination is adoption. It is also one of mine. The reasons that I want to get adopted is usually if I want to go to the movies, I have to ask my house parents and they have to ask my village social worker who has to ask my social worker -- and then it has to come back the same way. That usually takes awhile. And if I want clothes, I have to ask my house parents who have to ask my village social worker who has to ask my social worker. There is also paper work that needs to be done and that usually takes up to about three weeks.

The other reasons that I want to be adopted is I would have a place that I could call home. I would have a room that I could call my room. I would have a family that I could love and would love me back.

I wrote a poem about waiting for a home and I would like to share it with you now:

My nerves cringe with excitement as I must wait.
I don't know when it will happen, there is no date.

My one wish that I hope to come true.
Will you make my wish come true, will you?

I don't want to be here forever, I want a home.
Please get me out of this system and out of this dome.

Does anyone want me; it feels like three whole years.
I am still waiting for you, I'm so close to tears.

I want to live happy with my spirit so free.
Only you can make it happen; when will it be?

The papers are here, you have finally heard.
I'd fly to you now if I were a bird.

One question left; Do we make a pair?
Are you somebody who will really care?

I hope you're the one for other choices have come.
I'll go through them all for my choice should not be dumb.

I've always been hoping for this day to arrive.
Without a good family I could not survive.

My nerves boil with excitement I no longer wait.
I know when it will happen and I do know the date.

Mrs. Clinton: "I want to thank everyone who's here and all of the participants. I want to invite all of you into the State Dining Room where there will be a reception and some cookies and things for all of the children who have demonstrated extraordinary patience this afternoon. I just want to end with something that really, I think, echoes what everyone said. The primary responsibility for children lies with the parents and parents have the highest obligation to their own children and should do everything in their power to take care of those children. But sometimes for a lot of reasons that go back to the beginning of human history, that responsibility is not accepted. And then all the rest of us, I think, have the responsibility. We are a part of every child's family whether we acknowledge it or not. And so in any way that we can, we should try to accept that responsibility and give the love and attention that every child who was born deserves to have. And so that's what we hope the result of this National Adoption Month campaign will lead to -- more and more Americans accepting responsibility for all our children. Thank you very much."

TALKING IT OVER
BY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
RELEASE: WEEKEND, OCTOBER 28-29, 1995

When I first began writing this column more than three months ago, I hoped to occasionally use this space to respond to the many people who write to me.

So far, I have received more heartwarming and thought-provoking letters than I can count. I also have received a few angry letters whose contents cannot be published in a family newspaper.

I've heard from a class of second- and third-graders in Kansas who are concerned about pollution, a man from Illinois who is campaigning against tobacco use, and a retiree in Florida worried about the high cost of health care.

A boy from Texas wanted to know what Socks eats (dried cat food) and a 10-year-old in Minnesota asked how many rooms are in the White House (132).

I wish I could respond to all of these letters in this column. Instead, I can only answer a few.

Many readers wrote in response to my column in July about our nation's complicated system of adoption and the thousands of needy children who are waiting for permanent, loving homes. Not surprisingly, I heard from lots of people who said they were eager to adopt children but had become overwhelmed by the long wait, red tape and high cost involved.

A Florida woman, frustrated by a lack of communication among adoption agencies and government social workers, summed up the feelings of many prospective adoptive parents: "I know there is a little girl in this country somewhere waiting for my home."

One couple from Oregon, trying to adopt through a county agency, was told that it might take several years before a child was available. Their alternative, to adopt through a private agency, could cost \$16,000 or more.

Because these problems are so widespread -- and because so many children continue to languish in foster care -- I recently got together a group of experts, adoption advocates and concerned parents to help people learn more about adoption and to make the process simpler and more efficient for waiting parents. There is no reason so many loving parents cannot be united with children desperate for their care and attention.

I also have received mailbags of letters about my trip to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September. Some people were

concerned about my participation, and many others were enthusiastic about it. A few expressed their outrage over infanticide and coerced abortions in China, problems that people became more aware of because the conference was held there. Others wondered if the conference would really make a difference in improving women's rights around the world.

I believe the conference was an important and historic first step in giving women the tools they need to lead productive lives. More than 180 nations agreed for the first time that women are integral to the economic, political and social life of every country and that global peace and prosperity depend on the well-being of women.

However, the conference in Beijing will only be a lasting success if governments, institutions and each of us in our own lives work to ensure that women are full and equal partners in society. Here at home, for example, the President has created a special White House Council on Women that will enable government agencies to work together and reach out to private organizations to fulfill the goals of the women's conference.

Health issues were on the minds of many readers. I heard from scores of Gulf War veterans and their families, who were concerned about the government's response to illnesses commonly referred to as Gulf War Syndrome. I hope those families, many of whom have suffered greatly, know that the President has established an advisory committee to investigate Gulf War veterans' illnesses.

Perhaps the most gratifying health-related letter I received came from Miriam Murtha, a Virginia woman who got a mammogram as a result of our breast cancer awareness campaign that began earlier this year. Her screening found two malignant tumors before they could spread to other parts of her body. "I will be having regular checkups from now on," she wrote.

Children also wrote to me with suggestions and questions. Many wondered if I could raise their allowances, lower the voting age or send them free tickets to Washington. (Sorry, I can't.)

And quite a few offered their own editorial comments. "I think there should be no more drugs. I don't want any more guns and no more pollution," wrote Brandon Jackson, a second-grader from Kansas.

To Brandon and everyone else who wrote to me over these last few months, thanks for talking things over with me.

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