

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mary Smith, Tom Freedman
FROM: David Hochschild
DATE: July 27, 1998
RE: Summary of Heritage Foundation's Adoption Plan

All of this information came from an article posted on the Heritage Foundation web site. It was written by Conna Craig, who is president of the Institute for Children, a private, non-profit organization working to reshape foster care and adoption.

The Adoption Problem

The Heritage Foundation claims the main problem with adoption is that government is involved with it. Surprise, surprise. A few facts, or "facts" - considering they are from the Heritage Foundation...

- In 1980, Congress started offering states matching funds to assist states with the adoption of children with special needs. This has resulted in "graft and fiscal abuse" by states who exaggerate the number of special needs children.
- Each year, 15,000 children in foster care turn 18 with no permanent family.
- State agencies consistently fail to recruit enough families for the children eligible for adoption every year. Potential parents are often turned down because of racial considerations when there are waiting lists of families willing to take in even the most emotionally troubled and physically handicapped children.
- 40% of all foster children leaving the system end up on welfare.
- America spends \$10 billion a year on foster care and adoption services through public agencies (federal \$ are about a third of all foster care funding).
- In LA, 39% of homeless youth are former foster children

The National Commission on Child Care argues that the foster care crisis is the "logical result of two decades of national neglect in providing funding and services for children, youths and their families." But the author contends that as long as there is tax money involved in the process, the system will fail. In particular, the problem is that there is no financial incentive for adoption agencies to find families for the children.

The Solution

Hold states accountable for reporting their progress in finding homes for children in foster care. Require states to make public the number of children in foster care, the number of foster children free to be adopted, and the number of state-recruited families with completed home studies.

Prohibit race-based delays in adoption. This seems to mean disallowing race from being considered at all when matching children with adoptive families.

End government funding that creates incentives to keep children in substitute care for longer than 12 months. Create penalties for states that have too many bureaucratic delays.

Require that states find adoptive homes for children within 30 days after the termination of parental rights. The foster child who is freed for adoption typically has been in the system for at least two years. However, once that child become legally free to be adopted, there are often additional delays of many months.

State-level reforms

Make entrance requirements for foster families as stringent as those for adoptive families. This might shrink the pool of foster parents but the author disagrees, arguing the it will increase the number of people who want to be foster parents because a high-caliber, more efficient system will be more attractive to potential foster parents.

Allow no more than 12 months for biological parents to prove their fitness to resume custody of their children. This would create an incentive for troubled parents to get their lives together or risk losing their right to get their child back.

Allow no more than 30 days from the birth of the child for biological fathers to formalize paternity. The “Baby Jessica” case was an example of the problem of allowing biological fathers to come from nowhere and claim their children after they have been adopted.