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Health, Education, and
Human Services Division

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April 20, 1999

The Honorable Nancy L. Johnson
Chairman, Subcommittee on Human Resources
Committee on Ways and Means
House of Representatives

Foster Care: Increases in Adoption Rates

Dear Madam Chairman:

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) authorizes incentive payments to states for increasing the number of foster child adoptions in fiscal years 1998 through 2002. States may receive up to \$6,000 for each finalized adoption of a foster child over a state's base number for a fiscal year. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is responsible for determining the base number of foster child adoptions that a state must exceed in order to be eligible for incentive payments. To determine each state's base numbers for fiscal year 1998, HHS averaged that state's number of finalized foster care adoptions for federal fiscal years 1995, 1996, and 1997. Recently, the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) reported that, of the 42 states that provided estimates for the survey, at least 36,000 foster children were adopted in fiscal year 1998, which represents an increase of 7,859 over the base numbers.¹

This letter responds to your request that we determine the source of information states used to derive both the fiscal year 1998 and the base numbers of finalized foster care adoptions, and to identify factors that contributed to the increases in foster care adoptions. You were interested in the increases reported in finalized adoptions of foster children in five states—Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, and Texas. These five states estimated increases in finalized foster care adoptions for fiscal year 1998 of at least 50 percent over their base numbers. In responding to your request, we conducted interviews with state child welfare officials in March 1999.

STATE DATABASES WERE PRIMARY SOURCE OF NUMBERS REPORTED TO NACAC

Officials in four of the five states we reviewed told us that they derived the fiscal year 1998 and base numbers of finalized foster care adoptions reported by NACAC from their state child welfare databases. These databases contain child-specific records of a state's foster care population and are the source of data submitted by these states to the federal Adoption and

¹Joe Kroll, "1998 U.S. Adoptions From Foster Care Projected to Exceed 36,000," Adoptalk (Winter 1999), pp. 1-2.

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Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System.² The fifth state conducted a manual count of finalized adoptions; although that state included the name of each foster child in the tabulation of fiscal year 1998 adoptions, it did not do so for the earlier base numbers. Thus, with the exception of the base numbers for one state, all five states could identify the individual children included in their counts.

Table 1: State Estimates of Finalized Foster Care Adoptions in Fiscal Year 1998

State	Baseline total	Fiscal year 1998 estimated total	Number change	Percentage change
Connecticut	207	314	107	51.7
Florida	987	1549	562	56.9
Illinois	2,200	4,423	2,223	101.0
Iowa	350	537	187	53.4
Texas	880	1,548	668	75.9

Source: Adoptalk (Winter 1999), p. 2.

ASFA CITED AS CONTRIBUTOR TO INCREASED ADOPTIONS

The emphasis on adoption in ASFA was among several factors that state officials cited as contributing to an increase in fiscal year 1998 foster care adoptions over the base numbers. Other factors included administrative reform, such as assigning additional staff to efforts to move children toward permanent placement; increased recruitment efforts, such as state funding for recruitment of adoptive parents for children with special needs; and court-related changes, such as an increase in the number of staff attorneys to help caseworkers prepare cases for court reviews.

²The federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) is the primary source of federal administrative data about foster care and adoption. It allows HHS to perform research on and evaluate state foster care and adoption programs, and it assists HHS in targeting technical assistance efforts, among other uses.

Table 2: Factors Cited by State Officials as Contributing to Increased Foster Care Adoptions

Factors	Number of states
Increased emphasis on adoption in federal or state laws	3
Changes in internal processes or administrative reform	3
Increased emphasis on recruitment of adoptive parents	2
Streamlined court process or increased court-related personnel	2

An official in one state told us that she expects the number of adoptions to continue to increase. Officials in two other states expected the number of adoptions in that state to remain high but to not increase above the level estimated for fiscal year 1998. Officials in the remaining two states did not offer estimates of future adoption levels.

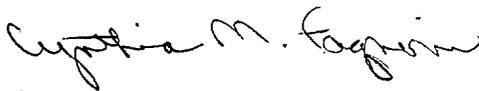
AGENCY COMMENTS

We requested that HHS review a draft of this letter. HHS provided no substantive comments.

As we arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we will make no further distribution of this correspondence until April 22, 1999. At that time, we will send copies to other relevant congressional parties and to the Honorable Donna E. Shalala, the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

If you have any questions about this information, please contact me on (202) 512-7215. Major contributors to this correspondence were David D. Bellis, Kerry Gail Dunn, and Ann T. Walker.

Sincerely yours,



Cynthia M. Fagnoni
 Director, Education, Workforce,
 and Income Security Issues

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