

# 2015 Final Report

This report contains information regarding the Governor's Adoption Study Committee, appointees, meeting agenda items, a summary of discussion topics, and final recommendations in accordance with HEA 1222 (2014).

THE GOVERNOR'S  
ADOPTION STUDY  
COMMITTEE

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# Introduction

The Governor's Adoption Study Committee (the Committee) is just one of the ways that Governor Pence is fulfilling his promise to make Indiana the most adoption-friendly state in the country. Other initiatives to achieve that goal include hosting numerous Adoption Fairs and also creating the first ever state income tax credit for Hoosiers who adopt, beginning in taxable year 2015.

The Committee was appointed by Governor Pence in July 2014, and their terms expire on June 30, 2015. This report is a summation of the committee's discussions and includes their final recommendations for improvements that could be made to make Indiana more adoption friendly for Hoosier families.

# Statutory Authorization

## ENGROSSED HOUSE BILL No. 1222

DIGEST OF HB 1222 (Updated February 25, 2014 4:08 pm - DI 73)

**Citations Affected:** IC 6-3; noncode.

**Synopsis:** Adoption committee and tax credit. Provides an adjusted gross income tax credit for an individual who is eligible to claim the federal adoption credit. Establishes the interim committee on adoption to: (1) study how other states provide services under public adoption programs and study legal and regulatory costs associated with foster care and private adoption; (2) make recommendations concerning improving adoption programs; and (3) report the committee's findings and recommendations.

**Effective:** July 1, 2014; January 1, 2015.

### **Kubacki, Turner, Macer**

(SENATE SPONSORS — YODER, CHARBONNEAU, RANDOLPH, DELPH,  
BRODEN)

## ENGROSSED HOUSE BILL No. 1222

A BILL FOR AN ACT to amend the Indiana Code concerning  
taxation.

*Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Indiana:*

1 SECTION 1. IC 6-3-3-13 IS ADDED TO THE INDIANA CODE

2 AS A NEW SECTION TO READ AS FOLLOWS [EFFECTIVE

3 JANUARY 1, 2015]: **Sec. 13. (a) This section applies only to taxable**

4 years beginning after December 31, 2014.

5 (b) Each taxable year, an individual who is eligible to claim the  
6 credit provided by Section 23 of the Internal Revenue Code on the  
7 individual's federal return for the taxable year is entitled to a  
8 credit against the individual's adjusted gross income tax liability  
9 for the taxable year equal to the lesser of:

10 (1) the amount of the credit allowable under Section 23 of the  
11 Internal Revenue Code for each eligible child on the  
12 individual's federal return for the taxable year multiplied by  
13 ten percent (10%); or

14 (2) one thousand dollars (\$1,000) for each eligible child.

15 (c) The credit provided by this section may not exceed the  
16 amount of the taxpayer's adjusted gross income tax liability for the

1 taxable year, reduced by the sum of all credits for the taxable year  
2 that are applied before the application of the credit provided by  
3 this section. The amount of any unused credit under this section for  
4 a taxable year may not be carried forward to a succeeding taxable  
5 year, carried back to a preceding taxable year, or refunded.

6 (d) If all or part of the credit allowed under Section 23 of the  
7 Internal Revenue Code for a taxable year beginning after  
8 December 31, 2014, is required to be claimed in, or carried  
9 forward to, a taxable year after the taxable year in which the credit  
10 is first allowed, the part carried forward and allowed to be claimed  
11 as a credit shall be treated as allowable under subsection (b). A  
12 credit first allowed under Section 23 of the Internal Revenue Code  
13 for a taxable year beginning before January 1, 2015, and required  
14 to be claimed in, or carried forward to, a taxable year after the  
15 taxable year in which the credit is first allowed shall not be treated  
16 as allowable under subsection (b).

17 SECTION 2. [EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2014] (a) As used in this  
18 SECTION, "committee" refers to the committee on adoption  
19 established by subsection (b).

20 (b) The committee on adoption is established.

21 (c) The committee consists of nine (9) members appointed by the  
22 governor as follows:

23 (1) One (1) representative from a licensed child placing  
24 agency that provides adoption services.

25 (2) One (1) parent who adopted a child who was a ward of the  
26 department of child services.

27 (3) One (1) parent who adopted a child through a private  
28 adoption.

29 (4) One (1) court appointed special advocate.

30 (5) Two (2) representatives from the department of child  
31 services, one (1) of whom must be an attorney.

32 (6) Two (2) judges who have experience with adoption cases.

33 (7) One (1) person chosen at the governor's discretion.

34 (d) The governor shall appoint one (1) of the representatives  
35 from the department of child services to serve as the chairperson  
36 of the committee.

37 (e) An individual from the governor's office shall provide staff  
38 support for the committee.

39 (f) A member of the committee is not entitled to compensation,  
40 per diem, or reimbursement for expenses.

41 (g) The committee shall do all the following:

42 (1) Study:

1 (A) how other states have partnered with private, faith  
2 based, and community entities to provide services under  
3 the public adoption programs of those states, including:

4 (i) public and private services offered under adoption  
5 programs; and

6 (ii) new services that entities have provided under the  
7 public adoption programs; and

8 (B) the legal and regulatory costs associated with foster  
9 care and private adoption in Indiana.

10 (2) Make recommendations concerning improving adoption  
11 programs in Indiana.

12 (3) **Before November 1, 2014, report the committee's findings**

13 **and recommendations to the:**

14 (A) **governor;**

15 (B) **department of child services; and**

16 (C) **legislative council in an electronic format under**

17 **IC 5-14-6.**

18 (h) **This SECTION expires July 1, 2015.**

## Committee Members

*Pursuant to House Enrolled Act 1222, the Committee consists of nine members appointed by the Governor as follows:*

- 1) One representative from a licensed child placing agency that provides adoption services
  - a. Sharon Pierce, The Villages
- 2) One parent who adopted a child who was a ward of the Department of Child Services
  - a. Karen Sauer, adoptive mother
- 3) One parent who adopted a child through a private adoption
  - a. Zachary Kester, adoptive father & adoption attorney
- 4) One court appointed special advocate
  - a. Gregg Ellis, CASA
- 5) Two representatives from the Department of Child Services, one of whom must be an attorney
  - a. Jane Bisbee, Deputy Director of Field Operations
  - b. Tamara Wilson, Deputy General Counsel
- 6) Two judges who have experience with adoption cases
  - a. Judge Dana Kenworthy
  - b. Judge Steven Galvin
- 7) One person chosen at the Governor's discretion
  - a. Michele Jackson, adoptive mother & adoption attorney

## Meeting Minutes

# Study Committee on Adoption

*Tuesday, August 12, 2014, 2:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M.*

*Indiana Government Center South, Conference Room C*

**Members present:** Jane Bisbee, Chair; Michele Jackson, adoptive mother and adoption attorney; Gregg Ellis, Guardian ad Litem/Child Advocates, Marion County; Judge Dana Kenworthy, Grant Superior Court 2; Tamara Wilson, DCS Legal; Judge Steven Galvin, Monroe Juvenile Court; Sharon Pierce, Villages; Zachary Kester, adoptive father and adoption attorney; Karen Sauer, adoptive mother.

**Guests present:** Lindsey Craig, Brady Brookes, Parvonay Stover, Angel Owens.

**Commission staff present:** Lindsey Craig, Governor's Office Policy Director; Brady Brookes, DCS Legislative Director.

**I. Welcome:** Jane Bisbee welcomes the committee. Introduces herself, as well as support staff for the committee. Jane also gives her background with the Department of Child Services.

**II. Introduction of Committee Members:** Committee members introduce themselves, giving their specific backgrounds.

**III. Discussion of Committee Rules:** Jane reads all standing committee rules, reviews House Enrolled Act 1222, and asks for questions/comments from the committee. Question raised by Tamara Wilson regarding whether or not there will be additional ground rules. Tamara requests to add a rule to committee regarding current pending litigation against the state involving adoption and adoption assistance indicating that we cannot have that as a topic of discussion. Jane says it will be noted, but no need to add to rules. Jane Bisbee entertains motion to approve these committee rules. Motion made to adopt committee rules, passes committee vote, and rules are adopted.

**IV. Appointment of Deputy Chair for the Committee:** Jane Bisbee indicates she will not put anyone on the spot today. If anyone is interested in becoming Deputy Chair for the Committee, email Jane at [jane.bisbee@dcs.in.gov](mailto:jane.bisbee@dcs.in.gov) or email the committee at [adoptionstudycommittee@gov.in.gov](mailto:adoptionstudycommittee@gov.in.gov). This will be made first agenda item at next meeting.

**V. Review of Statute:** Lindsey Craig reviews how committee came to exist. Governor wants Indiana to be the most adoption friendly state in the country. Discusses HEA 1222. Part of bill has already taken effect. Created first tax credit for families in Indiana. Second part of that bill includes what created this committee. Reviews charge given for committee (see attached). Nov 1, 2014 originally listed as the date that committee shall submit a report on their progress, but have discussed with

legislators that this date will be used as halfway point. The final report will be submitted by June 30, 2015. Intention with this committee is to look at all issues currently facing adoptive parents. What can we do to make Indiana better? How can we better support, provide better resources, raise awareness, and make it more affordable to adopt? Perhaps committee can have concrete recommendations to improve.

Lindsey announces that the Governor has directed DCS to fund the State Adoption Subsidy for State Fiscal Year 2015.

## **VI. Overview of Adoption Basics:**

**Reba James**, DCS Deputy Director of Permanency and Practice Support gives high level overview of adoption. The primary responsibility of DCS is to preserve the family, however, we do have kids whose relationship with their parents has been terminated. We then need to get them to permanency through adoption. Our kids are either adopted by relative/s or current foster families, but sometimes that doesn't happen. There are kids that are difficult to place. Discusses the Special Needs Adoption Program (SNAP). We have workers (SNAP workers) that work with (DCS) field staff, as well as working to recruit adoptive families. Once our workers identify a family, there is a prep process, home study process, and training. DCS looks at both sides to match a child with a family. Also discusses post-adoption services. When issues come up, adoptive families are able to contact the SNAP worker. That worker talks to the family, finds out issues, and resolves.

- Gregg Ellis question: Policy on when SNAPS referral can be initiated. Do they have to wait until TPR? Reba will check on timing.
  
- Jane clarifies who is eligible for post-adopt services. The answer is all who have adopted.
  
- Tamara – how do families access post-adopt services?

**Tamara Wilson** explains the legal division and how DCS legal gets involved, as well as what they do to achieve adoption.

- Zachary Kester questions whether the cost of a home study is borne by DCS, or is it by the private attorney? Tamara Wilson states that there is a form of adoption assistance that is available, which is known as non-recurring adoption expense/s. Yes, there is reimbursement available for home studies.
  
- Jane Bisbee indicates that licensed foster parents (who go on to adopt their foster children) do not have the cost of home study because it was paid for by DCS when they were getting licensed.
  
- Sharon Pierce questions if we know what percentage of kids are adopted by their foster parents. Jane will find out.

**Michele Jackson** discusses her general conversations with prospective adoptive parents. They are best interest of the children, safety issues, mental health issues of adoptive parents, child's mental health issues, general health of the child, and financial aspects of adoption. There are **domestic adoptions** which can include infant; private; foster to adopt; step-parent adoption; relative adoption; disruption/dissolution adoption (where a child is adopted and then the parents no longer want the adoption to stay intact); and second parent adoption. In Indiana it is a statutory-driven process. Details are within statute (I.C. 31-19). One concern is putative father and how he can contest adoption. Gave example of case where child placed in adoptive home for several years, but putative father was able to "step back in". There are also **inter-country/international adoptions**. This includes children being adopted from other countries, as well as unaccompanied children crossing the United States boarder. International adoption has drastically changed. Any Indiana resident now has to use a federally accredited or approved entity in order to perform their international adoption.

**Judge Steven Galvin** gives his perspective on adoption. As judges they try not to forget that for these families there is rarely anything more important than adoption. Cognizant that they (Judges) need to move children toward permanency. Discusses how there are low income families who want to adopt, but they cannot afford an attorney and do not understand process. Suggests that committee look at low income families and how to make it more understandable/affordable to adopt. How can we make this process more clear, concise, and available?

## **VII. Topics for future meeting dates:**

Discussion held regarding topics for upcoming meetings. Committee reviews compiled suggestions and decides upon topics for the next two meetings. Karen Sauer suggests adoption awareness. Sharon Pierce suggests barriers.

October 1, 2014 - **ADOPTION AWARENESS**

- Sharon Pierce suggests discussion on social media
- Judge Galvin suggests discussion on African Americans/Hispanics

November 19, 2014 - **BARRIERS**

## **VIII. Future Commission Meeting Dates:**

- October 1, 2014 10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.**
- November 19, 2014 10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.**
- January 14, 2015 10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.**
- March 11, 2015 10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.**

# Study Committee on Adoption

*Wednesday, October 1, 2014 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.*

*Indiana Government Center South, Conference Room A*

**Members present:** Jane Bisbee, Chair; Michele Jackson, adoptive mother and adoption attorney; Gregg Ellis, Guardian ad Litem/Child Advocates, Marion County; Judge Dana Kenworthy, Grant Superior Court 2; Tamara Wilson, DCS Legal; Judge Steven Galvin, Monroe Juvenile Court; Sharon Pierce, Villages; Zachary Kester, adoptive father and adoption attorney; Karen Sauer, adoptive mother.

**Guests present:** Lindsey Craig, Parvonay Stover, Angel Owens.

**Commission staff present:** Lindsey Craig, Governor's Office Family Policy Director; Parvonay Stover, DCS Deputy Legislative Director.

**I. Welcome and Introductions:** Jane Bisbee greets audience. Committee members introduce themselves and explain their roles. Jane reminds members and audience of Adoption Study Committee website and email address. Email address is [adoptionstudycommittee@gov.in.gov](mailto:adoptionstudycommittee@gov.in.gov).

**II. Approval of August 12, 2014 Meeting Minutes:** Jane Bisbee entertains motion to approve previous minutes. Motion made to approve minutes, passes committee vote, and meeting minutes of August 12, 2014 approved

**III. Appointment of Deputy Chair:** Sharon Pierce and Karen Sauer volunteer to be Deputy Chair. Jane decides to have both serve as co-deputy chairs. Motion entertained for Adoption Study Committee to have co-deputy chairs. Motion made, passes committee vote, and motion carries.

**IV. Update on State Adoption Subsidy:** Jane Bisbee introduces Tamara Wilson, DCS Deputy General Counsel. Jane makes reference to handouts (Frequently Asked Questions and Adoption Subsidy Press Release). Tamara Wilson states she has two matters to discuss. 1) Explained that DCS has been authorized to provide funding for state adoption subsidies for all children on the waitlist beginning July 1, 2014, as well as any children who may become eligible during state fiscal year 2015. Payments will be retroactive to July 1, 2014. DCS Central Eligibility Unit is currently processing families' information in order to get them into payment status. 2) Settlement has been reached in lawsuit. Will provide for the State paying \$15.1 million, which will be administered by a third party administrator. Will cover families with state adoption subsidy agreements on the waitlist from January 1, 2009, through June 30, 2014 (if approved by Court).

**V. Specialty License Plate:** Alex Miller, Legislative Director for the Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles, discusses specialty license plates and the process. Governed in IC 9-18-25-2.3. A group can submit an application for consideration for the next registration year. First available would be

2016. Once application is received, BMV will review and submit to legislature (Interim Study Committee on Roads and Transportation). Applications are not considered complete unless they meet all requirements in code. Once committee has applications, it has its own scoring method. Committee makes recommendations to accept or reject. Ultimately BMV makes final determination as to whether or not group gets specialty license plate. Per Indiana law, BMV cannot issue more than five new specialty plates in any given year. Committee gives recommendation on which groups are most relevant. It typically receives no more than ten to twelve applications per year. This year it had seven.

Short discussion on the fact that if committee decides to do this, there will be many more questions. Michelle Jackson suggests we assign this to someone to bring to next committee. Zac Kester agrees, but believes the group submitting application has to be a non-profit. Alex Miller says that we do have governmental agencies that have license plates (i.e. DCS Kids First Trust Fund). Sharon agrees to bring up question to Kids First Trust Fund Board at meeting on October 2, 2014. Motion made to further look into this issue and bring to next committee meeting for discussion purposes only. Motion approved by committee.

**VI. Indiana Heart Gallery:** Amanda Lopez explains that the Heart Gallery is a traveling photo exhibit featuring children in foster care who are available for adoption. DCS started its Heart Gallery in 2007. Purpose is to raise awareness. As a State contractor (Transform Consulting) they try to get people to host this Heart Gallery. Last year averaged six to seven events per month. Hosted in all 18 DCS regions. Explains how children are featured in the Heart Gallery. Contractors work closely with DCS Special Needs Adoption Program (SNAP) specialists. Family Case Managers (FCMs) can also make referral to have a child featured in Heart Gallery. Child must also agree that he or she wants to be adopted. Generally have 20-30 kids featured at one time. Further explained that the Heart Gallery website features a few children who are available for adoption, as well as the Heart Gallery tour. Events are also featured on social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.). Continuously working with partners in the community, such as YMCA's, Boys and Girls Club, churches, etc.

**VII. Indiana Adoption Program:** Anna Wolak, Director of Adoption Recruitment with the Children's Bureau, explains that there are 20 Adoption Champions in the State of Indiana, at least one per region. They are contracted with the state to hold one event per region, per quarter. These events include PR events, educational events and National Adoption Day events. Further discussed their role and what they do. Not promoting any one state agency, just adoption in general. Invite groups of families and kids to "matching events". A big push in November is to show appreciation for those who have adopted. Invites committee members to private reception where Director Bonaventura is speaking on November 6, 2014, at the Children's Museum. Asks committee for contacts that might help get the word out about National Adoption Day events.

**VIII. Faith-Based Adoption Awareness Initiatives:** Angela Hall, Live 1:17 Ministry, Trader's Point Christian Church, discusses how their ministry came about. Comes from the biblical passage, Isaiah 1:17. The ministry exists to be a catalyst for adoption. Shares with the committee ways to promote awareness within the church. Their ministry is doing things within the church to raise awareness. They try to do a couple of educational sessions per year, mission trip, coffee sleeves for the first Sunday in November (promoting National Adoption Month), and provide a kiosk on site at the church with information to raise awareness. They are excited to see church families who can

work with prevention efforts as well. Great resource for them to come, help, and learn. Their ministry is four years old and is part of the National Alliance.

**IX. Adoption Awareness Ideas:** Lindsey Craig, Director of Family Policy, Office of the Governor, discusses how important it is to the Governor that we partner with the faith-based communities with regard to adoption. She would love to do more outreach with the church community regarding “Orphan Sunday.” Wants to promote all adoption. Faith-based community has the same “heart for kids” as the State. Wants to expand the partnership with faith-based community. The thought is that maybe you cannot adopt and you cannot foster, but you can support people who do/are. Targeting churches and congregations to “step up”. Somehow figuring out a way to have that unified goal of adoption of kids in the DCS system. Discusses the success of the Virginia Adopts campaign. Announces that Governor Pence will host another adoption fair. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Informational Adoption Fair will be held on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

Sharon Pierce discusses One Church, One Child of Illinois. If every church in our state embraced/supported a family adopting, then there would not be children waiting for families, but families waiting for children. Sharon further notes concerns about disproportionality.

#### **X. Adoptive Parents’ Perspective on Adoption Awareness:**

##### a. Michele Jackson, *Committee Member*

When she thinks about adoption awareness, she thinks about advocacy. Gives statistics. Feels DCS is doing a good job. Thanks the Governor’s Office for centralizing things, doing collaborative work, and bringing more awareness to this issue. Ideas include 1) Governor’s Office being on a national platform with organizations such as Christian Alliance. Can we have someone from the Governor’s Office present at some of these events and/or conferences? 2) Reaching out and collaborating with Licensed Child Placing Agencies, 3) Expanding our social media, 4) Using public radio/television to promote awareness, 5) Creation of a permanent advocacy committee, and 6) Promoting adoption awareness within our schools.

##### b. Zac Kester, *Committee Member*

Shares his family’s personal story. He and his wife were always serious about adoption, and their Christian life is a reason they wanted to adopt. Discusses theological convictions. They recognized that they had a good home that they could open up to other children. Began process and adopted two daughters from Ethiopia. Suggests that committee could and should make recommendations regarding adoption awareness (specifically targeting people of faith) to think about adoption within the state system.

##### c. Karen Sauer, *Committee Member*

When she was young, she read a magazine article about kids aging out of the system. Her family wanted her to have a baby, suggesting that if she adopted she might “get a bad one”. There are not

bad kids, but instead kids who were in bad situations and taught bad things. People will realize that they are missing out on some amazing kids. Wants to change the fear and focus on success. The resource she wished existed when she was adopting is “networking”. She thinks we should focus on the positives and success stories.

**XI. Courtroom Adoption Day Events:** Judge Dana Kenworthy, Grant Superior Court 2, discusses involvement in Adoption Day events. She and Judge Galvin sit on the Indiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. Suggests that they talk to the Council about putting adoption on the agenda for the Indiana Juvenile Judges Conference next June. Thinks the judiciary in Indiana is a hugely untapped resource. Need to get the word out to the judiciary, as we have easy allies in them. Discusses handout regarding free conference October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014. Motion made on Judge Kenworthy and Judge Galvin discussing issue with Juvenile Court Judges. Passes committee vote and motion approved.

**XII. Committee Discussion on Adoption Awareness Strategies:** Jane invites audience to send input to the email address. Does anyone have any other suggestions on follow-up or recommendations on awareness?

Michele Jackson makes motion to research the possibility of a permanent advocacy committee that primarily focuses on awareness that would be through the Governor’s Office. Passes committee vote and approved.

Procedural question by Zac regarding report submission to the Governor and Legislature. Jane suggests we will pull motions, strategies, and/or information from each meeting to create an initial draft report. Jane further suggests that we have an interim report for the next meeting saying what we have done so far and what we plan to do in the future. Staff will likely put this together and send to committee members in draft form.

**XIII. Discussion of Topics/Presenters for Next Committee Meeting on November 19, 2014 regarding “Barriers to Adoption”:**

We are looking for “what are the barriers” and who can speak to the barriers?

- Sharon Pierce suggests **financial concerns and capacity** (to meet the needs of the child)
- Zac Kester suggests **mistrust or misunderstanding of state authorities.**
- Karen Sauer suggests **being single** and **what to expect when you adopt a special needs child.**
- Greg Ellis suggests **preparation of family to adopt** and **understanding of post adoption services.**

**XIV. Future Commission Meeting Dates:**

- November 19, 2014 10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.**
- January 14, 2015 10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.**
- March 11, 2015 10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.**

# Study Committee on Adoption

*Wednesday, November 19, 2014 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.*

*Indiana Government Center South, Conference Room 2*

**Members present:** Jane Bisbee, Chair; Michele Jackson, adoptive mother and adoption attorney; Gregg Ellis, Guardian ad Litem/Child Advocates, Marion County; Judge Dana Kenworthy, Grant Superior Court 2; Tamara Wilson, DCS Legal; Judge Steven Galvin, Monroe Juvenile Court; Sharon Pierce, Villages; Zachary Kester, adoptive father and adoption attorney; Karen Sauer, adoptive mother.

**Guests present:** Lindsey Craig, Parvonay Stover, Angel Owens.

**Commission staff present:** Lindsey Craig, Governor's Office Family Policy Director; Parvonay Stover, DCS Legislative Director.

**I. Welcome:** Jane Bisbee greets audience. Reminds members and audience of Adoption Study Committee Website and email address. Email address is [adoptionstudycommittee@gov.in.gov](mailto:adoptionstudycommittee@gov.in.gov).

**II. Approval of Minutes from October 1, 2014 Meeting:** Jane Bisbee entertains motion to approve previous minutes. Motion made to approve minutes, passes committee vote, and meeting minutes of October 1, 2014 approved. Note: A few inaccuracies on minutes have now been corrected.

**III. Approval of Interim Committee Report:** Jane Bisbee entertains motion to approve Interim Committee Report. Motion made to approve interim committee report. Passes committee vote and interim report approved. Jane asks Lindsey Craig what will happen once report is approved. Lindsey says it will be posted on ASC website and then sent to legislature. No further discussion.

## **IV. Possible Adoption License Plate: Update – Sharon Pierce, committee member**

Sharon gives background on consideration of a specialty license plate and whether or not it would promote adoption. There were two purposes:

- Continued adoption awareness
- Raising funds

Made aware that because of increasing numbers of specialty plates, this is not necessarily the “fund-raising vehicle” that it once was. Most likely DCS would have to provide oversight on that particular plate. Although there is awareness that would come from this, DCS probably would not be able to manage more than one specialty plate. Jane Bisbee feels it is the same population that might choose that plate as would be choosing the Kids First Trust Fund Plate.

Need to consider that. No vote today. Need to hear more before vote. When committee begins considering recommendations, it will be revisited.

#### **V. Possible Adoption Advocacy Council: Update – Michele Jackson, committee member**

Background on whether there should be permanent committee or council to bring awareness/advocacy to adoption. Is there already an existing organization that does this? Yes and no. Clearly DCS is main vehicle for protecting and supporting children within the foster care system. Do we want to be more expansive/inclusive of other types of adoptions, as well? Looked into the community for currently existing organization - Indiana Adoption Agencies United/Indiana Adoption and Child Services Organization (doing some things, but hard to know how they are composed.) Further looking within the existing structures of government, such as The Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana to see whether or not we could have a subcommittee or task force within that Commission. Another option is to have an independent organization. Need to figure out what their mission would be. Third option is not pursuing this at all.

- Sharon shares one thing they like about the Commission on Children is that it is so interdisciplinary. Wants an “intentionality” on focus of adoption. That might be a subcommittee around permanency. There might be dynamic strategies that would help achieve permanency for more children.
- How difficult would a stand-alone organization be? Question by Gregg Ellis. Michele Jackson – depends on the direction that this committee gave to that. What would the goals be? Supporting existing programs might be more realistic. Depends on the focus you want and are they a support mechanism versus completely independent?
- Question by Zac Kester – Which would be the most viable? Needs to be discussed with the Commission first.
- Jane asks Lindsey/Parvonay to give guidelines on approaching the Committee. Lindsey indicates that Commission on Improving the Status of Children already has their agenda set. She will discuss with Chief Justice Rush and other key players. Explains that during the last session the legislature was trying to reduce the number of commissions and committees. Does not think legislature will be receptive to creating another standalone committee. Can we informally have a committee of citizens, bringing these players together to form their own coalition/committee? Jane asks Michelle to assist in this process.

#### **VI. Awareness Activities in the Juvenile Courts: Update – Judge Steven Galvin, committee member**

Discusses Juvenile Justice Improvement Committee meeting and indicates that they are very receptive to having he and Judge Kenworthy present at the Juvenile Judges Conference in June. Need to remind judges to work with their DCS adoption champions and to take part in their quarterly events. Judge Kenworthy talks about their upcoming adoption celebration. Supreme Court putting together a flicker gallery.

- Question by Michele Jackson– What are hindrances when there is not participation by adoption friendly counties? Judge Galvin indicates they are busy actually getting adoptions completed.

**VII. Vital Records Services for Adoptees and Families – *Brian Carnes, State Registrar, ISDH***

Explains administrative function Health serves with regard to adoptions.

- Handle records of adoption. Gets order from the courts. Change names of children. By law, ISDH must seal original birth certificate. Number one complaint they get at their office because people are trying to identify their birth information. Create new birth certificate for them and that stays on record along with the sealed certificate.
- Handle domestic and “foreign” adoptions (they call out-of-state-adoptions foreign also because they don’t “own” that original birth certificate)
- Matching programs-should a parent and child want to meet post adoption, they can reunite families.
- Medical history registry-if parent wants to leave medical history behind so child can access later.
- Putative father registry-for fathers who may want to assert their rights.

Zac Kester recommends Committee follow-up with regard to specific records questions. He will do research and send email to study committee.

**VIII. Current Initiatives to Reduce Barriers – *Sandra Caesar, Department of Child Services***

Sandy gives background. DCS picks up after public has learned about DCS and foster care adoptions. However they came to find out about it, they are directed to the special needs adoption program specialist (SNAPS), who covers specific regions where families reside. SNAPS talk to people who are interested in adopting in general. If they decide that adoption from foster care is the best option, SNAPS serves as referral agent for that family for their training and home study process. Discusses foster care versus “adopt only”. Training is the same for either. Home study for families adopting from foster care is at no cost to the family. Detailed discussion on role of the SNAPS. DCS only has a role in the adoption of children who are in the state foster care system. DCS does not handle step-parent, private, or international adoptions.

On the back end, any adoptive family who resides in the State of Indiana can access post-adoption services. A SNAPS facilitates referral to the post-adoption specialists. Map w/SNAPS.

Reference: [adoptachild.in.gov](http://adoptachild.in.gov)

Specific question and answer session.

Per Jane Bisbee, the topic of open adoptions should be further discussed by this committee.

## **IX. Psychological Challenges Faced by Older Youth – Shannon Branick, Children’s Bureau**

Director of Adoption services w/Children’s Bureau. Discussion on post-adoption services. Services are available to every family who has adopted, regardless of what type. In order to access, families need to contact their SNAPS. Social workers work with families to:

- Provide case management services, such as linking families with resources, finding qualified therapists for adoption therapy, etc.
- Help advocate for families in the school system, such as sitting in on IEP meetings, etc.
- Provide crisis support
- Parent education
- Respite

General things they do for families:

- Connecting adoptive families with each other, support groups, (serve six regions right now, currently have twelve support groups within those regions)
- Book clubs
- Trainings for adoptive families
- Helping to provide more information on common issues for families, helping families reduce barriers to getting the services they need.
- Some flexible funding available that can help support those in some cases (i.e. equine therapy, special camps, etc.)

Hear these things from families:

- Wish they would have known about post-adoption services earlier. Doing the best they can to get the word out. Program has been in existence for a few years. Try to go to community events to advertise their services. Attend regional meetings with DCS. The lack of knowledge of post-adoption services is definitely a barrier. Families are fearful of the day that DCS “pulls out”.
- Families wish they would have known more about the mental health disorders prior to adoption. Specific attachment issues.
- Families wish they had more info on impacts of trauma. Families are often surprised later on that child is having mental health issues due to trauma.

Other issues they see are pre-adoptive, challenges in older children, issues of attachment are playing out. They don’t trust anyone. Resistant to adoption. Children afraid they will lose connections to biological families. Sometimes families who are considering adopting older children feel they are doing child disservice, making them unavailable to some of the services that would be available if they were not adopted (independent living/collaborative care).

Specific question and answer session.

**X. Committee Discussion on Barriers to Adoption/Future Meeting Topics**

- Collaborative care
- Education on Open Adoptions
- Legal Risk Children
- Background checks for Pre-Adoptive Parents
- Financial Aspects/Subsidy Information
- Timing
- Best Practices
- What type of families can adopt?
- Recruitment of Different Races and Ethnicities
- Faith Based Initiatives/Kansas

**XI. Future Commission Meeting Dates:**

- **January 14, 2015**                      **10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.**
- **March 11, 2015**                      **10:00 A.M. – 12: 00 P.M.**

Location TBD

# Study Committee on Adoption

*Wednesday, January 14, 2015 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.*

*Indiana State Library, History Reference Room*

**Members present:** Michele Jackson, adoptive mother and adoption attorney; Gregg Ellis, Guardian ad Litem/Child Advocates, Marion County; Judge Dana Kenworthy, Grant Superior Court 2; Tamara Wilson, DCS Legal; Judge Steven Galvin, Monroe Juvenile Court; Sharon Pierce/Acting Chair, Villages; Zachary Kester, adoptive father and adoption attorney; Karen Sauer, adoptive mother.

**Guests present:** Lindsey Craig, Parvonay Stover, Angel Owens.

**Commission staff present:** Lindsey Craig, Governor's Office Family Policy Director; Parvonay Stover, DCS Legislative Director.

## **I. Welcome:**

Sharon Pierce greets audience.

## **II. Approval of Minutes from November 19, 2014 Meeting**

Sharon Pierce entertains motion to approve previous minutes. Motion made to approve minutes, passes committee vote, and meeting minutes of November 19, 2014 approved.

## **III. Personal Adoption Experience-Mike Allen, Adoptive Father**

Introductions made by committee. Mr. Allen presented his perspective on an international adoption experience and why they chose that avenue. When they were looking to adopt, they couldn't qualify to adopt through domestic agencies, so they went to counties around them to get on a list to be chosen for adoption (1984/85). Faced a lot of resistance at that time. Informed by more than one person that they could not adopt bi-racial or African American children. Felt it was too much trouble at that time to adopt from the system (bureaucracy). Found the China program to be very well-run and predictable. What they indicated would happen was what actually happened. He is very encouraged that the State of IN is stepping up in the adoption front. Feels like this is about providing for kids in need. Anything that can be done to make it easier to pursue adoption would be wonderful. Commends committee. Offers his assistance in that regard. Things should be streamlined to make process easier.

Questions: Tamara Wilson asks when their first and last child were adopted and when Answer: First child adopted in 1986 and the last two were adopted in 2013. Further questions if he and his wife had ever considered adopting a child out of foster care? Answer: Early on could not seem to get anywhere and they felt like all answers from State were no. They began looking at

other avenues. Once they started with international adoption, they got very comfortable with that process. Did not go back to looking at domestic adoptions. Suggests that when parents are told “this is going to happen”, things indeed happen that way. He feels that would help families feel more favorable about adopting from system.

#### **IV. Update on November Adoption Events and Court Activities and Potential Adoption Advocacy Council-Lindsey Craig, Office of the Governor**

Lindsey Craig recalls events that occurred in November for National Adoption Month. Governor Pence hosted 2<sup>nd</sup> annual adoption event at statehouse in November. Chief Justice, Loretta Rush, emailed Lindsey a list of what courts across the state had done. Recapped information from judges across the state in adoption celebrations

Judge Kenworthy shares success story/adoption gift from first child who was adopted under her watch.

Lindsey updates committee on idea of permanent adoption council. She has spoken to Chief Justice Rush about how we can continue the momentum after committee has concluded. Chief Justice Rush suggested to Lindsey that after this committee is finished, someone present the findings of the Adoption Study Committee to the Commission on Improving the Status of Children. She is open to the Commission having that put on their agenda.

#### **V. Update on Follow-up Question from 11/19 Meeting – Brian Carnes, State Registrar**

*Process of how a record is changed in another state and gets to Indiana or how Indiana changes the record:* Discusses differences in in-state born vs. out-of-state born children. When a child is born in Indiana it is a simplistic process. Courts send an order to change birth certificate, Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) changes, and then seals the original. Parents can then request the changed certificate at any time. Process becomes more complicated when it is an out-of-state adoption. If the child is adopted in Indiana, ISDH sends court order to state in which child was born. Indiana does not own that original birth certificate. The letter sent with that information requests that other state modify their original birth certificate. They do not have to change and may or may not respond. If we do not hear back, assumption is that they have changed their record. If we do hear back from them it is usually that they are not willing to change their record. In that case in Indiana issues a delayed registration of birth. It is a document that can be used (not as good), to prove identity. If other state does change the birth certificate, parents can go to that other state to obtain it. Indiana does get copy for our records, but we cannot issue that birth certificate – Parents must go to that particular state to obtain that document. In foreign adoptions ISDH rarely hears back from that foreign country. If we do not hear back, by law we must wait 90 days. Same process exists as if it were another state. ISDH sends family back to that country to obtain the birth certificate.

Question and answer session.

## **VI. Collaborative Care Transition and Potential Barriers – Heather Kestian, DCS**

Introduces herself as the Collaborative Care Field Director for DCS and explains collaborative care in general. They work to develop supports and support systems for youth aging out of care. What they try to do is to ease the transition into adulthood.

*Previous question: What benefits might a young person not be able to use or gain if they were adopted after the age of sixteen or if they were to go into a guardianship?*

When children are adopted or in permanent guardianship they are able to access the following services (if they were adopted at the age of 16 or older and in foster care for at least 6 months). Heather discussed each of the following services and explained the differences.

- **Emancipation goods and services-** Money up to \$1000, used for one time services (luggage, assistance for paying for test fees, household items, etc.) Funds cannot be used for medical expenses, cell phones, car purchases, car repairs, home purchases, etc.
- **Voluntary independent living services**
- **Voluntary case management services**
- **Driver’s License-** at discretion of adoptive parent or guardian
- **Education and Training Voucher**

Adopted children (or those in permanent guardianships) cannot access:

- **Room and board funds** - To access these funds, child must be in foster care at the time of their eighteenth birthday.

Extensive question and answer session.

\*\*Collaborative Care policies located in Chap. 11 (for reference).

## **VII. Update on Eligibility and Distribution of State Adoption Subsidy-Tamara Wilson, Committee Member, Department of Child Services**

Discusses status of state adoption subsidy project. As of last week, we have been able to place over 850 adoption assistance agreements into pay status. Team of attorneys supporting central eligibility unit who are negotiating those subsidies now. DCS has determined over 130 families who are no longer eligible for SAS. There are over 200 families who haven’t responded to us where we are not sure if the child is still with the family, or continues to be eligible for subsidy, etc. We are in process of investigating those. DCS investigators are assisting with those we cannot locate.

Hearing positive comments from families who have been through the process. Families are grateful.

Question and answer session.

\*\*Negotiations for Adoption Assistance located in Chapter 10 (for reference).

## **VIII. Update on Faith-Based Partnerships in Kansas, Judge Dana Kenworthy, Committee Member**

Judge Kenworthy has reached out to Lucy Bloom, of Kansas, but has not yet had response from her. She is currently working with a Judge in Kansas who is trying to assist her in finding the right person to talk to.

Zac Kester offers that he has learned that Arkansas has faith-based. He can reach out.

### **IX. 2015 DCS Legislative Proposals Impacting Adoption-Parvonay Stover, Department of Child Services**

- DCS has requested \$11M a year to fund state adoption subsidy.
- Senate Bill 324 – legislative proposal in one of our child support bills that impacts adoption - Topic is Notification of Adoption Finalization in IV-D cases. Currently prosecutors are not being notified once adoption orders are finalized on a child who is the subject of a IV-D case. If a current child support order is not being paid, by non-custodial parent, arrearages can continue to accumulate even after the adoption has been finalized. Non-custodial parent who is not paying can continue to get court sanctions. Notice of whether there is an existing child support order, it will allow prosecutors to close out that particular case and let them focus on those open cases that actually need attention.

Lindsey informs committee that there is another bill that would impact adoptions. Brian Carnes gives brief update. This bill is not an agency bill, but was introduced by Senator Delph and Senator Steele. This bill would modify procedure to move all pre-1994 adoptees into the post-1994 laws and rules. It would mirror what is happening currently.

No questions.

### **X. Committee Discussion on Topics for Next Meeting:**

- Best Practices – Dave Thomas Foundation
- Faith-Based
- Barriers

### **XI. Future Commission Meeting Dates**

- **March 11, 2015 – 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. – State Library**
- May 13, 2015 – 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
- June 10, 2015 – 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

# Study Committee on Adoption

*Wednesday, March 11, 2015 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.*

*Indiana State Library, Author's Room*

**Members present:** Jane Bisbee, Chair; Michele Jackson, adoptive mother and adoption attorney; Gregg Ellis, Guardian ad Litem/Child Advocates, Marion County; Tamara Wilson, DCS Legal; Sharon Pierce/Acting Chair, Villages; Zachary Kester, adoptive father and adoption attorney; Karen Sauer, adoptive mother.

**Guests present:** Lindsey Craig, Parvonay Stover, Angel Owens.

**Commission staff present:** Lindsey Craig, Governor's Office Family Policy Director; Parvonay Stover, DCS Legislative Director.

## **I. Welcome:**

Jane Bisbee calls meeting to order. This is the fifth meeting of the Adoption Subsidy Committee, with two meetings remaining. This discussion will be about how we will put the final report together and the recommendations.

## **II. Approval of Minutes from January 14, 2015 Meeting**

Jane Bisbee entertains motion to approve previous minutes. Michelle Jackson indicates that minutes should reflect the fact that she was not present on January 14, 2015. Motion made to approve minutes with correction, passes committee vote, and meeting minutes of January 14, 2015 approved.

## **III. Presentation on Wendy's Wonderful Kids, Dave Thomas Foundation – Carrie Boerio and Angela Marshall**

Background given. 1992 Foundation was established to increase adoptions of children from foster care systems in North America. Those visions and values still drive and guide the foundation today. Foundation initially did a lot of public awareness. While successful in that, felt they needed to do more. In 2004 the Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK) Model was developed because a lot of money was being spent on child welfare, but not a lot was being accomplished. Discussion on the "Why" slide. Recently developed a Youth Voices video, as shown- Life After Foster Care. Discussion on exactly how the program works. Further discussion on components of the WWK Model.. Video shown - Unadoptable is Unacceptable. Carrie Boerio discusses specifics for Indiana and what that means. Estimates that Wendy Wonderful Kids has saved the State of Indiana \$10,012,400 (SEE ATTACHED POWERPOINT PRESENTATION).

## **Q and A:**

**Q:** Michelle Jackson - Have you noticed anything in Indiana that has been a hindrance in the process?

**A:** A couple of aspects of the model that recruiters need to resolve. 1) Reviewing the case file to glean possible people that might be a connection to the child, or for possible adoption, and 2) Looking back at birth family, perhaps to adopt, but to also connect and fill those gaps. Often these children want to reconnect with their birth family and better understand where they came from.

**Q:** Zac Kester - Do you have data that adoptions completed with your model have an increase on educational outcomes or various appropriate outcomes for the children?

**A:** The Dave Thomas Foundation has invested quite a bit of money in the first control group evaluation. Now they are investing in another five-year evaluation of outcomes after adoption. Currently doing interviews with youth who have been adopted and asking about well-being after aging out, etc. When this report comes out it will be interesting to see how they are doing after adoption.

**Q:** Gregg Ellis - What steps do you put in place (inaudible)?

**A:** Looking at the child in the center, his or her connections, both current and past and then spreading out. After all of that has been exhausted they reach out even further. Some recruiters do matching events or flyers about the children. Model does not necessarily encourage a public venue, media, etc, but they do from time to time utilize those activities. They also might reach out to people unknown to the child, but that might have a similar interest in something specific (i.e. art).

**Q:** Jane Bisbee - What is the average length of involvement for a child and what happens when no match is made?

**A:** Not sure what the average is, but will find out. Child can remain on caseload until family is identified. If child ages out of foster care without being adopted, recruiter would end up closing their case, but only 4% of children served age out without being adopted. Some children are on caseload for four years before they are adopted.

**Q:** Jane Bisbee - What is the timeframe to adoption?

**A:** About 18 months.

*(last question inaudible)*

#### **IV. Report on Red Tape and Legal Barriers Faced by Adoptive Families – Zac Kester, Committee Member**

- 1) Citizenship and immigration issues/birth certificate records. No way to prove child was born in the United States. Difficult to obtain a passport without specific paperwork. Can we streamline process for adoptive families?
- 2) Full faith and credit clause in US Constitution (specifically regarding the recognition of foreign decrees). There has been inconsistent application among Indiana courts in recognizing those foreign decrees.
- 3) How dense and complex the adoption laws in the State of Indiana are. Example: Laws regarding child placement agencies and the lack of regulations leave unanswered questions and a lack of clarity.

Zac has spoken to Brian Carnes, Judge Galvin, and several other colleagues in other states with similar issues.

### ***Possible solutions/recommendations***

Educational/Informational Awareness Brochure be developed with regard to the birth certificate knowledge and process that can point the courts and staff in the right direction in how to be aware of these citizenship/immigration issues.

Continued education for attorneys, specifically pertaining to full faith and credit issues, as well as citizenship/immigration issues (and how to streamline that process).

Potential overhaul or review of Indiana's adoption law – if that is “too big of a bite for” us we might identify areas that needs direct attention – one area is the license child placing agency registrations/certifications

*\*\*Minutes will reflect that Zac Kester makes further recommendation that there is a need for a federal immigration statute that would require states to modify the birth certificate when presented with another state's decree. Jane indicates this would likely be outside the scope of this committee. An interesting federal issue.*

### **V. Begin Committee Discussion on Final Recommendations**

Final report is due in June. Plan is for Lindsey to begin working on that report after this meeting. The May 13, 2015 meeting will include final conversations. Goal is to begin now and work from interim report. Jane suggests that the actual recommendations be summarized in an executive summary.

### ***Suggested Final Recommendations:***

- Sustainability of the “conversation” through a subcommittee within the Commission on Children
- Review of the statutory language and process of adoption
- Centralized resource center in Indiana
- Resources for financial aspects of adoption
- Movement towards best practice

Committee will likely have 5 -10 recommendations.

No legislative updates.

At the next meeting committee should be prepared to finalize the recommendations. If there are questions or input about recommendations, email the adoption study committee or Lindsey Craig.

**Future Commission Meeting Dates**

- May 13, 2015 – 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
- June 10, 2015 – 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

# Study Committee on Adoption

*Wednesday, May 13, 2015 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.*

*Indiana Government Center South, Conference Room 4*

**Members present:** Jane Bisbee, Chair; Gregg Ellis, Guardian ad Litem/Child Advocates, Marion County; Sharon Pierce, Villages; Judge Dana Kenworthy, Grant Superior Court 2; Judge Steven Galvin, Monroe Juvenile Court; Zachary Kester, adoptive father and adoption attorney; Karen Sauer, adoptive mother.

**Guests present:** Lindsey Craig, Parvonay Stover, Amy Kent, Angel Owens.

**Commission staff present:** Lindsey Craig, Governor's Office Family Policy Director; Parvonay Stover, DCS Legislative Director.

## I. **Welcome**

Jane Bisbee calls meeting to order. This is the sixth meeting of the Adoption Subsidy Committee, with one meeting remaining. This discussion will be about finalizing the recommendations and working through ideas for the final report. What are our specific recommendations and how do we move forward?

## II. **Approval of Minutes from March 11, 2015 Meeting**

Jane Bisbee entertains motion to approve previous minutes. Sharon Pierce suggests the previous minutes be amended to include guests from the Dave Thomas Foundation. Motion made to approve minutes with correction, passes committee vote, and meeting minutes of March 11, 2015 approved.

## III. **Legislative Update, Parvonay Stover, DCS Legislative Director**

Brief update on 2015 legislative session provided. DCS budget request of \$11M approved for state adoption subsidy for state fiscal years 2016-2017. DCS received additional \$7.5M to fund the hiring of family case managers and family case manager supervisors. Further reports on monies allocated to the Supreme Court, State Department of Health, Criminal Justice Institute, etc.

## IV. **Committee Discussion on Final Recommendations**

- A. **Adoption Awareness Brochure** – Brochure that provides information about both public and private adoptions. Possibly a joint brochure with agencies that have involvement in adoptions. Sharon moves for that to become one of the recommendations. Motion made, seconded, voted, motion carries.
- B. **Social Media Campaign** - How can different entities promote adoption on a larger scale? Social media campaign is needed to increase adoption awareness to include

faith-based initiatives, as well as public adoption initiatives, not just in November, but throughout the year.

**Focus Areas**

- Increasing adoption fairs at county level
- Encouraging all counties to participate in Orphan Sunday
- Stronger promotion of foster care month
- Strengthen partnership with Wendy’s Wonderful Kids
- Increase number of Adoption Champions

Motion made (by statement of Sharon Pierce), seconded, voted, motion carries.

**C. DCS Paying for Fingerprints for DCS Adoptions** - Motion made, seconded, voted, motion carries.

**D. Adoption Advocacy Council** - Present our ideas to Commission on Children to see whether they would be interested in carrying on the work this committee has done. Possibly housing a sub-committee/task force within that Commission to be an ongoing entity (replica) of this committee. Motion made, seconded, voted, motion carries.

**Focus Areas**

- Assessing best-practice strategies for addressing barriers
- Data
- Code re-write
- Increase ability to obtain birth certificate, not delayed registration of birth

V. **Continuation of Commitment to Post-Adoption Services**

Currently DCS provides post-adoption services to families who have adopted, regardless of whether that adoption occurred through DCS, or privately. Committee recommends that Indiana continue to provide and support these services.

*\*\*During the next meeting committee will review the recommendations and finalize the report.*

VI. **Future Commission Meeting Date**

- June 10, 2015 – 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

## Summary of Proposals

At the Committee's two meetings thus far, the members have discussed a variety of topics and potential ideas to make adoptions easier and more affordable for Hoosier families, to better promote adoption, and to better connect kids with loving, permanent, and safe families. Below is a summation of the ideas discussed. None of the items below are official recommendations of the committee, they are simply ideas that have been discussed by the Committee. A final report of recommendations by the Committee will be published on or after June 30, 2015.

*Specialty License Plate:* Discussed as a potential idea to increase adoption awareness, and also help raise funds to further promote adoption.

*Faith-Based Adoption Awareness Initiatives:* Many churches across the state hold special events for "Orphan Sunday," which occurs the first Sunday in November each year. The Administration has expressed interest in better partnering with the faith-based community to promote adoption and better connect kids with loving, permanent, and safe families.

*Social Media Campaigns:* Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell orchestrated an adoption promotion strategy via social media. He utilized Twitter and Facebook to promote adoption and help reach a goal of finalizing 1,000 adoptions in the state of Virginia.

*Creation of a Permanent Adoption Advocacy Council:* The Committee discussed this preliminarily as a way to continue the discussion on improvements to, and awareness of, adoption.

*Better Coordination with Juvenile Courts:* The Committee has discussed better coordination with the Indiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges to promote adoptions. It might be a possibility to put adoption on the agenda for the Indiana Juvenile Judges Conference in June 2015.

*Adoption Education/Awareness Brochure:* The Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) could develop and distribute a brochure regarding birth certificates for adoptees, and the legal process necessary to resolve any citizenship/immigration issues.

*Continuing Legal Education:* Material could be developed for use in CLE seminars specifically pertaining to full faith and credit issues in adoption and how to streamline the process.

*Additional Topics for Potential Recommendation:*

- Complete review/overhaul of Indiana adoption statutes
- Centralized adoption resource center
- Information on financial resources available for adoption
- Movement toward best practice

# Final Recommendations

## of the Governor's Adoption Study Committee

### for Advancing, Promoting, and Improving Adoption in Indiana

- I. Adoption Promotion Brochure
  - a. It was brought to the Committee's attention that many adoptive and prospective adoptive families are unclear on the adoption options as well as the post-adoption support made available by the Department of Child Services (DCS) for all adoptive families. Adoptions could be better promoted by utilizing a brochure – made available in hard copy and electronically – which includes comprehensive information from multiple state agencies in a single document. A brochure could include information on both public and private adoptions, as well as post-adoption services that are available for all adoptive families.
- II. Social Media Campaign & Other Adoption Awareness Efforts
  - a. Although efforts are already underway both at the state and local levels, a more concerted and coordinated effort to promote adoption could greatly impact the opportunity for our most vulnerable children to find a forever home. Promotional ideas could include, but are not limited to:
    - i. Increasing the number of Adoption Fairs that occur at the county level
    - ii. Encourage courts in all 92 counties to participate in National Adoption Day events
    - iii. Better promote May as Foster Care Month
    - iv. Increase the number of Adoption Champions (ACs)
      1. There are currently 18 ACs in Indiana that help inform the community of the need for adoptive homes and help identify families for waiting children.
    - v. Increase the existing partnership with Wendy's Wonderful Kids
- III. Fingerprints for Adoptive Parents
  - a. The Committee was informed that a potential barrier to adoption existed in regards to foster families who adopted children already in their care. These families must pay to be fingerprinted in order to be foster parents, and they must go through the process again when they choose to adopt. This unnecessary financial burden could discourage families from adopting, and it is the Committee's recommendation that DCS absorb the cost for the fingerprinting process for foster families who wish to proceed with an adoption.
- IV. Create a More Permanent Body to Continue to Study and Advocate for Adoption
  - a. This Committee was intentionally created to be a temporary, targeted effort to identify unnecessary barriers to adoption and offer solutions to make Indiana more adoption friendly. While productive strides have been made over the past twelve months, during the course of Committee discussion several potential barriers to adoption were uncovered or discussed that the Committee simply did

not have the time or resources to address. Therefore, it is the recommendation of the Committee that efforts continue to identify potential barriers along with potential resolutions, and that these efforts be spearheaded by the Commission on Improving the Status of Children. Suggested items that the Commission might assess could include, but are not limited to:

- i. Continue to identify and address barriers to adoption
- ii. Identify where data is lacking, and better gather relevant data to delineate best practices
- iii. Review and make recommendations regarding Indiana’s adoption code
- iv. Provide better information on the differences between birth certificates and delayed birth certificates, and assess whether there is a more efficient way to provide adopted children with necessary records of identification needed for other types of government identification

V. Continued Commitment to Post-Adoption Services

- a. Under the leadership of Governor Mike Pence and the Indiana Department of Child Services, the State of Indiana already provides a wide array of free post-adoptive services for any Hoosier family that adopts – regardless of whether that adoption is a private, public, or international process. It is the Committee’s recommendation that the State of Indiana continue to provide this excellent resource for Hoosier families in order to encourage adoptions and to continue to support those who have helped our most vulnerable children find permanent, safe, and loving homes.

## Conclusion

The Committee has taken many steps to learn more about potential barriers to adoption that exist for families, and they have made efforts to help increase awareness of adoption. This report reflects a summary of the topics the Committee has discussed during their tenure. The report also states the Committee's final recommendations intended for further consideration by advocates and policy makers.