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# Adoption in Massachusetts: Private and Public Agency Placements and Practices in 2005: Issue Brief on Adoption Fees

Prepared by:

Jennifer Ellingwood, MPA

Center for Adoption Research, part of the  
Center for Health Policy and Research

The Center for Adoption Research is part of the Center for Health Policy and Research (CHPR) at the University of Massachusetts Medical School under the direction of Dr. Ron Steingard. CHPR's mission is to promote and conduct applied research, evaluation, quality improvement, education and training aimed at informing policy decisions and advancing practice to improve the health and well-being of people served by public agencies. For more information, please contact us at [healthpolicy@umassmed.edu](mailto:healthpolicy@umassmed.edu).

At the Center for Adoption Research, under the direction of Martha Henry, Ph.D., we are dedicated to developing practical responses to improve foster care and adoption policy and practice by conducting research, policy analysis, and developing education and training programs. In line with our mission, we conduct an annual survey of all licensed adoption agencies in Massachusetts. This survey collects information on the number and nature of adoptions finalized in Massachusetts each year.

## Background

Since 1999, Massachusetts law<sup>1</sup> has required that every licensed adoption agency in the Commonwealth provide annual information about the number and nature of adoptions finalized through their agency. Massachusetts is an agency state, meaning that all residents seeking to adopt a child must utilize the services of an adoption agency licensed by the state. Specifically, all Massachusetts citizens interested in adopting a child must, at a minimum, have a home study conducted by a Massachusetts licensed adoption agency. These agencies may provide services for private domestic adoptions, international adoptions or they may contract with the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS) to provide services for adoptions from foster care.

The Center for Adoption Research collects and analyzes the data on the number and nature of adoptions finalized annually, and disseminates this information to interested parties. The request for data from licensed Massachusetts agencies, issued in the summer of 2006 to collect information about adoptions finalized in calendar year 2005, was completed and returned by 45 private adoption agencies<sup>2</sup> and by DSS. The results of this survey are being presented in five issue briefs. This issue brief contains information pertaining to fees paid for private adoptions finalized during 2005 in Massachusetts.

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<sup>1</sup>In 1999, HB 4900 37 amended M.G.L. 28A §10 (c) (8). This is the fifth annual report. Previous reports can be downloaded from [www.umassmed.edu/adoption/index.aspx](http://www.umassmed.edu/adoption/index.aspx). In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, only licensed adoption agencies may legally place children for adoption. The Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) regulates adoption agencies in Massachusetts; contact them at [www.eec.state.ma.us](http://www.eec.state.ma.us) for information about regulations, as well as a listing of licensed agencies. The EEC Central Office is located at: 600 Washington St., 6th Floor, Suite 6100, Boston, MA 02111.  
Phone: (617) 988-6600

<sup>2</sup> This represents a 98% response rate from private agencies.

## Fees

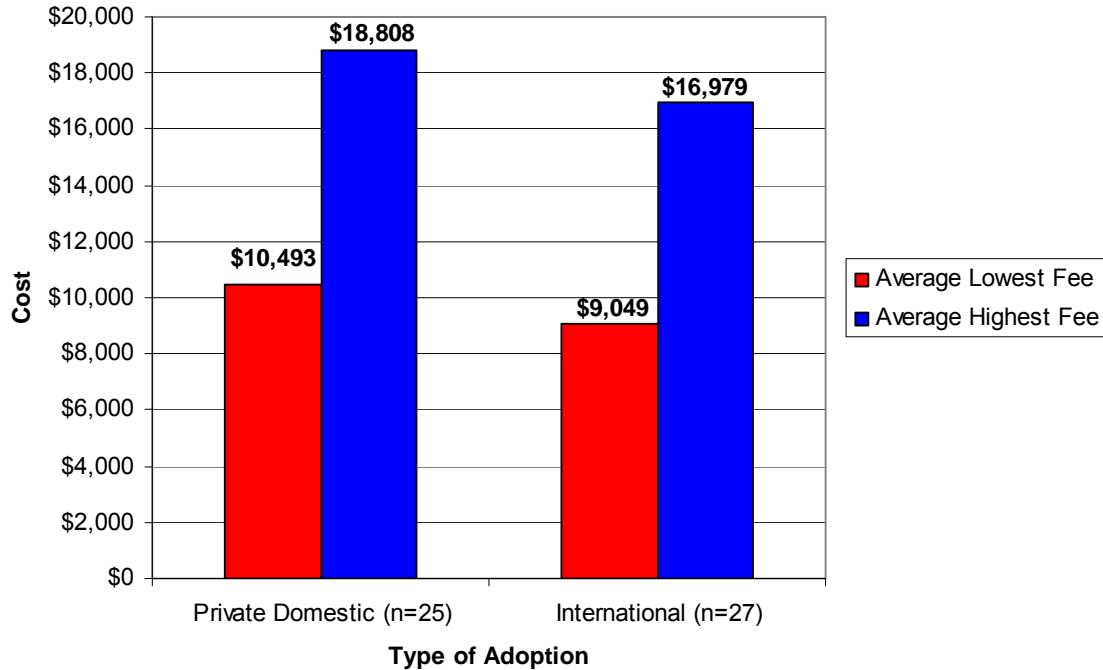
Various fees are associated with private adoptions. Fee variability depends on the type of adoption. Home studies are mandatory for all types of adoption. A fee is associated with home studies conducted by private adoption agencies, and is set at their discretion, while there are no fees for home studies conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Social Services. Other expenses are adoption-specific: private domestic adoptions involve birth parent expenses, while international adoptions involve travel expenses and expenses for the child's care prior to adoption. Adoptions from foster care may include minimal fees, and many times these fees are waived. This issue brief contains information about fees charged by private agencies for private domestic and international adoptions. In Massachusetts, there are no fees associated with adoption of children from foster care.

Private agencies were asked to provide information on lowest and highest total fees associated with private domestic and international adoptions, as well as average fees for components of adoption services. There may be other costs associated with adoption that are not included in the fees reported by agencies. The reported adoption fees for international adoptions may or may not include costs incurred by the adoptive parents for travel and/or required documentation; for private domestic adoption, the reported fees may not include travel expenses. Also, in some agencies the placement fee is higher, but includes additional components, such as legal fees and post-placement fees.

***Average Fees for Total Cost of Adoption.*** The average lowest and highest fees are reported in Graph 1, by type of adoption program. The range of average fees for both domestic and international adoptions was quite wide. In the case of private domestic adoption the lowest fees reported ranged from \$0 to \$28,000, and the highest fees reported ranged from \$2,500 to \$40,000. For international adoptions, the lowest fees reported ranged from \$250 to \$21,000 and the highest fees reported ranged from \$2,100 to \$40,000. National data indicates that adoption costs for domestic private adoptions range from \$5,000 to over \$40,000, while expenses for intercountry adoptions range from \$7,000 to \$30,000.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway (November, 2003). *Adoption options: A factsheet for families*. Washington, D.C.: Child Welfare Information Gateway. Downloaded from [http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_adoption.pdf](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_adoption.pdf)

**Graph 1: Average Lowest and Highest Fees for Total Cost of Adoption**



**Component Fees.** Agencies also reported the average fees for various components of the adoption process, including application fees, placement fees and legal fees. As noted previously, agencies structure their fee schedules differently, so a placement fee may include other component fees as well. Average component fees were divided by total cost to calculate the percentage of total cost for each component of adoption. The results of this are shown in Table 1. For private domestic adoptions, the *placement fee* was the most expensive component, accounting for 49% of the total cost. The most expensive component for international adoptions was the *in-country fee*, which accounted for 52% of the total cost. In-country fees include fees paid to the orphanage or agency that was responsible for the child prior to the adoption and fees associated with obtaining the appropriate documentation for the child to leave the country.

**Table 1: Component Fees as Percentage of Total Cost of Adoption**

Component fees	Private Domestic	International
Application fee	2%	4%
Home study fee	16%	15%
Placement fee	49%	n/a
Post-Placement fee	9%	8%
Legal fees	6%	3%
Birth parent expenses	10%	n/a
ICPC* sending	4%	n/a
ICPC receiving	3%	n/a
In country fee	n/a	52%
Travel fee	n/a	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*ICPC stands for the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, agreed to by all states, and designed to facilitate adoptions between states.

## Discussion

The results above demonstrate the range of fees experienced by adoptive parents working with private agencies for adoptions finalized during 2005. These results only apply to private adoptions (i.e., domestic and international), and do not include adoptions from public foster care.

The cost of adoption varies depending on the type of adoption and the services provided by the agency. For example, if the adoptive parents identify a prospective birth mother on their own, the cost would be lower than if the adoption agency assists in matching the parents with a birth mother. In the case of international adoption, some countries require the adoptive parents to travel and spend time in the country, while other countries will allow an escort to accompany the child to the U.S. and the parents do not need to travel.

In Massachusetts, adoptions can only be completed by a licensed adoption agency. In other states, prospective adoptive parents can work with facilitators or unlicensed agencies, which are largely unregulated, meaning that there is little or no recourse if issues or conflicts arise. In Massachusetts, if problems arise, it is possible to appeal to the EEC for recourse. While agencies in Massachusetts are regulated by the state, it is still important for prospective adoptive parents to discuss their adoption options and related fees with their selected adoption agency at the beginning of the adoption process, so they know what to expect, and can learn about resources that may be available to assist with their adoption.

For more information, please contact Jennifer Ellingwood at (508) 856-8514.

