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Adoption in Massachusetts: Private and Public Agency Placements and Practices in 2005: Issue Brief on Length of Wait between Home Study Approval and Placement

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.

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 law¹ 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 agencies² and by DSS. The results of this survey are being presented in five issue briefs. This issue brief addresses the length of wait between home study approval and placement for private adoptions finalized in calendar year 2005.

Length of Wait between Home Study Approval and Placement

A frequently heard concern about adoption is that adoptive families have to wait for a long time before having a child placed in their home. This issue brief examines the

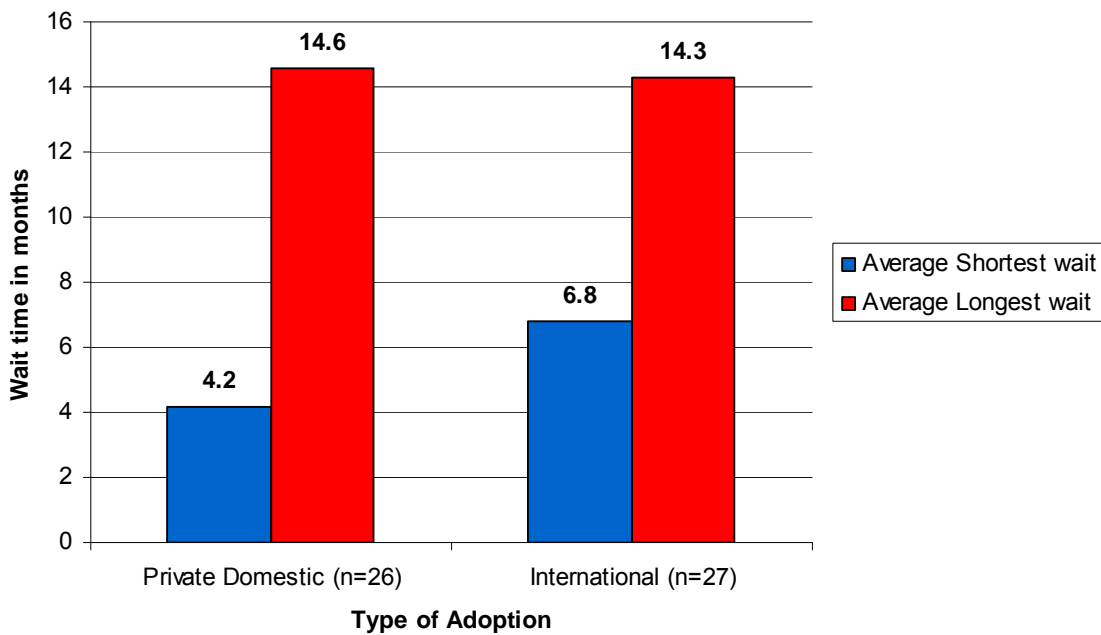
¹In 1999, HB 4900 37 amended M.G.L. 28A §10 (c) (8). This is the fifth annual report. Previous reports can be downloaded from www.umassmed.edu/adoption/index.aspx. In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, only licensed adoption agencies may legally place children for adoption. The Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) regulates adoption agencies in Massachusetts; contact them at www.eec.state.ma.us 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

² This represents a 98% response rate from private agencies.

waiting periods for adoptions in Massachusetts. In the Adoption Agency Survey, the waiting period was defined as the number of months from home study approval to the placement of a child in the adoptive home. Agencies were asked to provide the shortest and longest waiting periods for adoptions finalized during calendar year 2005. This brief concerns only private domestic adoptions and international adoptions. It does not include information about adoptions from foster care; information on waiting periods for adoptive parents is not collected from the Department of Social Services.

The average length of wait from home study approval to placement is presented in Graph 1. The average shortest waiting period for private domestic adoption was about two and a half months shorter than the corresponding wait for international adoption, but the average longest waiting period was similar for both private domestic and international adoptions. The waiting periods for shortest wait ranged from one month to eighteen months for private domestic adoptions and one month to thirteen months for international

Graph 1: Average Length of Wait from Home Study Approval to Placement



adoptions. The longest wait ranged from one month to thirty-six months for private domestic adoptions and from one month to twenty-six months for international adoptions.

Agencies providing international adoption services were asked which sending countries had the shortest and longest length of wait from home study approval to placement during 2005. The sending country with both the shortest and the longest length of wait was Russia, followed by China and Guatemala; these were three of the top four sending countries for international adoptions by Massachusetts agencies in 2005.

Discussion

The results above demonstrate the range of waiting times experienced by adoptive parents working with private agencies for adoptions finalized during 2005. These results apply only to private domestic and international adoptions. Data regarding length of wait for adoptions from foster care is not reported by DSS.

The waiting period between the home study approval and the placement of the child is dependent upon the type of adoption and the match between what the prospective adoptive parents are seeking and the children available for adoption. Waiting times for international adoptions will vary by the sending country, but tend to be more predictable than the wait for private domestic adoptions.³

³ 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_adoptoption.pdf

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

