



## **Adoption reform bill would remove barriers to out-of-state adoptions**

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WASHINGTON, D.C. (Dec. 2, 2013) – American University economics professor Mary Eschelbach Hansen knows the bureaucracy and barriers that lie behind adopting a child, and began research and writing about the issue. Currently, the state where the adoption occurs receives the entire incentive payment, and she is pushing for a change.

The Removing Barriers to Adoption and Supporting Families Act of 2013 was introduced by Sen. Jay Rockefeller, D-W. VA and co-sponsored by Sen. Robert Casey, D-Pa earlier this fall. If enacted, the bill would reduce the barriers to the placement of children across state lines by reauthorizing the federal adoption incentives programs for five years, through FY 2018. It would also create an \$8,000 bonus—split in half for each state under the Adoption Incentive Program for states that place a foster child in a permanent home out-of-state.

The bill would also direct the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services to investigate the possibility of developing a standardized method of studying families. Currently, each state has its own standards of studying families.

A similar bill that would reauthorize adoption incentives passed the House unanimously in October.

“When Congress created the adoption incentives program, they rewarded just one state for an adoption,” Hansen says. “The other state gets nothing,” she says. “In a place like D.C., for example, where a whole lot of child welfare placements are across state lines, that’s kind of silly. You would want both jurisdictions to participate.”

In 2010, Americans adopted 11,058 children from other countries, State Department data shows. In sharp contrast, Americans adopted 527 children from foster care across state lines in 2010, according to the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect.

Hansen has worked in cooperation with the nonprofit organization Listening to Parents, of which she is a board member, the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, and child welfare advocacy groups, to improve the out-of-state adoption process, and get attention for the Senate’s adoption reform bill.

Hansen says by allowing child welfare policies and programs to run at the state level, many policies vary, and some state programs grant power to counties. This type of separation of powers could create problems with county borders, she says, noting that the State of New York has such issues.

“Kids who are adopted do about 50 percent better than kids who stay in foster care,” Hansen says. “Permanency makes a big difference because families invest in these children because they’re going to stay with them.”

Hansen is hopeful the bill will get traction in Congress.

“We’re trying to move away from the sort of policy that says ‘nobody wants these kids.’ It’s going to be clearer that we need to do something for these children, and I think people are going to be ready, willing and able to do those things.”

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