



# national adoption day

www.nationaladoptionday.org

## Executive Summary

On any given day in the United States, more than 100,000 foster children are waiting to be adopted by someone who can provide a permanent, loving home. Child welfare agencies and courts around the country make efforts to find forever families for these children, but significant barriers impede the process. As a result, many of these children remain in foster care for years without having a place to call home, and often “age out” of the system with no one to care for them and no place to belong.

The National Adoption Day Coalition works to draw attention to these children and celebrate loving parents that adopt. The Coalition, comprised of seven partners – The Alliance for Children’s Rights, Casey Family Services, Children’s Action Network, Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption®, Freddie Mac Foundation and Target Corporation – commissioned the Urban Institute to conduct a state-by-state analysis to identify the common barriers and promising approaches that exist in the process of adopting children from the foster care system across the country.

This study is the first nationwide analysis of adoption information collected from the congressionally mandated Child and Family Services Reviews conducted in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. It provides the country with something it never had before - a national picture of the state of adoption from foster care.

## Key Findings

- **Reveals Complexity of the Process of Adoption from Foster Care**  
This report documents how the foster care to adoption process requires a complex interplay between the child welfare agencies and the courts. Each of these agencies has its own mission, system of operations, and organizational culture, making coordination of efforts extremely challenging.
- **Highlights a Set of Barriers Most States Face**  
Given the complexity of the process, states face many barriers to moving children toward adoption. Moreover, the vast majority of states report facing similar barriers, including difficulties in terminating parental rights (TPR) (48 states), recruiting adoptive homes (47 states), child welfare case management (43 states), court case management (43 states), and establishing / changing permanency goals (42 states). (These barriers are described in the full report. State profiles highlighting barriers for each state are also available in the final report.)
- **Highlights a Set of Promising Approaches in Which Most States are Engaged**  
Interest in achieving permanency outcomes for children who cannot be reunited with their birth families has grown significantly in recent years. This report provides further evidence of this interest, as shown in the numerous promising practices undertaken by states to address barriers to adoption. States report the most efforts to improve the adoption process in recruiting adoptive homes (50 states), child welfare case management (45 states), approving adoptive homes (38 states), holding permanency hearings (36 states), and establishing adoption subsidies / services (35 states). (Again, these stages are defined and explained in the full report. State profiles highlighting promising approaches for each state are also available in the final report.)
- **Points to Persistent Barriers Most States Face**  
Many of the significant barriers states report occur at stages of the adoption process in which many states also report promising approaches. This suggests that states are aware of some of the most difficult issues and are taking steps to address them. This also suggests that despite significant promising approaches, some barriers are persistent and may require significant time and resources to resolve. Three barriers are of particular note: finding adoptive homes, case management, and addressing TPR tensions.





# national adoption day

www.nationaladoptionday.org

- **Points to Barriers Many States Face but Few Have Addressed**  
The report shows that for some stages of the adoption process where many states report barriers, few states report promising practices to address them. Specifically, many states report barriers around providing sufficient legal services during TPR proceedings, but few report promising approaches to address this problem. Similarly, many states report that the appeals process in TPR has significant barriers, and yet few have come up with promising approaches for addressing this problem.
- **Points to Stages of the Adoption Process on Which Few States Have Focused**  
There are a number of areas in which states do not report facing major barriers and also do not identify many promising practices. These areas include completing diligent searches for birth fathers and relatives, preparing and transitioning the child and adoptive family, and conducting the adoption proceedings.

## Recommendations

The National Adoption Day Coalition is encouraged by the progress states are making to improve the process of transitioning foster children to adoption and to address specific barriers. However, there is still much work to be done to ensure that all children find the permanent, loving families they need and deserve in a timely manner. Based on this research report, the National Adoption Day Coalition recommends the following:

- **Direct Future Adoption Opportunities Grants Toward Addressing Identified Barriers**  
This funding stream may be used to direct resources to explore strategies for addressing the barriers identified in this study as the most common and persistent or those not yet addressed by many states. Some of the promising approaches could also be targeted for adoption opportunity grants.
- **Use National Child Welfare Resource Centers to Provide Technical Assistance**  
The National Child Welfare Resource Centers could garner resources and expertise to provide technical assistance around the barriers identified in this study. These Resource Centers could also be used as a repository for information on promising approaches.
- **Focus Attention on Coordination Between the Child Welfare Agencies and the Courts**  
Two of the five most reported barriers (terminating parental rights and establishing / changing permanency goals) reflect the complex and difficult interplay between child welfare agencies and the courts at several stages in the adoption process. Heightened attention needs to be given to the role of the courts in the adoption process, and the vital importance of ensuring coordination between courts and child welfare agencies.
- **Ensure Workforce Issues Have a Place on the Agenda for Improvement**  
Case management issues in both the courts and child welfare agencies were among the most cited barriers in the adoption process. A greater focus and higher priority on staffing issues, organizational culture, and information systems must be part of the national and state agendas to improve the foster to adoption process.
- **Encourage Peer-to-Peer Learning**  
Child welfare administrators, policy makers, and legislators can use the state-level information provided in the report as a springboard for sharing ideas about promising approaches. While the report is not able to provide detailed information on particular approaches, the hope is states will contact each other to learn more about them.

