

ADOPTION PROFESSIONALS ASSOCIATION OF MASSACHUSETTS

1750 WASHINGTON STREET, HOLLISTON, MA 01746-2234

December 5, 2006

The Reverend Richard Richardson, Chair

Ms. Marylou Sudders, Chair

Human Services Working Group

Deval Patrick/Timothy Murray Transition Team

56 Roland Street, Suite 100D

Boston, MA 02129

Dear Patrick/Murray Transition – Human Services Working Group:

On behalf of the Adoption Professionals Association of Massachusetts (APAM), I want to congratulate you and your colleagues on your appointment to the Human Services Working Group for the Patrick/Murray Transition Team.

APAM is the statewide voice for “non-profit” adoption agencies in Massachusetts and the clients we serve. APAM members are licensed “non-profit” social service agencies that are committed to providing services to all involved in the adoption process. Our organization is committed to serving and protecting the interests of adoptive children, birth parents and adoptive parents while maintaining the highest ethical standards in the area of adoption.

In the spirit of the unprecedented openness and interest in civic engagement that has characterized the Patrick/Murray campaign and the transition effort, APAM is pleased to share with you the following thoughts and recommendations. During the course of the transition and beyond, we hope the new administration will consider supporting a number of proactive public policies such as efforts to grant access to birth records, new laws to prevent putative fathers from using their position to punish a women who might want to place a child for adoption, and policies that will make adoption less expensive, such as the introduction of adoption tax credit that would mirror the federal credit for those who adopt in Massachusetts. Unfortunately, in addition to working to advance these proactive polices, APAM has been forced to deal with the reactive consequences of a recent change in the Massachusetts law.

Without a hearing or substantive debate in the State House, the Legislature and the Governor amended the legal definition of “placement agencies” in Massachusetts this past summer. This significant change in the law now allows “for-profit” corporations to engage in the placement of children, a task that has been the exclusive responsibility of the “non-profit” community. The change was meant to allow one well respected Massachusetts “for-profit” foster care agency to provide foster care placement services without the need to partner with a “non-profit” placement agency. However, while the change in the legislative language allows “for-profit” foster care agencies to engage in placement services, it also unintentionally allows “for-profit” adoption placements in Massachusetts. **The new law unlocks the door to “for-**

profit” adoption agencies by allowing them to do business in Massachusetts, having the potential of putting existing “non-profit” adoption agencies out of business and causing unnecessary harm to children, birth parents and families wishing to adopt.

Unlike foster care, adoption agencies do not have mandated fees limitations. “For profit” adoption agencies offer “financial incentives” to birth parents in exchange for the termination of parental rights, a process which is not only exploitative, but morally and ethically reprehensible. Massachusetts has always been a leader in setting high ethical standards for adoption practice. Unfortunately, adoption and social welfare professionals were never informed in advance by the Romney Administration of the change prior to it being signed into law.

In the immediate sense, APAM is hopeful that the legislature will pass language reversing the unintended consequences of the new law by the end of this year. However, we look forward to working with the Patrick/Murray administration on issues relative to licensed “non-profit” social service adoption agencies in Massachusetts. We are confident that your overall commitment to human services mirrors our dedication and commitment to the interests of adoptive children, birth parents and adoptive parents in the Commonwealth and that these high standards for child welfare and issues related to adoption will be a priority for the new administration.

Sincerely,

Amy S. Cohen, LICSW
Executive Director
Adoptions With Love, Inc.

On Behalf of the Adoption Professionals Association of Massachusetts