

*A Note from the presidents of the FCC Chapters of New England, Greater New York, Northern California and Southern California.*

Dear FCC Members:

Our community has responded with many emotions to the recently announced changes in eligibility requirements for China adoption, set to go into effect on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Reactions range from resigned understanding to sadness and anger. These responses are mixed with the profound gratitude and appreciation that most adoptive families feel towards the birth country of their children. The restrictions have also raised deeper questions about the future of adopting from China. (See attached pages for the specific regulations).

Several FCC chapters felt it was important to coauthor an open letter to the Chinese Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) that gives voice to our reactions as well as to our hope that the proposed changes may still be moderated to allow the full continuation of one of the most successful and largest programs in the history of adoption.

Many Americans have asked why these changes are being proposed. The short answer is that the number of dossiers from waiting parents, rumored to be as high as 25,000 dossiers, greatly outnumbers the number of children available to be adopted, resulting in the extended delays of 2005 and 2006. China's consistent and transparent adoption process has grown in popularity, not only in America, but in the other adopting countries as well, leading to a significant increase in applicants. At the same time, the number of children available to be matched has apparently not grown commensurately. We use the word apparently because no one truly knows the factor, or, more precisely, the combination of factors that has led to fewer children being available.

For the past several years, Americans knowledgeable about orphanages have been reporting that all healthy children, including older children, in several provinces are being adopted by both Chinese and foreign families. There seem to be fewer children in orphanages, even accounting for the increase in children in foster care; the children who remain in the orphanages appear to have significant disabilities which preclude most prospective adoptions.

The Internet and media have speculated about why fewer children seem to be available. These speculations include the following possibilities:

- A prior change in adoption eligibility now allows both Chinese and foreign families with a healthy child to adopt additional healthy children, which may have led to an increase in the number of adoption applications. Previously a family with a healthy child had to apply for a child with disabilities.
- The Hague Treaty on Inter-Country Adoption's preference for domestic adoptions may mean that fewer international adoptions are occurring as a percentage of all Chinese adoptions.

- Better economic conditions may allow families in some areas to avoid relinquishing a child, and new PRC regulations are replacing fines for over-quota childbirths with rewards for those who comply with the one-child guideline.
- Changing attitudes about a child's gender, especially in less agricultural areas, may encourage urban families to keep girl children.
- In contrast to the urban areas, the greater availability of ultrasound in rural areas may lead to more pregnancy terminations based on gender.
- Orphanage directors at orphanages large enough to participate in the international adoption program may be more cautious about accepting children from smaller orphanages after the improprieties reported in the Chinese press about the transfer of babies to larger orphanages in Hunan Province.
- The example of Korea decreasing the number of international adoptions at the time of its Olympics in 1988 may have led to a similar decision in China.

Given the apparent imbalance between prospective adoptive parents and the availability of children and the multiple factors that may be behind this imbalance, some FCC members have asked if it is even worth presenting our concerns about the proposed eligibility changes. Others suggest that the decision has been made and our chances of inducing change is small – which could be true.

Indeed we wrestled with these questions and a related concern: that we not needlessly offend the people who had helped bring our children into our families. With characteristic American optimism we ultimately came to two conclusions:

- We should do whatever we can to open a dialogue with the officials in charge of the adoption program and provide them with respectful and constructive feedback. We cannot know if any change can be effected if we don't try; and
- It is important that the children and parents in existing adoptive families that would now be ruled ineligible know that we continue to celebrate and welcome their families as full members of our community, and that we support them and their voices. We favor a system that relies on good home studies, rather than blanket restrictions. A good parent and a successful family come in many forms – a message all our children need to hear.

We also went back and forth over the tone of this letter, which combines our appreciation with our concerns. Some families will find the letter too soft; others will find it too hard. The experience of co-writing this letter with four different FCCs meant considerable discussion and countless drafts with the goal that we produce a letter that the majority of our members could support and that, we earnestly hope, will be received by the CCAA with the respect and appreciation with which it was written. Although it will be tempting to continue to wordsmith this document, we ask at this point that you accept our document with an understanding that many eyes have already reviewed it and offered changes and improvements. We plan to offer this letter to other FCC boards of directors, so that, if they wish, they may sign it as well.

We hope our letter will strengthen bridges within the FCC community, and we hope that it will strengthen the bridge to China. Struggling with deeply felt issues, sharing opinions respectfully, doing our best to stand up for children, all of which we hope this letter represents, are things that our adoptive families community does especially well.

Sincerely,

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