



**Intercountry
Adoption
Decline**

2004

22,989

2005

22,726

2006

20,275

2007

19,601

2008

17,449

2009

12,744

2010

11,058

2011

9,319

2012

8,667

2013

7,092

2014

6,438

2015

5,647

2016

5,370

2017

???

Before You Accept an Invitation to the Symposium’s Table, Consider This...

Dear Friends,

I know that you share my concern for the unrelenting attack on intercountry adoption coming from our own State Department. However, I also know you share our passion for helping children, and that very passion will not allow us to stop until the State Department replaces the leadership in the Office of Children’s Issues and recognizes that the best interest of any child begins with a permanent family. As Hague accredited agencies, we already strive to be the honest, ethical and transparent partners to the families and the children we serve. Is there room for improvement? Yes, we know there is always an opportunity to grow and be better. This we can all agree on. We want to collaborate with a positive and balanced approach to accreditation and oversight.

Now, I have a few things I would like to share with you regarding Friday’s invitation from the Office of Children’s Issues:

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to invite you to participate in the second symposium for adoption service providers (ASP), scheduled to take place on April 9-10, 2018, in Washington, D.C. The Department of State, in coordination with U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) and Intercountry Adoption Accreditation and Maintenance Entity, Inc. (IAMME), invite you to discuss the upcoming changes to the monitoring and oversight process and to identify best practices to strengthen the future of intercountry adoption.

Having the collective sum experience of eight different stakeholder calls between the above-named parties and the professional adoption community, we now know that the new accrediting entity, IAAME, is woefully unprepared to lead. Attending the symposium with expectations of any meaningful exchanges, given the lack of progress in formulating policies and procedures (specifically without policies and procedures or contracts and agreements with agencies in place until after the symposium is over) continues to demonstrate a blatant disregard of regulations. With the State Department’s stated intentions of carrying out overreaching interpretation of the standards to the detriment of every agency’s viability, I cannot help but question the value and sincerity of this invitation.

Throughout the event, we will have presentations, discussions and interactive break-out sessions on topics such as supervising foreign supervised providers, fees and financial practices, handling complaints, preparing families for intercountry adoption, and assisting families with post adoption services. We plan to discuss IAAME’s plans for monitoring and oversight and how ASPs can show due diligence in fulfilling their requirements under the regulations.

Presentations, discussions and interactive break-out sessions on the very issues we have asked for clarification on for months and received only dismissive non-responses from the Office of Children’s Issues? The same issues for which we pleaded, in mass, for extensions on until we could get clarification, with zero flexibility or professional courtesy from the Office of Children’s Issues? The Office of Children’s Issues has refused to listen to us and has marginalized the National Council for Adoption we depend on to represent and speak on our behalf. Nothing has changed for the better. Do we expect to get anything more by attending the symposium when the Office of



Children's Issues still cannot provide us with clear and consistent responses? They are not saving their answers for the big reveal during the symposium, and we are deceiving ourselves if this is our expectation.

Given the lack of transparency we have all experienced firsthand, please do not go with expectations that this symposium is for your agency's benefit in any sense of the word. The Office of Children's Issues and IAAME stand to gain much more than your agency will gain, all at your expense.

How can this symposium benefit your agency? Here are a few things to first consider. IAAME is not yet prepared to lead and demonstrates this by:

- Their inability to have hired a full and competent staff to date;
- The need for the Office of Children's Issues to interrupt nearly every question asked of IAAME's leadership during stakeholder calls and answer on their behalf with non-answers;
- Every email sent to IAAME being responded to on their behalf directly from the email of the Office of Children's Issues;
- Most IAAME website links leading back to the Department of State's "still under construction" website;
- Not having policies or procedures available for adoption service providers for whom they are responsible for monitoring and overseeing – if you express a "concern," you can bet it will come out the following week as a new procedure that will kill more hope;
- No contracts being provided to adoption service providers until April 15th;
- ZERO experience in accreditation.

You can be assured this symposium is more for IAAME's benefit to train their team and the Office of Children's Issues to appear to be collaborative and on the best of terms with the adoption service providers. This is not for your benefit, but it is at your great expense.

Can you afford the expense of the new accreditation, monitoring and oversight fees and attending a symposium to train a new accrediting entity? Can you afford the time away from your office? The standard's "interpretation" and technical guidance will be published as they change; this will cost zero from the comfort of your office, and you'll likely get the same degree of clarification and support that you have always been given by the Office of Children's Issues – none.

As we mentioned during the 2015 Symposium, our officers are working to implement a worldwide adoption strategy to improve the viability of intercountry adoption options throughout the world. We look forward to providing you with an update on the activities of our office and to provide you an overview of our bilateral and multilateral engagements. Representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services will join us to discuss recent work related to post-adoption services. You will also have an opportunity to hear directly from IAAME, as they introduce their staff and outline their structure and processes.

Can I just say how chilling it is to read the words **"working to implement a worldwide adoption strategy to improve the viability of intercountry adoption options throughout the world"**? I do not think the remaining children waiting for families will survive another round of advocacy from our Office of Children's Issues, if history and data support this statement. We know the Office of Children's Issues traveled to over 30 countries in 2016-2017, and what happened? Even fewer children came safely home and all was conveniently blamed on the failure of agencies to send post-adoption reports to foreign countries, while reports were coming to us about the other countries the Office of Children's Issues offended. Agencies want the best for our families; however, without a legal instrument to force family compliance, our hands are tied. Instead of being our partner and standing up for us, the Office of Children's Issues failed us and the children by allowing this narrative to be presented to Congress.



We have heard from and met with the Office of Children's Issues; we've attended the webinars for post-adoption work, which all seem great, but need to be knitted together for continuity of a child's care; and we have heard from IAAME on the stakeholder calls. We will have the opportunity to meet all of them in person during the National Council for Adoption Conference in June, also hosted in D.C. this year. The conference offers CEUs...bonus!

To make the most of these sessions, it would be helpful if each ASP could send a representative with extensive knowledge and experience about accreditation operations in foreign countries. This person should be able to discuss best practices and challenges to working in countries of origin. In some ASPs that might be the Executive Director, whereas in others it may be an international program coordinator or other subject matter expert.

In other words, come to the table in good faith, just like you did in 2015 where all of your vulnerabilities and trust were laid before the Office of Children's Issues in full confidence that this was "a new start – a new day – and we were indeed partners. Together, we would change the world." We toasted one another, we drank champagne and we genuinely celebrated this new collaboration. Do you remember? I have the photos from that day. I was naïve, and it pains me to see how foolish we were to believe the Office of Children's Issues.

If you are still inclined to attend the symposium, please go with your eyes open. The Office of Children's Issues and IAAME are asking you to send someone from your agency "with extensive knowledge and experience about accreditation operations in foreign countries, able to discuss best practices and challenges to working in countries of origin." From our 2015 experience, this translates into further exploitation of the standards and expert training in the overreaching monitoring and oversight – only, you'll be paying for their training and the costly site visits that they have already warned you about because they do not understand intercountry adoption.

You may argue that this is the very reason to attend, to help them learn about intercountry adoption, but IAAME was not recruited by the Office of Children's Issues to be our partner. They were recruited to expect the very worst from every agency and were expected to institute forensic accounting and overseas investigations, with the need for 20 full-time evaluators and a 2.5 million dollar plus budget. Maybe your budget to attend the symposium would be better spent by donating to Save Adoptions and NCFA, with a proven record of collaboration with YOU, because you know what's coming and we need to band together.

Sure, everyone wants to know what will be said, if anything of value can be said, and to that end, if your agency has legal counsel on staff, consider sending them in your place to ask all of the questions for which your agency seeks guidance. By sending someone to the symposium to gather information, rather than provide free training to IAAME and provide the Office of Children's Issues more ways to exploit the standards, you'll protect your agency and still get the value if any is to be had.

As a caution, we can only recommend that you refrain from making this your place to air your grievances; this is not a place to make changes or be heard. This has been proven, so keep contacting your members of Congress. During the course of the interactive exercises, you may inadvertently mention a common practice that was not found to be problematic yesterday (soft/unofficial referral), which will suddenly become worthy of an adverse action today. Mention a country that the Office of Children's Issues finds problematic or a waiting child program, and you open yourself up to a potentially very costly investigation or adverse action. The Office of Children's Issues knows what they are doing, and they are succeeding with those intended goals. Nothing we say to them is going to make a change – only a change in leadership can do that.

Please see the attached welcome information for information on logistics and registration at the bottom of this email. The deadline to register is March 9. We look forward to the opportunity to meet with you to discuss all of the topics outlined above and more.



If you feel inclined after having considered these serious issues, I have two suggested action steps:

1. Sign a petition to boycott the **symposium**:
2. Go to www.saveadoptions.org, read the articles and latest news, add your name as a supporter, or make a donation.

In closing, thank you for listening and please don't hesitate to reply to info@saveadoptions.org if you have questions or concerns.

With encouragement,

Robin

Robin E. Sizemore, Executive Director

Hopscotch Adoptions, Inc.

Save Adoptions, Inc., Board Secretary

Best Regards,

Trish Maskew

Adoption Division Chief

Office of Children's Issues

Bureau of Consular Affairs