

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

744 P Street, Sacramento, California 95814



February 4, 2005

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE: I-82-04

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL ADOPTIONS DISTRICT OFFICES
ALL ADOPTION SERVICE PROVIDERS

SUBJECT: INDEPENDENT ADOPTION PROGRAM: 2004 LEGISLATIVE CHANGES
EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1, 2005

REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- State Law Change
 Federal Law or Regulation Change
 Court Order
 Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
 Initiated by CDSS

The purpose of this All County Information Notice is to provide information concerning legislative changes, enacted during the 2003-04 Legislative Session, which affect the Independent Adoption Program (IAP), effective January 1, 2005. The statutory changes are as follows:

Assembly Bill 2492 (Chapter 128, Statutes 2004)

This legislation amended Family Code Section 8811.5 and expanded the definition of agencies which can certify prospective adoptive parents by a preplacement evaluation. Section 8811.5(a) will read as follows:

A licensed private or public adoption agency of the state of the petitioners' residency may certify prospective adoptive parents by a preplacement evaluation that contains a finding that an individual is suited to be an adoptive parent.

Senate Bill 1357 (Chapter 858, Statutes 2004)

This legislation added Family Code Sections 7660.5 and 7907.5 and amended Family Code Sections 8502, 8616.5, and 8802.

Added to the statutes, Family Code Section 7660.5 permits a presumed father to waive his right to notice when the child's mother consents to an adoption or proposes to relinquish her parental rights. This added section will read as follows:

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, if a presumed father waives the right to notice pursuant to Section 7660 in writing by executing a form developed by the department using existing resources before a notary public or other person authorized to perform notarial acts, no notice, relinquishment for, or consent to adoption of the child shall be required from him for the adoption proceeding to proceed. This shall be a voluntary and informed waiver without undue influence. If the child is an Indian child as defined under the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), any waiver of consent by an Indian presumed father shall be executed in

accordance with the requirements for voluntary adoptions set forth in Section 1913 of Title 25 of the United States Code. The waiver shall not affect the rights of any known federally recognized Indian tribe or tribes from which the child or the presumed father may be descended to notification of, or participation in, adoption proceedings as provided by the ICWA. Notice that the waiver has been executed shall be given to any known federally recognized Indian tribe or tribes from which the child or the presumed father may be descended, as required by the ICWA.

The waiver form, AD 590A, may be obtained online by going to the California Department of Social Services Form and Publication homepage at www.dss.ca.gov.

The second added section to the Family Code, Section 7907.5, changes how California applies the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) to out-of-state birth mothers who travel to California, give birth to a child, and place that child in this state with California residents. The added section (which supercedes ACL No. 03-01) will read as follows:

(a) A child who is born in this state and placed for adoption in this state with a resident of this state is not subject to the provisions of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children.

(b) A child who is born in this state and placed for adoption with a person who is not a resident of this state is subject to the provisions of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, regardless of whether the adoption petition is filed in this state. In interstate placements, this state shall be deemed the sending state for any child born in the state.

Family Code Section 8502, which defines the role of an adoption service provider (ASP), was revised in order to expand the definition of an ASP, thereby including out-of-country individuals and agencies. The revised section will read as follows:

8502. (a) "Adoption service provider" means any of the following:

(1) A licensed private adoption agency.

(2) An individual who has presented satisfactory evidence to the department that he or she is a licensed clinical social worker who also has a minimum of five years of experience providing professional social work services while employed by a licensed California adoption agency or the department.

(3) In a state other than California, or a country other than the United States, an adoption agency licensed or otherwise approved under the laws of that state or country, or an individual who is licensed or otherwise certified as a clinical social worker under the laws of that state or country.

(4) An individual who has presented satisfactory evidence to the department that he or she is a licensed marriage and family therapist who has a minimum of five years of experience providing professional adoption casework services while

employed by a licensed California adoption agency or the department. The department shall review the qualifications of each individual to determine if he or she has performed professional adoption casework services for five years as required by this section while employed by a licensed California adoption agency or the department.

(b) If, in the case of a birth parent located in California, at least three adoption service providers are not reasonably available, or, in the case of a birth parent located outside of California or outside of the United States who has contacted at least three potential adoption service providers and been unsuccessful in obtaining the services of an adoption service provider who is reasonably available and willing to provide services, independent legal counsel for the birth parent may serve as an adoption service provider pursuant to subdivision (e) of Section 8801.5.

"Reasonably available" means that an adoption service provider is all of the following:

(1) Available within five days for an advisement of rights pursuant to Section 8801.5, or within 24 hours for the signing of the placement agreement pursuant to paragraph (3) of subdivision (b) of Section 8801.3.

(2) Within 100 miles of the birth mother.

(3) Available for a cost not exceeding five hundred dollars (\$500) to make an advisement of rights and to witness the signing of the placement agreement.

(c) Where an attorney acts as an adoption service provider, the fee to make an advisement of rights and to witness the signing of the placement agreement shall not exceed five hundred dollars (\$500).

Family Code Section 8616.5, which governs post-adoption contact agreements, was amended to include the child's Indian tribe among possible future contacts if the case is governed by the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Additional language was added and deleted in order to link Section 8616.5's provisions and applicability to other adoption programs, including the IAP. The revised section will read as follows:

8616.5. (a) The Legislature finds and declares that some adoptive children may benefit from either direct or indirect contact with birth relatives, including the birth parent or parents, after being adopted. Postadoption contact agreements are intended to ensure children of an achievable level of continuing contact when contact is beneficial to the children and the agreements are voluntarily entered into by birth relatives, including the birth parent or parents, and adoptive parents.

(b) (1) Nothing in the adoption laws of this state shall be construed to prevent the adopting parent or parents, the birth relatives, including the birth parent or parents, and the child from voluntarily entering into a written agreement to permit continuing contact between the birth relatives, including the birth parent or parents, and the child if the agreement is found by the court to have been entered into voluntarily and to be in the best interests of the child at the time the adoption petition is granted.

(2) Except as provided in paragraph (3), the terms of any postadoption contact agreement executed under this section shall be limited to, but need not include, all of the following:

(A) Provisions for visitation between the child and a birth parent or parents and other birth relatives, including siblings, and the child's Indian tribe if the case is governed by the Indian Child Welfare Act (25 U.S.C. Sec. 1901 et seq.).

(B) Provisions for future contact between a birth parent or parents or other birth relatives, including siblings, or both, and the child or an adoptive parent, or both, and in cases governed by the Indian Child Welfare Act, the child's Indian tribe.

(C) Provisions for the sharing of information about the child in the future.

(3) The terms of any postadoption contact agreement shall be limited to the sharing of information about the child, unless the child has an existing relationship with the birth relative.

(c) At the time an adoption decree is entered pursuant to a petition filed pursuant to Section 8714, 8714.5, 8802, 8912, or 9000, the court entering the decree may grant postadoption privileges if an agreement for those privileges has been entered into, including agreements entered into pursuant to subdivision (f) of Section 8620.

(d) The child who is the subject of the adoption petition shall be considered a party to the postadoption contact agreement. The written consent to the terms and conditions of the postadoption contact agreement and any subsequent modifications of the agreement by a child who is 12 years of age or older is a necessary condition to the granting of privileges regarding visitation, contact, or sharing of information about the child, unless the court finds by a preponderance of the evidence that the agreement, as written, is in the best interests of the child. Any child who has been found to come within Section 300 of the Welfare and Institutions Code or who is the subject of a petition for jurisdiction of the juvenile court under Section 300 of the Welfare and Institutions Code shall be represented by an attorney for purposes of consent to the postadoption contact agreement.

(e) A postadoption contact agreement shall contain the following warnings in bold type:

(1) After the adoption petition has been granted by the court, the adoption cannot be set aside due to the failure of an adopting parent, a birth parent, a birth relative, or the child to follow the terms of this agreement or a later change to this agreement.

(2) A disagreement between the parties or litigation brought to enforce or modify the agreement shall not affect the validity of the adoption and shall not serve as a basis for orders affecting the custody of the child.

(3) A court will not act on a petition to change or enforce this agreement unless the petitioner has participated, or attempted to participate, in good faith in mediation or other appropriate dispute resolution proceedings to resolve the dispute.

(f) Upon the granting of the adoption petition and the issuing of the order of adoption of a child who is a dependent of the juvenile court, juvenile court

dependency jurisdiction shall be terminated. Enforcement of the postadoption contact agreement shall be under the continuing jurisdiction of the court granting the petition of adoption. The court may not order compliance with the agreement absent a finding that the party seeking the enforcement participated, or attempted to participate, in good faith in mediation or other appropriate dispute resolution proceedings regarding the conflict, prior to the filing of the enforcement action, and that the enforcement is in the best interests of the child. Documentary evidence or offers of proof may serve as the basis for the court's decision regarding enforcement. No testimony or evidentiary hearing shall be required. The court shall not order further investigation or evaluation by any public or private agency or individual absent a finding by clear and convincing evidence that the best interests of the child may be protected or advanced only by that inquiry and that the inquiry will not disturb the stability of the child's home to the detriment of the child.

(g) The court may not award monetary damages as a result of the filing of the civil action pursuant to subdivision (e) of this section.

(h) A postadoption contact agreement may be modified or terminated only if either of the following occurs:

(1) All parties, including the child if the child is 12 years of age or older at the time of the requested termination or modification, have signed a modified postadoption contact agreement and the agreement is filed with the court that granted the petition of adoption.

(2) The court finds all of the following:

(A) The termination or modification is necessary to serve the best interests of the child.

(B) There has been a substantial change of circumstances since the original agreement was executed and approved by the court.

(C) The party seeking the termination or modification has participated, or attempted to participate, in good faith in mediation or other appropriate dispute resolution proceedings prior to seeking court approval of the proposed termination or modification. Documentary evidence or offers of proof may serve as the basis for the court's decision. No testimony or evidentiary hearing shall be required. The court shall not order further investigation or evaluation by any public or private agency or individual absent a finding by clear and convincing evidence that the best interests of the child may be protected or advanced only by that inquiry and that the inquiry will not disturb the stability of the child's home to the detriment of the child.

(i) All costs and fees of mediation or other appropriate dispute resolution proceedings shall be borne by each party, excluding the child. All costs and fees of litigation shall be borne by the party filing the action to modify or enforce the agreement when no party has been found by the court as failing to comply with an existing postadoption contact agreement. Otherwise, a party, other than the child,

found by the court as failing to comply without good cause with an existing agreement shall bear all the costs and fees of litigation.

(j) The Judicial Council shall adopt rules of court and forms for motions to enforce, terminate, or modify postadoption contact agreements.

(k) The court may not set aside a decree of adoption, rescind a relinquishment, or modify an order to terminate parental rights or any other prior court order because of the failure of a birth parent, adoptive parent, birth relative, or the child to comply with any or all of the original terms of, or subsequent modifications to, the postadoption contact agreement.

Finally, Family Code Section 8802, which defines the petition process for the IAP, was amended to specify that a petitioner, having entered into a postadoption contact agreement, must attach a copy of the agreement to the petition during the filing process. The revised section will read as follows:

8802. (a) (1) Any of the following persons who desire to adopt a child may, for that purpose, file a petition in the county in which the petitioner resides or, if the petitioner is not a resident of this state, in the county in which the placing birth parent or birth parents resided when the adoption placement agreement was signed, or the county in which the placing birth parent or birth parents resided when the petition was filed:

(A) An adult who is related to the child or the child's half sibling by blood or affinity, including all relatives whose status is preceded by the words "step," "great," "great-great," or "grand," or the spouse of any of these persons, even if the marriage was terminated by death or dissolution.

(B) A person named in the will of a deceased parent as an intended adoptive parent where the child has no other parent.

(C) A person with whom a child has been placed for adoption.

(D) (i) A legal guardian who has been the child's legal guardian for more than one year.

(ii) If the court has found the child to have been abandoned pursuant to Section 7822, a legal guardian who has been the child's legal guardian for more than six months. The legal guardian may file a petition pursuant to Section 7822 in the same court and concurrently with a petition under this section.

(iii) However, if the parent nominated the guardian for a purpose other than adoption for a specified time period, or if the guardianship was established pursuant to Section 360 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, the guardianship shall have been in existence for not less than three years.

(2) If the child has been placed for adoption, a copy of the adoptive placement agreement shall be attached to the petition. The court clerk shall immediately notify the department at Sacramento in writing of the pendency of the proceeding and of any subsequent action taken.

(3) If the petitioner has entered into a postadoption contact agreement with the birth parent as set forth in Section 8616.5, the agreement, signed by the participating parties, shall be attached to and filed with the petition for adoption.

(b) The petition shall contain an allegation that the petitioners will file promptly with the department or delegated county adoption agency information required by the department in the investigation of the proposed adoption. The omission of the allegation from a petition does not affect the jurisdiction of the court to proceed or the validity of an adoption order or other order based on the petition.

(c) The caption of the adoption petition shall contain the names of the petitioners, but not the child's name. The petition shall state the child's sex and date of birth and the name the child had before adoption.

(d) If the child is the subject of a guardianship petition, the adoption petition shall so state and shall include the caption and docket number or have attached a copy of the letters of the guardianship or temporary guardianship. The petitioners shall notify the court of any petition for guardianship or temporary guardianship filed after the adoption petition. The guardianship proceeding shall be consolidated with the adoption proceeding.

(e) The order of adoption shall contain the child's adopted name, but not the name the child had before adoption.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Robert (Bob) Scott, Program Consultant at (916) 651-8103.

Sincerely,

WESLEY A. BEERS, Chief
Operations and Evaluation Branch