



Families for Orphans Coalition

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Contact: Terry Baugh 202-280-6327 or 202-352-5437, terry@kidsave.org

Executive Committee

Jane Aronson
orphandocor@aol.com

Terry Baugh
terry@kidsave.org

Thomas DiFilipo
tdifilipo@jcics.org

Chuck Johnson
cjohnson@adoptioncouncil.org

McLane Layton
mclane@equalityforadoptedchildren.org

Brian Luwis
brian.luwis@awaa.org

Judith Rycus
JSRycus@aol.com

Coalition Members

Bucker International

EACH

**Joint Council on
International Children's
Services**

Kidsave International

**National Council for
Adoption**

**The Institute for Orphan
Advocacy**

**The Institute for Human
Services/North American
Resource Center for Child
Welfare**

University of Minnesota

**Worldwide Orphan
Foundation**

BILL INTRODUCED TO ADDRESS GLOBAL LACK OF PARENTS FOR EPIDEMIC NUMBERS OF CHILDREN

June 29, 2009 (Washington, DC) -- The Families for Orphans Coalition announces support today for The Families for Orphans Act, introduced in the House on Friday (HR 3070). The Families for Orphans Act (FFOA) will place a new emphasis on the need to improve US policy for supporting healthy development of children globally. AIDS, war and poverty are causing an explosion in the number of children worldwide who are growing up without parents in orphanages and long term foster care. Spearheaded by Representatives Diane Watson (D-CA) and John Boozman (R-AR), The Families for Orphans Act will empower the US government to proactively address a global gap in the most basic of human rights – a permanent family for every child.

If enacted, The Families for Orphans Act would establish the Office of Orphan Policy, Diplomacy and Development within the Department of State and provide diplomatic authority to help the 30 million children orphaned worldwide and the 100 million plus vulnerable children who have lost one parent or are at risk of losing parental care. The new office would be responsible for developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy to support diplomacy and policy focusing on the preservation of families and the provision of permanent families and legal, permanent relationships for orphans. This function is currently not a part of the US government's diplomatic portfolio.

Research has shown that families are essential to the healthy development of children, and those unfortunate children who grow up without the support of a permanent family often face homelessness, suicide, incomplete education, teen pregnancy and emotional disorders. “The human cost for children growing up without parents is steep,” said Terry Baugh, President of Kidsave, and a member of the Coalition. “Children lose one month of development for every three months in an orphanage. With this handicap it is not hard to understand why these children are unprepared for independent living when turned out of institutions starting as young as 8-years-old. As a result an estimated 50% turn to crime and prostitution, over one-third experience a period of homelessness and most are highly vulnerable to human trafficking and to adults recruiting terrorists and child soldiers.” The Bucharest Early Intervention Study appears to support Baugh’s assessment. The Study, conducted over five years by notable researchers from Harvard Medical School, the University of Maryland, Tulane, the University of Virginia and the University of Minnesota reported that children living outside of family care suffered decreased brain activity (including lower IQ’s), poor growth and a variety of emotional delays.

“An investment in permanent family care for children is an investment in the health of the global economy,” said Thomas Difilipo, President of the Joint Council of International Children’s Services, a member of the Coalition. “Cost benefit data shows that effective, high-quality interventions to improve parenting skills and reduce child maltreatment save between \$2 and \$8 for every dollar spent. In a global economic crisis it only makes sense that every country – and every community -- would begin to invest in permanent family care.”

The new office will elevate the plight of children, giving the US a clear, dedicated, diplomatic authority to represent the interests of orphaned children. The office will advise the Secretary of State and President in all matters related to global family preservation and permanent parental care for orphans, as well as developing global strategy, including the coordination of all foreign policy and assistance related to global family preservation. The new office will also conduct research designed to better understand the size of the population of children living without parental care and global efforts to support these children. Oversight of three grant programs directly related to

preserving families and providing permanent parental care for families is an additional function of this new office.

“The Families for Orphans Act emphasizes that activities that keep a child in the country of birth through family preservation, domestic adoption, legal guardianship and kinship care, are always the preferred child welfare methods. However, when these are not timely options, a family through international adoption is clearly in the best interests of those children languishing in orphanages or living in temporary foster care,” said Chuck Johnson, Coalition member and Chief Operating Officer for the National Council For Adoption.

The Families for Orphans Coalition was established in 2008 to support both domestic and foreign efforts that ensure every child lives, grows and thrives in a safe, permanent and loving family.

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