A GUIDE TO THE MULTIETHNIC PLACEMENT ACT OF 1994

AS AMENDED BY THE INTERETHNIC ADOPTION PROVISIONS OF 1996

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And

The ABA Center on Children and the Law
National Resource Center on Legal and Court Issues
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This monograph was prepared by the American Bar Association under Cooperative Agreement No. 90CW1087/01 from the Administration for Children and Families. Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This monograph was funded through the National Resource Center on Legal and Court Issues.
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Acknowledgments

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The author would like to thank the following:

Alice Bussiere, for writing the original version of this monograph and for many discussions about the scope and implications of the Multiethnic Placement Act.

Mark Hardin and Debra Ratterman Baker of the ABA Center on Children and the Law for initiating this project and Mark Hardin for editing the monograph.

Sujung Kim, Regina Deihl, and Deanna Peters for research assistance.

Judith Anderson, Rick Barth, Sarah Berman, Wilfred Hamm, Ritch Hemstreet, Marcia Henry, Carolyn Johnson, Jackie Kidd, Leora Neal, Pat Montgomery, Liz Oppenheim, Glendora Patterson, Susan Shalhoub, Ken Watson, and Kristen Weber for their suggestions and questions.

The Stuart Foundation, the North American Council on Adoptable Children, the California Department of Foster Care and Adoption Recruitment and Licensing, and the Association of Administrators for the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance for their conferences where many of the issues and questions raised by MEPA-IEP were discussed.

The Children’s Bureau staff for their guidance, comments and corrections: Mike Amborse, Cecelia Sudia and Sharon Rothman-King.

Special thanks go to Miriam Laver, Sally Small Inada and Steve O’Reilly of the ABA Center on Children and the Law for their special help in pulling together all the changes on short notice to produce this monograph.
Chapter 1: Introduction

The Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) was enacted in 1994 amid spirited and sometimes contentious debate about transracial adoption and same-race placement policies. At the heart of this debate is a desire to promote the best interests of children by ensuring that they have permanent, safe, stable, and loving homes that will meet their individual needs. This desire is thwarted by the persistent increases in the number of children within the child protective system waiting for, but often not being placed in, adoptive families. Of particular concern are the African American and other minority children who are dramatically over-represented at all stages of this system, wait far longer than Caucasian children for adoption, and are at far greater risk of never experiencing a permanent home. Among the many factors that contribute to placement delays and denials, Congress found that the most salient are racial and ethnic matching policies and the practices of public agencies which have historically discouraged individuals from minority communities from becoming foster or adoptive parents. MEPA addressed these concerns by prohibiting the use of a child's or a prospective parent's race, color, or national origin to delay or deny the child's placement and by requiring diligent efforts to expand the number of racially and ethnically diverse foster and adoptive parents.

MEPA was signed into law by President Clinton in 1994 as part of the Improving America's Schools Act. In April 1995, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued a detailed Guidance to assist states and agencies in implementing MEPA and understanding its relationship to the equal protection and anti-discrimination principles of the United States Constitution and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. In 1996, MEPA was amended by the provisions for Removal of Barriers to Interethnic Adoption (IEP) included in the Small Business Job Protection Act. As explained in the Information Memoranda on IEP issued by HHS in June 1997, and May 1998, the amendments remove potentially misleading language in MEPA's original provisions and clarify that "discrimination is not to be tolerated," whether directed at children in need of appropriate, safe homes, at prospective parents, or at previously "underutilized" communities who could be resources for placing children. The IEP also strengthens compliance and enforcement procedures, including the withholding of federal funds and the right of any aggrieved individual to seek relief in federal court against a state or other entity alleged to be in violation of the Act.

This Guide will not resolve the ongoing controversies about the role of race and ethnicity in child welfare policies. However, it will assist states and child welfare agencies in their efforts to comply with the new federal mandates concerning the role of race, color, and national origin in foster care and adoptive placements, hereinafter referred to as MEPA-IEP. States and agencies are encouraged to take full advantage of the opportunities the law creates for improving policies and practices and, as a consequence, improving the quality of children's lives. In addition to providing advice for determining precisely what the law does and does not require, the Guide contains practical suggestions for child welfare administrators and social workers who must implement MEPA-IEP in the best interests of the children they serve.
A. Overview of MEPA-IEP

MEPA-IEP is one of several recent federal initiatives and laws aimed at removing the barriers to permanency for the hundreds of thousands of children who are in the child protective system. The specific intentions of MEPA-IEP are to:

- decrease the length of time that children wait to be adopted,
- facilitate the recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive parents who can meet the distinctive needs of children awaiting placement, and
- eliminate discrimination on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the child or the prospective parent.⁷

To achieve these goals, MEPA-IEP has three basic mandates:

(1) It prohibits states and other entities that are involved in foster care or adoption placements, and that receive federal financial assistance under title IV-E, title IV-B, or any other federal program, from delaying or denying a child's foster care or adoptive placement on the basis of the child's or the prospective parent's race, color, or national origin;⁸

(2) It prohibits these states and entities from denying to any individual the opportunity to become a foster or adoptive parent on the basis of the prospective parent's or the child's race, color, or national origin;⁹ and

(3) It requires that, to remain eligible for federal assistance for their child welfare programs, states must diligently recruit foster and adoptive parents who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the children in the state who need foster and adoptive homes.¹⁰

Although MEPA-IEP does not explicitly incorporate a "best interests" standard for making placements, the 1997 and 1998 HHS Guidelines note that "the best interests of the child remains the operative standard in foster care and adoptive placements." Nonetheless, to be consistent with constitutional "strict scrutiny" standards for any racial or ethnic classifications, as well as with MEPA-IEP, a child's race, color, or national origin cannot be routinely considered as a relevant factor in assessing the child's best interests.¹¹ Only in narrow and exceptional circumstances arising out of the specific needs of an individual child can these factors lawfully be taken into account. Even when the best interests of an individual child appear to compel consideration of these factors, caseworkers cannot assume that needs based on race, color, or national origin can be met only by a racially or ethnically matched parent. Much will depend on the nature of the child's specific needs and on the capacity of individual prospective parents to respond to these needs.

MEPA-IEP is fully consistent with President Clinton's Adoption 2002 Initiative, with its goal of doubling by the year 2002 the number of adoptions of children who cannot return to their biological parents.¹² MEPA-IEP also complements the emphasis of the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) on a child's health and safety as the paramount concern in child welfare decisions.¹³ This emphasis implies that no factors, including racial or ethnic factors, should be taken into
account in placement decisions unless they have a specific and demonstrable bearing on the child's health and safety.

In conjunction with these and other federal policies, MEPA-IEP offers child welfare agencies an unprecedented opportunity to make early and individualized assessments of a child's needs, expand the pool of qualified foster and adoptive parents, and make prompt placements based on the distinctive characteristics of each child.

**B. CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE:**

In enacting MEPA, Congress found that there are nearly 500,000 children in out-of-home care, of whom many tens of thousands are waiting for adoption, and that children who are eventually adopted wait an average of 2.67 years after they are legally available for permanent placement. More recent data shows that compared to white children, African-American and American Indian/Alaskan Native children typically spend considerably more time in foster care before being adopted.

African American children are vastly over represented within the child welfare system compared to their proportion within the population as a whole. They also constitute more than half of the children legally free for adoption, and wait significantly longer than other children for an adoptive placement.

According to HHS-VCIS data, nearly 60,000 children in out-of-home care at the end of 1994 had a goal of adoption, of whom around 16,000 were legally free. Of these children, 54% were African American, 42% were white, and 1.3% were Hispanic. Most of these children were over six years of age, but nearly a third were between one and five years of age. Of the total number of children in out-of-home care at the end of fiscal year 1995, estimates are that more than 45% were African American, 36.5% white, 11.3% Hispanic, 1.6% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 1.0% Asian/Pacific Islander and around 4% of unknown racial or ethnic origin. The annual number of finalized adoptions in the 1990s has not exceeded 18,000-19,000, or not quite 4% of the total number of children in out-of-home care.

The striking 72% increase since 1986 in the number of children in the child protective system is not necessarily attributable to the larger numbers of infants under age one who are entering care, but to declines in the rate of children who leave care. In California, for example, 1/4 of all children under age six entering non-kinship foster care are likely to be there six years later, without having been reunified with their birth parents and without being adopted by foster parents or other non-related individuals.

Although very few studies track children’s experience within the child protective system from the time they enter care until their cases are closed, Richard Barth and his colleagues now have a thorough account of the experiences over a six year period for the nearly 3,900 children under the age of six who entered non-kinship out-of-home care in California during the first half of 1988. The most significant and independent predictors of how long these children wait for a permanent placement are their age at the time they enter care and their race or ethnicity. Infants who entered care before their first birthday were more likely than older children, regardless of their race or ethnicity, to be returned to their birth parents or adopted within a few years. By contrast, African American children, and
to a much lesser extent, Hispanic children, regardless of their age at entry, wait dramatically longer than white children. Six years after entering care, African American children's likelihood of being adopted was only 1/5 of that of white children.23

Another way to summarize this sobering data is that, after six years, African American children were more than twice as likely to be in care than to have been adopted. For white children, the ratios are reversed: they were twice as likely to be adopted as to remain in care. Hispanic children were about as likely to remain in care as to be adopted.24

What accounts for these extraordinary differences in outcomes between African American and all other children?25 No doubt, some of these differences are attributable to the initially large numbers of African Americans who are subject to the child protective system,26 as well as to factors that cause delay for all children, including bottlenecks in court proceedings, low rates of reunification,27 and the challenge of providing appropriate care givers for children who have suffered serious neglect or abuse.28 Nonetheless, much of the difference is probably due to same race matching policies that preclude others from adopting these children and recruitment practices that, however well intended, discourage African American and other minority families from pursuing adoption.29

C. STANDARD PRACTICE BEFORE MEP A-IEP.

Before MEPA-IEP became the law, adoption practice throughout the country had for several decades generally favored placing children in racially or ethnically matched families. Transracial placements, which nearly always refer to placements of children of Color, especially African-American children, with Caucasian parents, were considered as a "last resort," acceptable only under unusual circumstances.20 The states generally required foster care and adoptive placements to meet a best interests standard. Many differences existed, however, in how much discretion caseworkers could exercise in making a best interests assessment and in determining whether and to what extent to consider race, culture, and ethnicity. Some states required that children be placed with families of the same racial, ethnic, or cultural background if consistent with the best interests test; others specified that such matching was preferred or created an order of preference that typically began with relatives and then favored other matched families. Several states prescribed the time period within which agencies had to search for a matched family before widening the search for an unmatched family.31

Racial and ethnic matching policies were based on the widely accepted belief that children have significant needs generated by their immutable racial or ethnic characteristics, as well as by their actual cultural experiences, and further, that children have a right to placements that meet these needs. Just as it was assumed that most prospective parents want children who resemble them, it was assumed that children would be uncomfortable in an adoptive family that did not have a similar racial or ethnic heritage.32 It was alleged that children raised in racially or ethnically matched families would more easily develop self esteem and a strong racial identity, and that minority children would have the best opportunity to learn the skills needed to cope with the racism
they were likely to encounter as they grew up in American society.\textsuperscript{33}

Unfortunately, during the same decades when racial matching policies became standard practice, efforts to expand the pool of minority foster and adoptive parents faltered. Even when successful, these recruitment efforts did not keep up with the growing demand for appropriate homes for minority children who could not be reunited with their parents or placed with relatives.\textsuperscript{34} The unintended consequence of these developments, as well as of other and often inadvertently discriminatory practices throughout the child welfare system, has been the prolonged delays in securing permanent placements for African American, Hispanic, and other minority children.

Both proponents and critics of matching policies became concerned about these delays and about allegations that some children were being removed from stable transracial foster-adopt homes solely in order to prevent a permanent transracial placements.\textsuperscript{35} No one doubts the adverse effects on children's emotional and cognitive development if they spend considerable time in their early years in institutional care or in a succession of foster placements.\textsuperscript{36} Research conducted from a variety of theoretical perspectives indicates that children who are deprived of an early, continuing, stable relationship with at least one psychological parent may lack the capacity to form deep emotional attachments or close social relationships.\textsuperscript{37} This risk is exacerbated if children are subject to additional neglect or abuse while in out-of-home care. Claims about the harms attributable to delays in achieving permanency gain support from studies that show how much better adopted children do on most outcome measures than do children who remain in foster care.\textsuperscript{38} Moreover, being placed at an early age is positively correlated with generally more positive adoption outcomes for all kinds of children.\textsuperscript{39}

Proponents of racial and ethnic matching insist that the key to eliminating delays is to do a better job recruiting racially and ethnically diverse foster and adoptive parents and ferreting out traditional screening procedures that have historically discriminated against minority applicants and discouraged them from pursuing adoption.\textsuperscript{40} Critics of matching policies fully acknowledge the need for non-discriminatory yet targeted and flexible efforts aimed at screening minority applicants into, rather than out of, the pool of prospective parents. However, many critics also believe that racial and ethnic matching policies are independently harmful to children, even if more successful recruitment of minority parents would eventually reduce delays.\textsuperscript{41} These policies are said to be harmful because they are based on unsubstantiated assumptions that children have racial or ethnic needs that outweigh their other needs and that only racially or ethnically matched families can adequately serve these needs.\textsuperscript{42}

The critics of racial matching note that no credible evidence supports the claim that transracial adoption is harmful to children's self-esteem, sense of racial identity, or ability to cope with racism. There are consistent positive findings, they assert, regardless of sample size and methodology, concerning the children adopted transracially before the practice was discouraged in the mid-1970s, as well as the smaller numbers of transracially adopted children since then.\textsuperscript{43} Whether compared to African American or white adoptees raised in same race adoptive homes, or to African American or white children raised by their biological families, transracial
adoptees do as well as other children on standard measures of self-esteem, cognitive development and educational achievement, behavioral difficulties, and relations to peers and other family members. When compared to children who remain in foster care, or are returned to dysfunctional biological parents, both same-race and transracial adoptees do significantly better.

Studies that focus on adolescence, when most children experience doubts about their identity and capacity for autonomy and independence, do not find unusual difficulties among transracial adoptees. The few studies that track children into their twenties indicate that transracial adoptees are doing well, maintain solid relationships with their adoptive families, and may have higher educational attainments than same-race adoptees.

Transracial adoptees develop a positive sense of racial identity. Studies of transracial adoptees conclude that African American children raised by white or mixed race parents are as comfortable with their racial identities as children raised in same-race families. Although some public agencies report adoption disruption rates as high as 10-15%, these rates are no higher for transracial adoptions than for other adoptions. There are some differences that manifest themselves over time between same-race and transracial adoptive families. Among these is that transracial adoptees have a more positive attitude about relations with whites, are more comfortable in integrated and multiethnic settings, and do not consider race as basic to their self-understanding as do most same-race adoptees.

MEPA-IEP addresses the desire of both the proponents and the critics of racial matching to expand the pool of racially and ethnically diverse prospective parents. It also addresses the concerns of the critics of racial matching who claim that the policy is based on unsubstantiated claims about the needs of children and denies minority children an equal opportunity to have a permanent home.

D. THE LAW BEFORE MEPA-IEP

Discrimination within the child welfare system based on race, color, or national origin was illegal before MEPA or the 1996 amendments were enacted. Under the Constitution's Equal Protection Clause, racial classifications are generally invalidated unless they meet the "strict scrutiny" test. To survive this test, racial and other "suspect classifications" must be justified by a compelling governmental interest and must be necessary to achieve this interest. If the state's interest can be served through a less restrictive, non-discriminatory means, the non-discriminatory means must be used. The strict scrutiny test similarly applies to cases arising under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in all federally funded programs.

In the past, some racial classifications were evaluated with less than strict scrutiny if they were intended, along with other factors, to promote diversity or remedy the deleterious effects of historic discrimination. Recently, however, the United States Supreme Court has applied the strict scrutiny standard to all racial classifications, even those that are allegedly benign. Strict scrutiny is warranted "precisely because it is necessary to determine whether [the classifications] are benign ... or whether they misuse race and
foster harmful and divisive stereotypes without a compelling justification."  

Applying anti-discrimination principles to child welfare decisions demands care. Unlike decisions in other areas, such as housing or credit loans, where general qualifications determine an individual's entitlement to certain goods and services, a child welfare decision requires an individualized determination of whether a specific placement is in the child's best interest. In making these determinations, broad or general assumptions about children's needs or parental suitability are supposed to be put aside in order to place a child with individuals who can love and respond to the child's distinctive characteristics.  

Can the "best interests of the child" standard, which is a fundamental principle in child welfare practice, ever be a "compelling reason" to consider the race, color, or national origin of a child or a prospective parent in making a placement decision? In *Palmore v. Sidoti*, the United States Supreme Court did not say that the state has a "compelling reason" to use a best interests test to resolve custody disputes between parents, but acknowledged that the test "indisputably" serves "a substantial governmental interest." The Court then went on to conclude that it was not in a child's best interests to allow private racial biases to justify removing her from the home of her white mother and her Black stepfather.  

In foster care and adoption cases, as contrasted with custody disputes between two parents, some lower appeals courts have indicated that a commitment to a child's best interests may be a compelling reason to consider race, color, or national origin, but only if these factors are not used categorically to preclude the possibility of transracial placements. Many courts have allowed race to be one among a number of factors that may appropriately be considered in making placement decisions, especially if sensitivity to the development of the child's racial identity and self-esteem is determined to be important for the well-being of a specific child. Nonetheless, blanket policies favoring same-race placements have generally been disfavored, and in individual cases, courts have held that a child's need for a permanent home may outweigh any considerations based on race or color.
Chapter 2: The Provisions of MEPA-IEP

A. SUBSTANTIVE PROVISIONS

1. What entities are subject to the Act?

MEPA-IEP applies to any state or other entity that receives funds from the federal government and is involved in some aspect of adoptive or foster care placements. All state and county child welfare agencies involved in placements that receive federal title IV-E and title IV-B funds are subject to MEPA-IEP. The Act also applies to other public or private agencies involved in placements that receive federal funds from any source, whether they receive the funds directly or through a subgrant from a state, county, or another agency. This means that a child placement agency that receives no funding from either the federal foster care or child welfare programs under titles IV-E or IV-B, but does receive financial assistance from other federal programs, including the Adoption Opportunities Act, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), or Title XX, is subject to MEPA-IEP.

2. Placements

(a) What is prohibited?

A state or other entity covered by MEPA-IEP may not:

- delay or deny the placement of a child for adoption or into foster care on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent, or the child involved.

(b) What is denial?

Under MEPA-IEP, the race, color, or national origin of a child or of a prospective parent cannot be used to make the child ineligible for foster care or adoption, or to deny a particular foster care or adoptive placement. In addition, an agency's failure to pursue reunification efforts, concurrent planning, or a judicial termination of parental rights because of the race or ethnicity of a child or of groups of children, would violate the law. Thus, a significant disparity between the rate at which certain minority children become legally available for adoption as compared to other children, while not itself direct evidence of a MEPA-IEP violation, may justify further inquiry to determine if the disparity was the result of intentional or inadvertent racial or ethnic bias. Moreover, a refusal to place a child with a particular prospective parent followed by a placement with another parent, would be suspect if these decisions appeared to be based on any of the impermissible factors.

While explicitly prohibiting the use of race, color, or national origin to deny a foster care or adoptive placement, MEPA-IEP does not require that these factors must always be ignored when an agency or caseworker makes an individualized assessment of a particular child to determine the kind of placement that will serve that child's best interests. The 1997 and 1998 HHS Guidances indicate that in exceptional, non-routine, circumstances, a child's best
interests may warrant some consideration of needs based on race or ethnicity. The use of these factors in exceptional circumstances as part of an individualized assessment of a child's best interests would not violate the "strict scrutiny" test found in the relevant constitutional and Title VI caselaw.

As stated in the earlier 1995 Guidance, any consideration of race or ethnicity "must be narrowly tailored to advancing the child's interests and must be made as an individualized determination for each child." Although the best interests of some older children may justify limited attention to race or ethnicity, "it is doubtful that infants or young children will have developed such needs." Moreover:

[a]n adoption agency may not rely on generalizations about the identity needs of children of a particular race or ethnicity, or on generalizations about the abilities of prospective parents of one race or ethnicity to care for, or nurture the sense of identity of a child of another race ...

The 1997 and 1998 Guidances confirm that any consideration of race or ethnicity is appropriate only when based on specific concerns arising out of the circumstances of an individual case.

While the adoption worker might wish to counsel the child, the child's ideas of what would make her or him most comfortable should not be dismissed, and the worker should consider the child's willingness to accept the family as an element that is critical to the success of the adoptive placement.

(c) What is delay?

The 1996 IEP amendments to MEPA confirm that any delay in placement based on impermissible factors is illegal. As explicitly stated in the earlier 1995 HHS and OCR Guidance, the widespread pre-MEPA policy and practice of "holding periods" in order to make a same-race adoptive placement of a child in agency custody are impermissible and clearly violate the federal law. Similarly, an agency may not require a certain period of time to search for a same race placement if an appropriate transracial placement is available when the child's need for placement arises. Nor may the agency routinely permit same-race placements while requiring caseworkers to specially justify a transracial placement. If no appropriate placement options are immediately available, the agency may conduct a search, but the search cannot be limited to same-race prospective parents except in those rare circumstances where the child has a specific and demonstrable need for a same-race placement.

Although MEPA-IEP prohibits states and agencies from delaying a child's placement for the purpose of finding a racial or ethnic match, many other factors contribute to delays within the child welfare system. Among these are high caseloads that impede the completion of individualized
assessments of children's needs, court delays in scheduling mandatory review or termination hearings, the distinctive physical and emotional needs of children who have been abused or neglected which may make it difficult to secure appropriate out-of-home care, misinformation about the availability of medical and other assistance and subsidies for foster care and adoptive children, and cultural norms that are hostile to formal adoption.\textsuperscript{72}

Given the existence of both discriminatory and non-discriminatory barriers to permanency, it is important for states and child welfare agencies to monitor whether minority children as a whole are being disproportionately held back from foster, post-adopt, or adoptive placements at each stage of the child protection process. Both systemic patterns and the placement histories of particular children should be internally monitored so that marked disparities can be identified, explained, and ultimately reduced or eliminated.

In addition, agencies should monitor whether they are timely in processing transracial or transethnic placements. That is, agencies can check to see whether transracial or interethnic placements and adoptions are taking substantially longer than other cases and, if so, why.

One of the best ways to reduce delays, regardless of their cause, is for agencies to undertake a comprehensive and well-documented assessment of each child's placement needs as promptly as possible once a child is likely to enter out-of-home care. If placement with a relative is an option, the relative should be notified and assisted in completing any requirements for serving as the child's caregiver. If the court determines that reunification efforts are not required for a particular child, a permanency case plan should be prepared and reasonable efforts devoted to its prompt implementation. Active recruitment and retention of appropriate and diverse foster and adoptive families is also essential to any overall policy aimed at achieving permanency.

Senator Coats made it clear that the prohibition on delay does not relieve agencies from making an aggressive effort to identify families that can meet the needs of the waiting children:

[MEPA] also prohibits any delay in making an adoption placement. While I have expressed concern about the effect of this prohibition I have determined that it is the best legislative approach we can take at this time. I do however want to reiterate my concern that this not be perceived as an excuse for agencies not to aggressively recruit prospective adoptive parents. Agencies should, on an ongoing basis-consistently, creatively, and vigorously recruit and study families of every race and culture of children needing adoptive families.\textsuperscript{73}

3. The opportunity to become an adoptive or foster parent

Entities covered by MEPA-IEP may not:

deny to any person the opportunity to become an adoptive or a foster parent, on the basis of race, color, or national origin of the person, or of the child involved.\textsuperscript{74}
Although the debate surrounding MEPA-IEP has usually focused on discrimination against white parents who wish to adopt African American children, researchers have also pointed out discriminatory practices that keep African American and other minority families from becoming foster and adoptive parents.⁷⁵

The central legal issue in discrimination against white parents is whether same race placement policies unfairly deprive them of the general opportunity to become foster or adoptive parents. However, the controversies usually have arisen in the context of a particular family who wants to adopt or foster a particular child.

The equal protection clause and Title VI prohibit agencies from using race or ethnicity to deprive individuals of the general opportunity to serve as a foster or adoptive parent, assuming they are otherwise qualified to do so. Nonetheless, in individual cases, MEPA-IEP focuses on the specific and distinctive needs of the child and on the capacity and willingness of particular individuals to meet those needs. Because placement decisions are based on the needs of the child, no one is guaranteed the “right” to foster or adopt a particular child.⁷⁶

Agencies should make sure that they are not systematically and inappropriately filtering out transracial or interethnic placements in the process of selecting foster and adoptive parents. For example, agencies can track what happens to all parents willing to adopt white or African American children, and can determine whether parents from different racial or ethnic groups are being screened out or rejected at a far higher than average rate.

Agencies can also use this information to determine whether certain placements are screened out at specific stages of the foster care or adoption process. For example, are prospective parents willing to accept children of other ethnic groups included in lists of eligible applicants for children of all ethnic groups? Are these prospective parents actually matched with children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds? Do all prospective parents have the opportunity to meet and observe children of different racial and ethnic groups? If a very low proportion of transracial or interethnic foster and adoptive placements survive the various steps of screening and placement, the agency should carefully examine its practices to determine why this is happening and whether it is due to discrimination.

The 1995 Guidance makes clear that the prohibition on discrimination includes not only denials overtly based on race, color, or national origin but also using race-neutral policies that have the effect of excluding groups of prospective parents on the basis of race, color, or national origin, where those standards are arbitrary or unnecessary or where less exclusionary standards are available.⁷⁷ Race-neutral policies that may have the effect of discriminating on the basis of race, color, or national origin may include those related to income, age, education, family structure, and size or ownership of housing, where such policies are not shown to be necessary to the program's objectives or there are no less discriminatory alternatives available that will achieve those objectives. Restrictive criteria such as these have been cited as barriers to the inclusion
of African American and other minority families in the pool of prospective foster and adoptive parents who can provide homes for children.\textsuperscript{78} Other barriers to participation include lack of minority staff and management in placement agencies, lack of recruitment in appropriate communities, lack of communication about the need for families in appropriate communities, fees and costs that make adoption difficult or impossible for low income families, negative perceptions about child welfare agencies in minority communities, and the traditional use of informal rather than formal adoption in certain cultures.\textsuperscript{79} Barriers to participation can be addressed in an appropriate recruitment plan.\textsuperscript{80}

4. Diligent Recruitment

MEPA-IEP requires states to develop plans that:

provide for the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.\textsuperscript{81}

Experience demonstrates that minority communities respond when they are given information about the need for homes and when they are treated with respect.\textsuperscript{82} There are many models for successful recruiting.\textsuperscript{83} The 1995 Guidance explains that the recruitment plan must focus on developing a pool of potential foster and adoptive parents willing and able to foster or adopt the children needing placement. Recruitment must seek to provide all children with the opportunity for placement and to provide all qualified members of the community with an opportunity to adopt or foster a child.

The Guidance specifies that an appropriate comprehensive recruitment plan includes:

1. A description of the characteristics of waiting children.

2. Specific strategies to reach all parts of the community.

3. Diverse methods of disseminating both general and child specific information.

4. Strategies for assuring that all prospective parents have timely access to the home study process, including location and hours of services that facilitate access by all members of the community.

5. Strategies for training staff to work with diverse cultural, racial and economic communities.


7. Non-discriminatory fee structures.

8. Procedures for a timely search for prospective parents for a waiting child, including the use of exchanges and other interagency efforts, provided that such procedures must ensure that placement of a child in an appropriate household is not delayed by the search for a same race or ethnic placement.\textsuperscript{84}

The Guidance recognizes that both general and targeted recruitment activities are important.\textsuperscript{85} These include use of the
general media (radio, television and print), dissemination of information to targeted community organizations, such as religious groups and neighborhood centers, and the development of partnerships with community groups to make waiting children more visible and to identify and support prospective adoptive and foster parents. Recruitment activities should provide potential foster and adoptive parents with information about the characteristics and needs of the available children, the nature of the foster care and adoption process, and the financial, medical, counseling and other assistance and support available to foster and adoptive families.

5. Interaction with Indian Child Welfare Act

MEPA-IEP specifically provides that it has no effect on the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). ICWA was enacted in 1978 in response to concerns about the large number of Native American children who were being removed from their families and their tribes and the failure of states to recognize the tribal relations of Indian people and the cultural and social standards of Indian communities. ICWA establishes standards and procedures for certain “custody proceedings” that affect Indian children, including voluntary and involuntary terminations of parental rights and foster care, pre-adoptive, and adoptive placements. An "Indian child" for purposes of ICWA is an unmarried individual under the age of 18 who is either a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe or is eligible for membership and is the biological child of a tribal member. ICWA gives tribal courts exclusive jurisdiction over proceedings concerning Indian children whose “domicile” (permanent home) is on a reservation and allows tribes to intervene in state court proceedings concerning non-reservation Indian children. MEPA-IEP does not alter ICWA’s recognition of tribal rights, nor does it affect ICWA’s preferences for placing Indian children with members of their extended families or other tribal members. Because MEPA-IEP does apply, however, to placement activities not covered by ICWA, Indian adults are protected by MEPA-IEP against discrimination if they want to become foster or adoptive parents of non-Indian children.

The exemption of ICWA from the provisions of MEPA-IEP underscores the importance of early and comprehensive assessments of a child’s history and needs upon entering out-of-home care. If a caseworker has reason to know that a child may have some Indian heritage, it is essential to determine whether the child is a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe, or may be eligible for membership by virtue of being the biological child of a member. Delays in determining a child’s status as an "Indian child" can have the unfortunate consequence, years later, of disrupting stable placements with non-Indian foster or adoptive parents to rectify an earlier failure to abide by ICWA. If it turns out that a child is of mixed ancestry, including some Indian heritage, but is not an "Indian child" under ICWA, then the child's placement is not subject to ICWA and the child is entitled to the MEPA-IEP protections against discriminatory placement decisions.
6. Implementation

Compliance with the original provisions of MEPA was required by October 21, 1995, and compliance with the 1996 IV-E provisions was required by January 1, 1997. States had to submit their recruitment plans to HHS by October 31, 1995. They had the option of doing so as part of a consolidated state plan that includes the plans submitted under title IV-B subparts 1 and 2 or, for states submitting a separate title IV-B subpart 1 plan, as a separate plan amendment.92

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) joined together to provide legal and social work expertise to assist the states and agencies in implementing MEPA. HHS issued its first MEPA Guidance on April 20, 1995. It issued basic information about the Interethnic Adoption Provisions on November 14, 1996,93 its Guidance on the Interethnic Adoption Provisions on June 5, 1997, and further Guidance in the form of questions and answers on May 11, 1998.94 These documents are available from HHS or any HHS Regional Office. They are also available on the Internet along with OCR regulations and information about how to file an OCR complaint. The Internet address of the OCR Home Page is http://www.hhs.gov/progorg/ocr/ocrhmpg.html. The ACF Children’s Bureau Internet Home Page address is http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs.

In 1995, HHS conducted a systematic review of States’ statutes, regulations, and published policies in the area of adoption and foster care to assess their compliance with MEPA’s nondiscrimination provisions. At that time, the Interethnic Placement provisions had not been enacted; thus HHS’ review focused only on MEPA. Since the passage of the Interethnic Placement provisions, HHS continues to review issues, statutes, regulations and policies that come to its attention and provides technical assistance when needed. However, because such statutes, regulations, and policies may not always come immediately to the attention of HHS, the Department encourages States to review their own statutes and policies to ensure compliance with the Interethnic Placement provisions. As discussed below, HHS will be including compliance with the title IV-E provisions of MEPA-IEP provisions in the child welfare review process.

Staff from ACF and the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), in addition to conducting Compliance Reviews, are available for technical assistance, and teams from ACF and OCR have gone to at least one state in each region to provide technical assistance. They are also available to respond to requests from other states. In addition, states may request the assistance of groups like the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law and the National Resource Center on Special Needs Adoption and the National Resource Center on Permanency Planning through a request to their regional Administration on Children and Families (ACF) office. For more information on this, please contact the ACF Regional Offices or the Resource Centers listed in the Appendices.
7. Enforcement

MEPA-IEP can be enforced through administrative action by HHS or through litigation by individuals or the Justice Department. Noncompliance may result in loss of federal funds, in injunctive relief, and, in certain cases, in an award of money damages.

(a) Administrative enforcement

(1) Title VI

Failure to comply with MEPA-IEP’s prohibitions against discrimination is a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. The 1995 Guidance suggests that failure to engage in appropriate recruitment efforts could also constitute a violation of Title VI. Title VI prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs receiving federal assistance. Anyone who believes he or she has been subjected to discrimination in a program funded by HHS may file a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR). Information about how to file a complaint is available from HHS or any of its regional offices.

OCR must investigate promptly whenever it receives a complaint or other information indicating that a violation of Title VI has occurred. OCR can also initiate its own compliance reviews to determine whether any Title VI violations have occurred. OCR staff review the policies and practices of the entity receiving federal funds, the circumstances that led to the complaint, and other information about a possible violation.

If OCR determines that a violation of Title VI has occurred, it will notify the entity involved and seek voluntary compliance. If voluntary compliance is not forthcoming, HHS may bring administrative proceedings to terminate federal assistance. These proceedings provide the state or the agency with a formal due process hearing to determine whether a violation has occurred and whether fiscal sanctions should be imposed. In the alternative, OCR may refer the matter to the Justice Department with a recommendation to initiate judicial proceedings.

HHS is required to seek the cooperation of recipients of federal funds in obtaining compliance with Title VI, and HHS is committed to working closely with covered agencies to promote voluntary compliance. An agency may agree to come into voluntary compliance at any point during the investigation or any action to terminate funding.

(2) Title IV-B

In order to receive title IV-B funds for child welfare services, promoting safe and stable families, and family preservation and support services, States and Tribes must develop a plan that meets the requirements of IV-B including the requirements for a recruitment plan. States and Tribes are required periodically to submit new plans under title IV-B. Failure to develop a recruitment plan could result in the loss of title IV-B funding. Before granting federal assistance, HHS must determine whether a state plan complies with federal statutes, regulations and guidelines. This determination must be completed within ninety days of the date the state submits the
plan. After the initial plan is approved, HHS may withhold future payment of federal funds if the plan no longer complies with federal law, either because of changes in federal requirements or because of plan amendments submitted by the state. Federal funds also may be withheld if the state fails to administer the plan in substantial compliance with federal law. However, HHS is working jointly with States and Tribes to achieve voluntary compliance, and could afford States and Tribes an opportunity for corrective action before withholding funds.

(3) Title IV-E

The 1996 Interethnic Placement Provisions added MEPA-IEP provisions to title IV-E. States found to be in violation of these provisions are subject to graduated financial penalties that will vary depending on the amount of title IV-E funding the state receives and the frequency and duration of violations. States will have the opportunity to avoid a financial penalty through a corrective action process if the violation is cured within six months. HHS estimates that penalties will range from under $1,000 to over $10 million. Other covered entities that violate MEPA-IEP will have to repay the amount of money they received from the state during each quarter in which a violation occurs.

ACF will start screening for indications of MEPA-IEP compliance as part of the child welfare review process starting in 1999. OCR will continue to address compliance by investigating complaints and conducting independent reviews. ACF and OCR are working together to develop common protocols and review standards along with policies and procedures for monitoring compliance, developing corrective action plans, and imposing penalties. The formal review standards and protocols will be published in the Federal Register.

(b) Private law suits

MEPA-IEP expressly provides a federal cause of action for any individual who is aggrieved by a violation of the title IV-E provisions of MEPA-IEP. This gives anyone who is adversely affected by a violation the right to file a lawsuit within two years after the violation occurs. Another provision removes an obstacle to bringing an action for failure to comply with the recruitment plan requirements under title IV-B. In addition, the 1995 Guidance suggests that the failure to implement an appropriate recruitment plan could give rise to a discrimination claim under Title VI. Other violations of MEPA-IEP that constitute discrimination may also give rise to civil rights claims based on the Constitution and Title VI.

Litigation can result in court orders requiring the defendant state or agency to comply with the law and an award of attorneys' fees if the person bringing the lawsuit is successful. Monetary compensation, known as "damages", may also be available in certain circumstances to individuals who are harmed by discriminatory policies and practices.
8. Barriers to Implementation

Agency administrators should anticipate barriers to implementation of MEPA-IEP and make plans for reducing those barriers. Some of the potential barriers are discussed below.

(a) Confusion

Confusion about the requirements of MEPA-IEP is likely to exist among child welfare workers and the general public as a result of the public debate about transracial adoption and same race placement policies. Confusion is also likely to result from the changes MEPA-IEP will require in law and policy in some states. It is important that administrators act quickly to say what is and what is not required by the law and to specify which current policies and practices must change and which are not affected. Administrators should develop clear written guidelines that detail mandatory requirements and areas where professional judgment is appropriate.

Agency staff must be given an opportunity to clarify issues and to discuss and understand how the law applies to their daily practice. Training sessions and meetings in which the law and policies are applied to facts of real or simulated cases can be helpful in translating the provisions of MEPA-IEP into actual practice. Supervisory staff should encourage review and discussion by all staff members of placement practices and decisions.

Administrators should also develop ways of informing the general public and prospective foster and adoptive parents about the law and the policy and practices of the agency. Recruitment materials, communications between workers and individual parents, and information distributed to the general public should provide a consistent message about what the law requires and what the agency is doing. Information about the reasons for the law and the way that the agency plans to meet the best interest of the children will help the public and prospective parents understand the agencies' policies and practices.

(b) Lack of resources

Child welfare agencies have faced increased responsibilities and decreasing resources in recent years. Implementation of MEPA-IEP may be viewed as another unfunded mandate that will take time away from other issues that affect the lives of children.

Since MFPA-IEP incorporates good social work practice, much of the implementation should be consistent with the work administrators, supervisors, and caseworkers are doing on a regular basis. Administrators should look for ways to incorporate MEPA-IEP implementation into ongoing activities, such as supervision, training, and case reviews.

It is clear however, that some additional resources will be needed for implementation. Administrators should identify all potential sources of support and make use of them. In addition to title IV-E administrative funds and Adoption Opportunities Grants, administrators should make use of HHS technical assistance and the services available from the federal resource centers listed in the appendix.
They should also explore the resources available from nongovernmental sources, such as private foundations. Permanence, the problems of children in foster care, and the effects of discrimination are among the priorities of many foundations, and agencies should be able to develop fundable projects that include MEPA-IEP implementation. Agencies should also be creative in using free community resources, such as churches and community groups in collaborative implementation activities.

(c) Resistance

Agencies may also encounter resistance from individual workers either because of their personal views or a perception that the federal law is dictating decisions in individual cases where professional discretion should be exercised. Administrators can overcome this resistance by discussing with workers the basic goals and underlying values of the law in addition to its specific provisions. Staff meetings or discussion groups can provide an opportunity for value clarification that will promote consistent decision making in individual cases. Open discussion is particularly important because implementation of MEPA-IEP can raise explosive and emotional issues concerning the needs of children and the meaning of racism and discrimination.

(d) Fear of litigation

Fear of litigation can create a climate in which social workers or supervisors are fearful of exercising their discretion in the best interest of the children. Administrators should provide their staff with competent legal advice about what is and what is not
Chapter 3: Common Questions About MEPA-IEP

1. Since the Constitution and Title VI already prohibit discrimination, what difference will MEPA-IEP make?

Although the Constitution and Title VI bar discriminatory practices by states and publicly funded entities, many states and child welfare agencies nonetheless assumed that it was lawful to prefer racially and ethnically-matched foster care and adoptive placements for children. MEPA-IEP has made it clear that such preferences are illegal.

In enacting MEPA-IEP, Congress was concerned about widespread reports that children were being harmed by being removed from stable foster placements simply in order to be placed with someone else of the same race or national origin whom they had never met.

Reports also suggested that growing numbers of children were being denied a permanent adoptive placement because of efforts, often futile, to find a racially or ethnically matching adoptive home. For example, some agencies required specific waiting periods to search for a same race placement or required social workers to justify a transracial placement.

Minority children, particularly African-American children, were the most likely to experience lengthy delays in placement and to have fewer opportunities to be adopted as they grew older. Despite differences of opinion about whether these delays were caused primarily by unfair exclusion of minority individuals from being considered as foster or adoptive parents, or by unfair exclusion of whites who sought transracial placements, or by some combination of these and other factors, child welfare experts agreed that something had to be done to prevent the adverse effects on minority children of placement delays and "foster care drift."

MEPA-IEP can assist states and agencies to remove the vestiges of unlawful discriminatory practices by providing technical assistance through OCR and ACF staff. This assistance will continue to be available to help states review their statutes and administrative codes and to help agencies develop procedures that reflect good social work principles and promote the best interests of children in out-of-home care.

By requiring diligent recruitment of foster and adoptive parents who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in state care, MEPA-IEP also aims to expand the pool of qualified parents who can meet the needs of children awaiting homes, including those whose specific and well-documented needs may justify an effort to achieve a same-race placement.
2. What are the differences between MEPA, as originally enacted, and the 1996 Interethnic Adoption Provisions?

The Interethnic Adoption Provisions (IEP) make several important changes to MEPA which clarify the kinds of discriminatory placement activities that are prohibited and, as explained in Chapter 2(7)(a)(3), add sanctions under title IV-E for violations of MEPA-IEP.

To clarify that the routine consideration of a child’s or prospective parents’ race color, or national origin is impermissible, the IEP amends the basic MEPA prohibitions as follows:

...neither the State nor any other entity in the State that receives funds from the Federal Government and is involved in adoption or foster care placements may--

(a) deny to any person the opportunity to become an adoptive or foster parent, on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the person, or of the child involved or (b) delay or deny the placement of a child for adoption or into foster care on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent, or the child involved.120 [language deleted from original MEPA is indicated with strikeouts]

In addition, the IEP repeals a section of MEPA that permitted agencies to determine a child’s best interests by considering, as one of a number of factors, “the child’s cultural, ethnic, and racial background and the capacity of the prospective foster or adoptive parents to meet the needs of a child from this background.”121 The deletion of the words “categorically” and “solely” from the Act’s prohibitions and the repeal of the permissible considerations make it clear that the standard for the use of race, color, national origin in foster care and adoptive placements is strict scrutiny. Even where a placement decision is not based on a prohibited categorical consideration, other actions that delay or deny placements on the basis of race, color, or national origin are prohibited.122 According to the 1997 and 1998 Guidance, agencies may not routinely assume that children have needs related to their race, color, or national origin. Nor may agencies routinely evaluate the ability of prospective foster and adoptive parents to meet such needs.123

As amended by IEP, MEPA does not prohibit agencies from the nondiscriminatory consideration of a child’s cultural background and experience in making an individualized placement decision. However, the 1998 Guidance warns against the use of “culture as a proxy for race, color, or national origin.” Any routine use of “cultural assessments” of children’s needs or prospective parent’s capacities would be suspect if it had the effect of circumventing the law’s prohibition against the routine consideration of race, color, national origin.124

3. Can race ever be taken into consideration in making placements? When?

On rare occasions, the distinctive needs of an individual child may warrant
consideration of the child’s race, color, or national origin. Any consideration of these factors must pass the strict scrutiny test: Is it necessary to take into account the child’s needs related to race, color, or national origin in order to make a placement that serves this particular child’s best interest? If it appears that the child does have these distinctive needs, caseworkers should document their response to the following questions:

- What are the child’s special or distinctive needs based on race, color, or national origin? Why is it in the child’s best interests to take these needs into account?

- Can the child’s needs related to race, color, or national origin be taken into account without delaying placement and placing the child at risk of other harms?

- Can these needs be met by a prospective foster or adoptive parent who does not share the child’s racial or ethnic background?

- Can these needs be met only by a same race/ethnic placement? If so, is some delay justified in order to search for a parent of the same race or ethnicity, if an appropriate person is not available in the agency’s current files?

- In a foster care placement, can the child’s special needs be taken into account without denying the child an opportunity to be cared for in a readily available foster home?

- What are the child’s other important needs?

Even when the facts of the particular case allow some consideration related to race, color, or national origin, this consideration should not predominate. Among other needs to be considered and typically to be given the most weight are: the child’s age, ties to siblings and other relatives, health or physical condition, educational, cognitive, and psychological needs, and cultural needs, including religious, linguistic, dietary, musical, or athletic needs. In addition, the child may have personal preferences that he or she can articulate and discuss.

MEPA-IEP encourages child welfare workers to make decisions on the basis of the individualized needs of each child, and renders suspect any placement decision based on stereotypical thinking or untested generalizations about what children need. From now on, it should be clear that any use of race, color, or ethnicity is subject to the strict scrutiny standard of review, and that the use of racial or ethnic factors is permitted, only in exceptional circumstances where the special or distinctive needs of a child require it and where those needs can be documented or substantiated.

Consider the following example: A six year old girl in foster care has been attending a school where she is regularly teased because of her race. She is deeply distressed about this and cries inconsolably whenever the teasing occurs. This child needs a foster parent who can enroll her in
another school where the teasing is less likely to occur or can work with staff and other parents at her current school to improve the situation there. The foster parent has to help the child understand that the teasing is inappropriate and not a reaction to anything she did that was objectionable.

While this child has a specific race-based need, the caseworker cannot assume that the only way to meet this need is through a same-race placement. It is an issue to discuss with the foster parent (or a prospective foster parent), regardless of their race. Simply being from the same racial background does not ensure that a particular individual will do any better in helping the child cope with the atmosphere in school than an individual from a different racial background.

Consider another example: A three year old boy born in Honduras and present in this country for less than six months is suddenly removed from his parents who have allegedly beaten him. His verbal skills are age appropriate but he only speaks and understands Spanish. He needs immediate foster care, preferably in a home where Spanish is spoken. He should not be further traumatized by placing him with caregivers who cannot speak Spanish. Although this child will eventually need to learn English, his immediate needs call for finding a foster parent who speaks Spanish. It would not be appropriate to limit the search to someone from Honduras or some other Latin American country. The placement should be made on the basis of the child’s demonstrable cultural needs, and not on the basis of the child’s national origin.

4. Can state law or policy include a preference for racial or ethnic matching so long as no child or prospective parent is precluded from being considered for placement on the basis of their race, color, or national origin?

MEPA-IEP does not allow state laws or policies to be based on blanket preferences for racial or ethnic matching. General or categorical policies that do not derive from the needs of a specific child are not consistent with the kinds of individualized decisions required by MEPA-IEP. Statutes or policies that establish orders of preference based on race, color, or ethnicity or that require caseworkers to justify departures from these preferences violate MEPA-IEP and Title VI.125

5. Can agencies honor the preferences of a birth parent based on race, color, or national origin?

Because agencies subject to MEPA-IEP may not deny or delay placements on the basis of race, color, or national origin,126 they cannot honor a biological parent’s preferences for placing the child in a family with a similar racial or ethnic background.127

6. Does MEPA-IEP prevent States from having a preference for placing a child with a relative?

MEPA-IEP does not prohibit a preference for placing a child with relatives,
if the placement is in the best interest of the child and not in conflict with the requirement that the child’s health and safety be the paramount concern in child placement decisions.128

In 1996, Congress added a section to the title IV-E State Plan requirements that States are to consider giving preference to an adult relative over a non-related foster or adoptive parent, provided that the relative meets all relevant state child protection standards.129 Many states include preferences for relatives in their foster care or adoptive placement statutes or administrative regulations. Nonetheless, caseworkers should not use general preferences for placing children with relatives as a device for evading MEPA-IEP. All placement decisions should be specific to the needs of the individual child.

Generalizations about the wisdom of placing with a relative, even when a relative has not yet been located or evaluated should not necessarily result in removing a child from the child’s current placement. For example, caseworkers should exercise caution before removing a child from a stable, long-term, transracial fost-adopt home in order to make a racially-matched placement with a relative the child may have never met. To avoid this situation, caseworkers should attempt to locate all relatives who might serve as a child’s caregiver as promptly as possible whenever a child is likely to require out-of-home care.

8. How does MEPA-IEP apply to infants?

MEPA-IEP applies regardless of the age of the child. The 1995 and 1997 Guidelines suggest that the age of the child may be a factor in determining the effect of race or ethnicity on the best interest of the child. For example, an older child may have a strong sense of identity with a particular racial or ethnic community; an infant may not have developed such needs.131 However, the Guidelines emphasize that each decision must be individualized. Further, the 1998 Guidance notes that, regardless of age, racial or ethnic factors can seldom determine where a child will be placed.132

9. How should biracial/bicultural and multiracial/multicultural children be treated?

MEPA-IEP requires that all children be treated equally, without regard to their racial or ethnic characteristics. If a child has a mixed racial ethnic heritage, that heritage does not have to be ignored when assessing the child’s needs,133 but it cannot become the basis for a placement decision except in those exceptional or distinctive circumstances that would apply to making a placement decision for any other child based on race, color, or national origin.

Nevertheless, in order to comply with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA),134 children entering the child welfare system who may have some Native American
heritage should have their existing or potential tribal affiliations ascertained immediately so that ICWA notice, jurisdictional, and placement requirements can be followed. Because ICWA is not based on a child’s race as such, but on the child’s cultural and political ties to a quasi-sovereign federally recognized Indian tribe, ICWA is not affected by MEPA-IEP. This means that a child with a certain quantum of “Indian blood” may or may not be subject to ICWA. Caseworkers generally have to rely on tribal determinations whether or not the child is a tribal member or eligible for membership.135

10. Does MEPA-IEP apply to private agencies and independent adoptions?

MEPA-IEP applies to all agencies and entities receiving federal assistance directly or as a subrecipient from another entity.136 Agencies or entities that do not receive federal assistance are not covered by MEPA-IEP unless a federally assisted agency is also involved in their placement decisions. However, these entities may be covered by other statutes or policies prohibiting discrimination.

11. Can agencies conduct targeted recruitment?

MEPA-IEP requires diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children who need homes.137 Therefore, states must develop strategies that reach the communities of these families. At the same time, states and other entities must ensure that they do not deny anyone the opportunity to adopt or foster a child on the basis of race, color or national origin.138

The 1995 federal Guidance discussed targeted recruitment: efforts as part of a comprehensive strategy aimed at reaching all segments of the community.139 The 1995 Guidance provides that information should be disseminated to targeted communities through organizations such as churches and neighborhood centers. It further suggests agencies develop partnerships with community groups that can help spread the word about waiting children and identify and support prospective adoptive and foster parents.140

In addition, the 1998 Guidance states that targeted recruiting cannot be the exclusive means for a state to identify families for particular categories of children.141 For example, while a state may contract with a private agency to make public announcements in Spanish to recruit Hispanic foster and adoptive parents, the state may not rely exclusively on that private agency to place Hispanic children. Rather, in identifying a potential pool of foster or adoptive parents for a child, the state must consider individuals listed with agencies that recruit parents from all ethnic groups.

12. Do prospective adoptive parents have the right to adopt a particular child?

Under MEPA-IEP, individuals cannot be denied an opportunity to be considered as a potential adoptive parent. They have a right to an assessment of their suitability as adoptive parents which is not based on discriminatory criteria. If accepted into the
pool of qualified applicants for an agency, a state, or an interstate exchange, they have a right to be considered as a possible adoptive parent for children for whom they have expressed an interest, and whose needs they believe they can meet. However, neither they nor anyone else has an absolute right to adopt a particular child.

When foster parents seek to adopt a child who has been in their care for a significant period of time, the child’s attachment to them and the child’s need for permanence may suggest that they are the most appropriate parents for the child. Nonetheless, this decision must be based on the agency’s and the court’s assessment of the child’s best interests and not on an alleged “right” of the foster parents to adopt this child.

13. What funds are available to implement MEPA-IEP?

Implementation of MEPA-IEP is an administrative cost of implementing federal foster care mandates. States are entitled to claim MEPA-IEP implementation expenses as part of their administrative costs under title IV-E. Discretionary funds for innovative projects, such as recruitment programs, are also available under the Adoption Opportunities Program authorized by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act.
Chapter 4: Checklists for Implementation of MEPA-IEP

A. WHAT AGENCIES CAN DO

1. Promote good child welfare practice

MEP-IEP is consistent with good child welfare practice. Both MEPA-IEP and good practice require: individual decisionmaking; consideration of all of the child's needs from the time the child first comes into contact with the child welfare system; consistent attention to all those needs throughout the child's relationship with the agency and in each placement decision; active recruitment of potential foster and adoptive parents from all segments of the community; development of a pool of foster and adoptive parents that respond to the needs of the children in care; eligibility criteria for foster and adoptive parents that are related to their ability to care for a child; and support and respectful treatment of all prospective parents. Good practice will improve permanence for children and decrease the chances that MEPA-IEP will be violated.

2. Decrease delays in permanence caused by other factors

A number of the controversies concerning transracial placements arise because the child has been in foster care for too long. Frequently the delay in obtaining a permanent placement for the child is due to other factors such as inadequate reunification efforts, failure to search for relatives who are willing and able to care for the child, high social worker caseloads, bureaucratic inertia, and court delays.

3. Review current state law and agency policies for compliance with MEPA-IEP

HHS has reviewed the statutes and policies that are readily available, but state agencies should conduct their own review of all state laws and written policies as well as informal policies and practices to ensure violations of MEPA-IEP do not occur in written policy or in practice.

Other public and private agencies are also required to comply with MEPA-IEP. All covered agencies should thoroughly review policies and practices to ensure compliance. When state statutes or policies appear to be in conflict with MEPA-IEP, agencies should seek clarification from the state child welfare agency or HHS or both.

4. Monitor agency compliance with MEPA-IEP

To assess whether their practices comply with MEPA-IEP, agencies should consider systematically monitoring their own practices regarding all foster care and adoptive placements. Specifically, agencies should make sure that children are not moved from one foster placement to another simply in order to achieve a racial or ethnic match, that adoptive placements of minority
children are not processed at much slower rates than placements of caucasian children, and that transracial or interethnic placements are not arbitrarily filtered out at different stages of the placement process.

A successful outcome measure for MEPA-IEP compliance is a reduction in current disparities between rates of placement of minority and non-minority children, and an increase in permanency for all children as the pool of suitable and diverse parents expands. By contrast, evidence that transracial or interethnic placements are not occurring, or are being “filtered” out of agency practice, could raise concerns about the persistence of at least inadvertent discrimination against children as well as against prospective parents when the pool of waiting children is predominately of one race.

Except for purposes of reviewing their own compliance with MEPA-IEP, agencies should no longer follow any procedures that routinely classify or divide children awaiting placement by racial or ethnic groups. Similarly, individuals seeking approval, or already approved, as foster or prospective adoptive parents should not be routinely classified by race or ethnicity, but can be classified according to the general characteristics of the kinds of children they prefer or are willing to consider. Any “matching” of a child to a prospective parent should be responsive to the particular needs of a child and the capacities of the parent, without regard to general assumptions about the risks or benefits of same-race or transracial adoption.142

To evaluate their compliance with MEPA-IEP, as well as the effects of non-discriminatory practices on the number, rate, and permanency of placements for all children, agencies should keep internal records of the racial and ethnic backgrounds of the children and foster and adoptive parents in their case files. Agencies should track the experience of children under their supervision from the time of entry into out-of-home care through the time the cases are closed. Significant differences in the experience of minority children should be recorded and efforts made to account for these differences. Was there a reluctance to seek termination of parental rights because of concerns that a same-race adoptive placement would be difficult to justify? Are children being held in long-term foster care in order to keep them in a racially-matched custodial environment, even though potential transracial adoptive placements are available? How are decisions about “adoptability” being made? Are the criteria for minority children different than the criteria used for white children? Which lists and exchanges within and outside the state were used to locate an adoptive parent? How much time elapsed until each child’s permanency goals were met?

Because the central goal of MEPA-IEP is to reduce placement delays and denials based on discriminatory factors, it is important for agencies to monitor and document the rates at which minority children leave care and the kinds of placements they experience. Are minority children’s rates of adoption becoming comparable to the rates of white children? Are minority children waiting about the same time as white children?
5. Implement a comprehensive recruitment plan.

States were required to submit an appropriate comprehensive recruitment plan to HHS no later than October 31, 1995. States should take into consideration both the mechanisms they will use to reach all segments of the community and the protections they will implement to ensure compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions of MEPA-IEP. For example, the state may choose to use targeted efforts to reach minority communities, but these efforts may not exclude whites who wish to become foster or adoptive parents.

Public and private agencies should assist the state in developing an appropriate recruitment plan that meets the needs of the children they serve. Agencies should ensure state plans include creative and affirmative efforts to reach communities that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children who need homes. The diversity and cultural competency of the recruitment staff should be reviewed as should any written or audiovisual materials used. Recruitment efforts should also address how parents are treated in the home study and placement process. Recruitment is wasted if the system does not make appropriate use of interested parents who respond, or if such efforts are not timely.

Agencies should also collaborate in developing comprehensive community services to ensure that prospective parents are not denied the opportunity to become foster or adoptive parents. Cooperation among different organizations is necessary to ensure that all individuals who are interested in foster care and adoption are encouraged and supported.

Submission of the plan does not end the responsibility of the state or the other agencies involved in recruitment. Implementation, evaluation, and appropriate adjustment are necessary to serve the best interests of children and families and to avoid violations of law. HHS has made clear that the failure to conduct adequate recruitment may be a violation of Title VI as well as a violation of the IV-B state plan requirements.\textsuperscript{143}

6. Issue clear policies and standards for placement.

All agencies should develop clear written policies and standards that implement MEPA-IEP. These policies and standards should define prohibited practices to the extent possible making it clear that such a list is not all inclusive. These policies and standards also should identify the areas where professional judgment is appropriate. Vague or ambiguous policies invite confusion and create barriers to implementation. Agencies can use the federal Guidance in formulating these policies. Additional assistance is available from the resource centers listed in the appendix.

7. Provide training for workers.

Training on the provisions of MEPA-IEP and discussion of how those provisions apply in individual situations is important to ensure that workers understand and implement the law properly. Appropriate training will also help protect agencies from
claims they have engaged in discriminatory practices.

Training should also include practice issues that increase the competency of staff to make individualized assessments of children’s needs.

8. Develop a system for supervision and technical assistance for workers to promote compliance that meets the best interests of the children.

Ongoing attention will be necessary not only to ensure that MEPA-IEP is followed but also to ensure that misunderstandings about what MEPA-IEP requires do not interfere with fulfilling the best interests of children. As with adequate training, appropriate supervision will help protect agencies from claims they have engaged in discriminatory patterns of practice.

9. Provide opportunities for discussion and value clarification.

Discussing the goals of the agency, of MEPA-IEP, and of child welfare services will be helpful in reducing misunderstanding of MEPA-IEP requirements and resistance to implementing them. It will also promote more child-centered decisionmaking. Workers who understand the reasons for policies are more likely to implement them correctly and will be more confident in exercising their professional judgement.

Agencies should encourage caseworkers to meet with each other to review hypothetical and actual cases in order to improve their ability to distinguish between general or untested assumptions about children’s needs and specific, distinctive needs related to race or ethnicity. Hypothetical and actual cases should also be used to illustrate the difference between having a need related to race and ethnicity and requiring a same race/ethnic placement to address that need. Even children who have documented racial or ethnically related needs may have those needs met in a transracial as well as in a same-race placement.

10. Get good legal advice.

Given the controversial nature of these issues, agencies can anticipate litigation if difficult cases arise. However, the fear of litigation should not prevent workers from making appropriate decisions. Workers can best exercise their professional judgment if agency policies and practices have been reviewed for compliance with the law. A good review will also prepare the agency to defend their practices if litigation should occur. If the attorneys who usually work with the agency are not familiar with civil rights issues, they may wish to arrange for a consultation with experts.


Assistance is available from ACF, OCR, HHS Regional Offices, and the Resource Centers. States should take advantage of the resources listed in the Appendix.
B. WHAT WORKERS SHOULD DO

1. Make individual decisions based on sound child welfare practice and the best interest of the child.

MEPA-IEP makes it clear that concerns about race, color, or national origin are not to be the predominant or sole basis of child placement decisions. Indeed, they are not to be taken into account in any foster care or adoptive placement decision except in those rare circumstances where the caseworker can document a specific, distinctive need of a particular child arising from the child’s race or ethnicity. This does not require caseworkers to be “colorblind,” but to understand the difference between acknowledging a child’s race, color, or national origin as an element of that child’s whole being and using general assumptions about those factors as a shortcut for preferring certain placement options over others. Caseworkers should understand that in every case, the available prospective parents should be considered, regardless of their race or ethnicity, as eligible to adopt waiting children.

Same-race placements are not required, nor are they prohibited. Similarly, transracial placements are not required, nor are they prohibited. What is required are decisions based on careful individualized assessments of the characteristics and needs of each child and non-stereotypical assessments of individuals who are potential parents of the child.\textsuperscript{144}

Agencies should give caseworkers the opportunity to read and discuss the social science research findings that substantiate the claims that children are not harmed by transracial adoption, and indeed, are significantly better off than being left in foster care or returned to dysfunctional biological parents.

The focus of MEPA-IEP is the best interests of children. Workers should keep in mind that the primary concern of child welfare services, including adoption, is the well-being of children.\textsuperscript{145} MEPA-IEP emphasizes the use of professional judgment in making individualized decisions in the best interest of each child. Workers who base their decisions on sound child welfare practice and the needs of the individual child will be unlikely to run afoul of the law.

2. If a child has specific or distinctive needs related to race or ethnicity that require consideration, address them as soon as the child comes into the child protective system.

In the great majority of cases, agencies can assume that a child has no special needs based on race, color, or national origin which should be taken into account in selecting a foster or adoptive parent.\textsuperscript{146} However, where such needs exist, they should be identified and assessed early in the case. These needs should then be considered in providing services and in making every placement decision. All too often these needs are not addressed until a decision has to be made about adoption or another permanent plan. Waiting this long is problematic for two reasons. First, it means the child’s needs are not met for a significant period of time. Second, it creates difficulties...
in balancing interests at the time of adoption or other permanent placement if the child's current caregivers cannot meet the child's identified needs.

3. Consider permanence from the first contact with the child.

Early attention to permanence is especially important. All too often emergency placements or other temporary arrangements become long term. Even when race or ethnicity is not an issue, these placements can create difficulties if the foster parents are not willing to make a long term commitment to the child or are not appropriate adoptive parents. Appropriate planning and action can ensure that children do not remain in foster care drift and can reduce the controversies that arise when children are moved from one placement to another. Early identification of relatives, including absent parents, comprehensive reunification efforts, attention to all of the child's needs in making placement decisions, and other good child welfare practices will reduce the time a child waits for permanence and the chance that problems will arise in making an appropriate permanent placement for children who cannot return home.

4. Read the statute and the federal guidance.

A lot of questions can be resolved by referring to the 1995, 1997, and 1998 Guidances or the language of the Act itself. Workers should read the federal law and policy for themselves and not rely on written or oral summaries provided by others. When in doubt, workers and their supervisors should review the language of the federal law, the Guidances, and state laws and policies before making a decision. If questions remain, staff should get legal advice.

5. Review state law and agency policy and ask for clarification.

Where state law or agency policies are unclear or appear to conflict with the federal law, workers should ask for clarification. It may take some time for the states and agencies to resolve all of the issues that MEPA-IEP presents. However, workers need to be able to make decisions for children while this process is going on. Workers should insist upon clarification to the extent possible. Questions from workers can also assist the states and the agencies in identifying issues that need to be resolved.

6. Document the reasons for decisions.

MEPA-IEP emphasizes individualized decision making based on the needs of the child. Workers should document the basis for their decisions including all the factors they considered in reaching that decision. Documentation will help workers clarify for
themselves the factors taken into consideration and the reasons for the decision. It will provide a record a supervisor or another worker can refer to in understanding the case, and it will provide evidence of appropriate action in the event the worker is charged with violation of the law.

7. Be honest with prospective adoption and foster parents and treat them with respect.

Good communication and respectful treatment will decrease misunderstandings and improve recruitment and retention of prospective parents. Open discussion can also help the agency learn about potential problems and ways to address them.
Conclusion

The overriding goals of MEPA-IEP are to reduce the length of time children spend in out-of-home care, and to prevent discrimination in placement decisions. However, we should have realistic expectations about what MEPA-IEP can accomplish. The waiting children in the child welfare system have multiple needs, and the child welfare system faces multiple challenges in achieving permanence for these children. MEPA-IEP is only one part of the comprehensive effort that is needed to improve the lives of children who are waiting for permanent homes.

Implementation of MEPA-IEP provides an opportunity for states and agencies to improve permanency for children. Agencies and social workers will need to have a clear understanding of the requirements of MEPA-IEP and Title VI and of good social work practice to avoid the problems and controversies that can arise. Attention to the goals of MEPA-IEP and the best interest of the individual children being served are the keys to successful implementation.
ENDNOTES


16. For example, preliminary estimates from the 1998 Federal Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System show that the average number of months between removal from home and finalized adoptions for white children is 37.4, African-American children 49.8, and American Indian/Alaskan native children 42.7. The average number of months for Hispanic children is 39.6 and for Asian/Pacific Islander children 36.9. Personal communication with Penelope Mazza, Senior Policy Research Analyst, U.S. Children’s Bureau, August 19, 1998.


18. PROGRESS AND PERIL, supra note 17, at 43; Barth, et al., supra note 17, at 82-83, 154, 158-163, & 267; Andrea J. Sedlak & Diane D. Broadhurst, STUDY OF ADOPTION ASSISTANCE IMPACT


20. These data are reported at the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute website, http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/ research/ressta.html

21. Nearly 25% of all children entering out-of-home care are infants under the age of one, many of whom are drug-exposed. The rate of entry into out-of-home care for children up to age 4 is now twice as large as for children 5-17 years of age. R.M. Goerge et.al., supra note 17.


23. Id. Barth's data on children who entered care in California in 1988 indicate that, even after controlling for age and geographical region, African American children spend at least 25% more time than all other children without a permanent placement.

24. Id.

25. The disparities found by Barth in California are evident in other states; in Michigan, for example, of the 2,400 children with adoption as their permanency goal during the 1980s, more than half of the African American children, but only a third of the white children, still had open cases as of 1990. S. Kossoudji, Race and Adoption in Michigan, in PUBLIC AGENCY ADOPTION POLICY (D. Mont and R. Avery, eds. Forthcoming: Greenwood Press).

26. Mason & Williams, supra note 17. See also, PROGRESS AND PERIL, supra note 17, at 42-43; Barth et al., supra note 17, at 36, 72, 267; Robert L. Hampton & Eli H. Newberger, Child Abuse Incidence and Reporting by Hospitals: Significance of Severity, Class, and Race, 75 AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH 56 (1985).

27. Mason & Williams, supra note 17. See also, Barth et. al. supra note 17, at 127.


29. Andrew Billingsley and Jeanne M. Giovanni, CHILDREN OF THE STORM: BLACK CHILDREN AND AMERICAN CHILD WELFARE (1972); Mason & Williams, supra note 17, at 84; Barth et al., supra note 17, at 131.


32. Child Welfare League of America, STANDARDS FOR ADOPTION SERVICE, 4.5 (1988); Mason & Williams, supra note 17, at 86; Rita J. Simon, Responses to "Where Do Black Children Belong?" 1 RECONSTRUCTION 51 (1992); 140 CONG. REC. S10281-01, S10303 (daily ed. Aug. 2, 1994) (statement of Sen. Metzenbaum); but see Bartholet, supra note 30, at 1221-1223.


34. Bartholet, supra note 30; Barth, supra note 22, at 301.


38. David M. Brodzinsky, Long-Term Outcomes in Adoption, 3 FUTURE OF CHILDREN 153-166 (1993).

39. For a discussion of these studies, see, Richard P. Barth & Marion Berry, ADOPTION AND DISRUPTION 3-35 (1988).


44. Id.; Lucille Grow & Deborah Shapiro, BLACK CHILDREN, WHITE PARENTS: A STUDY OF TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION (1974); Joyce Ladner, MIXED FAMILIES (1977); Ruth McRoy & Louis A. Zurcher, TRANSRACIAL AND INRACIAL ADOPTEES (1983); Joan Shireman & Penny Johnson, A Longitudinal Study of Black Adoptions: Single Parent, Transracial and Traditional, 31 SOC.
45. Brodzinsky, supra note 38; Nicholas Zill et al., *Health of Our Nation's Children*, Vital and Health Statistics, Sers. 10, No. 191, U.S. Public Health Service, 1994. The results from the 1988 children's health survey are compared for four groups: children being raised by unmarried mothers, children of two parent non-divorced families, children being raised by grandparents, and adopted children. Adopted children had quality of home environment superior to all other groups. They had superior access to health care, were as healthy as children in non-divorced families living with biological parents, had better educational attainment than single parent or grandparent-run families. Children adopted as infants did best of all.


47. Barth & Berry, supra note 39; confirmed by more recent data compiled by North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC).

48. Simon & Altstein, supra note 46, at 185: "All of the research bearing on transracial adoption support the practice and demonstrate that the adoptees and their families adjust well to each other and that the adoptees are aware of and comfortable with their own racial identities."


51. J. Powell drew the distinction between the impermissible use of race as "the factor" and its permissible use as "a factor" along with other factors in Regents of the Univ. of Cal. v. Bakke, 438 U.S. 265, 315-19 (1978).


61. See, Adoption of Baker, 185 N.E.2d 51 (Ohio App. 1962).


67. Id.


69. Id.

70. Id. at 3.


Children Spring 1993); Barth, et al., supra note 17, at 261-264; Office of Inspector General, Department of Health and Human Services, BARRIERS TO FREEING CHILDREN FOR ADOPTION (February 1991); Debra Ratterman, TERMINATION BARRIERS: SPEEDING ADOPTION IN NEW YORK STATE THROUGH REDUCING DELAYS IN TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS (American Bar Association 1991). See also, Adoption 2002, supra note 12; Linda Katz, Effective Permanency Planning for Children in Foster Care 35 SOCIAL WORK 220 (1990) and authorities cited therein.


75. E.g., Tom Gilles and Joe Kroll, BARRIERS TO SAME RACE PLACEMENT (North American Council on Adoptable Children 1991); Mason & Williams, supra note 17, at 87.

76. Information Memorandum ACYF-IM-CB-98-03, supra note 5, at 1.


78. Gilles & Kroll, supra note 75; Mason & Williams, supra note 17, at 87.

79. Gilles & Kroll, supra note 75.


83. E.g. Kinship Center National Urban League, Friends of Black Children Project, CREATING NEW LINKAGES FOR THE ADOPTION OF BLACK CHILDREN: A GUIDEBOOK (1984). Information about successful recruitment programs is also available from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) or the National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption.


85. Id. at 20274.

86. Id.


94. *Information Memorandum ACYF-IM-CB-97-04*, supra note 5; *Information Memorandum ACYF-IM-CB-98-03*, supra note 5.


98. 45 C.F.R. §80.7(b) (1998).

99. 45 C.F.R. §80.7(c) (1998).

100. 45 C.F.R. §80.7(a) & (c) (1998).

101. *Id.*


104. 45 C.F.R. §80.6(a) (1998).


106. 45 C.F.R. 80.7(d) (1998).


108. 45 C.F.R. §201.3(d) (1998).

110. 45 C.F.R. §201.6(a) (1998).


122. Information Memorandum ACYF-IM-CB-97-04, supra note 5, at 3.


135. Hollinger, supra note 91.


140. Id. at 20274.


144. Information Memorandum ACYF-IM-CB-98-03, supra note 5, at 2.


146. Information Memorandum ACYF-IM-CB-98-03, supra note 5, at 2.
APPENDIX A: MEPA-IEP STATUTES

MULTIETHNIC PLACEMENT ACT OF 1994, PUBLIC LAW 104-188,

Part E - Multiethnic Placement
Subpart 1 - Multiethnic Placement

SEC. 551 SHORT TITLE.
This subpart may be cited as the “Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994.”

SEC. 552 FINDINGS AND PURPOSE.

(a) FINDINGS — The Congress finds that —
(1) nearly 500,000 children are in foster care in the United States;
(2) tens of thousands of children in foster care are waiting for adoption;
(3) 2 years and 8 months is the median length of time that children wait to be adopted;
(4) child welfare agencies should work to eliminate racial, ethnic, and national origin discrimination and bias in adoption and foster care recruitment, selection, and placement procedures; and
(5) active, creative, and diligent efforts are needed to recruit foster and adoptive parents of every race, ethnicity, and culture in order to facilitate the placement of children in foster and adoptive homes which will best meet each child’s needs.

(b) PURPOSE—it is the purpose of this subpart to promote the best interests of children by—
(1) decreasing the length of time that children wait to be adopted;
(2) preventing discrimination in the placement of children on the basis of race, color, or national origin; and
(3) facilitating the identification and recruitment of foster and adoptive families that can meet children’s needs.

SEC. 553 MULTIETHNIC PLACEMENTS - Repealed
SEC. 554 REQUIRED RECRUITMENT EFFORTS FOR CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PROGRAMS.

Section 422(b) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 622(b)) is amended —

(1) by striking “and” at the end of paragraph (7);
(2) by striking the period at the end of paragraph (8) and inserting “; and”; and —
(3) by adding at the end the following:
“(9) provide for the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.”
SEC. 1808. REMOVAL OF BARRIERS TO INTERETHNIC ADOPTION

(a) STATE PLAN REQUIREMENTS. — Section 471(a) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 671(a)) is amended —

(1) by striking “and” at the end of paragraph (16);
(2) by striking the period at the end of paragraph (17) and inserting “; and”;
(3) by adding at the end the following:

“(18) not later than January 1, 1997, provides that neither the State nor any other entity in the State that receives funds from the Federal Government and is involved in adoption of foster care placements may—

“(A) deny to any person the opportunity to become an adoptive or a foster parent, on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the person, or of the child, involved; or

“(B) delay or deny the placement of a child for adoption or into foster care, on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent, or the child, involved.”

(b) ENFORCEMENT — Section 474 of such Act (42 U.S.C. 674) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(d)(1) If, during any quarter of a fiscal year, a State’s program operated under this part is found, as a result of a review conducted under section 1123A, or otherwise, to have violated section 471(a)(18) with respect to a person or to have failed to implement a corrective action plan within a period of time not to exceed 6 months with respect to such violation, then, notwithstanding subsection (a) of this section and any regulations promulgated under section 1123A(b)(3), the Secretary shall reduce the amount otherwise payable to the State under this part, for that fiscal year quarter and for any subsequent quarter of such fiscal year, until the State program is found, as a result of a subsequent review under section 1123A, to have implemented a corrective action plan with respect to such violation, by —

“(A) 2 percent of such otherwise payable amount, in the case of the 1st such finding for the fiscal year with respect to the State;

“(B) 3 percent of such otherwise payable amount, in the case of the 2nd such finding for the fiscal year with respect to the State; or
“(C) 5 percent of such otherwise payable amount, in the case of the 3rd or subsequent such finding for the fiscal year with respect to the State.

In imposing the penalties described in this paragraph, the Secretary shall not reduce any fiscal year payment to a State by more than 5 percent.

“(2) Any other entity which is in a State that receives funds under this part and which violates section 471(a)(18) during a fiscal year quarter with respect to any person shall remit to the Secretary all funds that were paid by the State to the entity during the quarter from such funds.

“(3)(A) Any individual who is aggrieved by a violation of section 471(a)(18) by a State or other entity may bring an action seeking relief from the State or other entity in any United States district court.

“(4) this subsection shall not be construed to affect the application of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978.”

(c) CIVIL RIGHTS —
(1) PROHIBITED CONDUCT — A person or government that is involved in adoption or foster care placement may not —
   (A) deny to any individual the opportunity to become an adoptive or a foster parent, on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the individual, or of the child, involved; or
   (B) delay or deny the placement of a child for adoption or into foster care, on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent, or the child, involved.
(2) ENFORCEMENT — Noncompliance with paragraph (1) is deemed a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
(3) NO EFFECT ON THE INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT OF 1978 — This subsection shall not be construed to affect the application of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978.

(d) CONFORMING AMENDMENT — Section 553 of the Howard M. Metzenbaum Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (42 U.S.C. 5115a) is repealed.
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Office for Civil Rights

Administration for Children and Families

Policy Guidance on the Use of Race, Color or National Origin as Considerations in Adoption and Foster Care Placements

AGENCY: Office for Civil Rights; Administration for Children and Families. HHR

ACTION: Policy Guidance

SUMMARY: The United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is publishing policy guidance on the use of race, color, or national origin as consideration in adoption and foster care placements.

DATES: This guidance is effective immediately.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Carol Williams or Dan Lewis (ACF) at 202-205-8618 or Ronald Copeland (OCR) at 202-619-0553; TDD: 1-800537-7697. Arrangements to receive the policy guidance in an alternative format may be made by contacting the named individuals.

The Improving America's Schools Act, Pub. L. No. 103-382, 108 State. 3518, contains the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (hereinafter referred to as "the Act"). The act directs the secretary to publish guidance to concerned public and private agencies and entities with respect to compliance with the Act. Section 553, 108 Stat. 4057 (to be codified at 42 U.S.C. § 5115a). This guidance carries out that direction.

The policy guidance is designed to assist agencies, which are involved in adoption or foster care placements and which receive Federal Assistance, in complying with the Act, the U.S. Constitution and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The guidance provides, consistent with those laws, that an agency or entity that receives Federal financial assistance and is involved in adoption or foster care placements may not discriminate on the basis of the race, color or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent or the child involved. The guidance further specifies that
the consideration of race, color, or national origin by agencies making placement determinations is permissible only when an adoption or foster care agency has made a narrowly tailored, individualized determination that the facts and circumstances of a particular case require the consideration of race, color, or national origin in order to advance the best interests of the child in need of placement.

In addition to prohibiting discrimination in placements on the basis of race, color or national origin, the Act requires that agencies engage in diligent recruitment efforts to ensure that all children needing placement are served in a timely and adequate manner. The guidance sets forth a number of methods that agencies should utilize in order to develop an adequate pool of families capable of promoting each child's development and case goals.

Covered agencies or entities must be in full compliance with the Act not later than six months after publication of this guidance or one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, whichever occurs first, i.e., October 21, 1995. Under limited circumstances outlined in the guidance, the Secretary of HHS may extend the compliance date for states able to demonstrate that they must amend state statutory law in order to change a particular practice that is inconsistent with the Act. The guidance explains in detail the vehicles for enforcement of the Act's prohibition against discrimination in adoption or foster care placement.

The text of the guidance appears below.

Dated: 4/20/95

Dennis Hayashi,
Director
Office for Civil Rights

Dated: 4/20/95

Mary Jo Bane,
Assistant Secretary
Administration for Children and Families
POLICY GUIDANCE
Race, Color, or National Origin As Considerations in
Adoption and Foster Care Placements

BACKGROUND

On October 20, 1994 President Clinton signed the "Improving America's Schools Act of
1994," Public Law 103-382, which includes among other provisions, Section 551, titled "The
Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994" (MEPA).

The purposes of that Act are: to decrease the length of time that children wait to be
adopted; to prevent discrimination in the placement of children on the basis of race, color, or
national origin; and to facilitate the identification and recruitment of foster and adoptive parents
who can meet children's needs.

To accomplish these goals the Act identifies specific impermissible activities by an agency or
entity (agency) which receives Federal assistance and is involved in adoption or foster care
placements. The law prohibits such agencies from "categorically denying to any person the
opportunity to become an adoptive or foster parent solely on the basis of the race, color, or
national origin of the adoptive or foster parent or parents involved." Under the Act, these
prohibitions also apply to the failure to seek termination of parental rights or otherwise make a
child legally available for adoption.

The law does permit an agency to consider, in determining whether a placement is in a
child's best interests, "the child's cultural, ethnic, and racial background and the capacity of
prospective foster or adoptive parents to meet the needs of a child of this background." If an
agency chooses to include this factor among those to be considered in making placement
decisions, it must be considered in conjunction with other factors relevant to the child's best
interests and must not be used in a manner that delays the placement decision.

The Act also seeks to ensure that agencies engage in active recruitment of potential foster
and adoptive parents who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the children needing placement.
Section 554 of the Act amends Section 422(b) and Part A of Title XI of the Social Security Act.
The amendment specifies the following requirements for child Welfare services programs: "[Each
plan for child welfare services under this part shall ...] (9) provide for the diligent recruitment of
potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the
State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed."

The Multiethnic Placement Act is to be viewed in conjunction with Title VI of the Civil
Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), which prohibits recipients of Federal financial assistance from
discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in their programs and activities and from
operating their programs in ways that have the effect of discriminating on the basis of race, color or national origin.

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have the responsibility for implementing these laws. OCR has the responsibility to enforce compliance with Title VI and its implementing regulation (45 CFR Part 80), as well as other civil rights laws. ACF administers programs of Federal financial assistance to child welfare agencies and has responsibility to enforce compliance with the laws authorizing this assistance.

Private, as well as public, adoption and foster care agencies often receive Federal financial assistance, through State Block Grant programs, programs under Title-IV-E of the Social Security Act, and discretionary grants. The assistance may reach an agency directly, or indirectly as a subrecipient of other agencies. Receipt of such assistance obligates recipients to comply with Title VI and other civil rights laws and regulations and with the requirements of the Social Security Act. Further, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 confers jurisdiction over entities any part of which receive any Federal funds.

This guidance is being issued jointly by ACF and OCR, pursuant to Section 553(a) of MEPA, to enable affected agencies to conform their laws, rules, and practices to the requirements of the Multiethnic Placement Act and Title VI.

DISCUSSION

A. Race, Culture, or Ethnicity As a Factor In Selecting Placements

1. Impermissible Activities

In enacting MEPA, Congress was concerned that many children, in particular those from minority groups, were spending lengthy periods of time in foster care awaiting placement in adoptive homes. At present, there are over twenty thousand children who are legally free for adoption but who are not in preadoptive homes. While there is not definitive study indicating how long children who are adoptive must wait until placement, the available data indicate the average wait may be as long as two years after the time that a child is legally free for adoption, and that minority children spend, on average, twice as long as non-minority children before they are placed. Both the number of children needing placements and the length of time they await placement increase substantially when those children awaiting termination of parental rights are taken into account.

\[1\]MEPA applies to decisions regarding both foster care and adoption placements. In discussions regarding the bill, members of Congress focused primarily on problems related to adoption decisions.
MEPA reflects Congress' judgement that children are harmed when placements are delayed for a period longer than is necessary to find qualified families. The legislation seeks to eliminate barriers that delay or prevent the placement of children into qualified homes. In particular, it focuses on the possibility that policies with respect to matching children with families of the same race, culture, or ethnicity may result in delaying, or even preventing, the adoption of children by qualified families. It also is designed to ensure that every effort is made to develop a large and diverse pool of potential foster and adoptive families, so that all children can be quickly placed in homes that meet their needs.

In developing this guidance, the Department recognizes that states seek to achieve a variety of goals when making foster or adoptive placements. For example, in making a foster care placement, agencies generally are concerned with finding a home that the child can easily fit into, that minimizes the number of adjustments that the child, already facing a difficult situation, must face, and that is capable of meeting any special physical, psychological, or educational needs of the child. In making adoption placements, agencies seek to find homes that will maximize the current and future well-being of the child. They evaluate whether the particular prospective parents are equipped to raise the child, both in terms of their capacity and interests to meet the individual needs of the particular child, and the capacity of the child to benefit from membership in a particular family.

Among the factors that many state statutes, regulations, or policy manuals now specify as being relevant to placement decisions are the racial, ethnic, and cultural background of the child. Some states specify an order of preference for placements, which make placement in a family of the same race, culture, or ethnicity as the child a preferred category. Some states prescribe set periods of time in which agencies must try to place a child with a family of the same race, culture, or ethnicity before the child can be placed with a family of a different race, culture, or ethnicity. Some states have a general preference for same race or ethnicity placements, although they do not specify a placement order or a search period. And some states indicate that children should be placed with families of the same race or ethnicity provided that this is consistent with the best interests of the child.

Establishing standards for making foster care and adoption placement decisions, and determining the factors that are relevant in deciding whether a particular placement meets the stands, generally are matters of state law and policy. Agencies which receive Federal assistance, however, may use race, culture, or ethnicity as factors in making placement decisions only insofar as the Constitution, MEPA, and Title VI permit.

In the context of child placement decisions, the United States Constitution and Title VI forbid decision making on the basis of race or the ethnicity unless the consideration advances a compelling governmental interest. The only compelling governmental interest, in this context, is protecting the "best interests" of the child who is to be placed. Moreover, the consideration must be narrowly tailored to advancing the child's interests and must be made as an individualized determination for each child. An adoption agency may take race into account only if it has made
an individualized determination that the facts and circumstances of the specific case require the consideration of race in order to advance the best interests of the specific child. Any placement policy that takes race or ethnicity into account is subject to strict scrutiny by the courts to determine whether it satisfies these tests. Palmore v. Sidoti, 466 U.S. 429 (1984).

A number of practices currently followed by some agencies clearly violate MEPA or Title VI. These include statutes or policies that:

- establish time periods during which only a same race/ethnicity search will occur;
- establish orders of placement preferences based on race, culture, or ethnicity;
- require caseworkers to specially justify transracial placements, or
- otherwise have the effect of delaying placements, either before or after termination of parental rights, in order to find a family of a particular race, culture, or ethnicity.

Other rules, policies, or practices that do not meet the constitutional strict scrutiny test would also be illegal.

2 Permissible Considerations

MEPA does specifically allow, but not require, agencies to consider "the child's cultural, ethnic, and racial background and the capacity of prospective foster or adoptive parents to meet the needs of a child of this background" as one of the factors in determining whether a particular placement is in a child's best interests.

When an agency chooses to use this factor, it must be on an individualized basis. Agencies that provide professional adoption services usually involve prospective parents in an educative family assessment process designed to increase the likelihood of successful placements. This process includes providing potential adoptive parents with an understanding of the special needs of adoptive children, such as how children react to separation and maltreatment and the significance of the biological family to a child. Adoption specialists also assess the strengths and weaknesses of prospective parents. They help them decide whether adoption is the right thing for them and identify the kind of child the family thinks it can parent. Approved families are profiled, as are the waiting children.

When a child becomes available for adoption, the pool of families is reviewed to see if there is an available family suitable for the specific child. Where possible, a number of families are

Among the child-related factors often considered are:

- the child's current functioning and behaviors;
- the medical, educational and developmental needs of the child;
- the child's history and past experience;

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identified and the agency conducts a case conference to determine which family is most suitable. The goal is to find the family which has the greatest ability to meet the child's psychological needs. The child is discussed with the family, and decisions are made about the placement of the specific child with the family. This process helps prevent unsuccessful placements, and promotes the interest of children in finding permanent homes.

To the extent that an agency looks at a child's race, ethnicity, or cultural background in making placement decisions, it must do so in a manner consistent with the mode of individualized decision-making that characterizes the general placement process for all children. Specifically, in recruiting placement placements for each child, the agency must focus on that child's particular needs and the capacities of the particular prospective parent(s).

In making individualized decisions, agencies may examine the capacity of the prospective parent(s) to meet the child's psychological needs that are related to the child's racial, ethnic, or cultural background. This may include assessing the attitudes of prospective parents that relate to their capacity to nurture a child of a particular background. Agencies are not prohibited from discussing with prospective adoptive and foster parents their feelings, capacities and preferences regarding caring for a child of a particular race or ethnicity, just as they discuss issues related to other characteristics, such as sex, age, or disability, nor are they prohibited from considering the expressed preference of the prospective parents as one of several factors in making placement decisions.

Agencies may consider the ability of prospective parents to cope with the particular consequences of the child's developmental history and to promote the development of a positive sense of self, which often has been compromised by maltreatment and separations. An agency also may assess a family's ability to nurture, support, and reinforce the racial, ethnic, or cultural identity of the child and to help the child cope with any forms of discrimination the child may encounter. When an agency is making a choice among a pool of generally qualified families, it may consider whether a placement with one family is more likely to benefit a child, in the ways described above or in other ways that the agency considers relevant to the child's best interest.

- the child's cultural and racial identity needs;
- the child's interests and talents;
- the child's attachments to current caretakers.

Among the factors that agencies consider in assessing a prospective parents' suitability to care for a particular child are:

- ability to form relationships and to bond with the specific child;
- the ability to help the child integrate into the family;
- the ability to accept the child's background and help the child cope with her or his past;
Under the law, application of the “best interests” tests would permit race or ethnicity to be taken into account in certain narrow situations. For example, for children who have lived in one racial, ethnic, or cultural community, the agency may assess the child’s ability to make the transition to another community. A child may have a strong sense of identity with a particular racial, ethnic, or cultural community that should not be disrupted. This is not a universally applicable consideration. For instance, it is doubtful that infants or young children will have developed such needs. Ultimately, however, the determination must be individualized. Another example would be when a prospective parent has demonstrated an inability to care for, or nurture self-esteem in, a child of a different race or ethnicity. In making such determination, an adoption agency may not rely on generalizations about the identity needs of children of a particular race or ethnicity or on generalizations about the abilities of prospective parents of one race or ethnicity to care for, or nurture the sense of identity of, a child of another race, culture, or ethnicity. Nor may an agency presume from the race or ethnicity of the prospective parents that those parents would be unable to maintain the child’s ties to another racial, ethnic, or cultural community.

B. Recruitment Efforts

As recognized in the Multiethnic Placement Act, in order to achieve timely and appropriate placement of all children, placement agencies need an adequate pool of families capable of promoting each child’s development and case goals. This requires that each agency’s recruitment process focuses on developing a pool of potential foster and adoptive parents willing and able to foster or adopt the children needing placement. The failure to conduct recruitment in a manner that seeks to provide all children with the opportunity for placement, and all qualified members of the community an opportunity to adopt, is inconsistent with the goals of MEPA and could create circumstances which would constitute a violation of Title VI.

An adequate recruitment process has a number of features. Recruitment efforts should be designed to provide to potential foster and adoptive parents throughout the community information about the characteristics and needs of the available children, the nature of the foster care and adoption processes, and the supports available to foster and adoptive families.

Both general and targeted recruiting are important. Reaching all members of the community requires use of general media- radio, television, and print. In addition, information should be disseminated to targeted communities through community organizations, such as religious institutions and neighborhood centers. The dissemination of information is strengthened when agencies develop partnerships with groups from the communities from which children come, to help identify and support potential foster and adoptive families and to conduct activities which made the waiting children more visible.
To meet MEPA's diligent efforts requirements, an agency should have a comprehensive recruitment plan that includes:

- a description of the characteristics of waiting children;
- specific strategies to reach all parts of the community;
- diverse methods of disseminating both general and child specific information;
- strategies for assuring that all prospective parents have access to the home study process, including location and hours of services that facilitate access by all members of the community;
- strategies for training staff to work with diverse cultural, racial, and economic communities;
- strategies for dealing with linguistic barriers;
- non-discriminatory fee structures; and
- procedures for a timely search for prospective parents for a waiting child, including the use of exchanges and other interagency efforts, provided that such procedures must insure that placement of a child in an appropriate household is not delayed by the search for a same race or ethnic placement.

Agencies receiving Federal funds may not use standards related to income, age, education, family structure, and size or ownership of housing, which include groups of prospective parents on the basis of race, color, or national origin, where those standards are arbitrary or unnecessary or where less exclusionary standards are available.

ENFORCEMENT

As provided in Section 553(d) (1) of MEPA, covered agencies or entities are required to comply with the Act no later than six months after publication of this guidance or one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, whichever occurs first, i.e., October 21, 1995. Pursuant to Section 553(d) (2) of MEPA, if a state demonstrates to the satisfaction of the Secretary of HHS that it is necessary to amend state statutory law in order to change a particular practice that is inconsistent with MEPA, the Secretary may extend the compliance date for the state a reasonable number of days after the close of the first state legislative session beginning after April 25, 1995. In determining whether to extend the compliance date, the Secretary will take into account the constitutional standards described in Part A of this guidance. Because states need not enforce unconstitutional provisions of their laws, statutory amendments are not an essential precondition to coming into compliance with respect to any such provisions.

HHS emphasizes voluntary compliance with the law and recognizes that covered agencies may want further guidance on their obligations under these laws. Accordingly, HHS is offering technical assistance to any covered agency seeking to better understand and more fully comply with the Multiethnic Placement Act. Organizations wishing to be provided with technical assistance on compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions of MEPA should contact Ronald Copeland of OCR at 202-619-0553. Organizations wishing to be provided with technical
assistance regarding required recruitment efforts should contact Carol Williams or Dan Lewis of the Administration on Children and Families at 202-205-8618.

The Multiethnic Placement Act provides two vehicles for enforcement of its prohibition against discrimination in adoption or foster care placement. First, pursuant to Section 553(b), any individual who is aggrieved by an action he or she believes constitutes discrimination in violation of the Act has the right to bring an action seeking equitable relief in a United States district court of appropriate jurisdiction. Second, the Act provides that noncompliance with the prohibition is deemed a violation of Title VI.

OCR has published regulations to effectuate the provisions of Title VI. 45 CFR Part 80. Any individual may file a complaint with OCR alleging that an adoption or foster care organization funded by HHS makes placement decisions in violation of the Multiethnic Placement Act and Title VI. OCR may also initiate compliance reviews to determine whether violations have occurred. If OCR determines that an adoption or foster care organization makes discriminatory placement decisions, OCR will first seek voluntary compliance with the law. Should attempts at voluntary compliance prove unsuccessful, OCR will take further steps to enforce the law.

These steps may involve referring the matter to the Department of Justice with a recommendation that appropriate court proceedings be brought. HHS may also initiate administrative proceedings leading to the termination of the offending agency's Federal financial assistance. These proceedings include the opportunity for a covered agency or entity to have a hearing on any OCR findings made against it. 45 CFR 80.8

At any point in the complaint investigation process or during the pendency of fund termination proceedings, organizations may agree to come into voluntary compliance with the law. OCR will work closely with organization to develop necessary remedial actions, such as training of staff in the requirements of Title VI and MEPA, to ensure that their efforts at compliance are successful.

When a state fails to develop an adequate recruitment plan and expedite the placement of children consistent with MEPA, the Secretary through ACF and OCR will provide technical assistance to the state in the development of the plan and where necessary resolve through corrective action major compliance issues. When these efforts fail the Secretary will make a determination of appropriate proportional penalties.
INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

TO: State Agencies Administering the Title IV-B Child and Family Services Program and the Title IV-E Foster Care and Adoption Assistance Programs

SUBJECT: GUIDANCE FOR FEDERAL LEGISLATION - The Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996 (Public Law (P.L.) 104-188), Section 1808, "Removal of Barriers to Interethnic Adoption"


PURPOSE: The purpose of this Information Memorandum is to provide State agencies and others with guidance and clarification that relates to Section 1808, "Removal of Barriers to Interethnic Adoption," of the Small Business Job Protection Act.

BACKGROUND: On August 20, 1996 President Clinton signed The Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996. Included in this new law was Section 1808 "Removal of Barriers to Interethnic Adoption." On November 14, 1996 the Children's Bureau issued an Information Memorandum (IM), ACYF-IM-CB-96-24, to State title IV-E/IV-B agencies informing them of the changes to the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994 and the amendments to title IV-E.
GUIDANCE: The Department issued a memorandum dated June 4, 1997 to the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) Regional Managers and the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Regional Administrators to provide guidance in the implementation of MEPA as amended. Attached is the memorandum.

INQUIRIES: OCR and ACF Regional Office (lists attached)

James A. Harrell
Deputy Commissioner
Administration on Children, Youth and Families

cc: OCR and ACF Regional Office

B: Section 1808, "Removal of Barriers to Interethnic Adoption," of the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-188)
C: OCR and ACF Regional Office lists
MEMORANDUM

June 4, 1997

TO : OCR Regional Managers
    and
    ACF Regional Administrators

FROM : Dennis Hayashi
       Director, Office for Civil Rights
       and
       Olivia Golden
       Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
       Administration for Children and Families


On August 20, 1996, President Clinton signed the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996. Section 1808 of the Act is entitled "Removal of Barriers to Interethnic Adoption." The section affirms and strengthens the prohibition against discrimination in adoption or foster care placements. It does this by adding to title IV-E of the Social Security Act a State Plan requirement and penalties which apply both to States and to adoption agencies. In addition, it repeals Section 553 of the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA), which has the effect of removing from the statute the language which read "Permissible Consideration -- An agency or entity [which receives federal assistance] may consider the cultural, ethnic, or racial background of the child and the capacity of the prospective foster or adoptive parents to meet the needs of a child of such background as one of a number of factors used to determine the best interests of a child."

Congress has now clarified its intent to completely eliminate delays in placement where they were in any way avoidable. Race, culture or ethnicity may not be used as the basis for any denial of placement, nor may such factors be used as a reason to delay any foster or adoptive placement.

The Interethnic Adoption provisions maintain a prohibition against delaying or denying the placement of a child for adoption or foster care on the basis of race, color, or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent, or the child involved. They further add a title IV-E State Plan requirement which also prohibits delaying and denying foster and adoptive placements on the basis of race, color or national origin.

The provisions also subject States and entities receiving Federal funding which are not in compliance with these title IV-E State plan requirements to specific graduated financial penalties (in cases in which a corrective action plan fails to cure the problem within six months). ACF staff and OCR staff are working to develop
a common protocol for determining compliance with these Interethnic Adoption provisions, as well as policy and procedures for ACF to use in applying the title IV-E requirements, developing corrective action plans and imposing penalties.

As a first step in implementing the new title IV-E State Plan requirement and the associated penalties, ACF expects to amend certain of its child welfare reviews to screen for compliance with MEPA and the Interethnic provisions. ACF will begin preliminary documentation of MEPA compliance during fiscal year 1997, while completing the work on formal review standards and protocols, which will be published as proposed regulations. States which are determined to be out of compliance will be engaged in corrective action planning immediately. The penalties imposed by the statute are graduated, and vary according to the State population and the frequency and duration of noncompliance. The Department has estimated that State penalties could range from less than $1,000 to more than $3.6 million per quarter, and penalties for continued noncompliance could rise as high as $7 million to $10 million in some States.

The Office for Civil Rights will continue to receive and investigate complaints related to MEPA, and in addition will conduct independent reviews to test compliance within the States. The Administration for Children and Families will also conduct reviews which focus on or include tests of MEPA compliance. The two HHS agencies will use the common protocol and review standards in order to assure uniform application of the statute, and equitable and effective enforcement.

The Congress has retained section 554 of MEPA, which requires that child welfare services programs provide for the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed. This is the section that requires States to include a provision for diligent recruitment in their title IV-B State Plans. The diligent recruitment requirement in no way mitigates the prohibition on denial or delay of placement based on race, color or national origin.

Set forth below is the language of the new provision. Key terms contained in MEPA that have been eliminated are shown, but struck.

A person or government that is involved in adoption or foster care placements may not--(a) [categorically] deny to any individual the opportunity to become an adoptive or a foster parent, [solely] on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the individual, or of the child involved; or (B) delay or deny the placement of a child for adoption or into foster care [or otherwise discriminate in making a placement decision, solely] on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the
adoptive or foster parent, or the child, involved.

HHS civil rights and child welfare policies already prohibit delay or denial on the basis of race, color or national origin. Those policies have been developed according to a strict scrutiny standard, and are further supported by the language of the Interethnic Placement provisions. The effect of the elimination from the statute of the words "categorically," "solely," and "or otherwise discriminate in making a placement decision, solely" is to clarify that it is not just categorical bans against transracial placements that are prohibited. Rather, these changes clarify that even where a denial is not based on a categorical consideration, which is prohibited, other actions that delay or deny placements on the basis of race, color or national origin are prohibited.

The repeal of MEPA's "permissible consideration" confirms that the appropriate standard for evaluating the use of race, color or national origin in adoption and foster care placements is one of strict scrutiny. In enacting MEPA, Congress prohibited actions that violated the rigorous constitutional strict scrutiny standard. That standard is reflected in the provision establishing that a violation of MEPA is deemed a violation of Title VI. Title VI itself incorporates the strict scrutiny standard. The Department's published MEPA guidance stressed that standard, stating unequivocally that "rules, policies, or practices that do not meet the constitutional strict scrutiny test would . . . be illegal."

Notwithstanding that guidance, after passage of MEPA, some had argued that the permissible consideration language allowed States to routinely take race into account in making placement decisions. This Department had never taken that view because it would be inconsistent with a strict scrutiny standard. Congress' repeal of the permissible consideration language removes the basis for any argument that such a routine practice would be permissible and reinforces the HHS position. Elimination of that language, however, does not affect the imposition of the strict scrutiny standard. As it had under MEPA, Congress included a general nondiscrimination provision in the new law and connected violations of that provision to violations of Title VI. The changes made in the law strengthened it by removing areas of potential misinterpretation and strengthening enforcement while continuing to emphasize the importance of removing barriers to the placement of children. In that area, as noted below, "the best interests of the child" remains the operative standard in foster care and adoptive placements.

The Department's policy in this delicate area is guided by a number of complementary statutory provisions:

1) From the perspective of civil rights law, the strict scrutiny standard under Title VI, the Interethnic Adoption provisions and the U.S. Constitution forbid decision making on
the basis of race or ethnicity except in the very limited circumstances where such consideration would be necessary to achieve a compelling governmental interest. The only compelling governmental interest related to child welfare that has been recognized by courts is protecting the "best interests" of the child who is to be placed. Additionally, the consideration must be narrowly tailored to advance the child's interests, and must be made as an individualized determination for each child.

2) From the standpoint of child welfare legislation, Public Law 96-272, the child welfare reform legislation passed in 1979, applied the "best interests of the child" standard to judicial determinations regarding removal of children into foster care as a condition of eligibility for federal financial participation under title IV-E of the Social Security Act (the Act). The best interests standard is a common provision of State laws regarding child welfare and domestic matters. Title IV-B of the Act requires States to act in the best interests of children, and, in their State Child and Family Services Plans to "provide for the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed." In addition to providing for determinations regarding the best interests of the child, State Plans under title IV-E of the Act are required to provide "that the State shall consider giving preference to an adult relative over a non-related caregiver when determining a placement for a child, provided that the relative caregiver meets all relevant State child protection standards."

Consistent with the intent of the new law and the constitutional standard, it would be inappropriate to try to use the constitutional standard as a means to routinely consider race and ethnicity as part of the placement process. Any decision to consider the use of race as a necessary element of a placement decision must be based on concerns arising out of the circumstances of the individual case. For example, it is conceivable that an older child or adolescent might express an unwillingness to be placed with a family of a particular race. In some states older children and adolescents must consent to their adoption by a particular family. In such an individual situation, an agency is not required to dismiss the child's express unwillingness to consent in evaluating placements. While the adoption worker might wish to counsel the child, the child's ideas of what would make her or him most comfortable should not be dismissed, and the worker should consider the child's willingness to accept the family as an element that is critical to the success of the adoptive placement. At the same time, the worker should not dismiss as possible placements families of a particular race who are able to meet the needs of the child.
Other circumstances in which race or ethnicity can be taken into account in a placement decision may also be encountered. However, it is not possible to delineate them all. The strict scrutiny standard exists in part because the law cannot anticipate in advance every factual situation which may present itself. However, the primary message of the strict scrutiny standard in this context is that only the most compelling reasons may serve to justify consideration of race and ethnicity as part of a placement decision. Such reasons are likely to emerge only in unique and individual circumstances. Accordingly, occasions where race or ethnicity lawfully may be considered in a placement decision will be correspondingly rare.

ACF has issued an Information Memorandum (ACYF-IM-CB-96-24, dated November 14, 1996, attached) which provided the States with basic information about the Interethnic Adoption provisions and about other legislative changes which directly affect adoptive and foster placements, including the new requirement in title IV-E that States shall consider relatives as a placement preference for children in the child welfare system.

Much has already been accomplished through our joint efforts to implement MEPA. These efforts to date have focused on the importance of four critical elements:

1) Delays in placing children who need adoptive or foster homes are not to be tolerated, nor are denials based on any prohibited or otherwise inappropriate consideration;

2) Discrimination is not to be tolerated, whether it is directed toward adults who wish to serve as foster or adoptive parents, toward children who need safe and appropriate homes, or toward communities or populations which may heretofore have been under-utilized as a resource for placing children;

3) Active, diligent, and lawful recruitment of potential foster and adoptive parents of all backgrounds is both a legal requirement and an important tool for meeting the demands of good practice; and

4) The operative standard in foster care or adoptive placements has been and continues to be "the best interests of the child." Nevertheless, as noted above, any consideration of race, color or national origin in foster or adoptive placements must be narrowly tailored to advance the child's best interests and must be made as an individualized determination of each child's needs and in light of a specific prospective adoptive or foster care parent's capacity to care for that child.

Protection of activities associated with adoption and foster care from discriminatory practices is a major priority for HHS.
Questions regarding this memorandum should be directed to Kathleen O'Brien in the Office for Civil Rights at (202) 619-0403 or Michael Ambrose in the Children’s Bureau at (202) 205-8740.
INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

TO: State and Territorial Agencies Administering Title IV-B and Title IV-E of the Social Security Act

SUBJECT: INFORMATION ON IMPLEMENTATION OF FEDERAL LEGISLATION - Questions and answers that clarify the practice and implementation of section 471(a)(18) of title IV-E of the Social Security Act.


PURPOSE: The General Accounting Office (GAO) is conducting a study on States’ implementation of the Interethnic provision of the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996 and raised several questions. The purpose of this memorandum is to inform States, Tribes and private child placement agencies of the responses to these questions.

BACKGROUND: On August 20, 1996 President Clinton signed the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996. Included in this new law was Section 1808, “Removal of Barriers to Interethnic Adoption,” which repealed section 553 of MEPA and amended title IV-E of the Act by adding a State plan requirement at section 471(a)(18). On June 5, 1997 the Children’s Bureau issued an Information Memorandum (ACFY-IM-CB-97-04) to State title IV-B/IV-E agencies and others providing them with guidance and clarification on Section 1808.
INFORMATION: The attached document, "GAO Questions and Answers," addresses a number of implementation and practice issues that States, Tribes, private child placement agencies and others may find helpful in achieving compliance with title IV-E of the Social Security Act.

INQUIRIES: Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Regional Offices (lists attached).

James A. Harrel
Deputy Commissioner
Administration on Children, Youth and Families

cc: OCR and ACF Regional Offices

Attachments: "GAO Question and Answers"
OCR and ACF Regional Office Lists
Answers to GAO QUESTIONS Regarding
the Multiethnic Placement Act, as Amended

1. May public agencies allow foster parents to specify the race, color, national origin, ethnicity or culture of children for whom they are willing to provide care?

2. May public agencies allow adoptive parents to specify the race, color, national origin, ethnicity or culture of children of whom they are willing to adopt?

A: In making decisions about placing a child, whether in an adoptive or foster setting, a public agency must be guided by considerations of what is in the best interests of the child in question. The public agency must also ensure that its decisions comply with statutory requirements. Where it comes to the attention of a public agency that particular prospective parents have attitudes that relate to their capacity to nurture a particular child, the agency may take those attitudes into consideration in determining whether a placement with that family would be in the best interests of the child in question.

The consideration of the ability of prospective parents to meet the needs of a particular child should take place in the framework of the general placement decision, in which the strengths and weaknesses of prospective parents to meet all of a child's needs are weighed so as to provide for the child's best interests, and prospective parents are provided the information they need realistically to assess their capacity to parent a particular child.

An important element of good social work practice in this process is the individualized assessment of a prospective parent's ability to serve as a foster or adoptive parent. This assessment can include an exploration of the kind of child with whom a prospective parent might comfortably form an attachment. It is appropriate in the context of good practice to allow a family to explore its limitations and consider frankly what conditions (for example, disabilities in children, the number of children in a sibling group, or children of certain ages) family members would be able or willing to accept. The function of assessing the needs and limitations of specific prospective foster or adoptive parents in order to determine the most appropriate placement considering the various individual needs of a particular child is an essential element of social work practice, and critical to an agency's ability to achieve the best interests of that child. The assessment function is also critical, especially in adoptive placements, to minimizing the risk that placements might later disrupt or dissolve.
The assessment function must not be misused as a generalized racial or ethnic screen; the assessment function cannot routinely include considerations of race or ethnicity.

The Department generally does not distinguish between foster and adoptive settings in terms of an agency's consideration of the attitudes of prospective parents. However, it is possible that a public agency may attach different significance in assessing the best interests of a child in need of short term or emergency placement.

As noted in the Department's original guidance on MEPA, agencies are not prohibited from discussing with prospective adoptive and foster parents their feelings, capacities and preferences regarding caring for a child of a particular race or ethnicity, just as they discuss other individualized issues related to the child. However, as the Department has emphasized, any consideration of race or ethnicity must be done in the context of individualized placement decisions. An agency may not rely on generalizations about the needs of children of a particular race or ethnicity, or on generalizations about the abilities of prospective parents of one race or ethnicity to care for a child of another race or ethnicity.

3. May public agencies assess the racial, national origin, ethnic and/or cultural needs of all children in foster care, either by assessing those needs directly or as part of another assessment such as an assessment of special needs?

A: Public agencies may not routinely consider race, national origin and ethnicity in making placement decisions. Any consideration of these factors must be done on an individualized basis where special circumstances indicate that their consideration is warranted. A practice of assessing all children for their needs in this area would be inconsistent with an approach of individually considering these factors only when specific circumstances indicate that it is warranted.

Assessment of the needs of children in foster care, and of any special needs they may have that could help to determine the most appropriate placement for a child, is an essential element of social work practice for children in out-of-home care, and critical to an agency's ability to achieve the best interests of the child.

Section 1808 of Public Law 104-188 by its terms addresses only race, color, or national origin, and does not address the consideration of culture in placement decisions. There are situations where cultural needs may be important in
placement decisions, such as where a child has specific language needs. However, a public agency's consideration of culture would raise Section 1808 issues if the agency used culture as a proxy for race, color or national origin. Thus, while nothing in Section 1808 directly prohibits a public agency from assessing the cultural needs of all children in foster care, Section 1808 would prohibit an agency from using routine cultural assessments in a manner that would circumvent the law's prohibition against the routine consideration of race, color or national origin.

4. **If no to question 3, may they do this for a subset of all children in foster care?**

A: As noted above, Section 1808 prohibits the routine consideration of race. It permits the consideration of race on an individualized basis where circumstances indicate that it is warranted. The question suggests that assessment of race, color, or national origin needs would not be done for all children in foster care, but for a subset. If the subset is derived by some routine means other than where specific individual circumstances suggest that it is warranted, the same considerations discussed above would apply.

5. **May public agencies assess the racial, national origin, ethnic and/or cultural capacity of all foster parents, either by assessing that capacity directly or as part of another assessment such as an assessment of strengths and weaknesses?**

A: No. Race, color and national origin may not routinely be considered in assessing the capacity of particular prospective foster parents to care for specific children. However, assessment by an agency of the capacity of particular adults to serve as foster parents for specific children is at the heart of the placement process, and essential to determining what would be in the best interests of a particular child.

6. **If yes to question 5, may public agencies decline to transracially place any child with a foster parent who has unsatisfactory cultural competency skills?**

A: Not applicable; the answer to question 5 is no.

7. **If no to question 5, may public agencies decline to transracially place a child who has documented racial, national origin, ethnic and/or cultural needs with a foster parent who has unsatisfactory cultural competency skills?**
A: As noted in the answer to questions No. 1 and 2 above, good practice requires an assessment of the capacity of potential foster parents to accommodate all the needs of a particular child. It is conceivable that in a particular instance race, color or national origin would be a necessary consideration to achieve the best interests of the child. However, any placement decision must take place in a framework that assesses the strengths and weaknesses of prospective parents to meet all of a child's needs so as to provide for the child's best interests. As noted in the answer to Questions 1 and 2, prospective parents should be offered, typically through training provided by an agency, information sufficient to confirm or broaden their understanding of what types of children they might most appropriately provide a home for.

8. May public agencies honor the request of birth parents to place their child, who was involuntarily removed, with foster parents of a specific racial, national origin, ethnic and/or cultural group?

A: No.

9. Would the response to question 8 be different if the child was voluntarily removed?

A: No.

10. If an action by a public agency will not delay or deny the placement of a child, may that agency use race to differentiate between otherwise acceptable foster placements?

A: No.

11. May public agencies assess the racial, national origin, ethnic and/or cultural capacity of all adoptive parents, either by assessing that capacity directly or as part of another assessment such as an assessment of strengths and weaknesses?

A: No. The factors discussed above concerning the routine assessment of race, color, or national origin needs of children would also apply to the routine assessment of the racial, national origin or ethnic capacity of all foster or adoptive parents.

12. If yes to question 11, may public agencies decline to transracially place any child with an adoptive parent who has unsatisfactory cultural competency skills?
A: As noted in the answer to questions No. 1 and 2 above, good practice requires an assessment of the capacity of potential foster parents to accommodate all the needs of a particular child. It is conceivable that in a particular instance race, color or national origin would be a necessary consideration to achieve the best interests of the child. However, any placement decision must take place in a framework that assesses the strengths and weaknesses of prospective parents to meet all of a child's needs so as to provide for the child's best interests.

13. If no to question 11, may public agencies decline to transracially place a child who has documented racial, national origin, ethnic and/or cultural needs with an adoptive parent who has unsatisfactory cultural competency skills?

A: As noted in the answer to questions No. 1 and 2 above, good practice requires an assessment of the capacity of potential foster parents to accommodate all the needs of a particular child. It is conceivable that in a particular instance race, color or national origin would be a necessary consideration to achieve the best interests of the child. However, any placement decision must take place in a framework that assesses the strengths and weaknesses of prospective parents to meet all of a child's needs so as to provide for the child's best interests. As noted in the answer to Questions 1 and 2, prospective parents should be offered, typically through training provided by an agency, information sufficient to confirm or broaden their understanding of what types of children they might most appropriately provide a home for.

14. If no to question 11, how can public agencies assure themselves that they have identified an appropriate placement for a child for whom racial, national origin, ethnic and/or cultural needs have been documented?

A: Adoption agencies must consider all factors that may contribute to a good placement decision for a child, and that may affect whether a particular placement is in the best interests of the child. Such agencies may assure themselves of the fitness of their work in a number of ways, including case review conferences with supervisors, peer reviews, judicial oversight, and quality control measures employed by State agencies and licensing authorities. In some instances it is conceivable that, for a particular child, race, color or national origin would be such a factor. Permanency being the sine qua non of adoptive placements, monitoring the rates of disruption or dissolution of adoptions would also be appropriate. Where
it has been established that considerations of race, color
or national origin are necessary to achieve the best
interests of a child, such factor(s) should be included in
the agency's decision-making, and would appropriately be
included in reviews and quality control measures such as
those described above.

15. May public agencies honor the request of birth parents to
place their child, who was involuntarily removed, with
adoptive parents of a specific racial, ethnic and/or
cultural group?

A: No.

16. Would the response to question 15 be different if the child
was voluntarily removed?

A: No.

17. If an action by a public agency will not delay or deny the
placement of a child, may that agency use race to
differentiate between otherwise acceptable adoptive parents?

A: No.

18. May a home finding agency that contracts with a public
agency, but that does not place children, recommend only
homes that match the race of the foster or adoptive parent
to that of a child in need of placement?

A: No. A public agency may contract with a home finding agency
to assist with overall recruitment efforts. Some home
finding agencies may be used because of their special
knowledge and/or understanding of a specific community and
may even be included in a public agency's targeted
recruitment efforts. Targeted recruitment cannot be the
only vehicle used by a State to identify families for
children in care, or any subset of children in care, e.g.,
older or minority children. Additionally, a home finding
agency must consider and include any interested person who
responds to its recruitment efforts.

19. May a home finding agency that contracts with a public
agency, but that does not place children, dissuade or
otherwise counsel a potential foster or adoptive parent who
has unsatisfactory cultural competency skills to withdraw an
application or not pursue foster parenting or adoption?

A: No. No adoptive or foster placement may be denied or
delayed based on the race of the prospective foster or
adoptive parent or based on the race of the child.
Dissuading or otherwise counseling a potential foster or adoptive parent to withdraw an application or not pursue foster parenting or adoption strictly on the basis of race, color or national origin would be a prohibited delay or denial.

The term "cultural competency," as we understand it, is not one that would fit in a discussion of adoption and foster placement. However, agencies should, as a matter of good social work practice, examine all the factors that may bear on determining whether a particular placement is in the best interests of a particular child. That may in rare instances involve consideration of the abilities of prospective parents of one race or ethnicity to care for a child of another race or ethnicity.

20. May a home finding agency that contracts with a public agency, but that does not place children, assess the racial, national-origin, ethnic and/or cultural capacity of all adoptive parents, either by assessing that capacity directly or as part of another assessment such as an assessment of strengths and weaknesses?

A: No. There should be no routine consideration of race, color or national origin in any part of the adoption process. Any assessment of an individual's capacity to be a good parent for any child should be made on an individualized basis by the child's caseworker and not by a home finding agency. Placement decisions should be guided by the child's best interest. That requires an individualized assessment of the child's total needs and an assessment of a potential adoptive parent's ability to meet the child's needs.

21. If no to question 20, may they do this for a subset of adoptive parents, such as white parents?

A: No.

22. If a black child is placed with a couple, one of whom is white and one of whom is black, is this placement classified as inracial or transracial?

23. If a biracial black/white child is placed with a white couple, is this placement classified as inracial or transracial?

24. Would the response to question 22 be different if the couple were black?

A: The statute applies to considerations of race, color or national origin in placements for adoption and foster care.
The Department's Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) collects data on the race of the child and the race of adoptive and foster parents, as required by regulation at 45 CFR 1355, Appendix A. AFCARS uses racial categories defined by the United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. The Department of Commerce does not include "biracial" among its race categories; therefore no child would be so classified for AFCARS purposes. The Department of Health and Human Services does not classify placements as being "inracial" or "transracial."

25. How does HHS define "culture" in the context of MEPA guidance?

A: HHS does not define culture. Section 1808 addresses only race, color, or national origin, and does not directly address the consideration of culture in placement decisions. A public agency is not prohibited from the nondiscriminatory consideration of culture in making placement decisions. However, a public agency's consideration of culture must comply with Section 1808 in that it may not use culture as a replacement for the prohibited consideration of race, color or national origin.

26. Provide examples of what is meant by delay and denial of placement in foster care, excluding situations involving adoption.

A: Following are some examples of delay or denial in foster care placements:

1. A white newborn baby's foster placement is delayed because the social worker is unable to find a white foster home; the infant is kept in the hospital longer than would otherwise be necessary and is ultimately placed in a group home rather than being placed in a foster home with a minority family.

2. A minority relative with guardianship over four black children expressly requests that the children be allowed to remain in the care of a white neighbor in whose care the children are left. The state agency denies the white neighbor a restricted foster care license which will enable her to care for the children. The agency's license denial is based on its decision that the best interests of the children require a same-race placement, which will delay the permanent foster care placement. There was no individualized assessment or evaluation indicating that a same-race placement is actually in the best interests of the children.
3. Six minority children require foster placement, preferably in a family foster home. Only one minority foster home is available; it is only licensed to care for two children. The children remain in emergency shelter until the agency can recertify and license the home to care for the six children. The children remain in an emergency shelter even though a white foster home with capacity and a license to care for six children is available.

4. Different standards may be applied in licensing white versus minority households resulting in delay or denial of the opportunity to be foster parents.

5. Foster parent applicants are discouraged from applying because they are informed that waiting children are of a different race.

6. There are placement delays and denials when states or agencies expend time seeking to honor the requests of biological parents that foster parents be of the same race as the child.
APPENDIX E: NATIONAL AND REGIONAL DDHS OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

OCR Headquarters and Regional Addresses:

- Send the complaint to the appropriate OCR Regional office or OCR headquarters.
- Address inquiries to the OCR Regional Manager.
- Contact the OCR regional office for your State or Territory, or the headquarters office for further information.

Headquarters

David F. Garrison, Acting Director
Office for Civil Rights
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Room 509F HHH Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20201

DHHS Regional Offices for Civil Rights

| Region I - Boston (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont) |
| Caroline Chang, Regional Manager |
| Office for Civil Rights |
| U.S. Department of Health and Human Services |
| Government Center |
| J.F. Kennedy Federal Building - Room 1875 |
| Boston, Massachusetts 02203 |
| Voice phone (617) 565-1340 |
| FAX (617) 565-3809 |
| TDD (617) 565-1343 |
| Region II - New York (New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands) |
| Michael Carter, Acting Regional Manager |
| Office for Civil Rights |
| U.S. Department of Health and Human Services |
| Jacob Javits Federal Building |
| 26 Federal Plaza - Suite 3312 |
| New York New York, 10278 |

| Region VI - Dallas (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas) |
| Ralph Rouse, Regional Manager |
| Office for Civil Rights |
| U.S. Department of Health and Human Services |
| 1301 Young Street, Suite 1169 |
| Dallas, TX 75202 |
| Voice Phone (214) 767-4056 |
| FAX (214) 767-0432 |
| TDD (214) 767-8940 |

<p>| Region VII - Kansas City (Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska) |
| John Halverson, Regional Manager |
| Office for Civil Rights |
| U.S. Department of Health and Human Services |
| 601 East 12th Street - Room 248 |
| Kansas City, Missouri 64106 |
| Voice Phone (816) 426-7278 |</p>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region III - Philadelphia (Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paul Cushing, Regional Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office for Civil Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3335 Market Street - Room 6300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia, PA 19101</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voice Phone (215)596-1262</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAX (215)596-4704</td>
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<td>TDD (215)596-5195</td>
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<th>Region IV - Atlanta (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee)</th>
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<td>Marie Chretien, Regional Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office for Civil Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Atlanta Federal Center, Suite 3B70, 61 Forsyth Street, S.W.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Atlanta, GA 30303-8909</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voice Phone (404)562-7886</td>
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<td>FAX (404)562-7881</td>
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<td>TDD (404)331-2867</td>
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<td>Charlotte Irons, Regional Manager</td>
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<td>Office for Civil Rights</td>
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<td>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>105 West Adams - 16 Floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago, Illinois 60603</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voice Phone (312)886-2359</td>
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<td>FAX (312)886-1807</td>
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<td>TDD (312)353-5693</td>
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<td>Ira Pollack, Acting Regional Manager</td>
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<td>Office for Civil Rights</td>
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<td>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>50 United Nations Plaza - Room 322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco, CA 94102</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voice Phone (415)437-8310</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAX (415)437-8329</td>
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<th>Region X - Seattle (Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington)</th>
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<td>Carmen P. Rockwell, Regional Manager</td>
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<td>Office for Civil Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>Region X</td>
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<tr>
<td>2201 Sixth Avenue - Suite 900</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seattle, Washington 98121-1831</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voice Phone (206)615-2287</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAX (206)615-2297</td>
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<td>TDD (206)615-2296</td>
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APPENDIX F: DHHS/ACF REGIONAL OFFICES

ACF Regional HUB Directors and Administrators

Region I
Hugh Galligan
Regional Administrator
Administration for Children and Families
Department of Health and Human Services
JFK Federal Building, Room 2000
Boston, MA 02203-0001
Phone: 617-565-1020
Fax: 617-565-2493

Region II
Mary Ann Higgins
Regional Administrator
Administration for Children and Families
Department of Health and Human Services
26 Federal Plaza, Room 4049
New York, NY 10278-0022
Phone: 212-264-2890
Fax: 212-264-4881

Region III
David Leht
Regional Administrator
Administration for Children and Families
Department of Health and Human Services
3535 Market Street, Room 5450
Philadelphia, PA 19104-3309
Phone: 215-596-0352
Fax: 215-596-5028

Region IV
Steven Golightly
Regional HUB Director
Administration for Children and Families
Department of Health and Human Services
101 Marietta Tower, Suite 821
Atlanta, GA 30323-0001
Phone: 404-588-5700
Fax: 404-331-1776

Region V
Linda J. Carson
Regional HUB Director
Administration for Children and Families
Department of Health and Human Services
105 West Adams Street - 20th Floor
Chicago, IL 60603-6201
Phone: 312-353-4237
Fax: 312-353-2204
Region VI
Leon McCowan
Regional HUB Director
Administration for Children and Families
Department of Health and Human Services
1301 Young Street, Room 914
Dallas, TX  75202-4309
Phone:  214-767-9648
Fax:    214-767-3743

Region VII
Linda Lewis
Regional Administrator
Administration for Children and Families
Department of Health and Human Services
601 E. 12th Street, Room 276
Kansas City, MO  64106-2898
Phone:  816-426-3981, ext. 104
Fax:    816-426-2888

Region VIII
Beverly Turnbo
Regional Administrator
Administration for Children and Families
Department of Health and Human Services
1961 Stout Street, Room 924
Denver, CO  80294-1185
Phone:  303-844-2622, ext. 301
Fax:    303-844-3642

Region IX
Sharon Fujii
Regional Administrator
Administration for Children and Families
Department of Health and Human Services
50 United Nations Plaza, Room 450
San Francisco, CA  94102-4988
Phone:  415-437-8400
Fax:    415-437-8444

Region X
Steve Henigson
Regional Administrator
Administration for Children and Families
Department of Health and Human Services
2201 Sixth Avenue, Room 610-M/S RX-70
Seattle, WA  98121-1832
Phone:  206-615-2547, ext. 2249
Fax:    206-615-2575
APPENDIX G: CHILD WELFARE RESOURCE CENTERS

ARCH National Resource Center for Respite and Crisis Care Services
The Chapel Hill Training-Outreach Project
800 Eastowne Drive, Suite 105
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
Tel: (800) 473-1727 or (919) 490-5577
Fax: (919) 490-4905
E-mail: HN4735@connectinc.com
URL: http://chantop.com
Newsletter: ARCH

National Abandoned Infants Assistance Resource Center
Family Welfare Research Group
University of California - Berkeley
School of Social Welfare
150 Addison Street, Suite 104
Berkeley, CA 94704-1182
Tel: (510) 643-8390 Fax: (510) 643-7019
Newsletter: The Source

National Resource Center for Child Maltreatment
1349 Peachtree Street, NE, Suite 900
Atlanta, GA 30309-2956
Tel: (404) 881-0707 Fax: (404) 876-7949
E-mail: nrccmcwrl@aol.com

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement
Edmund S. Muskie Institute
University of Southern Maine
One Post Office Square
P.O. Box 15010
Portland, ME 04112
Tel: (207) 780-5810 Fax: (207) 780-5817

National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice
University of Iowa
School of Social Work
112 North Hall
Iowa City, IA 52242-1223
Tel: (319) 335-2200 Fax: (319) 335-2204
Newsletter: The Prevention Report

National Resource Center on Legal and Court Issues
ABA Center on Children and the Law
740 15th Street, NW, 9th Floor
Washington, DC 20005-1009
Tel: (202) 662-1720 Fax: (202) 662-1755
E-mail: ctrchildlaw@abanet.org
URL: http://www.abanet.org/child
Newsletter: ABA Child Law Practice
Children's Legal Rights Journal

National Resource Center for Permanency Planning
Hunter College School of Social Work
129 East 79th Street, Room 801
New York, NY 10021
Tel: (212) 452-7053 Fax: (212) 452-7051

National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption
Spaulding for Children
16250 Northland Drive, Suite 120
Southfield, MI 48075
Tel: (248) 443-7080 Fax: (248) 443-7099
E-mail: HN4778@handsnet.org
Newsletter: The Roundtable

National Resource Center for Youth Services
The University of Oklahoma
College of Continuing Education
202 W. 8th Street
Tulsa, OK 47119-1419
URL: http://www.nrscs.cu.edu
Tel: (918) 585-2986 Fax: (918) 592-1841
Newsletter: Reflections on Youth

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information
P.O. Box 1182
Washington, D.C. 20013-1182
Tel: (800) FYI-3366 or (703) 385-7565
Fax: (703)385-3206
E-mail: nccanch@calib.com
URL: http://www.calib.com/nccanch

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