

Attachment & Trauma Network, Inc.

P.O. Box 164 Jefferson, MD 21755 Phone 240-357-7369 Fax 301-473-9399

For Immediate Release

Attachment & Trauma Network Supports the National Keeping the Promise Initiative for Post-Adoptive Services

May 10, 2011. Parents and Board Members of the Attachment & Trauma Network, Inc. (ATN) will participate in the briefing on Capitol Hill designed to “reshape” post-adoptive services in the US. ATN families across the country have volunteered to be local media contacts to share their adoption stories. Below are ATN’s policy recommendations:

To All Concerned About Children:

The Attachment & Trauma Network, Inc. (ATN) applauds the work of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute and Voice for Adoption on behalf of adoptive families nationwide. Every day ATN sees the critical need for more comprehensive post-adoptive services. As the organization providing support, education and advocacy for traumatized children and their families throughout the US, we know that a significant number of children have been traumatized and may suffer lasting emotional and relational challenges, not because of the adoption itself, but due to the difficult circumstances that made adoption necessary in the first place.

Hundreds of families contact ATN for support and assistance each year. Many times we have little to offer them since there are many areas throughout the country where no attachment-focused, trauma-sensitive resources exist. Furthermore, depending on the type of adoption (from foster care, private domestic or international) the family may find local services they cannot access. We try to help families whose challenges have been compounded by no pre-adoptive parent training; lack of information about the child’s history; lack of professionals who can correctly identify the child’s challenges; lack of understanding by family and friends; non-responsive school districts or no appropriate special education services; no available, appropriate respite; inadequate insurance coverage; and the heart-breaking choice of relinquishing custody or dissolving the adoption in order to obtain services. Many families face financial collapse, such as bankruptcy or homelessness.

We also see first-hand that families who are both formally and informally supported and able to access appropriate post-adoptive and mental health services gain the tools and the hope to become major healing agents for their traumatized children. ATN agrees with the Keeping the Promise policy report that “Adoption is a Lifelong Process,” and our families are dedicated to their children for life. But the dearth of adoption-competent mental health resources, coupled with systematic barriers to accessing what resources are available, bring insurmountable obstacles to the most vulnerable children and families.

Two of the most heart-breaking situations families are faced with are: forced relinquishments and unequal access to services. Therefore, ATN strongly recommends these policy initiatives:

- 1. Eliminating all state policies that force parents to give up custody in order to get services.** The Bazelon Center of Mental Health Law reports that 21 states have some type of relinquishment statute, requiring parents to relinquish custody to the state to access state-funded mental health services. Faced with the hard choice of receiving no services or relinquishing parental rights,

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thousands of families each year lose their children to state Child Protective Services. For adoptive children who have already been through at least one relinquishment and placement into their adoptive home, this practice is especially damaging, exacerbating their early trauma and attachment challenges. Further, in some of these states, the relinquishment is legally considered abandonment and the parents are criminally prosecuted, resulting in fines, jail time, child support payments and loss of professional licensures. A national policy prohibiting this practice and allowing families to access state-funded mental health facilities and resources is desperately needed.

2. *Providing equal access to post-adoptive services regardless of the type of adoptive family – domestic/foster care, domestic/private or international.* At this point, only a handful of states allow children adopted internationally or through private domestic adoptions to access the support groups, respite programs or counseling and therapies funded through state child welfare agencies. Most reserve these services only for children adopted from foster care. Although there were provisions within the Hague Convention for “promoting the development of adoption counseling and post-adoption services in their States” families adopting internationally are still less likely to have access to post-adoptive services than those adopting through foster care. While the number of adoption agencies and non-profit private child welfare organizations providing post-adoptive services has increased, the demand for trauma-sensitive, attachment-focused services continues to outpace the supply. Typically, post-adoptive services provided by private adoption agencies are provided on a fee basis, which presents additional barriers to families whose children are struggling with severe issues often not covered by the family’s mental health insurance.

It is worth noting that children in need of interventions who do not receive appropriate and timely services will often end up in government-funded systems such as foster care, mental health or juvenile justice, costing society so much more than early interventions ever would. As an organization that hears from families in crisis every day, we know the best possible scenario for a traumatized child is to be placed into a permanent adoptive home that is prepared for the child’s needs. Families must have access to therapies, respite and support services. Proactive, comprehensive services provided immediately when the family is formed lead to stable families and healthier outcomes for our vulnerable children. At ATN, this is what we mean by “Hope and Healing for Traumatized Children and Their Families.”

The Attachment & Trauma Network is a national, grass-roots organization of parents and professionals who provide support, education and advocacy for those raising traumatized children and children with attachment difficulties. Established in 1995, ATN provides peer-to-peer support groups, a crisis phone line, bi-monthly newsletter, webinars and other services to hundreds of adoptive and foster families annually. ATN families are willing to share their stories to help others understand the incredible need for trauma-sensitive, attachment-focused post-adoptive services.

For more information, contact:

Julie Beem
Executive Director
Attachment & Trauma Network, Inc.
678-520-5393
julieb@attachtrauma.org

Hope & Healing for Traumatized Children and Their Families
www.attachmenttraumanetwork