

HOUSE No. 1562

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Kimberly N. Ferguson

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act relative to the re-homing of children.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:	DATE ADDED:
<i>Kimberly N. Ferguson</i>	<i>1st Worcester</i>	<i>1/28/2021</i>
<i>Hannah Kane</i>	<i>11th Worcester</i>	<i>2/25/2021</i>
<i>F. Jay Barrows</i>	<i>1st Bristol</i>	<i>2/25/2021</i>
<i>Susannah M. Whipps</i>	<i>2nd Franklin</i>	<i>2/25/2021</i>
<i>Shawn Dooley</i>	<i>9th Norfolk</i>	<i>2/25/2021</i>
<i>Michael J. Soter</i>	<i>8th Worcester</i>	<i>2/25/2021</i>
<i>Mathew J. Muratore</i>	<i>1st Plymouth</i>	<i>2/26/2021</i>
<i>Jonathan D. Zlotnik</i>	<i>2nd Worcester</i>	<i>2/26/2021</i>
<i>Tricia Farley-Bouvier</i>	<i>3rd Berkshire</i>	<i>2/26/2021</i>

HOUSE No. 1562

By Mrs. Ferguson of Holden, a petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 1562) of Kimberly N. Ferguson and others relative to the re-homing so-called of certain adopted children. The Judiciary.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Second General Court
(2021-2022)**

An Act relative to the re-homing of children.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 1A of chapter 15D of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2016
2 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting after the definition of “department” the
3 following 2 definitions:-

4 “Disruption”, an adoption process that ends after the child is placed in an adoptive home
5 and before the adoption is legally finalized.

6 “Dissolution”, an adoption in which the legal relationship between the adoptive parent
7 and adoptive child is severed, either voluntarily or involuntarily, after the adoption is legally
8 finalized.

9 SECTION 2. Section 6 of said chapter 15D, as so appearing, is hereby amended by
10 striking out, in lines 44 and 45, the words “in a newspaper distributed in the commonwealth”.

11 SECTION 3. Said section 6 of said chapter 15D, as so appearing, is hereby further
12 amended by striking out, in lines 45 and 46, the words “on a radio or television station”.

13 SECTION 4. Said section 6 of said chapter 15D, as so appearing, is hereby further
14 amended by striking out, in line 47, the figure “16” and inserting in place thereof the following
15 figure:- 18.

16 SECTION 5. Said section 6 of said chapter 15D, as so appearing, is hereby amended by
17 inserting after subsection (c) the following 2 subsections:-

18 (c¹/₄) No person or entity, unless acting as a duly authorized agent or employee of the
19 department of children and families or a licensed placement agency, shall accept payment in the
20 form of money or other consideration in return for placing a child for adoption or for any other
21 temporary placement or permanent physical placement. No person or entity shall knowingly give
22 payment in the form of money or other consideration to another person or entity, other than a
23 duly authorized agent or employee of the department of children and families or a licensed
24 placement agency, for placing a child for adoption or for any other temporary placement or
25 permanent physical placement. Nothing in this subsection shall prohibit a duly authorized agent
26 or employee of the department of children and families or a licensed placement agency from
27 giving subsidies or other benefits for the care and maintenance of such children. For the purposes
28 of this section, the term “temporary placement” shall not include when the parents or custodians
29 of a child place that child for a designated short-term period with a specified intent for return of
30 the child; provided, however, that “short-term period” shall include, but not be limited to, short-
31 term placements due to parental employment, vacations, school-sponsored functions or activities,
32 incarceration, military service, medical treatment or the incapacity of a parent.

33 (c½) No person or entity, unless acting as a duly authorized agent or employee of the
34 department of children and families or a licensed placement agency, shall solicit payment in the
35 form of money or other consideration in return for placing a child for adoption or for any other
36 temporary placement or permanent physical placement. No person or entity shall knowingly
37 offer payment in the form of money or other consideration to another person or entity, other than
38 a duly authorized agent or employee of the department of children and families or a licensed
39 placement agency, for placing a child for adoption or for any other temporary placement or
40 permanent physical placement. Nothing in this subsection shall prohibit a duly authorized agent
41 or employee of the department of children and families or a licensed placement agency from
42 offering subsidies or other benefits for the care and maintenance of such children.

43 SECTION 6. Said section 6 of said chapter 15D, as so appearing, is hereby further
44 amended by adding the following 5 subsections:-

45 (f) A placement agency shall provide prospective adoptive parents with all relevant
46 information that the agency holds about a child to enable the prospective adoptive parent to
47 knowledgeably determine whether to accept the child for adoption. Relevant information shall
48 include, but not be limited to, all mental, emotional, behavioral or physical health issues of the
49 child and the child's birth family, any prior placement history and any other information which
50 would be relevant to the growth and development of the child. The department shall issue
51 guidelines for placement agencies on the release of relevant and accurate information relative to
52 a child's mental, emotional and behavioral health.

53 (g) A placement agency shall make available, either directly or by referral, post-adoption
54 services to adoptive parents and adopted children to avoid disruption or dissolution of the
55 adoption. The services shall include, but not be limited to:

56 (i) factual information pertaining to adoption services provided at the placement agency;

57 (ii) counseling concerning adoption related issues such as identity, roles and
58 relationships;

59 (iii) counseling and other services which support placements;

60 (iv) assistance in joining or developing support groups;

61 (v) information regarding health care coverage for the child through the state; and

62 (vi) general information regarding current adoption issues, practices and laws.

63 If the services are being offered by referral, the placement agency shall provide a list of
64 agencies that provide such services to adoptive parents.

65 (h) The adoptive parent shall contact the placement agency that facilitated the adoption if
66 there is a disruption or dissolution of an adoption or any potential disruption or dissolution of an
67 adoption or in the event that the adoptive parent can no longer adequately care for the child.

68 Upon notification by the adoptive parent, the placement agency that facilitated the adoption shall
69 contact the department of children and families. If the placement agency that facilitated the
70 adoption is no longer in operation or not reachable, the adoptive parent shall contact the
71 department of children and families.

72 (i) The department of early education and care shall create a uniform orientation
73 curriculum for adoptive parent applicants. All placement agencies shall provide this orientation
74 for adoptive parent applicants and all adoptive parent applicants shall participate. The curriculum
75 shall include a minimum number of hours to be completed as part of the orientation and shall
76 include, at a minimum, specific information for adoptive parent applicants seeking to adopt
77 international children and notice of section 11A of chapter 210.

78 SECTION 7. Said chapter 15D is hereby further amended by striking out section 15, as
79 so appearing, and inserting in place thereof the following section:-

80 Section 15. (a) As used in this section, the term “published” shall include, but not be
81 limited to, any computerized communication system including electronic mail, internet site,
82 internet profile or any similar medium of communication provided via the internet.

83 (b) Any person or entity, unless acting as a duly authorized agent or employee of the
84 department of children and families or a licensed placement agency, who causes to be published,
85 disseminated or broadcast in the commonwealth, an advertisement or notice for the placement or
86 reception of a child under 18 years of age, or in any way offers to place or locate children offered
87 or wanted for adoption or any other permanent physical placement, or who holds themselves out
88 in any way as being able to place or locate children for adoption or any other permanent physical
89 placement in violation of subsections (c) or (e) of section 6 shall be punished by a fine of not less
90 than \$5,000 nor more than \$25,000.

91 (c) Any person or entity, unless acting as a duly authorized agent or employee of the
92 department of children and families or a licensed placement agency, who violates subsection
93 (c/4) of section 6 by accepting payment in the form of money or other consideration in return for

94 placing a child for adoption or for any other temporary placement or permanent physical
95 placement shall be punished by a fine of not less than \$5,000 nor more than \$30,000, or by
96 imprisonment in a jail or a house of correction for not more than 2½ years or in a state prison for
97 not more than 20 years, or by both such fine and imprisonment. Any person or entity who
98 violates said subsection (c¼) of said section 6 by knowingly giving payment in the form of
99 money or other consideration to another person or entity, other than a duly authorized agent or
100 employee of the department of children and families or a licensed placement agency, for placing
101 a child for adoption or for any other temporary placement or permanent physical placement shall
102 be punished by a fine of not less than \$5,000 nor more than \$30,000, or by imprisonment in a jail
103 or a house of correction for not more than 2½ years or in a state prison for not more than 20
104 years, or by both such fine and imprisonment. For the purposes of this section, the term
105 “temporary placement” shall not include when the parents or custodians of a child place that
106 child for a designated short-term period with a specified intent for return of the child; provided,
107 however, that “short-term period” shall include, but not be limited to, short-term placements due
108 to parental employment, vacations, school-sponsored functions or activities, incarceration,
109 military service, medical treatment or the incapacity of a parent.

110 (d) Any person or entity, unless acting as a duly authorized agent or employee of the
111 department of children and families or a licensed placement agency, who violates subsection
112 (c½) of section 6 by soliciting payment in the form of money or other consideration for placing a
113 child for adoption or for any other temporary placement or permanent physical placement shall
114 be punished by a fine of not less than \$5,000 nor more than \$30,000, or by imprisonment in a jail
115 or a house of correction for not more than 2½ years or in a state prison for not more than 20
116 years, or by both such fine and imprisonment. Any person or entity who violates said subsection

117 (c½) of said section 6 by knowingly offering payment in the form of money or other
118 consideration to another person or entity, other than a duly authorized agent or employee of the
119 department of children and families or a licensed placement agency, for placing a child for
120 adoption or for any other temporary placement or permanent physical placement shall be
121 punished by a fine of not less than \$5,000 nor more than \$30,000, or by imprisonment in a jail or
122 a house of correction for not more than 2½ years or in a state prison for not more than 20 years,
123 or by both such fine and imprisonment.

124 (e) Any person who violates subsection (e) of section 6 by causing to be published,
125 disseminated or broadcast in the commonwealth, an advertisement or notice for the placement or
126 reception of a child under 18 years of age for family child care, large family child care, child care
127 center care, school-aged child care program, group residential care or temporary shelter care
128 shall be punished for each violation by a fine of up to \$5,000 or by imprisonment in a jail or a
129 house of correction for not more than 2 ½ years, or by both such fine and imprisonment.

130 (f) Any person who violates subsections (a), (b) or (d) of section 6 shall be punished for
131 each violation by a fine of up to \$5,000 or by imprisonment in a jail or a house of correction for
132 not more than 2 ½ years, or by both such fine and imprisonment.

133 (g) Upon petition of the department, the superior court shall have jurisdiction to enjoin
134 any violation of section 6 or to take other action that equity and justice may require.

135 SECTION 8. The third paragraph of section 6 of chapter 210 of the General Laws, as so
136 appearing, is hereby amended by adding the following sentence at the end thereof:- No decree of
137 adoption shall be entered by the court until the petitioner for adoption has executed an
138 acknowledgement of the criminal penalties available under section 11A for the unauthorized

139 adoption or placement of a child; provided, however, that failure of the court to provide for the
140 execution of such acknowledgement shall not be grounds for per se invalidation of the adoption.

141 SECTION 9. Said chapter 210 of the General Laws is hereby further amended by striking
142 out section 11A, as so appearing, and inserting in place thereof the following section:-

143 Section 11A. (a) As used in this section, the term “published” shall include, but not be
144 limited to, any computerized communication system including electronic mail, internet site,
145 internet profile or any similar medium of communication provided via the internet.

146 (b) Any person or entity, unless acting as a duly authorized agent or employee of the
147 department of children and families or a placement agency licensed under chapter 15D, who
148 causes to be published in the commonwealth, an advertisement or notice of children offered or
149 wanted for adoption or any other permanent physical placement, or in any way offers to place or
150 locate children offered or wanted for adoption or any other permanent physical placement, or
151 who holds themselves out in any way as being able to place or locate children for adoption or
152 any other permanent physical placement or who holds themselves out in any way as being able to
153 approve a family for adoption or the placement of a child shall be punished by a fine of not less
154 than \$5,000 nor more than \$25,000. Any such person who shall accept payment in the form of
155 money or other consideration in return for placing a child for adoption or any other permanent
156 physical placement shall be punished by a fine of not less than five thousand and no more than
157 thirty thousand dollars, or by imprisonment in jail or house of correction for not more than two
158 and one-half years or in the state prison for not more than five years, or both.

159 (c) No person unrelated to a child by blood or marriage, and no organization other than a
160 licensed or approved placement agency, shall receive a child for adoption or any other permanent

161 physical placement following an advertisement in violation of subsection (b). Whoever receives
162 a child to be adopted or placed in any other permanent physical placement in violation of this
163 section, shall be punished by a fine of not less than \$10,000 and no more than \$40,000, or by
164 imprisonment in jail or house of correction for not more than two and one-half years or in the
165 state prison for not more than five years, or both.

166 (d) A parent or legal guardian who causes a child to be adopted or placed in any other
167 permanent physical placement, in violation of this section, shall be punished by imprisonment in
168 the state prison for not less than 5 years nor more than 20 years and by a fine of not more than
169 \$25,000. Such sentence shall not be reduced to less than 5 years, or suspended, nor shall any
170 person convicted under this section be eligible for probation, parole, work release or furlough or
171 receive any deduction from his sentence for good conduct until he has served 5 years of such
172 sentence.

173 SECTION 10. Notwithstanding any general provisions or special laws to the contrary, (a)
174 There shall be a task force to identify likely channels for abuse, including legal vehicles, in the
175 re-homing of children. The task force shall consist of the following members or their designees:
176 the chief justice of the probate and family court department, who shall serve as chair; the
177 commissioner of early education and care; the commissioner of children and families; the chief
178 counsel of the committee for public counsel services; the attorney general; the child advocate;
179 the chair of the Children's League of Massachusetts, Inc.; and 2 appointees of the governor, who
180 shall have expertise in child welfare.

181 (b) The task force shall submit a report on likely channels for abuse in the re-homing of
182 children and any recommendations for responding to such potential or actual abuse including,

183 but not limited to, developing a system for mandated reporting. The task force shall submit its
184 report, together with any recommended legislation, to the clerks of the house and senate, the
185 chairs of the joint committee on children, families and persons with disabilities and the house
186 and senate committees on ways and means not later than June 30, 2018.

187 SECTION 11. Notwithstanding any general provisions or special laws to the contrary, (a)
188 There shall be a commission to examine the process of adoptions facilitated by the
189 commonwealth. The commission shall examine the monetary and temporal cost of adoption,
190 state regulations and procedures, supports provided for families prior to and after adoption,
191 educational transitions, issues related to oversight and accountability and best practices. The
192 commission shall also consider social barriers to adoption and differences between in-state,
193 national and international adoption processes. The commission shall provide recommendations
194 for ensuring efficient and safe adoptions.

195 (b) The commission shall consist of: the commissioner of the department of children and
196 families or a designee; the chief justice of probate and family court or a designee; the child
197 advocate; an adoptive parent to be nominated by the Home for Little Wanderers, Inc.; a
198 representative of the Rudd Adoption Research Program at the University of Massachusetts at
199 Amherst; the deputy chief counsel of the committee for public counsel services' children and
200 family law division or a designee; and a representative of the Massachusetts Adoption Resource
201 Exchange, Inc. The commission shall submit a report, together with any recommended
202 legislation, to the clerks of the house and senate, the chairs of the joint committee on children,
203 families and persons with disabilities and the house and senate committees on ways and means
204 not later than December 30, 2022.