

**ADOPTION TASK FORCE**  
**Legislative Directive to Study Ways to Reduce Time and Cost of Adoption Process**  
**2013 – 2014**

**OBJECTIVE:**

**Purpose:** The task force shall study ways to reduce the costs and delays of the adoption process in the Commonwealth:

**Section 2 of Chapter 38 of the Acts of 2013 (Item 4800-0038):** That the commissioner of the department of children and families shall lead a task force to study ways to reduce the costs and delays of the adoption process in the commonwealth; provided further, that this task force shall consist of two members appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives, two members appointed by the president of the senate, one member appointed by the minority leader of the house of representatives, and two members appointed by the governor; provided further that the task force shall consult with the chief justice of the probate and family court, the chief justice of the juvenile court, and the chief justice and trial court administrator of the trial court; and provided further , that the task force shall convene by September 1, 2013 and subsequently file a report with the clerk of the house of representatives and the clerk of the senate no later than March 1, 2014, and this report shall contain recommendations for legislative or regulatory changes to reduce costs of the adoption process and to make adoptions more easily available;

*Notation: The date of the report was extended by the Legislature to November, 2014 given that meetings did not begin until January. The membership was notified of this at the February meeting.*

**METHODOLOGY:**

The Task Force began by examining the regulations, licensing, policies and procedures governing the private, public and international sectors of the adoption arena. From there they felt it was necessary to encompass other voices and perspectives by convening several Focus Groups and developing a survey. The survey was developed by the Task Force and administered by Dr. Harold Grotevant and his staff at the UMass Amherst Rudd Adoption Research Center. The Focus Groups included some 200+ participants representing over 525 years of experience in the field of Adoption while the survey incorporated 123 families reporting on 163 children that were adopted since 2010.

**FEEDBACK:**

**Summary of Responses of Cost/Time Issues from Adoption Focus Groups, Adoptive Parents, Public and Private Sector Professionals and Public Sector Managers/Attorneys (July/September 2014)**

**ISSUE OF COST**

- Adoption professionals and families did not delineate cost as a barrier or as a defining issue.
- While private adoptions could be considered somewhat expensive, families felt they were informed and weren't surprised.
- While adoption practices were considered to be heavily regulated, this was felt to be good practice/protection for children and families. Better enforcement and oversight of these regulations was deemed to warrant additional attention.
- Any reduction in cost was felt to be a compromise in ethics related to the provision of services for families and children.

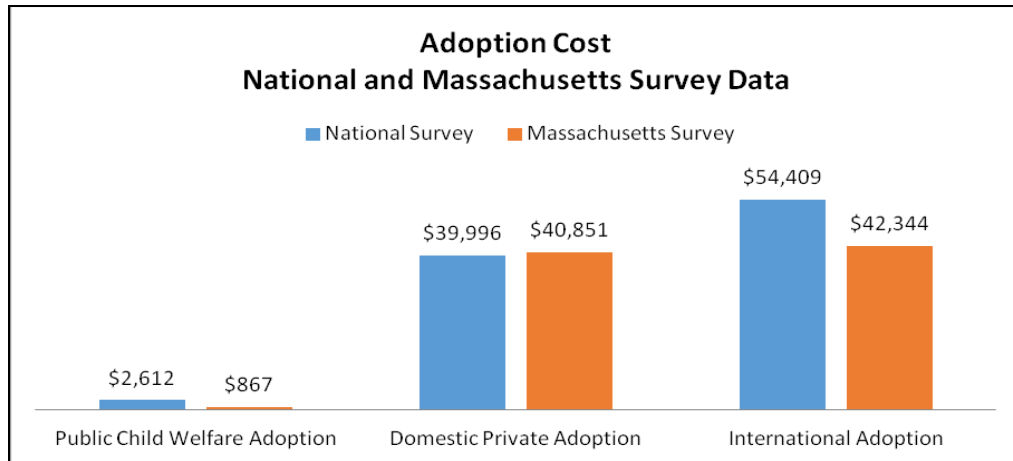
**ISSUE OF TIME**

- In International Adoptions time is in the control of the country chosen.
- In public adoptions the time to termination of parental rights is based on a variety of factors and many different resources.
- Cross-training of Court and Adoption Professionals could assist in understanding/assessing time issues involved.
- Limited resources effects timeframes relative to termination of parental rights.

## Summary from Adoption Survey (August/September 2014)

### ISSUE OF COST

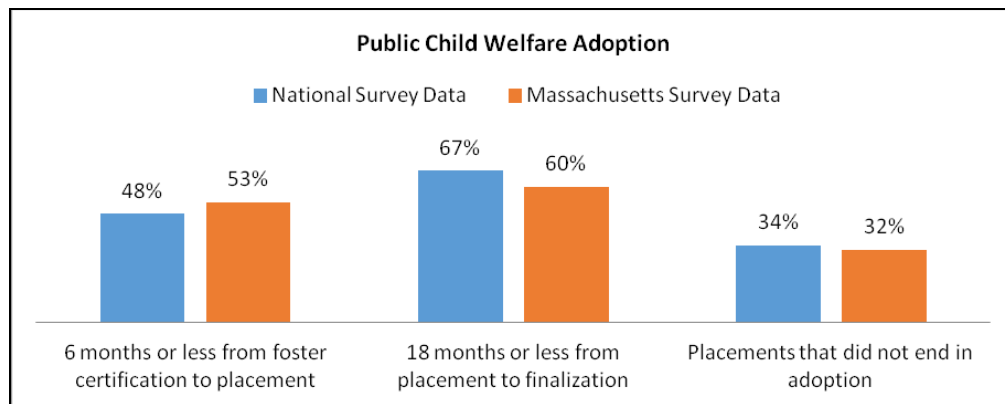
- Cost data from this Massachusetts survey were quite comparable to national data (as per an *Adoptive Families* magazine survey of their readership). The most recent national survey, focusing on children adopted in 2012 or 2013, included over 1100 parents and provides an instructive point of comparison for the Massachusetts data.

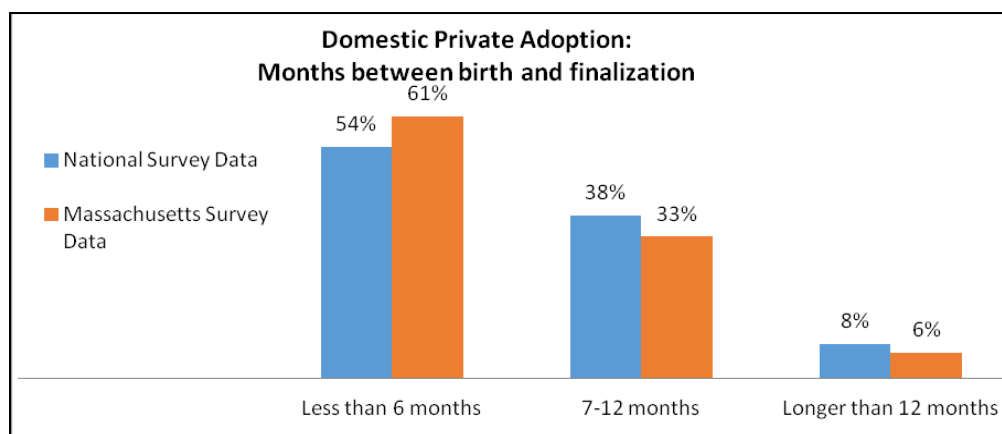
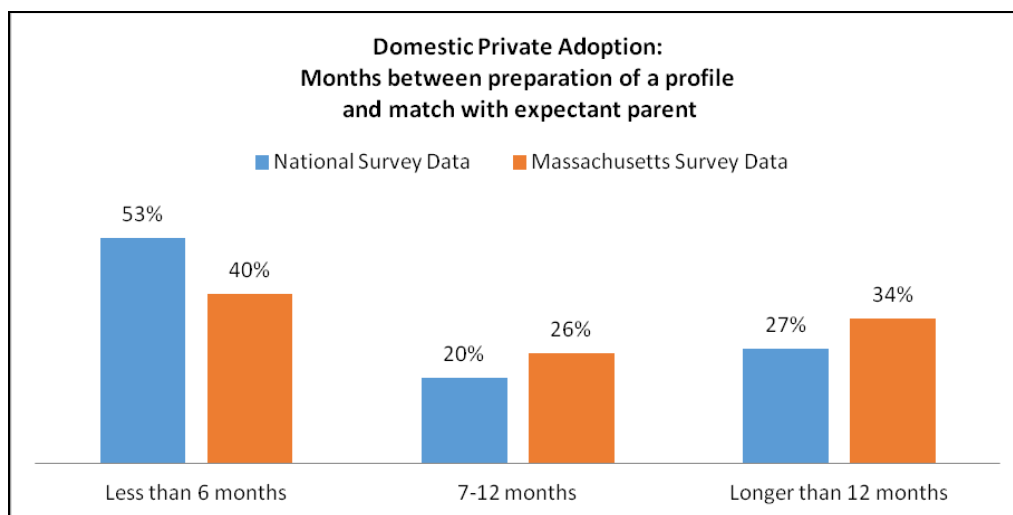


- Parents seemed aware of the cost differentials in different types of adoption at the outset.
- Parents in private adoptions expressed concerns about the high costs and lack of transparency about fees.
- About 2/3 of the parents adopting through private agencies were given an itemized estimate of costs ahead of time.
- Few parents in any type of adoption were offered a sliding fee scale.
- Although child welfare adoptions typically carried few fees, some parents noted less visible types of costs that affected them:
  - costs of fostering a child prior to the decision to adopt
  - costs involved in taking off from work (without pay) to meet with case workers, judges, etc. during business hours
  - costs involved with the need to buy a larger car, larger house, larger refrigerator, etc. especially when multiple children were being adopted.

### ISSUE OF TIME

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**Additional Time Considerations from Survey:**

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the number of months for each of the following phases of the adoption process: initial inquiry to home study, home study to placement, and placement to finalization. The mean number of months from inquiry to home study was 5.9, 8.3, and 5.8 for domestic private, domestic child welfare, and international adoptions, respectively. The mean number of months from home study to placement was 7.8, 8.6, and 16.0; and the mean number of months from placement to finalization was 9.7, 16.0, and 3.6. The total duration from inquiry to finalization was 19.8 months for domestic private, 32.4 months for domestic child welfare, and 25.4 months for international adoptions.

In general, domestic private adoptions proceeded faster than parents' expectations, child welfare adoptions took longer than expected, and international adoptions took a little longer.

The greatest length of time from start to finish was experienced by those adopting through the public child welfare system. About half of the adoptive parents (51.4%) indicated that their child was not legally free for adoption when s/he was placed with them, contributing to the lengthier times for some families. More than half (54.7%) of the parents adopting through the public child welfare system indicated that they had experienced significant delays in the process. The most frequent reasons included the following: pauses in the TPR process (termination of parental rights) (12), court interruptions – judge vacations or illness, continuances, complications scheduling court dates (10), problems with administrative / case worker paperwork (10), the initial match process (9), the home study (5), waiting for the child to be ready to be adopted (5), and waiting for MAPP / parenting classes to begin (4).

*In the Massachusetts survey, especially noteworthy was the length of time to finalization in adoptions from the child welfare system. As mentioned above, about half of these children were not legally free for adoption when placed.*

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE LEGISLATURE:**

While the driving issues of the Task Force related to cost and time were not considered to be key factors adversely impacting the adoption process, they were certainly a catalyst for examining the landscape for additional concerns related to improving practice and examining our infrastructure. With this in mind, the Task Force respectfully recommends the following:

- Fund more post-adoption services provided by adoption-competent therapists and child welfare workers using a national evidenced based model that promotes successful and stable adoptions.
- Support the Juvenile Court in ongoing efforts to improve caseload management and staffing levels which will support the movement of cases in a child-centered manner.
- Develop a statutory procedure for recognition of International Adoptions including issuance of a birth record.
  - Adoption of children from foreign countries can be a lengthy and costly process for the families involved. In recent years, the Federal Government has changed their policies to provide a mechanism for children adopted in foreign countries to enter the United States as citizens. This has made it possible for parents to obtain passports and other important documents. A document they cannot get is a Massachusetts Birth Certificate. Our statutes do not provide a specific mechanism for the recognition of a foreign adoption, except the re-adoption of the child here in Massachusetts. Even when parents re-adopt they still cannot obtain a Massachusetts Birth Certificate. They can register the adoption with their local city or town.
  - The majority of states have procedures specifically for recognition of foreign adoptions. The Massachusetts legislature could provide great assistance to both adoptive families and the courts by adopting a statute to recognize foreign adoptions and issue a birth certificate.
- Establish an annual adoption census for all Massachusetts adoptions to track types of adoption, waiting times, cost and experiences; provide funding for several longitudinal studies with colleges and universities in the Commonwealth; and provide an annual report to the Legislature.
- Explore and create an opportunity for federal and state governments, including funding, to address the emerging issue of the rehoming of adopted children.

## **TASK FORCE ACTION PLAN:**

- File report as required by statute
- Post final report on a variety of websites such as DCF, DEEC, UMass RUDD Center, and others.
- Send final report to adoptive parents/Focus Group participants who requested a copy.

### Attachments:

- Minutes from the 8 Task Force Meetings
- Minutes from the 3 Focus Groups
- Minutes from the APAM (Adoption Professional Association of Massachusetts) Meeting
- Summary of Minutes from the DCF Statewide Managers Meeting specific to cost/time
- Preliminary Slide presentation from Dr. Grotevant on 8/27/14
- Brief Summary of Cost/Time Issues from Adoption Forum/APAM (Adoption Professional Association of Massachusetts) Meeting and DCF Statewide Managers Meeting
- Massachusetts Survey of Time and Costs Involved in Adoption (draft narrative report) from 9/24/14 meeting
- Preliminary Report: Massachusetts Survey of Time and Costs Involved in Adoption (copy of slide presentation) from 9/24/14 meeting
- Adoption Task Force Survey Overview (email sent 10/5/14 to Task Force members)
- Task Force Categories & Examples for Open-Ended Questions (email sent 10/5/14 to Task Force members)
- Appointed Task Force Membership List