

2009 HOUSE HUMAN SERVICES

HB 1372

## 2009 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Bill/Resolution No. 1372

House Human Services Committee

☐ Check here for Conference Committee

Hearing Date: January 20, 2009

Recorder Job Number: 7277

Committee Clerk Signature

*Licky Crabtree*

Minutes:

**Chairman Weisz called the meeting to order on HB 1372.**

**Rep. Kerzman from District 31 sponsored and introduced the bill: See Testimony #1.**

**Chairman Weisz:** We do have a FN for \$700,000. It doesn't break it out. Have did you look at limiting it to the older children and help those?

**Rep. Kerzman:** I didn't, and when I put this together it didn't occur to me. Look at it at a per need basis and get it down. When first did this, I looked at the cost to see which the department could address. Hard to address legal fee and medical part of it. We pay for special needs adoptions.

**Rep. Porter:** Do you know off hand on page 5 of the handout talks about tax credits, the trigger points on those and how it works?

**Rep. Kerzman:** No I don't.

**Rep. Porter:** Is it specific to in-state adoptions, on country adoptions?

**Rep. Kerzman:** The intention was in-state adoptions. I don't know if the language specifically says that. It's up to the committee if they want to put more language in the bill to address that.

**Rep. Potter:** This bill says for initial preplacement adoption assessment. That's what we are paying for. Can you go over again what is involved in this?

**Rep. Kerzman:** A number of things involved. (Referred to page 3.)

**Rep. Potter:** So is there a social worker go in and scope out to see if someone is qualified to be adoptive parents?

**Rep. Kerzman:** Can't answer that. Assume it starts with that, but might be more encompassing. Up to agency what they require.

**Rep. Conklin:** The money would come back to the state?

**Rep. Kerzman:** When adoption is private, the adoptive parents pay for it and then go to the state for reimbursement.

**Rep. Conrad:** Do you consider the foster care cost (inaudible)? (Inaudible) quit paying foster care foster care when adopted.

**Rep. Kerzman:** That's what I alluded to.

**Rep. Kilichowski:** Is there a stipend paid to people doing adoptions now?

**Rep. Kerzman:** I'm not sure about a stipend, but there's an adoption done with special needs, then the state picks up some of those costs.

**Chairman Weisz:** There are subsidized adoptions where they get a monthly (drops sentence).

**Rep. Kilichowski:** I think there's not just special needs children either.

**Chairman Weisz:** The department could probably clarify what qualifies under that.

**Rep. Frantsvog:** Do we have any idea how many adoptions don't happen because of cost?

**Rep. Kerzman:** I don't have a number for you. Maybe a few.

**Rep. Pinkerton:** Testified in support. Told of having an adopted daughter and adoption process is pretty expensive. \$25,000-\$30,000. Believes this bill is a positive (inaudible).

**Deana Wiese:** Testified in support. **See Testimony #2.**

**Rep. Hofstad:** You mentioned the cost you incurred for this \$12,000. Would you break those costs down?

**Deana Wiese:** Around a \$500 application fees, \$300 workshop fee, \$3,000 assessment fee and \$7,200 for placement fee and then there are background checks you have to pay for.

**Rep. Hofstad:** So approximately \$3,000 is totally for assessment?

**Deana Wiese:** That is paid to your agency that you are working with for adoption.

**Rep. Conrad:** What is your lawyer's fee?

**Deana Wiese:** We haven't gotten that far yet.

**Christopher Dobson, Executive Director ND Catholic Conference:** Testified in support .

This state has a policy of favoring childbirth over abortion. It has a policy of assuring the best outcome for children for adoptions. These various fees and assessments and so on are put in place to assure the best interest of the child. All this is done through private agencies. The state doesn't do this unless it is a special needs adoption. We don't want to subsidize adoptions to where it is free or minimal. State needs to say, we want to send a signal that we want to encourage adoption and this is one part of the cost the state can reasonable (inaudible) in.

**Mrs. Gary Zins:** Testified in support. Adopted 4 out of 15 children and some were from abusive homes and one down syndrome.

**Julie Hoffman, Director of Adoption Administrator for DHS:** Gave information. **See Testimony #3.**

**Chairman Weisz:** Can you give us the number and costs of assessment (inaudible).

**Julie Hoffman:** The cost of assessments from the agencies vary. Some are \$2700-\$3100. Depends on the agency and the total number of assessments is 113. Greater number than adoptions that occurred.

**Chairman Weisz:** Do we have any that are beyond infants that are not in foster care system that are (inaudible) adoption?

**Julie Hoffman:** Clearly a few older children that (inaudible) adopted because it's called identified adoption that when a birth parent identifies a family specifically that they want to adopt their child. Go through the (inaudible) process and there is a cost assessment. Generally, those children are not significantly older. They may be toddlers.

**Rep. Porter:** On fiscal note, on speeding up the process children in foster care having something like this in place. Is there anything taken into account as far as revenues or increase in the expenditures when making out the fiscal note?

**Julie Hoffman:** No we did not. Hard to estimate. This bill actual cost of assessment.

**Rep. Porter:** Of the numbers you used to come up with the fiscal note, how many of those based on the information from the agency would be rejected in the future? What is approval/denial rate of those agencies right now?

**Julie Hoffman:** Have to check on that. I don't think there is very many people denied having gone through the assessment process. More often, family select themselves out of the process.

**Rep. Conrad:** The foster care cost, what does it cost per month under 3?

**Julie Hoffman:** I think currently the monthly cost for 0-6 year old child is \$435.

**Rep. Conrad:** Doesn't include Medicaid?

**Julie Hoffman:** No.

**Rep. Conrad:** Could you come up with a number of (inaudible).

**Julie Hoffman:** Can find out.

**Rep. Hofstad:** Can you give me a number of people come to agency and then abandon because of cost?

**Julie Hoffman:** I can tell you I get calls every week from folks who are concerned about the cost of adoption. Usually young people who don't have a lot of assets or have a lot of money in the bank.

**Rep. Conrad:** Do you have guidelines of how much money you have to have in order to support a child?

**Julie Hoffman:** I don't think we have an income cutoff. They would be looking at if they have sufficient means to support themselves and that would be looking at if they have a large debt load. Do they make payments on time or have they had a bankruptcy?

**Rep. Holman:** Your \$691,000 is based on present level adoption?

**Julie Hoffman:** Yes it was based on current level of assessments.

**Rep. Holman:** Would you anticipate an increase to the number of adoptions included that of older children?

**Julie Hoffman:** Yes, it would increase adoption.

**Rep. Uglem:** It is my understanding that these costs are already funded for anyone adopted from foster care?

**Julie Hoffman:** The department funds a contract that provides for the adoption services for children being adopted from foster care and the families who adopt them. We do not do the same thing for the families who are adopting privately or internationally.

**Rep. Uglem:** The adoption tax credit, is that a federal credit and how large is it?

**Julie Hoffman:** Yes, it is a federal tax credit. You can take it in the year the adoption is finalized. Somewhere over \$10,000, and I think it changes a bit from year to year. More for those who adopt from foster care. Can carry forward for 5 years.

**Rep. Kilichowski:** The assessment cost is now \$3,000. Five to ten years ago what was the cost? How often does it go up?

**Julie Hoffman:** I don't think cost has increased significantly over the years.

**NO OPPOSITION.**

**Chairman Weisz closed the hearing.**

## 2009 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Bill/Resolution No. 1372

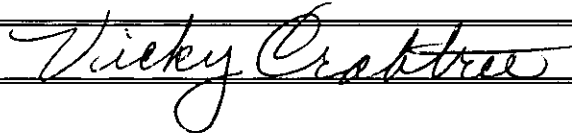
House Human Services Committee

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Hearing Date: February 3, 2009

Recorder Job Number: 8520

Committee Clerk Signature



Minutes: **Chairman Weisz:** Let's take up HB 1372. Adoption assessment costs.

**Rep. Frantsvog:** Can we deduct for anticipated foster care versus the cost of adoption?

**Chairman Weisz:** You can deduct the costs of adoption, some of them in federal taxes. The state picks up cost of adoptions from foster care. No reflection of cost to the parents with foster care.

**Rep. Uglem:** I'm of the opinion that there is a tax credit in the future for anyone that adopts a lot of their costs so I this is would be an additional subsidy for adoption I'm not sure we could do that for private adoption.

**Rep. Uglem:** Move a DO NOT PASS.

**Rep. Hofstad:** Second.

**Rep. Potter:** Julie Hoffman's testimony from the department listed a variety of problems.

**Chairman Weisz:** I would add to this that currently there isn't an issue of adopting new borns. There is a waiting list. Part of the reason for this bill leads to the whole study to have more adoptions and less abortions. The ones in foster care are the ones we currently come up with costs for.

**Rep. Holman:** Some of the testimony did lead to much of what you said.



**Chairman Weisz:** You have a 12 year old not in the foster care system, how do you get one?

You might have a family situation where the 12 year old is in.

**Rep. Conrad:** When was adoption last studied?

**Chairman Weisz:** Don't recall we have since I've been here.

**Rep. Conrad:** We adopted kids and you need money right then. I'm not satisfied with this bill, but I do think it is an issue.

**Roll Call Vote:** 11 yes, 1 no, 1 absent, Rep. Nathe

**MOTION CARRIED ON DO NOT PASS**

**BILL CARRIER:** Rep. Uglem

**FISCAL NOTE**  
**Requested by Legislative Council**  
01/13/2009

Bill/Resolution No.: HB 1372

**1A. State fiscal effect:** *Identify the state fiscal effect and the fiscal effect on agency appropriations compared to funding levels and appropriations anticipated under current law.*

	2007-2009 Biennium		2009-2011 Biennium		2011-2013 Biennium	
	General Fund	Other Funds	General Fund	Other Funds	General Fund	Other Funds
Revenues						
Expenditures			\$691,446		\$733,129	
Appropriations			\$691,446		\$733,129	

**1B. County, city, and school district fiscal effect:** *Identify the fiscal effect on the appropriate political subdivision.*

2007-2009 Biennium			2009-2011 Biennium			2011-2013 Biennium		
Counties	Cities	School Districts	Counties	Cities	School Districts	Counties	Cities	School Districts

**2A. Bill and fiscal impact summary:** *Provide a brief summary of the measure, including description of the provisions having fiscal impact (limited to 300 characters).*

This bill creates a program that provides reimbursement to adoptive families for the cost of a preplacement adoption assessment. It also requires the development of promotional materials that will be distributed to child-placing agencies for distribution to prospective adoptive parents.

**B. Fiscal impact sections:** *Identify and provide a brief description of the sections of the measure which have fiscal impact. Include any assumptions and comments relevant to the analysis.*

Section one of the bill requires reimbursement to prospective adoptive parents for the cost of a preplacement adoption assessment upon submission of an application and appropriate documentation of the initial adoption assessment costs. Also included will be the cost to develop promotional materials that will be distributed to child-placing agencies.

**3. State fiscal effect detail:** *For information shown under state fiscal effect in 1A, please:*

**A. Revenues:** *Explain the revenue amounts. Provide detail, when appropriate, for each revenue type and fund affected and any amounts included in the executive budget.*

**B. Expenditures:** *Explain the expenditure amounts. Provide detail, when appropriate, for each agency, line item, and fund affected and the number of FTE positions affected.*

Section one of the bill requires reimbursement to prospective adoptive parents for the cost of a preplacement adoption assessment upon submission of an application and appropriate documentation of the initial adoption assessment costs. Also included will be the cost to develop promotional materials that will be distributed to child-placing agencies. Those costs would include design, composition, and printing costs. The assessment costs are estimated to be \$691,110 with the costs for the promotional materials to be \$336.

**C. Appropriations:** *Explain the appropriation amounts. Provide detail, when appropriate, for each agency and fund affected. Explain the relationship between the amounts shown for expenditures and appropriations. Indicate whether the appropriation is also included in the executive budget or relates to a continuing appropriation.*

The Department of Human Services appropriation bill (HB 1012) does not include funding for this program. General

fund appropriation of \$691,446 will be needed in 2009-2011 and \$733,129 for 2011-2013.

<b>Name:</b>	Brenda M. Weisz	<b>Agency:</b>	DHS
<b>Phone Number:</b>	328-2397	<b>Date Prepared:</b>	01/19/2009

Date: 2-3-09  
Roll Call Vote #:

2009 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE ROLL CALL VOTES  
BILL/RESOLUTION NO. 1372

House HUMAN SERVICES Committee

☐ Check here for Conference Committee

Legislative Council Amendment Number \_\_\_\_\_

Action Taken ☐ Do Pass ☒ Do Not Pass ☐ Amended

Motion Made By Rep Uglem Seconded By Rep Hofstad

Representatives	Yes	No	Representatives	Yes	No
CHAIRMAN ROBIN WEISZ	✓		REP. TOM CONKLIN	✓	✓
VICE-CHAIR VONNIE PIETSCH	✓		REP. KARI L CONRAD	✓	
REP. CHUCK DAMSCHEN	✓		REP. RICHARD HOLMAN	✓	
REP. ROBERT FRANTSVOG	✓		REP. ROBERT KILICHOWSKI	✓	
REP. CURT HOFSTAD	✓		REP. LOUISE POTTER	✓	
REP. MICHAEL R. NATHE	✓				
REP. TODD PORTER	✓				
REP. GERRY UGLEM	✓				

Total (Yes) 11 No 1

Absent Rep. Nathe

Bill Carrier Rep Uglem

If the vote is on an amendment, briefly indicate intent:

**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE**

**HB 1372: Human Services Committee (Rep. Weisz, Chairman) recommends DO NOT PASS (11 YEAS, 1 NAY, 1 ABSENT AND NOT VOTING). HB 1372 was placed on the Eleventh order on the calendar.**

2009 TESTIMONY

HB 1372

# HB 1372

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the House Human Service Committee

HB 1372 would add a new section to North Dakota's Century Code relating to adoption assessment costs.

To my knowledge, most adoptions in the state are facilitated through private adoption agencies. Thus it may be a challenge to get a handle on costs.

People who have been involved in the adoption process have told me costs could easily reach twenty to thirty thousand dollars.

Costs like these can very easily limit the number of prospective families willing or able to adopt a child.

Imagine the soul searching, discussion and anticipation you would go through prior to proceeding to an adoption, then to be told of the astronomical costs. It would be like getting a rug pulled out from under you.

By allowing the adoptive family the means to be reimbursed for the initial pre-placement assessment costs, the State can help lessen the financial burden of adopting a North Dakota child.

I assure you there will be a fiscal note with this bill. Information I received from the Department of Human Services showed about 288 children adopted in 2007 in North Dakota. About 159 were finalized adoptions to new parents, the remaining were adopted by step-parents or relatives.

I don't know what average pre-placement assessments costs would be, but I have heard they may be a few thousand dollars. Therefore, 160 adoptions times three thousand dollars – we could be looking at \$480,000.

I believe this would be funds well spent helping to bring a child and family together.

I ask for your favorable consideration.

Rep. James Kerzman



# Child Welfare Information Gateway

PROTECTING CHILDREN ■ STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

A FACTSHEET  
FOR FAMILIES

June 2004

Esta hoja informativa es  
disponible en español  
[www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/  
s\\_costs/index.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s_costs/index.cfm)

## Costs of Adopting



Prospective adoptive parents may be concerned about the financial costs of adopting an infant or child and their ability to meet these costs. While becoming a parent is rarely free of expenses (even pregnancy and childbirth can be relatively expensive if there is inadequate insurance), adoptive parents often are faced with initial costs that can seem challenging. However, with planning and with knowledge about the different types of adop-

### What's Inside:

- Universal expenses
- Adoption-specific expenses
- Resources to help defray adoption costs
- Additional resources

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Administration on Children, Youth and Families  
Children's Bureau



**Child Welfare Information Gateway**  
Children's Bureau/ACYF  
1250 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Eighth Floor  
Washington, DC 20024  
703.385.7565 or 800.394.3366  
Email: [info@childwelfare.gov](mailto:info@childwelfare.gov)  
[www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)



tions and available resources, they should be able to develop a budget that includes most of the foreseeable expenses. This factsheet was designed to help prospective adoptive parents learn about these expenses so that they can make informed decisions throughout the adoption process.

The total cost of adopting varies from \$0 to more than \$40,000, depending on a number of factors. The chart below outlines some general categories of adoption and costs associated with the services provided. The wide range reflects the multitude of factors that may affect costs, including the type of adoption, the type of placement agency or facilitator, and the child's age and circumstances. Prospective adoptive parents are encouraged to check with the agencies they are considering to find out more about specific costs for their circumstances.

#### RANGE OF ADOPTION COSTS

Foster Care Adoptions	\$0 – \$2,500
Licensed Private Agency Adoptions	\$5,000 – \$40,000+
Independent Adoptions	\$8,000 – \$40,000+
Facilitated/Unlicensed Adoptions	\$5,000 – \$40,000+
Intercountry Adoptions	\$7,000 – \$30,000

While the overall figures may seem daunting, prospective adoptive parents should explore all adoption options and the associated costs for each. In some cases, the total cost may be much less than the maximum figures cited here; resources may also be

available to help offset costs. These are discussed at the end of this factsheet.

Breaking down the total cost into categorized expenses helps prospective parents understand what is involved and how to determine a predictable range for their costs. In some cases, understanding the costs associated with different types of adoption may help parents decide which type of adoption to pursue, or whether to pursue this approach to building a family.

This factsheet can help by outlining and discussing the following categories of expenses:

- Universal expenses, that is, those that occur for every type of adoption, including home study expenses and court costs.
- Adoption-specific expenses, that is, those that are associated with a particular type of adoption, including foster care adoptions, domestic infant adoptions, and intercountry (i.e., foreign or international) adoptions.

All adoptive parents pay some combination of universal and adoption-specific expenses.

Child Welfare Information Gateway (Information Gateway) offers a factsheet for parents, *Adoption Options*, that describes the different types of adoptions. This can be accessed at [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_adoption.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_adoption.cfm).

## Universal Expenses

Universal expenses are incurred by everyone who adopts a child. (In some cases, they may be offset by reimbursements or other resources.) These expenses include home study expenses and court costs.

### Home Study Expenses

A home study must be completed for all prospective parents, no matter what type of adoption they intend to pursue. In the case of foster care adoption, these most often are completed by the local public agency or its contractors; for other types of adoption, private agencies or certified social workers conduct the home study. The purpose of the home study is to prepare the prospective parents for the adoption, gather information about them so that an appropriate match between the child and parents can be made, and evaluate the fitness of the parents. Home studies culminate in the social worker's written report, which includes a recommendation about whether the prospective parents are qualified to adopt and, if so, what age child or children would be most appropriate. (For more information, read Information Gateway's *The Adoption Home Study Process* at [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_homstu.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_homstu.cfm).)

The cost for the home study is generally paid for by the prospective parents. In the case of foster care adoption, there may be no charge for conducting the home study, although parents may incur fees for medical or psychological evaluations that may be required as part of the process. With other types of adoption, the private agency or

certified (or licensed) social worker may charge \$1,000 to \$3,000 for the home study. In some cases, the fee for the home study may be included in the overall agency fee. Information about all fees should be provided in writing by the agency or social worker, and prospective parents should ask for such information.

### Legal Fees

All domestic adoptions and some intercountry adoptions must be finalized in a court in the United States. Some intercountry adoptions are finalized in the child's country of origin. Although not required in these situations, parents often choose also to finalize the placement in a U.S. court to provide additional protection of their child's legal status. All of these procedures incur a cost. The cost for court document preparation can range from \$500 to \$2,000, while the cost for legal representation may range from \$2,500 to \$12,000 or more in some States. (Again, these costs may be reimbursable.) In some jurisdictions, an adoption can be finalized without representation by an attorney.

## Adoption-Specific Expenses

In addition to the costs common to every adoption, adoptive parents generally incur costs specific to their type of adoption. The costs for three types of adoption are described here: foster care, domestic infant, and intercountry. These expenses are in addition to the universal expenses described above in most cases.

## **Foster Care Adoption**

### **Costs: \$0 to \$2,500**

Most public agencies in the foster care system place children with special needs only, a category that is defined differently in each State but may refer to children who must be placed with siblings, who are older or in a minority group, or those with disabilities. Up-front fees and expenses may range from \$0 to \$2,500, including attorney's fees and travel expenses. In foster care adoptions, fees often are kept to a minimum or even waived, so that final costs to parents are negligible. In some cases, the child may even be eligible for government subsidy payments (often called adoption assistance), Supplemental Security Income, or Medicaid coverage. (These resources are described at the end of this factsheet.)

## **Domestic Infant Adoption**

### **Costs: \$5,000 to \$40,000**

These vary widely according the type of agency used and, sometimes, the individual adoption circumstances. It is important for prospective parents to fully understand what is included in agency and attorney fees. In some cases, the cost of the home study is included, rather than broken out separately. Domestic infant adoptions fall into three general categories, each with its own attendant costs:

**Licensed Private Agency Adoption Costs: \$5,000 to \$40,000.** Costs for this type of adoption include a fee charged by the agency and may include the cost of the home study, birth parent counseling, adoptive parent preparation and training, and social work services involved in matching a child to a prospective family.

The fees charged by licensed agencies are generally predictable, and some even have sliding fee scales based on family income. In addition, some agencies may offer reduced fees to prospective parents who locate a birth parent on their own but who need the agency for counseling, facilitation, home study, and supervision services.

### **Independent Adoption Costs: \$8,000 to \$40,000 (average is \$10,000-\$15,000).**

Independent adoptions handled by an attorney generally result in costs that may include medical expenses for the birth mother (as allowed by law), as well as separate legal fees for representing adoptive and birth parents, and any allowable fees for advertising. Additional medical expenses may be required in situations in which there are birth complications.

State laws restrict many of these costs, including any reimbursements to the birth mother. Restrictions may also exist regarding advertisements seeking expectant parents. Where allowed, such advertising expenses may range from \$500 to \$5,000. Information Gateway publication *State Regulation of Adoption Expenses* ([www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/expenses.pdf](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/expenses.pdf)) has more information about State laws regulating these types of adoption expenses.

Compared to licensed agency adoptions, the costs of independent adoptions may be less predictable. In addition, costs may not be reimbursable in cases in which a birth mother changes her mind and chooses to parent her child.

**Facilitated/Unlicensed Agency Adoption Costs: \$5,000 to \$40,000.** These costs are

generally the same as costs of licensed agencies. However, in States that allow adoptive placements by facilitators these placements are largely unregulated. Prospective parents may have no recourse if the adoption does not proceed as expected.

### **Intercountry adoption costs: \$7,000 to \$30,000**

Agencies that provide intercountry adoption services charge fees that range from \$7,000 to \$30,000. These fees generally include dossier and immigration processing and court costs. In some cases, they may include a required donation to the foreign orphanage or agency. Overall costs may be affected by the type of entity in the foreign country that is responsible for placing the child (e.g., government agency, government orphanage, charitable foundation, attorney, facilitator, or some combination thereof). Many intercountry adoption agencies offer a sliding fee scale.

Depending on the country, there may be additional fees, such as:

- Child foster care (usually in South and Central American adoptions)
- Parents' travel and in-country stay(s) to process the adoption abroad
- Escorting fees, charged when parents do not travel but instead hire escorts to accompany the child on the flight
- Child's medical care and treatment (occasionally in South and Central America)
- Translation fees
- Foreign attorney fees

- Foreign agency fees
- Passport fees
- Visa processing fees and costs of visa medical examination

## **Resources to Help Defray Adoption Costs**

In many cases, tax credits, subsidies, employer benefits, and loans or grants can help with adoption costs.

### **Tax credits**

Adoption tax credits may be available to defray some adoption costs. The amount may depend on family income and any other adoption benefits. Parents may want to check with a tax professional to determine applicable benefits.

#### **Federal tax credits and tax exclusion.**

Prospective adoptive parents can find information about tax rules regarding adoption at the IRS website (<http://www.irs.ustreas.gov>). Parents should look for information on the IRS Adoption Taxpayer Identification Number (<http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=96452,00.html>) and information on the Adoption Tax Credit (<http://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc607.html>).

**State tax credits.** Several States have enacted State tax credits for families adopting children from the public child welfare system in that State. Some are restricted to adoptions from foster care, while others are not.

## Subsidies and Reimbursements for Children with Special Needs

Each State has its own definition of children with special needs, but they often include children who are older, have disabilities, belong to a minority group, or must be placed with siblings. To facilitate the adoption of these children, who often are in foster care, States may provide reimbursements for some adoption costs, as well as subsidies for some children.

**Reimbursement for Adoption Costs.** After families have finalized the adoption of a child with special needs from the public child welfare system, they may be able to apply for reimbursement of expenses they paid related to the adoption, including home study fees, travel expenses to see the child, and attorney fees. Most States, under a Federal match program, offer non-recurring adoption expenses reimbursements up to a set limit (which cannot exceed \$2,000).

**Subsidies.** Federal and State adoption subsidies (or adoption assistance) may be available to help adoptive parents pay for the ongoing care of children with special physical, mental, or emotional needs. In addition, some children qualify for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Medicaid coverage. The Information Gateway factsheet *Adoption Assistance for Children in Foster Care* ([www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_subsid.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_subsid.cfm)) provides more information on this topic.

## Employer Benefits

Many employers provide a range of benefits for families who adopt, including paid or unpaid leave when a child arrives in the

home, reimbursement of some portion of adoption expenses, or assistance with adoption services. (Corporate human resource departments can provide employees with information about any benefits available.) Information Gateway publishes a factsheet titled *Employer-Provided Adoption Benefits*, which can be accessed at on their website at [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_benefi.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_benefi.cfm).

## Adoption Loans and Grants

Adoptive parents may be eligible to receive a loan or grant to offset some of their adoption costs. Such programs may have specific requirements regarding the type of adoption that is eligible, or they may give preference to families with the greatest financial need or with other specific characteristics. Many agencies also have adoption grant programs. More detailed information may be found by checking the resources listed below.

## Additional Resources

National Endowment for Financial Education  
[www.nefe.org/adoption/default.htm](http://www.nefe.org/adoption/default.htm)  
Offers an online booklet on adoption costs

National Adoption Foundation  
[www.nafadopt.org](http://www.nafadopt.org)  
Offers information on adoption grants and loans

Other Information Gateway factsheets pertaining to adoption costs:  
*Employer-Provided Adoption Benefits*  
([www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_benefi.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_benefi.cfm))  
*Adoption Assistance for Children in Foster Care*  
([www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_subsid.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_subsid.cfm))

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**Testimony of Deana Wiese  
In Support of HB 1372  
January 20, 2009**

Chairman Weisz and members of the House Human Services Committee, for the record my name is Deana Wiese. I am here today to voice my support for HB 1372, which would provide a reimbursement for adoption assessment costs to prospective adoptive families. I would like to share with you my story regarding adoption, with hopes that this bill could assist other couples with similar stories.

After a short battle with infertility caused by childhood illness, my husband and I chose adoption to grow our family. Although it has been a long road to get there, we are extremely excited about that decision. We have always known we wanted to be parents and never could agree on the number...he wanted two and I wanted a baseball team! Today, we both would be ecstatic with one.

The thing I struggled with most was accepting the fact that I would never experience pregnancy. This struggle came to an end late one night when my husband told me that it didn't matter if our children were biological or not, I would still be a mother and he would still be a father. Those words opened our hearts to adoption. What could have been a significant strain on a marriage has turned into the one thing that has brought us closer than we could have ever imagined.

From that night forward the stress, both emotional and physical, that comes with infertility was lifted and mostly forgotten. We realized that the good Lord was moving us down a new path that would allow us to make a difference in the life of a child and lead us to our dream of parenthood.

We are still meandering down that path with great faith and optimism. We completed the adoption assessment process, as referred to in the bill, in June 2008 and are currently waiting for a referral. We can't wait to provide a child a safe, stable and loving home and hope it will be possible to maintain connections with his or her birth family.

When we began looking into adoption, money was a consideration as the total costs are around \$12,000 with the assessment being \$3,000. As with many couples, we had already paid for infertility treatments prior to our decision to adopt. However, we feel extremely blessed that cost didn't inhibit our ability to move forward with the adoption. If the assistance provided in this bill can give even one couple the hope, the comfort and piece of mind the adoption process has given us, than it would be well worth the effort.

In closing, I was told by a doctor at the age of 19 that I may never be able to have children. Stubbornness may be my best quality or it may be my worst, but I never have and never will believe him. Adoption is what is going to let me prove him wrong.

I thank you for your time and hope you will give favorable consideration to HB 1372.

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**Testimony**  
**HB 1372 – Department of Human Services**  
**House Human Services Committee**  
**January 20, 2009**

Chairman Weisz and members of the House Human Services Committee, I am Julie Hoffman, Administrator of Adoption Services for the Department of Human Services. Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on HB 1372.

It is our understanding that the sponsors of this bill are concerned with the cost of adoption, particularly for those families who are adopting infants and those adopting internationally. Nationally, infant adoption costs are estimated to be from \$5,000 to \$40,000, and international adoption costs are estimated to be from \$7,000 to \$30,000. Adoption fees in North Dakota are generally \$8,000 to \$10,000 at a minimum, and this is not inclusive of attorney fees, facilitation fees, travel costs for the family and additional fees for the involvement of multiple agencies (as in international or interstate adoptions). Compounding this, many families exhaust their personal financial resources pursuing various infertility treatments prior to their journey into adoption.

We understand this bill would direct the Department to develop and implement a program to reimburse prospective adoptive parents for the amount expended by the prospective adoptive family for the initial preplacement adoption assessment. Implementation of this bill would have a fiscal impact as identified in the fiscal note, To estimate the fiscal impact, I surveyed all currently licensed child-placing agencies in North Dakota as to the number of initial preplacement adoption assessments they have

completed in each of the last five years and the current cost of the assessments. Please note that I did not include the adoption program that provides assessments for families adopting children from foster care, since those costs are already funded by the Department through a contract with the child-placing agency that provides the service. I averaged the number of assessments for each agency (and projected a number for those agencies that do not have a five-year history), multiplied that number by the cost and totaled for all agencies for the two year period of the biennium. I did add a 5% increase in assessments, as I believe such a program will encourage more families to pursue adoption. I also included the cost needed to develop a simple brochure and application that will be disseminated to the licensed child-placing agencies and placed them on the Department's web site for easy access. As you can see, we have projected the costs for this program to be \$691,446 for the biennium.

In discussion within the Department and with child-placing agencies, a number of questions have arisen regarding the intent of this bill, particularly regarding to whom it would apply. For example, would we reimburse families whose assessment was not recommended? What about those families who are not residents of North Dakota but are adopting a ND child? Would we consider family income and resources at all in the reimbursement? Would the reimbursement be effected by other sources of adoption support (i.e. the adoption tax credit, employee adoption support programs, or adoption grant programs)? Would there be a cap to the amount of reimbursement? Because of these questions and if this bill were to move forward, it would be helpful if the committee would give us guidance in regard to these questions so that the Department is able to move forward in implementing this program.



Thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have at this time, or to provide additional information as you may need.