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## I. Letter from Executive Director

Dear Friends:

Adoption Circle, a state licensed, non-profit adoption agency, welcomes the opportunity to share our Agency and its services with you. The Agency was founded on the philosophy that children deserve the best we can give. Our **circle** is a symbol of the continuum and life-long relationship between adoptive families, birth families, children and adoption professionals.

To introduce you to Adoption Circle's programs and services, we have included our Agency Information Packet. If you wish to apply after reading the information packet, complete and sign the **Agency Application**. Return the completed documents to Adoption Circle with the \$250.00 **non-refundable** application processing fee.

We hope this information helps you to better understand Adoption Circle. We wish you well in your pursuit of adoption and look forward to the opportunity to work with you in the future.

Sincerely yours,



Meredith C. Blumenthal

Executive Director

## II. Adoption Circle's Mission Statement & Philosophy

Adoption Circle's philosophy is that all children have the right to love, security and nurturance; the foundation necessary to become a healthy, happy and productive adult. Adoption Circle realizes that this type of environment may not always be possible if a child remains with his or her family of birth. It is the Agency's belief that birthparents have the ultimate responsibility to make parenting decisions for their children. Adoption should be a parenting decision that birthparents make for their children after considering all of their options, free of pressure and coercion from all potential sources.

The primary focus of all of Adoption Circle's programs is to assist in adoption planning and the placement of newborn and young children. Adoption Circle will effectuate its philosophy and purpose by providing professional counseling for birthparents and adoptive parents contemplating an adoption plan.

Adoption Circle believes that if adoption is the choice for children and their parents, it should be facilitated by professionals who realize that adoption is a life-long process. Adoption Circle accepts this responsibility and Adoption Circle's policies reflect a commitment to the needs and best interest of the children of today, the adults of tomorrow.

Adoption Circle is committed to providing all parties to an adoption (birthparents, adoptive parents and adopted persons) with the support necessary to make the best possible decision for a child. The Agency maintains a staff of highly trained, state certified adoption assessors, who are available to perform adoption services including birthparent assessments and adoptive homestudies throughout Ohio. Adoption Circle may also provide adoption services to United States citizens in compliance with the Interstate Compact Rules and Regulations.

Adoption Circle shall be an Agency of advocacy for all its clients. The Agency believes it is important for all parties to be actively involved in designing their adoption plan. Adoption Circle will always attempt to meet the needs of its clients so long as facilitating the designed adoption plan is in full compliance with Ohio law and the Agency's license as a private child placement agency. Adoption Circle provides its services in full accordance with Federal and State Law including the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act as amended.

### III. Why Choose Adoption Circle?

- You design your adoption plan to meet your needs as an adoptive parent.
- You can be assured that you will receive one-on-one individualized attention with honest and helpful communication throughout your adoption journey. You will have direct access to one of our adoption social workers who will serve as your guide and partner in your adoption plan.
- Adoption is a stressful process. We are here to support you when you may feel overwhelmed, confused or challenged as you become an adoptive parent. In critical situations, no matter what time of day, you can call the Agency Director on her personal cell phone. You will always be connected to Adoption Circle.
- With over 20 years of experience, Adoption Circle's staff has been recognized in Ohio and across the United States for their extraordinary level of compassion, knowledge and expertise in the field of adoption. Any adoptive parent, birthparent or child that works with Adoption Circle will directly benefit from their affiliation with our professional and caring staff.
- Adoption Circle is your full-service adoption agency. We will be by your side every step of the way. Starting from the initiation of our working relationship we will facilitate all services needed to complete your adoption including the homestudy and approval process, birthparent match and selection, placement of child, the finalization of your adoption and beyond.
- Your adoption process may require or you may desire to have referrals to other adoption related professionals. Adoption Circle has access to a vast network of adoption professionals including highly experienced adoption attorneys, accountants, doctors and counselors, just to name a few. When choosing Adoption Circle you will have access to this network.
- Adoption Circle understands that adoption can be expensive and often requires financial sacrifice from the adoptive applicant. Our goal of the agency is to ease or lessen your fear surrounding the monetary commitment needed for each step of the adoption process. Our fee schedule is predictable and explained in detail during your adoption training. Our adoption fees are spread throughout the adoption process which allows for a more manageable and balanced payment system.
- If you select Adoption Circle as your agency, you can be assured that every birthparent that chooses Adoption Circle is provided with the utmost of care, compassion and support. Our staff provides 24/7 support and counseling for birthparents. Our agency will meet with birthparents face-to-face, complete a detailed social medical history and other paperwork required under Ohio law for the birthparent assessment. We are available for birthparents through all phases of the pregnancy, labor, delivery and placement process and continue to offer support after placement, if requested. Birthparents who have worked with Adoption Circle often recommend our agency to other birthparents considering adoption. We consider this the highest of praise.

## IV. Adoption Programs

### Infant Adoption Program

As part of its Infant Adoption Program, Adoption Circle places children born in the United States, usually under two months of age and deemed to be generally healthy by a hospital or physician at the time of placement. The application fee for this program is \$250.00.

### Targeted/Identified Adoption Program

Adoption Circle has developed a true expertise in the facilitation of adoptions in which the Adoptive Parents and the Birthparents have selected each other prior to contacting the Agency. Often, these adoptions are arranged by medical professionals, lawyers or mutual friends. These adoptions are handled through the Agency's Target/Identified Adoption Program.

The Agency is experienced in *quickly and efficiently* providing services so that the adoption will proceed without delay. All the services necessary to effectuate a successful adoption, including, homestudy, birthparent assessment and counseling and legal services are provided as part of this program.

Adoption Circle respects the relationship that has been established between the specific Birthparents and Adoptive Parents and will do everything possible to assist them with their adoption plan. Adoption Circle realizes the Birthparents and Adoptive Parents have already selected each other for the adoption plan.

*If you need immediate assistance with a targeted or identified adoption, please call the Agency's Administrator, Nancy Burley, at (614) 237-7222 or her cell at (614) 738-5458. No application fee is required.*

### International Adoption Program

Adoption Circle has established a long term working relationship with many international adoption agencies. We have assisted with the adoptive placement of children from China, Russia, Guatemala, Korea, India and Marshall Islands. Adoption Circle's International Adoption Program offers, homestudy, education, and post-placement services for families adopting internationally. Our program is supervised by a social worker with an expertise in meeting the unique needs of families adopting children through international sources. No application fee is required.

### Auxiliary Service Program

Adoption Circle can also provide a vast array of professional services to individuals who do not need to be part of one of the Agency's complete adoption programs. Under its Auxiliary Adoption Program Adoption Circle offers the following services:

- Homestudy
- Homestudy Updates

- Post-Placement Supervisory Visits
- State-required Birthparent Assessments
- Counseling
- Training and Education
- Legal Services

To initiate any of these services please contact our office. No application fee is required.

## **V. Minimum Requirements for Adoptive Parents**

1. Minimum age for an applicant is twenty-one (21) years of age or, if a married couple, one spouse must be at least twenty-one (21) years of age. Although this is the only age requirement for application, please note that birthparents participate in the selection process and age is frequently a factor which birthparents consider.
2. Married applicants must be married for a minimum of one year.
3. Applicants who have been convicted of any felonious criminal offense may or may not be approved dependent upon the nature and date of the offense.
4. Adoption Circle prefers applicants to be non-smokers.
5. Applicants shall have a plan to provide the child with religious and/or moral beliefs.
6. Applicants shall not be in arrears on court-ordered child support payments.
7. Applicants who have a history of Domestic Violence may or may not be approved dependent upon the nature and date of the offense.

These are minimum requirements and Adoption Circle reserves the right to impose any and all reasonable standards which it believes to be in a child's best interest.

## VI. The Adoption Process

### **Step 1: Application**

You have now received Adoption Circle's Information Packet which provides you with introductory information explaining the Agency's philosophy, programs, and procedures. This packet includes the Agency's Application. If, after review of this material, you wish to pursue adoption with our Agency, the Application must be completed and returned to Adoption Circle's Columbus office with a \$250.00 non-refundable application processing fee.

### **Step 2: Selection**

All completed applications received for the Infant Adoption Program will be reviewed and then scheduled to begin the adoption process by attending the Orientation and Education Meeting. A letter of receipt of the application and an invitation to the appropriate Orientation and Education Meeting will be sent within 15 (fifteen) days of the Agency receiving the application. Orientation and Education Meetings are scheduled quarterly in the months of March, June, September, and December: **\*Please note: Room space is limited for the Orientation and Education Meetings. If your applications and/or reservation are received after reaching room capacity, you will be invited to the next scheduled Orientation and Education Meeting.**

#### **2015-2016 Orientation and Education Meeting Dates:**

- **Wednesday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015**
- **Wednesday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016**
- **Wednesday, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016**
- **Thursday, September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016**
- **Thursday, December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016**

Adoption Circle makes every effort to provide services to anyone interested in beginning the adoption process. Adoption Circle will offer each applicant the opportunity to adopt. However, the Agency cannot guarantee that a placement will occur or the length of time that it may take for the placement to occur. Adoption Circle provides its services in full accordance and compliance with the Multi-Ethnic Placement as Amended.

### **Step 3: Orientation and Education Process**

An applicant is invited to begin the adoption process by attending the Orientation and Education meeting held in Columbus. This meeting is scheduled during the work week. It is a full day group meeting designed to provide you with adoption information that will orient you to the many facets of adoption. Topics to be addressed include Agency philosophy, programs, procedures, services, legal issues, birthparent information, and types of adoption. Applicants will hear birthparents and adoptive parents who have worked with Adoption Circle relate their adoption experiences. Openness in adoption



is discussed so that all applicants will eventually make informed decisions as they design their adoption plans. This meeting also provides the applicant with the opportunity to talk with other applicants and learn of support groups. Adoption Circle hopes this will be a time to allow the applicants to become better informed, educated and comfortable with the adoption process.

After attending the Orientation and Education meeting applicants are scheduled for the next required training meeting. Adoption Circle holds this a six hour small group meeting in the agency office training room. This meeting gives you the opportunity to explore and question issues such as genetics, bonding and attachment, myths and fantasies in adoption, parenting the adopted child, culture, and child development.

Additionally, all applicants without children or who have children older than five years of age, must complete a childcare class. Please visit [www.adoptioncircle.org](http://www.adoptioncircle.org) and go to education and training for specific child care classes. All prospective adoptive parents must have current certification in infant CPR. The Agency also provides applicants with additional training resources, i.e. reading lists, on-line education and may require you to read specific books prior to approval for adoption. Adoption Circle encourages you to become involved in adoption support groups and educational workshops in your community.

#### **Step 4: Adoptive Homestudy**

After you attend the Orientation and Education and Small Group Meetings, the process will continue with the Individual Adoptive Homestudy Assessment. You will be assigned a state certified adoption assessor who will visit with you to conduct your homestudy. These meetings will include interviews and discussions on a variety of adoption and parenting related issues. You and your homestudy assessor will discuss your social, medical, psychological and family history and other areas that relate to your decision to adopt.

Your social worker/assessor will assess your home to make certain that it meets the standards set by the State of Ohio and the Agency. You will have the opportunity to candidly discuss your motivation for adoption and your anticipated strengths and weaknesses as a parent. Adoption Circle views the homestudy process as an opportunity for you to assess your ability to successfully parent an adopted child. The goal of the homestudy is to educate and prepare you to reach a realistic decision regarding the adoptive placement of a child in your home.

Applicants will be given a list of specific documents which must be completed and given to the assessor/social worker during the homestudy process. Among the required forms are background checks, i.e. state and federal criminal, driving records and child abuse clearances, financial statement, medical form and four reference letters. All forms required by the State of Ohio will be provided to you by Adoption Circle. All documents will be reviewed by your social worker/assessor to determine the readiness of an applicant to parent an adoption child. Adoption Circle reserves the right to request and require other documentation deemed necessary for the assessment of an adoptive applicant on an ongoing basis throughout the homestudy and adoption process. This may include reports on

consultation with medical, psychological, and/or legal professionals. The homestudy cannot be completed if any requested documents are absent from your file.

The Agency's goal is always to be supportive and helpful in guiding you through your homestudy. We will lend a helping hand whenever possible. Your social worker/ adoption assessor will schedule appointments and phone calls with you at mutually convenient times but you must be prepared to dedicate a substantial amount of time to the process. The adoption process will likely require you to take time off from work. Adoption Circle will complete a written homestudy report and notify you in writing the results in accordance with Ohio law.

Adoption Circle encourages you to complete all required aspects of the homestudy in an organized and timely manner. Delays in completing your homestudy without Agency approval may result in the termination of the home-study process. The information which you will provide may become outdated and the process will have to begin again at your expense.

### **Homestudy Update**

A Homestudy may be updated every two years from the date of approval of the initial Homestudy. Applicants seeking to adopt another child as well as those who have not received a placement during the 24 month period will need to update their original Homestudy if they desire to continue in the adoption process.

Homestudy updates include personal interviews and provision of current documentation. Paperwork required (but not limited to) includes a professional reference as well as medical, financial and background clearances. Additional documents are required depending on each applicant's individual changes since the original Homestudy i.e. changes in residence, employment or number of household members.

### **Step 5: Family Profile**

You will be asked to write a family profile that once you are approved to adopt may be shared with birthparents upon their request. Your profile is the tool by which you are initially introduced the birthparents considering an adoption plan. This four page document should describe you and your spouse, if you are adopting as a married couple. If there are other children living with you, they should also be included. Details about your life, including age, religion, values, life experiences, occupation and home environment should be incorporated into your family profile. Agency staff members will be available to assist you with this assignment. When your homestudy has been approved, Adoption Circle will begin circulating your profile to Birthparents working with the Agency. Adoption Circle offers each approved adoptive applicant the opportunity to share their profile on the agency's website.

### **Step 6: Surrender and Placement**

No sooner than seventy-two (72) hours after the birth of a child a Birthparent may relinquish his or her parental rights and legal custody to Adoption Circle by voluntarily signing an *ODJFS 1666 Permanent*

*Surrender of Child.* The Agency will never accept a surrender from a Birthparent until the Birthparent appears to be making an informed and voluntary decision, free of all duress and pressure. Shortly after accepting a surrender, Adoption Circle will place the child in the approved home of the adoptive family and shall perform post-placement supervision.

## **VII. Post Placement Adoption Services**

The pre-finalization period shall be no less than six months from the date of placement. During that time Adoption Circle retains legal custody of the child and will perform post-placement, pre-finalization supervision. A caseworker/adoption assessor will make a home visit with the adoptive family no later than seven days following placement and shall make face-to-face visits during the post-placement, pre-finalization period. Per Ohio Law, all visits are in the home and both parents must be present. All members of the household must be present for at least two visits during a six month period.

During the post-placement visits your caseworker/adoption assessor will observe your family to make certain that your child is thriving in your home, surrounded by love and appropriate care. The assessor may offer parenting suggestions and will assess the total family environment to insure the health and welfare of the baby.

Adoptive parents are required to send pictures of the baby and letters describing the baby's progress on a monthly basis to the Agency for a period of one year from the date of placement. These items will be shared with the Birthparent(s) upon request.

For six consecutive weeks immediately following placement, one or both adoptive parents must remain home with the infant. Adoption Circle believes this is a very important time of parent/child bonding.

Adoption Circle will provide and/or arrange for services for the family or child as may be needed during this period of time. Adoptive parents who believe that their child may be eligible for any type of subsidy must apply for the subsidies during the post-placement, pre-finalization period.

### **Finalization**

During the post-placement period, adoptive parent(s) petition the Court to finalize the adoption, thereby transferring legal custody of the child from Adoption Circle to the adoptive parent(s). The Agency will assist with the process but you will have to hire an attorney to complete the legal paperwork and attend the Court hearing. The fees for the finalization including court costs and the attorney fees are not included in your agency adoption fee. The adoption finalization hearing cannot be held until the child has been in your home for six months.

## **VIII. Post Finalization Adoption Services**

Adoption Circle shall provide post finalization adoption services upon request of the birthparents, adoptive parents and/or adopted person even after the adoption has been finalized. These services shall be provided by trained professionals who are knowledgeable about the legal, social and emotional issues of the adoption process. If Adoption Circle cannot directly provide the services requested, the Agency shall make a referral to other trained individuals who can assist you. There may be a fee for these post-adoption services.

## IX. Adoption Circle Fee Schedule

To facilitate healthy, secure and well planned adoptions, the following services may be provided as part of your adoption plan.

- Adoptive applicant education and training
- One complete homestudy, review or update
- Assistance with writing adoptive applicant profile
- Birthparent services – state required assessments, counseling, education and provision of informational materials
- Working with adoptive applicant to design your individual adoption plan
- Preparation of legal documentation for surrender and placement and the review of these completed documents
- Communication with legal representatives of either party
- Acceptance of Permanent Surrender
- Accept physical custody of child from hospital, foster or parental care and facilitate transfer of physical custody to adoptive family
- Post-placement communication for one year from date of placement
- Post-placement supervisory visits, seven visits included, Ohio residents only
- One post-placement supervisory visit in Ohio for out of state applicants
- Facilitating payment of medical bills and legal bills
- Application for Medicaid assistance for newborn and application for subsidies, if requested
- Intermediary communications between birthparents, adoptive applicants, legal counsel, health care and social service providers and other agencies, if necessary

**Please refer to the Information Packet for a complete definition of the programs.  
The fee charged by Adoption Circle for each specific program is provided below.**

<b><u>Infant Adoption Program</u></b>	<b>\$19,000</b>
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- A non-refundable payment of three-thousand five hundred dollars (\$3,500.00) is due fourteen (14) days prior to attendance at the Orientation & Education Meeting or when invoiced, whichever is earlier.  
The next payment of three thousand five hundred dollars (\$3,500.00) is due upon completion and approval of the Homestudy/Family Assessment.  
The remaining balance is due and owing within seven (7) days of placement.

<b><u>Targeted or Identified Adoption Program</u></b>	<b>\$4,500</b>
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- A non-refundable fee of two-thousand dollars (\$2,250) is due to initiate services. If the applicants require an Ohio homestudy there is an additional \$1,500.00 Homestudy fee. Post placement supervision may be provided at a fee of \$300.00 per visit or \$1,800.00 for 7 visits.

**International Adoption Program and Auxiliary Service Program**

Independent homestudy	<b>\$ 1,500</b>
Post-placement supervisory visits (not to exceed seven visits)	<b>\$ 1,800</b>
Individual post-placement visits	<b>\$ 300 each</b>
For other specific adoption services, please contact our office.	

**Potential Additional Fees**

The necessity of these services will be determined on a case by case basis. Adoptive applicants will only be charged for those services necessary to complete their specific adoption.

- Legal termination of birthfather’s rights and/or Judicial Best Interest required for Adoption Subsidy Application (does not include cost of publication, court cost and guardian ad litem charges) \$950
- Update of an Adoption Circle Homestudy \$750
- Update of a non-agency Homestudy \$1000
- Compliance with Interstate Compact, out-of-state placements only \$850
- Compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act or other statutory requirements \$700
- Native American clearinghouse fee \$200
- Attending face-to-face meetings between birthparents and adoptive applicants \$250
- Preparation of legal documents required for Finalization Hearing \$200
- Appearance by an Agency representative at a Finalization Hearing \$200
- Accepting temporary custody of child \$500
- Arranging and contracting foster care for child \$200
- Surrender, Placement or meeting on a weekend or holiday \$200
- Special Requests (i.e. non-routine medical tests for the per hour birthparent and/or child) in addition to the cost of the test itself \$250
- Adoption counseling & education (*per hour*) \$200
- Non-routine legal services (*per hour*) \$225
- Additional post-placement supervisory visits, required after seventh visit (*each*) \$300
- Agency management of Birthparent living expenses \$200
- Agency management of Birthparent living expenses for Identified Adoption \$425

**Non-Agency Fees** An adoptive applicant will be responsible for paying for the following services if unpaid or not reimbursed through another source. These services are not provided by Adoption Circle but they may be required to complete your adoption plan.

- Adoption related medical expenses for birthmother and child, only if placement occurs
- Attorney fees incurred in the legal representation of adoptive applicant, if such representation is desired
- Attorney fees incurred in the legal representation of birthparent(s), whether or not a placement is completed
- Court costs, cost of publication and Guardian ad Litem fees for Birthfather Termination Hearings or Best Interest Hearings
- Attorney fees and court cost incurred for the finalization and issuance of the Final Decree of Adoption and birth certificate
- Foster care costs, if applicable
- Costs incurred to complete the homestudy such as the cost of childcare class, CPR class, fingerprints and physical examinations, etc.
- Cost of diagnostic and/or therapeutic services for adoptive applicant requested by the Agency at any time during the adoption process
- Cost of a private investigator to locate and/or serve papers on any individual
- Independent counseling for each of the birthparents
- Cost of Homestudy or Homestudy services for non-Ohio residents: Applicants arrange services and payment directly with the service provider in their home state
- Cost of Post- Placement Supervision or other needed services for non-Ohio residents: Applicants arrange services and payment directly with service provider in their home state
- Birthmother living expenses not to exceed \$3,000.00 per Birthmother

### **Methods of Payment**

Adoption Circle accepts cash, check, money order, cashier check, Visa, Mastercard, Discover and American Express. Please note: Adoption Circle has a 3% handling fee on credit card transactions. This fee will be added to each transaction.

*\*All Fees are subject to change. Please check current Fee Schedule at time of your application, match and placement*

## X. Adoption Assistance – Subsidy Snapshot

	<b>Title IV-E AA</b> <i>Federal Adoption Assistance</i>	<b>SAMS</b> <i>State Adoption Maintenance Subsidy</i>	<b>Nonrecurring Costs</b>	<b>PASSS</b> <i>Post Adoption Special Services Subsidy</i>
<b>Services</b>	Monthly Payment to family negotiable to a maximum of the foster care rate for the child.	Monthly maintenance payment. Maximum of \$250 in state payment.	One time payment for expenses directly related to the adoption. Maximum payment of \$1,000 per child after finalization.	Reimburses family for therapeutic, respite, residential services up to \$10,000 per SFY (\$15,000 in extraordinary circumstances).
<b>Special Needs Criteria for Child</b>	Child meets Title IV-E AA special needs criteria.	Child is not eligible for Title IV-E AA. Child meets the state special needs criteria.	Child meets Title IV-E special needs criteria.	Child has physical or developmental disability or mental or emotional condition that existed before the adoption petition is filed, or developed after the petition is filed and can be directly attributed to factors in the child's pre-adoption background or birth family's background or medical history.
<b>Financial Means Test</b>	Child's meets ADC relatedness standards or requirements of the Fostering Connection to Success and Increasing Adoption Act of 2008 or the child is eligible to receive SSI. No adoptive parent income requirements.	Adoptive family must be within 120% of the state median income.	No ADC relatedness requirement. No adoptive parent income requirements.	5% co-pay required, if family's gross income is greater than 200% of the poverty guidelines.
<b>Date of Application</b>	Sign agreement with custodial agency prior to finalization. Application after finalization through state hearing if PCSA did not inform parents of subsidy or failed to share relevant information regarding child's special needs.	Sign agreement prior to finalization with custodial agency.	Sign agreement with custodial agency if Title IV-E agreement is in place or with PCSA in county of residence if there is not a Title IV-E agreement. This must be signed prior to finalization.	Apply after finalization to PCSA in county of residence.
<b>Provision of Medicaid</b>	Child is eligible for Medicaid card, except if the child is eligible for AA based on a substantial risk only.	Family must apply for Medicaid in the county of residence; the child must have a medical necessity.	N/A	N/A

*Adoption Assistance –201-A4-S*

*Written by IHS for the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program –Revised June 2013*

Adoptive Parents have the right to apply for federal and state adoption subsidies. Any application and determination of subsidy eligibility must be made prior to finalization of an adoption. Adoption Circle cannot guarantee that child will be eligible for any adoption subsidy or assistance.

For more information call the ODJFS Helpline at 1-866-886-3537 or refer to the *Ohio Adoption Subsidy Guide* and other helpful adoption assistance information listed on ODJFS website:

<http://ifs.ohio.gov/oapl/publications.stm>



## XI. ODJFS Form 0611 Non-Discrimination Requirements

Ohio Department of Job and Family Services  
**NON-DISCRIMINATION REQUIREMENTS FOR FOSTER CARE AND  
ADOPTIVE PLACEMENTS**

The Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994, 42 U.S.C. 622(b)(9), 671(a)(18), 674(d) and 1996(b) (MEPA) and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d, et seq as it applies to the foster care and adoption process (Title VI), are designed to decrease the time children wait for foster care and adoption placement, prevent discrimination in the placement of children, and aid in the identification and recruitment of foster and adoptive families who can meet each child's needs. They prohibit any agency using federal funds from denying any person the opportunity to become an adoptive parent or foster caregiver on the basis of race, color or national origin (RCNO) of that person, or of the child involved and from 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 parent or parents, of the foster caregiver or caregivers, or the child involved.

Under MEPA and Title VI, no agency may routinely consider RCNO as a factor in assessing the needs or best interests of children. In each case, the only consideration shall be the child's individual needs and the ability of the prospective foster caregiver or adoptive parent to meet those needs. Only the most compelling reasons may serve to justify consideration of RCNO as part of a placement decision. Such reasons emerge only in the unique and individual circumstances of each child and each prospective foster caregiver or adoptive parent. In those exceptional circumstances when RCNO need to be taken into account in a placement decision, such consideration must be narrowly tailored to advance the child's best interest. Even when the facts of a particular case allow consideration related to RCNO, this consideration shall not be the sole determining factor in the placement decision.

The following actions by a PCSA, PCPA, or PNA are permitted under MEPA and Title VI:

- Asking about and honoring any choice made by prospective foster caregivers or prospective adoptive parents regarding the child's RCNO the prospective foster caregivers or prospective adoptive parents will accept.
- Honoring the decision of a child over 12 years of age to not consent to an adoption, unless the court finds that the adoption is in the best interest of the child and the child's consent is not required.
- Providing information and resources about adopting a child of another RCNO to prospective foster caregivers or prospective adoptive parents who request such information and making known to all families that such information and resource are available.
- Considering the request of a birth parent(s) to place the child with a relative or nonrelative identified by name.

This form is used in compliance with the Ohio Administrative Code rules 5101:2-48-05 and 5101:2-42-18.1
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- Considering the RCNO of the child as a possible factor in the placement decision when compelling reasons serve to justify that RCNO need to be a factor in the placement decision. Even when the facts of a particular case allow consideration related to RCNO, this consideration shall not be the sole determining factor in the placement decision.
- Promoting cultural awareness, including awareness of cultural and physical needs that may arise in the care of children of different races, ethnicities, and national origins as part of the training which is required of all applicants who seek to become foster caregivers or adoptive parents.
- Documenting verbal comments, verbatim, or documenting in detail any other indication made by a prospective foster caregiver or prospective foster caregiver family member or prospective adoptive parent or prospective adoptive family member living in the household reflecting a negative perspective regarding the RCNO of a child for whom they have expressed an interest in fostering or adopting and indicating whether those comments were made before or after completion of the cultural diversity training which is required for prospective foster care and adoptive applicants.

The following are examples of actions prohibited under MEPA and Title VI:

- Using the RCNO of a prospective foster caregiver or prospective adoptive parent to differentiate between adoptive placements for a child.
- Honoring the request of a birth parent(s) to place a child with a prospective foster caregiver of a prospective adoptive parent of a specific RCNO, unless the birth parent(s) identifies a relative or non-relative by name and that person is found to meet all relevant state child protection standards, provided that the agency determines that the placement is in the best interests of the child.
- Requiring a prospective foster caregiver or prospective adoptive family to prepare or accept a transracial foster care or adoption plan. Using "culture" or "ethnicity" as a proxy for RCNO.
- Delaying or denying placement of a child based upon the geographical location of the neighborhood of the prospective foster caregiver or a prospective adoptive family whenever geography is being used as a proxy for the racial composition of the neighborhood, the demographics of the neighborhood, the presence or lack of presence of a significant number of persons of a particular RCNO in the neighborhood or any similar purpose.
- Requiring extra scrutiny, additional training, or greater cultural awareness of individuals who are prospective foster caregivers or prospective adoptive parents of children of the different RCNO than required of other prospective foster caregivers or prospective adoptive parents.
- Relying upon general or stereotypical assumptions about the needs of children of a particular RCNO.

- Relying upon general or stereotypical assumptions about the ability of prospective foster caregivers or prospective adoptive parents of a particular RCNO to care for or nurture the sense of identity of a child of another RCNO.
- "Steering" prospective foster caregivers or prospective adoptive parents away from parenting a child of another RCNO. "Steering" is any activity that attempts to discourage prospective foster caregivers or prospective adoptive parents from parenting a child of a particular RCNO.

### **Adoption Circle Complaint Process - Pursuant to OAC Rule 5101:2-33-03 and 5101:2-5-13(A)(40)**

Adoption Circle procedure for complaints of alleged discriminatory acts, policies or practices in the adoption process that involve race, color or national origin (RCNO) shall include written notice of the procedure for any complaints of discrimination provide to all individual inquiring about or applying to be a foster caregiver or adoptive parent. Such notice shall be provided within seven days of the individual's first contact with the agency. The procedure is as follows:

1. Any individual may file a complaint alleging a discriminatory act, policy or practice involving (RCNO) in the foster care or adoption process of Adoption Circle or Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS)
2. Any person, including but not limited to, an employee or former employee of Adoption Circle or a member of a family which has sought to become an adoptive parent, may also file a complaint alleging that he or she was intimidated, threatened, coerced, discriminated against or otherwise retaliated against in some way by Adoption Circle or ODJFS because he or she made a complaint , testified, assisted, or participated in any manner in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing in connection with an allegation that Adoption Circle or ODJFS engaged in discriminatory acts, policies, or practices as it applies in the adoption process.
3. The individual filing a complaint shall use the JFS 02333 "Discrimination Complaint Form"
4. The complaint shall be filed within two years from the date of the occurrence of the alleged discriminatory act; or two years from the date upon which the complainant learned or should have known of a discriminatory act, policy or practice.
5. The complaint may be filed with Adoption Circle or ODJFS.
6. Adoption Circle shall forward the complaint to ODJFS within three working days of date of receipt of the complaint.
7. ODJFS shall notify Adoption Circle that it is the subject of the complaint within three working days of the receipt of the complaint.
8. ODJS shall conduct an investigation of the complaint. Adoption Circle shall not initiate, conduct, or run concurrent investigations surrounding the complaint or take any further action regarding the complainant or the subject of the complaint until the issuance of the final investigation report by ODJFS, unless approved by ODJFS.
9. Adoption Circle shall cooperate fully with ODJFS during the course of the investigation and shall submit any information requested by ODJFS not later than fourteen days from the date of the request, unless otherwise agreed upon.
10. ODJFS shall conduct an investigation that shall include but is not limited to:
  - a. Face to face interviews with the complainant, the respondent and all relevant witnesses
  - b. Issuance of a final investigation report to the complainant and Adoption Circle. The

- c. report shall include the allegations, background information, analysis, determination and recommendations and shall be issued within ninety days of the receipt of the initial complaint. If additional time is required ODJFS will notify the complainant and Adoption Circle regarding the needed time.
- d. Upon completion of the final investigation report, ODJFS shall determine if any action against Adoption Circle is warranted.
- e. No person who has filed a complaint alleging discriminator act, policy or practice involving RCNO in the foster care and adoption process of Adoption Circle or who has testified, assisted or participated in any manner in the investigation of a complaint shall be intimidated, threatened, coerced or retaliated against by any employee or contractor of Adoption Circle.
- f. Adoption Circle's policy does not prohibit an individual from filing a complaint with the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office for Civil Rights (OCR) alleging discrimination that involves RCNO in the foster care or adoption process of Adoption Circle.
- g. Adoption Circle shall provide a written notice of the procedures for any complaints of discrimination in the foster care and adoption process that involve RCNO within thirty days of the effective date to all foster caregivers certified or in the process of certification and to all individuals who have approved homestudies or who are participating in the adoptive homestudy process on the effective date of this rule.

## **XII. People Are Talking About Us...**

*"I want you to know meeting you has had an impact on my life directly; inasmuch as I now have the knowledge and understanding that adoptions give life as much as birth itself. Without people like you, many babies might not have their first breath. I am really grateful for agencies such as Adoption Circle."*

Birthmother, Central Ohio

*"How can I ever thank you for all you have done for us!! Knowing that our baby has been placed in a wonderful home means the world to us. Everyone at adoption circle has been so helpful. God bless you."*

Birthmother, Cleveland

*"You were able to sympathize and be reassuring... yet never offering assurances that you couldn't give. It is what saved us emotionally even though it was frustrating! We appreciate your professionalism."*

Adoptive mother, Central Ohio

*"It was great to see you again! Thanks for holding the support group meetings. You are very patient and understanding. You do a great job as a social worker and friend."*

Birthmother, Cleveland

