

OPINION UTAH GUEST OPINION

## Opinion: All children adopted from other countries should be U.S. citizens

Many adoptees have been shocked to learn decades later that their parents or legal guardians did not complete the naturalization process

By Sara Jones, Shelly Johnson, Jini Roby, and Kari Larson | Dec 13, 2021, 10:43am MST



Haitian orphans, whose orphanage was destroyed by an earthquake, are shown arriving in Pittsburgh in 2010. The orphans were being prepared for adoption into American families. Because of a technicality in the law, any such child born before Feb. 27, 1983, did not automatically become a U.S. citizen. | Gene J. Puskar, Associated Press

With the holiday season upon us, our thoughts turn to our families. Utah has a long and wonderful history of valuing family. Adoption has been one way that many Utah parents have chosen to form or expand their families. The idea is well-established that adopted children should be legally, religiously and emotionally treated the same as biological children.

It is common for children adopted to Latter-day Saint families to be sealed to their parents in the faith's temples. Yet, many are shocked to learn that tens of thousands of international adoptees in the U.S. still do not have citizenship. How did this happen?

Twenty years ago, Congress passed a well-intentioned law called the Childhood Citizenship Act of 2000 that automatically granted U.S. citizenship to all intercountry children adopted by U.S. citizen parents. But the act also contained an unfortunate technical oversight that meant international adoptees born on or before Feb. 27, 1983, would not be automatically granted U.S. citizenship.

Many adoptees in this category have been shocked to learn decades later that their parents or legal guardians did not complete the naturalization process, leaving these adoptees exposed without the protections of U.S. citizenship.

The authors of this editorial are all international adoptees raised in Utah and born before Feb. 27, 1983. Most of our parents completed our naturalization before adulthood. But many adoptive parents naturally and mistakenly assumed that their child would be automatically granted U.S. citizenship when they were legally adopted, and do not complete the steps for naturalization.

Anissa Druesedow was born in Jamaica and adopted as a teenager by U.S. citizens while living in Panama. In 2006, at age 36, she was deported from New York to Jamaica, and currently lives in Panama. Lacking resources to support her daughter Vanessa in Panama, Druesedow was grateful for Latter-day Saint friends who helped Vanessa move and resettle in Kaysville.

Vanessa completed her GED, graduated from what is now Ensign College and settled in Salt Lake City, where she has lived for the past 11 years. The family separation for Anissa and Vanessa is acute. Vanessa sees her mother only every few years as international travel is so costly.



International adoptees, brought to the U.S. as children and adopted by U.S. families, should never have to experience family separation and exile to a country they have little to no memory of or connection to because their parents failed to legalize them as U.S. citizens. (To learn more, watch [this short 3.5 minute video](#) sharing Anissa's story.)

More than 50 international adoptees across the nation have been deported to their countries of origin since the Childhood Citizenship Act was enacted. All of these children were brought to the U.S. with the promise of finding a permanent, loving home, and had every expectation that their citizenship matched that of their adoptive parents.

While international adoption may seem rare, more than 410,000 children were adopted from 28 countries into the U.S. between 1953 and 2016. Thousands of children have been internationally adopted in Utah over the decades. It is estimated that more than 18,000 South Korean adoptees alone fall into this legislative technical oversight.

Every aspect of a fulfilling life that we take for granted is made drastically more difficult for adoptees without U.S. citizenship: voting, running for public office, applying for college, serving in the military, applying for a passport or driver's license, securing a job, access to banking, applying for loans, owning a home, obtaining Social Security benefits and medical care, and legal justice.

This oversight in the law creates an unfair disparity between internationally adopted children and biologically born children.

Shelly Johnson, an executive vice president at Zions Bank, said, "A child who is internationally adopted should be equipped with the same economic empowerment as a biological child, and U.S. citizenship is a major factor. The current law makes it more difficult for thousands of international adoptees to access economic opportunity."

The Alliance for Adoptee Citizenship and advocates across the country have introduced the Adoptee Citizenship Act (HR1593 and SB967) in the 117th U.S. Congress. The proposed act has two main goals:

- Retroactively grant U.S. citizenship to all intercountry adoptees adopted by U.S. citizen parents.

- Restore rights lost by intercountry adoptees who were harmed by this technical oversight, including giving adult adoptees who have already been deported the opportunity to return to the United States and be eligible for U.S. citizenship.

We are pleased that Utah Rep. John Curtis is the lead co-sponsor of the House version of this act. He said, “When I heard about this situation, it was obvious that I needed to sponsor this bill. I’m pleased to see such tremendous bipartisan support for the Adoptee Citizenship Act.”

Rep. Burgess Owens, R-Utah, is also a co-sponsor of the bill.

In the 2022 general legislative session, Utah Sen. Jani Iwamoto will propose a concurrent state resolution to support the Adoptee Citizenship Act. She said, “Utah has always prided itself on being a family-friendly and child-friendly state. This technical flaw should have been cured decades ago. International adoptees should never have to worry whether they belong in this country.”

Children are to be loved and cherished. All children who have been adopted by U.S. citizens should be granted U.S. citizenship, regardless of the year of their birth. They should not be punished by the lack of a legal process they had no knowledge of, or control over as innocent children.

We call on all of Utah’s congressional and state government leaders to support passage of the Adoptee Citizenship Act 2021.

*Sara Jones is CEO of InclusionPro; Shelly Johnson is an executive vice president at Zions Bank; Jini Roby is a professor emeritus at BYU; and Kari Larson is vice president of the Utah Jazz. All of the authors are Utah residents and international adoptees.*





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859 Riverside Drive, #9  
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January 28, 2022

Re: S.C.R. 6—Concurrent Resolution Encouraging Support for Internationally Adopted Individuals

Dear Senators and Representatives of the Utah State Legislature:

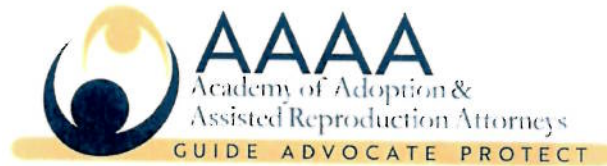
The Academy of Adoption & Assisted Reproduction Attorneys, Inc. (“AAAA”) is a not-for-profit international organization of approximately [450] invitation-only members consisting of attorneys, judges, and law professors who have distinguished themselves in the fields and are dedicated to the competent and ethical practice of adoption and assisted reproduction law. AAAA’s mission is to advocate for laws and policies to protect the best interests of children, the legal status of families formed through adoption and assisted reproduction, and the rights of all interested parties. AAAA has members who practice in the State of Utah and throughout the country.

The Academy of Adoption & Assisted Reproduction Attorneys urges your support for S.C.R. 6, the Concurrent Resolution Encouraging Support for Internationally Adopted Individuals. The Adoptee Citizenship Act of 2021 (“ACA of 2021”), provides a much needed technical correction to the Child Citizenship Act of 2000 (“CCA”) by making the CCA retroactive. Rep. John Curtis of Utah is a co-sponsor of the ACA of 2021. Since 2001, children adopted from other countries have had a streamlined path to citizenship. Each year we come across adult adoptees who are still not citizens after decades in the United States because they were adopted before the CCA was passed and their parents never finalized the adoption or applied for U.S. citizenship for their children. Because the CCA was not retroactive, which we believe was an oversight, these adoptees have seen significant hardship. The ACA of 2021 corrects this.

Some adult adoptees have not known their status, especially if they never left the U.S. or applied for a passport. If they voted or claimed to be a U.S. citizen, they may not be eligible for naturalization, and may, in fact, be subject to felony charges and deportation.<sup>1</sup> We have become more aware of adult adoptees who did not become citizens under the CCA as post 9/11 document requirements are forcing those in their 40s and older to show identification when crossing the border, renewing a security clearance, applying for Social Security, renewing a driver’s license, etc. Because they cannot show they are U.S. citizens, they are being denied, and some are even being deported to countries they do not know for minor crimes they may have committed.

Importantly, all of the adopted children who received permanent residence prior to the CCA went through significant screenings to be sure the adoptions were valid

<sup>1</sup> See “good moral character” requirement for citizenship under 8 U.S.C. 1101(f) and ground of deportability for unlawful voting under 8 U.S.C. 1227(a)(6). See also <https://www.nbcwashington.com/investigations/Tens-of-Thousands-of-Adoptees-Learn-They-Arent-US-Citizens-Even-After-Decades-Living-Here-505213201.html>.



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(including an I-604 investigation), and to check their criminal and national security background). And, the ACA of 2021 imposes a background check on adoptees now living abroad, and a requirement that they are held accountable for any crimes committed before acquiring U.S. citizenship.

The Adoptee Citizenship Act will correct the oversight from the CCA and remedy problems now being experienced across the country by many adoptees who have called the U.S. home for decades, and nearly their entire lives. Please show your support by voting for S.C.R. 6.

Sincerely,

THE ACADEMY OF ADOPTION AND ASSISTED REPRODUCTION ATTORNEYS

Genie Miller Gillespie  
President

Larry S. Jenkins  
Chair, Governmental Affairs Committee





## Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity

**Spencer J. Cox**  
Governor

**Deidre M. Henderson**  
Lt. Governor

**Daniel Hemmert**  
Executive Director

**Benjamin Hart**  
Deputy Director

January 28, 2022

Utah State Senate  
350 N. State Street, Suite 320  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114

Utah State House of Representatives  
350 North State, Suite 350  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114

Dear Senators and Representatives:

We write to encourage your support for State Concurrent Resolution 6: Encouraging Support for Internationally Adopted Individuals in the Utah 2022 Legislative General Session. We have learned that nationally tens of thousands of international adoptees 38 years of age and older are still without U.S. citizenship as a result of the Childhood Citizenship Act of 2001. At that time, the law changed to grant automatic citizenship to children under age 18 who are born internationally and legally adopted to U.S. citizen parents. This arbitrary date meant that thousands of older adoptees who were already legally adopted were under the older, more difficult, and more arbitrary immigration laws. All of these adults were brought to the U.S. as young children, with the promise of a loving family and economic opportunities that citizenship affords. A change in federal law is needed to provide similar protections to older international adoptees that are already granted to younger international adoptees.

The State of Utah has a long history of valuing families and children. We are also a state where economic opportunities are unlimited. With the nation's best economy and the lowest unemployment rates, Utah leaders should actively work so that every Utah resident feels productive and valued. Citizenship has fundamental impact on accessing jobs, education, careers, quality of life, and participation in public and political service. Every aspect of our lifetime, even retirement, is impacted by citizenship.

International adoptees who do not have citizenship experience significant economic distress, mental health concerns, and even risk of deportation. They want to work and thrive with the same economic opportunities that are available to domestically adopted and biological children. We encourage retroactively and inclusively applying a more equitable law for all international adoptees.

This Resolution is consistent with principles of economic fairness and opportunity. We urge you to support State Concurrent Resolution 6.

Sincerely,

  
Dan Hemmert  
Executive Director

  
Ben Hart  
Deputy Director

CC: Honorable Governor Spencer Cox, State of Utah  
Gordon Larsen, Sr. Advisor for Federal Affairs  
Nubia Peña, Sr. Advisor on Equity and Opportunity & Dir. of the Utah Division of Multicultural Affairs

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

January 28, 2022

The Honorable Governor Spencer J. Cox  
350 N. State Street, Suite 200  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114

Utah State Senate  
350 N. State Street, Suite 320  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114

Utah State House of Representatives  
350 North State, Suite 350  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114

Dear Governor Cox, Senators, and Representatives:

I write to encourage you to support the Concurrent Resolution Encouraging Support for Internationally Adopted Individuals SCR 6 in the Utah 2022 Legislative Session. I am honored to be the Republican House Sponsor for the national Adoptee Citizenship Act 2021 (H.R. 1593) that addresses the technical oversight in federal law referred to in SCR 6. In 2000, Congress unintentionally created a technical oversight in legislation, leaving thousands of international adoptees without citizenship. I have met personally with Utah constituents who have been impacted by lack of citizenship, when they were legally adopted by U.S. citizen parents.

Like many of you, I have been blessed to have a family with wonderful children. Through the legal process of adoption, a child expects to have the same opportunities and rights that a biological child has. Basic rights like voting, applying for a driver's license, obtaining a job, enjoying a career of choice, applying for college, and a myriad of other economic opportunities that are granted by virtue of U.S. citizenship. The Adoptee Citizenship Act will ensure that those left out of the Child Citizenship Act have the same rights as other domestically adopted and biological children.

One of the most enduring honors I have as a Federal congressional delegate is supporting enacting legislation that truly makes a difference in our constituents' lives. I sincerely hope you will support this national effort by passing the Utah Concurrent Resolution Encouraging Support for Internationally Adopted Individuals SCR 6. Thank you for your continued service to Utah. I look forward to working with you to support our constituents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John R. Curtis", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

John R. Curtis  
Member of Congress



February 1, 2022

Honorable Governor Spencer J. Cox	Utah State Senate	Utah State House of Representatives
350 N. State Street, Suite 200	350 N. State Street, Suite 320	350 North State, Suite 350
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114	Salt Lake City, UT 84114	Salt Lake City, Utah 84114

Dear Governor Cox, Senators and Representatives:

Leaders listed in this letter are international adoptees, adoptive parents, adoption law experts, and concerned citizens and Utah constituents. We are writing to request your support for State Concurrent Resolution 6: Encouraging Support for Internationally Adopted Individuals in the Utah 2022 Legislative General Session. We are deeply concerned that tens of thousands of international adoptees 38 years of age and older are still without U.S. citizenship as a result of the Childhood Citizenship Act 2000. We support federal legislation to fix this technical oversight.

The United States was one of the highest receiving countries of international adoptions during 1953 to 1983. As such, the U.S. maintains a responsibility to the children who were adopted by U.S. citizen parents during that time. U.S. citizenship is a fundamental right that should be granted to any international adoptee legally adopted by a U.S. citizen parent. Citizenship has immense impact on a person's ability to economically thrive into adulthood and throughout their lifetime: voting, applying for a driver's license, obtaining a job, enjoying a career of choice, applying for college, and the myriad of economic opportunities in the U.S. International adoptees who do not have citizenship experience significant economic distress and even risk of deportation.

This Resolution is consistent with principles of family values. We believe that adopted children should have the same legal rights and economic empowerment as biological children. All of these adults were brought to the U.S. as children with the expectation that their citizenship should match that of their adoptive U.S. citizen parents. Utah is a state that has long supported families, children, and been a welcoming state for refugees and immigrants.

We urge you to support Utah State Concurrent Resolution 6.

Sincerely,

Sara Jones  
International adoptee  
President InclusionPro

Shelly Johnson  
International adoptee  
EVP Zions Bank

Jini Roby  
International adoptee  
JL Roby Consulting  
Domestic/int'l adoption law expert  
Prof. Em. BYU School of Social Work

Scott Anderson  
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Woodland Hills City Council Member  
Pres. Utah Fed. of Republican Women  
Past Pres. Women's State Legislative Council of Utah

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Deputy Director  
Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity

Sarah Voelker  
International Adoptee

Vanessa Ripley  
Child of international adoptee  
Director Walker Edison

Clint Betts  
Adoptee  
Executive Director Silicon Slopes

Sunny Washington  
Executive Director Tech PAC

J. Ladd Johnson  
International adoptive parent  
Partner, Edinger Associates PLLC

Troy Keller  
International adoptive parent  
Partner, Dorsey & Whitney LLP

Amy Smedley  
Adoptive parent  
EVP & General Counsel Savage Services

Melody Linton  
Adoptive parent  
Founder Domino Foundation supporting transracial  
adoptees and families

Curtis Linton  
Adoptive parent  
Founder Domino Foundation supporting transracial  
adoptees and families

Scott Leckman  
Adoptive parent  
Physician & humanitarian

Rick Larsen  
President & CEO Sutherland Institute

Holly Tree Richardson  
Adoptive parent

Greg Richardson  
Adoptive parent



Utah constituent signatures collected in support of a petition for congress to pass an inclusive Adoptee Citizenship Act. Names collected by Adoptees for Justice, a project of NAKASEC. As of January 28, 2022.

		James	Munter	Pat	White
Alexandra	Chopine	James	Shoop	Patricia	Davidson
Alisa	Carlton	Jamie	Abraham	Patricia	Jennings
Andrew	Peterson	Jean	Rodriguez	Patricia	Medina
Ann	Mcmullen	Jean	Stephenson	Patricia	Montague
Anna	Van	Joan	Taylor	Patrick	Riley
	Wagoner	Jonathon	Anderson	Paul	Simmons
Annastasia	Weiss	Joyce	Olsen	Phyllis	Safman
Annie	Van Alstyne	Kadri	Barrani	Rebekah	Peterson
Audrey	Hollaar	Kairi	Shepherd	Richard C	Russell
Autumn	Hickman	Karen	Acosta	Rick	Shapiro
Barbara	Sterker	Karen	Jensen	Rick	Thompson
Barbara N	Muirhead	Kari	Weiss	Robert	Nelson
Briana	Patillo	Katherine	Overton	Robin	Wootton
C	Stevens	Kathleen	Reddy	Sandra	Cox
Carly	Stocks	Katrina	Morriss	Sarah	Kellermeyer
Carmela	Sudano	KC	Tabor	Shannon	Allsop
Carolyn	Barrani	Kelsey	Peterson	Sharon	Park
Chelsea	Rodriguez	Kerall	Reynolds	Shelby	Robertson
Cheryl	Ferguson	Kimberly	Pettit	Sidney	Potter
Chris	Larsen	Kimberly	Vincent	Stacy	Moranville
Christine	Hartmann	Laurie	Wilson-Bell	Stan	Neering
Christine	Skidmore	Leanna	Cruz	Steve	Shuput
Craig	Provost	Leigh	Fullmer	Steve	Jeong
D.L.	Bigler	Leslie	Brown	Sungkil	Kang
Daniel	Butler	Loren J	Young	Susan	Norris
Daniel	Jensen	M.	Honer-Orton	Tami	Wilkin
Daniel	Wood	Maha	Barrani	Tammy	Collier
Danielle	Oviatt	Malia	Annis	Tiffanie	Johnson
Debernierre	Torrey	Margaret	Garr	Toni	Holmes
Deborah	Dissette	Margaret	Stone	Trevor	Smith
Diana	Toth	Mariajose	Zarate	Tuesday	Allred
Diane	Arnal	Mark	Harrison	Vanessa	Ripley
Don	Scholl	Mark	Mylar	Virginia	Highfield
Elan	Carlson	Martha	Redeker	William	Edgington
Elizabeth	Nicholson	Marti	Woolford	William	Nikolai
Ellen	Collette	Michele	Cowley	William	Smart
Emma	Morgan	Midge	Pauluk	William	Wallace
Gaya	Covington	Nancy	Cornett		
Gloria	Wurst	Nancy M.	Veit		
Gregory	Probst	Nicole	Docta		
Heather	Buchanan	Omar	Barrani		
Holly	Stuart	Otolose	Tavake-Pasi		
Hyeawon	Clayton	Pat	Annoni		

