

REPORT BY THE  
AUDITOR GENERAL  
OF CALIFORNIA

---

**THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES'  
ADOPTION PROGRAM NEEDS IMPROVEMENT**

---

REPORT BY THE  
OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL  
TO THE  
JOINT LEGISLATIVE AUDIT COMMITTEE

P-064

THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES'  
ADOPTION PROGRAM NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

APRIL 1983



Telephone:  
(916) 445-0255

Thomas W. Hayes  
Auditor General

STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
**Office of the Auditor General**  
660 J STREET, SUITE 300  
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 95814

April 11, 1983

P-064

Honorable Art Agnos  
Chairman, and Members of the  
Joint Legislative Audit Committee  
State Capitol, Room 3151  
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members:

The Office of the Auditor General respectfully submits its report concerning the Department of Social Services' Administration of the State's Adoption Program.

Respectfully submitted,

  
THOMAS W. HAYES  
Auditor General

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
SUMMARY	i
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
I <u>PROBLEMS IN THE ADOPTION PROCESS ARE           DELAYING THE PLACEMENT OF SOME CHILDREN</u>	9
DELAYS IN THE ADOPTION PROCESS	10
FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DELAYS IN THE ADOPTION PROCESS	27
EFFECTS OF PLACEMENT DELAYS ON CHILDREN AND ADOPTING PARENTS	39
ADOPTION FEE SCHEDULE MAY NEED REVISION	46
CONCLUSION	48
RECOMMENDATION	49
ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE DEPARTMENT	52
II <u>INADEQUATE ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES AND           PAYMENT REVIEW FOR THE AID FOR           ADOPTION OF CHILDREN PROGRAM</u>	55
INCONSISTENT ELIGIBILITY AND PAYMENT LEVEL GUIDELINES	56
LACK OF PAYMENT REVIEW	59
CONCLUSION	61
RECOMMENDATION	62
RESPONSE TO THE AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT	
Health and Welfare Agency	64

TABLE OF CONTENTS  
(Continued)

	<u>Page</u>
APPENDICES	
A TIME INTERVALS BETWEEN PHASES OF THE INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION PROCESS	A-1
B TIME INTERVALS BETWEEN PHASES OF THE INDEPENDENT ADOPTION PROCESS	B-1
C TIME INTERVALS BETWEEN PHASES OF THE RELINQUISHMENT ADOPTION PROCESS	C-1
D RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO ADOPTING PARENTS	D-1

## SUMMARY

The adoption program of the State Department of Social Services (DSS) provides services to parents who wish to place their children for adoption and to persons who wish to adopt children. The DSS provides adoption services primarily through three adoption programs: intercountry adoptions, relinquishment adoptions, and independent adoptions. However, weaknesses in the adoption program are causing delays in the adoption process, the adoption fee schedule does not reflect current costs for adoption services, and inconsistencies in eligibility requirements and payment monitoring for the Aid for Adoption of Children program can result in inequitable treatment of adopting parents.

### Delays in the Adoption Process

Because of delays in the adoption process, adoption agencies are not always processing adoptions within legal time requirements. These delays are due to inefficiencies within the current adoption process, inadequate staffing, and other factors such as difficulties in locating a child's natural parents and in conducting home studies for families requesting hard-to-place children.

Delays in processing adoptions can have detrimental effects on children and the adopting family. In intercountry adoptions, for example, some children who are ready for placement frequently must wait for long periods, sometimes in unfit environments. In one case, a child related to the adopting family had waited over 20 months; the adoption agency

still had not assigned the case to a caseworker. During that time, the child, whose parents are dead, was living in deprived conditions in the foreign country.

For the adopting parents, these lengthy delays cause anxiety and frustration. As a result, some families are discouraged with the adoption process. Because of the unsatisfactory experience with the adoption process some families have decided not to adopt children through some public adoption agencies.

Adopting parents responding to our questionnaire identified delays as a significant problem in the adoption process. Although the majority of parents rated the overall services provided by adoption agencies as above average, some of these parents indicated that adoption agencies had not provided adequate information and encouragement to continue the adoption process.

#### Adoption Fee Schedule May Need Revision

Although the State's cost of processing adoptions has increased substantially in the last 15 years, the adoption fees have remained the same for intercountry and relinquishment adoptions and no fee has been established for independent adoptions. Consequently, the adoption fee schedule does not reflect the current cost of providing adoption services.

#### Inadequate Guidelines and Review

Adoption agencies are using inconsistent guidelines for determining eligibility and payment levels for recipients of the Aid for Adoption of Children program. In addition, the DSS does not have adequate fiscal controls over the Aid

for Adoption of Children program payments. Consequently, recipients are not receiving equitable treatment regarding program eligibility and payment levels, and program funds are not always being used in accordance with program eligibility requirements. Recent implementation of the Adoption Assistance Program should correct the problems related to program eligibility and fiscal controls. However, inconsistencies in determining payment levels in the Adoption Assistance Program may continue because the State Department of Social Services has not developed adequate guidelines.

### Recommendations

To address the problem of delays in the adoption process, the DSS should develop and distribute a policies and procedures manual that clarifies existing processing policies and provides procedures for improving the timeliness and effectiveness of the adoption process. The manual should also present guidelines on providing information and encouragement to parents throughout the adoption process. Further, we recommend that the Legislature enact legislation that will help streamline the method for notifying adoption agencies that an adoption petition has been filed.

In addition, the DSS should develop workload standards to assess current adoption staffing needs. The DSS should also study the feasibility of increasing the staff of the Los Angeles state adoption agency by requesting an exemption from the State's hiring freeze or by transferring caseworkers from other units.

To ensure that the adoption fees are appropriate to the current cost of providing adoption services, the DSS should review the adoption fee schedule and recommend to the Legislature appropriate revision of the fee schedule.

To address the problems in the Aid for Adoption of Children program and the Adoption Assistance Program, the DSS should develop guidelines for determining the payment level of the Adoption Assistance Program. Finally, the DSS should implement a review mechanism for the Adoption Assistance Program payments in order to comply with federal requirements.

## INTRODUCTION

The Adoptions Branch of the State Department of Social Services (DSS) is responsible for administering the statewide adoption program for parents who wish to place their children for adoption and for persons who wish to adopt children. Adoption services are provided statewide by 6 DSS district offices (referred to in this report as state adoption agencies), 28 county adoption agencies, and 12 private adoption agencies. These services are provided primarily through three adoption programs: intercountry adoptions, independent adoptions, and relinquishment adoptions.

In intercountry adoptions, a foreign-born child is placed with families who are U.S. citizens and California residents. This type of adoption is provided by all of the state adoption agencies, one county agency, and nine private agencies.

In independent adoptions, the natural parents place the child directly with an adopting family of their choice. All of the state agencies and eight county agencies provide these services.

In relinquishment adoptions, the child is placed through an adoption agency when the relationship between the natural parents and the child is terminated, either voluntarily or by a court order. The majority of adoptions are relinquishment adoptions and are provided by five of the state agencies, all county agencies, and ten private agencies.

Table 1 below shows the number of adoptions in each program for fiscal years 1979-80 through 1981-82.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF ADOPTIONS  
BY PROGRAM, FISCAL YEARS  
1979-80 THROUGH 1981-82

	<u>1979-80</u>	<u>1980-81</u>	<u>1981-82</u>
Intercountry program	191 (5%)	209 (5%)	188 (5%)
Independent program	1,646 (40%)	1,649 (41%)	1,823 (45%)
Relinquishment program	<u>2,293</u> (55%)	<u>2,168</u> (54%)	<u>2,042</u> (50%)
Total adoptions	<u>4,130</u>	<u>4,026</u>	<u>4,053</u>

The Adoption Process

Adoption is the legal action in which a person takes a minor as his or her own child and assumes all parental responsibilities for the child. According to California law, the primary objective of adoptions is to serve the best interest of children by providing the stability and security of a home when these conditions are missing from their lives.

Before children can be adopted, the existing legal relationship between the children and their parents must be terminated. This may be accomplished when the parents voluntarily give their children to a licensed adoption agency or to a family of their choice. It may also be accomplished involuntarily when the court declares children legally free from their parents when the parents refuse to properly care for their children or are unable to do so.

Prior to the adoption, the prospective adopting family must be evaluated and approved by an adoption agency through a home study process. The home study establishes whether the home is suitable for a child, whether the best interests of a child will be served through the placement, and whether there appear to be any legal barriers to the adoption.

#### Program Costs

The adoption program is funded entirely from the State's General Fund. Approximately 83 percent of the program funds are allocated to the 28 counties that operate their own adoption programs. The law authorizes state and county agencies to charge applicants a maximum fee of \$500 for relinquishment adoptions and state agencies to charge a maximum fee of \$300 for intercountry adoptions; no fee is authorized for independent adoptions. These fees may be reduced or waived

at the discretion of the adoption agency either when the amount would be a financial burden to the applicant or, in relinquishment adoptions, when the adopted child meets the hard-to-place requirements. A child may be hard to place because of such factors as age, minority background, or physical or emotional handicaps. Private adoption agencies are exempt from these restrictions and can establish their own fee schedules.

In fiscal year 1981-82, the adoption program cost \$22.5 million; approximately \$18.7 million of this amount was paid to the counties to support their adoption programs. Fees collected during this same period totaled approximately \$345,000.

Aid to Parents Who  
Adopt Hard-to-Place Children

To encourage and promote the adoption of hard-to-place children who would otherwise require long-term foster care, the State instituted the Aid for Adoption of Children program. This program provides financial aid to parents who adopt these children. During the first quarter of fiscal year 1982-83, approximately 2,400 recipients received Aid for Adoption of Children program payments. The program is

funded entirely by the State's General Fund; the DSS estimates that total program costs for fiscal year 1982-83 will be approximately \$4.9 million.

On October 1, 1982, the Adoption Assistance Program became operational in California. Under this program, aid payments will be available for a longer period than under the Aid for Adoption of Children program, and the State can obtain 50 percent federal financial participation for those hard-to-place children who are eligible. To qualify for federal eligibility, a child must meet federal eligibility requirements for the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program or the Supplemental Security Income program. Parents who entered into an agreement for aid prior to October 1, 1982, will remain in the Aid for Adoption of Children program, while parents who entered into such an agreement subsequent to this date will be in the Adoption Assistance Program. The DSS estimates that the total Adoption Assistance Program costs for fiscal year 1982-83 will be approximately \$500,000. As a result of federal financial participation, the DSS anticipates a federal reimbursement of approximately \$110,000 during fiscal year 1982-83.

## SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This is the second report the Auditor General has issued on the California adoption program. The first report addressed the recruitment of adopting parents and the computerized adoption referral system.\*

In this second report we focus on three aspects of the DSS adoption program: the time taken to complete the adoption process and the procedures used in processing adoptions; the information and encouragement provided to adopting parents during the adoption process; and certain aspects of the Aid for Adoption of Children program and the Adoption Assistance Program including eligibility requirements and payment monitoring.

We analyzed applicable laws and regulations regarding California's adoption program and examined DSS policies and procedures for processing adoptions. In addition, we interviewed DSS officials involved in the adoption program. We also visited eight adoption agencies that process adoptions in both northern and southern California. We visited three state adoption agencies: Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Santa Rosa;

---

\* The report is entitled "Department of Social Services: The Needs of Children in the Foster Care and Adoption Programs Are Not Being Met," Report P-003.2, October 1981.

four county adoption agencies: Santa Clara, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Ventura; and one private adoption agency, the Children's Home Society, which has branch offices throughout the State. We reviewed randomly selected adoption cases for fiscal years 1980-81 and 1981-82 at each of the adoption agencies visited. We also interviewed adoption agency administrators and staff to analyze the efficiency of adoption procedures. Further, we obtained information regarding adoption programs in six other states.

To aid in evaluating the information and services that adoption agencies provide to adopting parents during the adoption process, we sent a questionnaire to 400 randomly selected adopting parents. We also interviewed selected parents and surveyed members of adopting parent organizations to obtain information regarding the adoption process.

Finally, we reviewed the Aid for Adoption of Children program and the Adoption Assistance Program to evaluate guidelines for recipient eligibility and payment levels and to evaluate controls over such payments. We interviewed state and county adoption agency administrators and staff and analyzed policies and procedures for awarding the adoption subsidies to eligible recipients. We also examined case files to determine whether the recipients were eligible to receive aid.

In Chapter I, we assess the DSS adoption process and present ways to decrease the delays in placing children in adopting homes. In Chapter II, we discuss the Aid for Adoption of Children program and the Adoption Assistance Program.

## CHAPTER I

### PROBLEMS IN THE ADOPTION PROCESS ARE DELAYING THE PLACEMENT OF SOME CHILDREN

Weaknesses in the adoption program of the State Department of Social Services (DSS) are delaying the placement of some children. None of the adoption agencies that we reviewed, and that are subject to time requirements for processing adoptions, are fully complying with legal time requirements for completing home studies. Delays in the adoption process are caused by a lack of adequate DSS guidelines for adoption agencies, policies and procedures that could be streamlined, inadequate staffing, and other factors such as difficulties in locating a child's natural parents and problems in conducting home studies for hard-to-place children.

Delays in the adoption process can have detrimental effects on the children and the adopting families. In intercountry adoptions, children who are ready for placement frequently have waited for long periods, sometimes in unfit environments. Some children, who are known or related to the families waiting to adopt them, had been waiting over a year, and still the adoption agency had not assigned the case to a caseworker. In independent adoptions, children may live in an unfit home for an unnecessarily long period before the adoption

agency begins reviewing the family. For the prospective adopting parents, these lengthy delays are causing anxiety and frustration. In some instances because of the delays, families have decided not to adopt children through some public agencies. Finally, since the adoption fee schedule has not been revised for 15 years, adoption fees charged to adopting parents may need revision.

#### DELAYS IN THE ADOPTION PROCESS

Because adoption agencies are not fully complying with the legal time requirements, there are delays in the State's intercountry and independent adoption programs. Further, the time taken to process intercountry adoptions is increasing.

#### Intercountry Adoptions

Under the intercountry adoption program, families can adopt certain foreign-born children. The prospective parents submit to the adoption agency a preliminary information form that provides general information about the parents and the type of child they wish to adopt. The prospective adopting parents may be required to attend a group meeting to acquaint the parents with adoption procedures and to discuss problems that they may encounter as adopting parents.

When the agency is ready to conduct the home study, the prospective parents submit a formal application. The case is then assigned to a caseworker who conducts the required home study. Once all necessary interviews are conducted and all required documents are obtained, the completed home study report is sent to a foreign adoption agency, which then selects a child for the family. The foreign agency sends to the adoption agency information about the child including the child's picture, background, description of social and physical development, and medical report. After a child is placed with the family, the adoption agency supervises the placement for at least six months.

Section 16141 of the Welfare and Institutions Code requires state adoption agencies to complete home studies for intercountry adoptions within specific time constraints. If a child is hard to place because of such factors as age, ethnicity, or physical or emotional handicaps, the child is classified as a "priority child." Further, DSS policy also classifies a child who is known or related to the adopting family as a "priority child." State agencies are required to complete all home studies for a "priority child" within six months from the date the prospective adopting parents submit a preliminary information form to the agency. In all other cases, the home study is to be completed within twelve months. The Legislature implemented these time requirements in 1974

because of the lengthy delays that were occurring in processing intercountry adoptions. County and private adoption agencies are not required to complete intercountry home studies within specific time requirements.

Our review disclosed that state adoption agencies are not fully complying with these time requirements for completing home studies. We reviewed 60 of the 106 completed intercountry adoption cases processed by the Berkeley and Los Angeles state adoption agencies for fiscal years 1980-81 and 1981-82. In 22 of these 60 cases, the law required a completed home study within six months. However, in 13 (59 percent) of the 22 cases, the agencies did not comply with this requirement. The Berkeley state agency had completed the home study within the required six-month time limit in only 3 (37 percent) of 8 cases. In the Los Angeles state agency, only 6 (43 percent) of the 14 cases requiring a completed home study within six months were completed within the time specified by the Legislature. In the Los Angeles state agency, the average interval from the date the preliminary information form was received in these cases to the date the home study was completed was 245 days (8 months). For the Berkeley state agency, the average time interval was 288 days (9 months). The time taken to complete a home study in the 22 cases ranged from 85 to 733 days for these two agencies. Table 2 on the following page shows the agencies' compliance with this six-month requirement.

TABLE 2

STATE ADOPTION AGENCIES' COMPLIANCE  
WITH THE SIX-MONTH TIME REQUIREMENT FOR  
COMPLETING HOME STUDIES  
IN INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTIONS

<u>State Agency</u>	<u>Cases Reviewed</u>	<u>Cases Completed Within 6 Months</u>	<u>Cases Not Completed Within 6 Months</u>
Berkeley	8	3 (37%)	5 (63%)
Los Angeles	<u>14</u>	<u>6</u> (43%)	<u>8</u> (57%)
Total	<u>22</u>	<u>9</u> (41%)	<u>13</u> (59%)

The other 38 intercountry adoption cases we reviewed at the Berkeley and Los Angeles state adoption agencies required a completed home study within twelve months. In the Los Angeles state agency, the average time interval to complete a home study was 263 days (8 months), while for the Berkeley state agency it was 336 days (11 months). The processing time ranged from 69 to 559 days for the two agencies reviewed. For both state agencies, the average interval from the date the preliminary information form was received to the date the home study was completed was less than twelve months. However, in 13 (34 percent) of 38 cases, the agencies did not comply with the twelve-month requirement. Table 3 on the following page shows the adoption agencies' compliance with this twelve-month requirement.

TABLE 3

STATE ADOPTION AGENCIES' COMPLIANCE  
WITH THE TWELVE-MONTH TIME REQUIREMENT  
FOR COMPLETING HOME STUDIES IN  
INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTIONS

<u>State Agency</u>	<u>Cases Reviewed</u>	<u>Cases Completed Within 12 Months</u>	<u>Cases Not Completed Within 12 Months</u>
Berkeley	22	11 (50%)	11 (50%)
Los Angeles	<u>16</u>	<u>14</u> (88%)	<u>2</u> (12%)
Total	<u>38</u>	<u>25</u> (66%)	<u>13</u> (34%)

Although county and private adoption agencies are not required by law to complete home studies for intercountry adoptions within a specific time, we reviewed the time intervals in intercountry adoption cases processed by Ventura County and the Children's Home Society. We examined 55 of the 227 completed intercountry adoption cases processed by these two agencies for fiscal years 1980-81 and 1981-82. In 9 of these cases state law would require state agencies to complete a home study within six months; in 46 cases the twelve-month limit would be required of state agencies. Although the Ventura County agency and the Children's Home Society were more prompt in processing adoption cases than the two state agencies, we found that these agencies also did not always meet the processing time requirements required for state agencies. For example, in the 9 cases in which state agencies would have been required to complete a home study in six months, the

county and private agencies did not meet this requirement in 4 (44 percent) of the cases. But for the 46 cases in which state adoption agencies would have been required to complete a home study in twelve months, only 6 (13 percent) of the cases processed by the county and private agencies did not meet this requirement. (Appendix A shows the intervals between various phases of the intercountry adoption process for the state, county, and private agencies we reviewed.)

This comparison of time taken to complete the adoption process at state agencies with time taken by county and private agencies must be considered in light of several differences among the agencies. For example, the state agencies provide adoption services for a much larger geographical area than the county and private agencies we visited. Also, caseloads of the caseworkers at the agencies differ. At the two state agencies, caseworkers who processed intercountry adoptions also processed independent adoptions; at the county agency we visited, caseworkers who processed intercountry cases processed that type of adoption only.

Not only are state adoption agencies not fully complying with the time requirements for completing home studies, the length of time to process intercountry adoptions is increasing at the state agencies we reviewed because the DSS has given a higher priority to processing independent adoption

cases. Specifically, this increase is occurring in the interval between the time a family submits a preliminary information form and the time the case is assigned to a caseworker. For example, in the Los Angeles state adoption agency, this time interval averaged 89 days for cases completed during fiscal years 1980-81 and 1981-82; more recently however, we found that the preliminary information forms have remained unassigned to caseworkers for an average of 209 days. Delays at the initial stages of adoptions increase the time needed to complete the entire adoption process.

In intercountry adoptions, persons who wish to adopt must complete a preliminary information form before they can receive a formal application. After receipt of the completed application, the agency assigns the case to a caseworker. However, state adoption agencies are not promptly processing preliminary information forms. At the time of our review, we found that two state agencies had delayed mailing formal applications to 205 families who had submitted preliminary information forms. Consequently, none of these cases had been assigned to a caseworker.

Forty-nine of the 205 cases required completion of home studies within six months from the date the prospective families submitted a preliminary information form. Twenty-three (47 percent) of these 49 cases had already

exceeded the six-month requirement, and still the cases had not been assigned to a caseworker. Six of these 23 families had been waiting over a year to adopt children who were either known or related to them. At the time of our review, their cases still had not been assigned to a caseworker. For some of these families, the state agency was the only agency in the vicinity that provided intercountry adoption service for children who are known or related to adopting families. Consequently, these families had no alternative but to use the services of a state adoption agency.\*

The other 156 of the 205 families who had submitted preliminary information forms but who had not yet received formal applications involved cases requiring completion of home studies within twelve months. Twenty-seven cases (17 percent) had already exceeded the twelve-month processing requirement without having been assigned to a caseworker. Table 4 on the following page shows the length of time that intercountry adoption cases had remained unassigned to caseworkers at two state agencies because the agencies had not mailed application forms to the families.

---

\* During our review, the Children's Home Society began providing intercountry adoption services throughout the State for families wanting to adopt children known or related to them.

TABLE 4

LENGTH OF TIME INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION CASES  
HAD REMAINED UNASSIGNED  
TO CASEWORKERS IN STATE ADOPTION AGENCIES

Length of Time Unassigned	Number of Preliminary Information Forms					
	<u>6-Month Requirement</u>			<u>12-Month Requirement</u>		
	<u>Berkeley</u>	<u>Los Angeles</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Berkeley</u>	<u>Los Angeles</u>	<u>Total</u>
Less than 6 Months	12	14	26	33	33	66
7 - 12 months	1	14	15	12	51	63
13 - 18 months	<u>0</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>27</u>
Total	<u>13</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>45</u>	<u>111</u>	<u>156</u>

In addition to the 205 families who had submitted preliminary information forms but had not received application forms, we found 34 formal application forms at the Los Angeles state agency that had not been assigned to a caseworker; 32 of these had remained unassigned for longer than one year.

Finally, we found that the DSS is not adequately screening preliminary information forms in intercountry adoptions. We found that 19 of the 205 preliminary information forms that had not been assigned to a caseworker were improperly coded by the DSS Adoptions Branch. All 19 preliminary information forms were coded with a twelve-month home study completion due date when, in fact, a six-month

completion date was required. The families who submitted these forms were not receiving the processing priority that state policy requires.

### Independent Adoptions

In the independent adoption program, the natural parents place the child with the adopting parents of their choice. After placement, the adopting parents file an adoption petition with the superior court. The court clerk notifies the DSS Adoptions Branch, which in turn notifies the appropriate adoption agency that a petition has been filed. The adoption agency then assigns the case to a caseworker to conduct the home study. Once all the necessary interviews are conducted and the required documents are obtained for the home study, the adoption agency prepares a court report that contains a recommendation to the court on whether the adoption should be granted, denied, or dismissed.

Section 226.5 of the Civil Code requires an adoption agency to interview the parties to the adoption within 45 days of the date the petition is filed with the superior court. Further, Section 226.6 of the Civil Code requires that the adoption agency submit to the court a report within 180 days of the date the petition is filed recommending either approval,

denial, or dismissal of the adoption petition. If, however, the adoption agency needs additional time to prepare its report, the agency must obtain an extension from the court.

The adoption agencies we reviewed are not fully complying with the time requirements specified by law for independent adoptions. (Appendix B shows the average time intervals between the various phases of the independent adoption process for the state and county agencies we reviewed.) We reviewed a sample of 180 of the 2,361 independent adoption cases completed during fiscal years 1980-81 and 1981-82 by two state adoption agencies and two county agencies. In 7 of these 180 cases, there was not sufficient documentation to permit us to determine all time intervals. However, in 129 (75 percent) of the 173 cases in which we could determine the time interval, adoption agencies did not comply with the requirement that the parties to the adoption be interviewed within 45 days. The interval ranged from less than one day to 337 days. Table 5 on the following page shows the adoption agencies' compliance with this requirement.

TABLE 5

ADOPTION AGENCIES' COMPLIANCE WITH  
THE 45-DAY REQUIREMENT FOR  
INTERVIEWS IN INDEPENDENT ADOPTIONS

<u>State Agency</u>	<u>Cases Reviewed</u>	<u>Cases Meeting Requirement</u>	<u>Cases Not Meeting Requirement</u>
Berkeley	43	5 (12%)	38 (88%)
Los Angeles	50	13 (26%)	37 (74%)
<u>County Agency</u>			
Los Angeles	50	20 (40%)	30 (60%)
San Bernardino	<u>30</u>	<u>6</u> (20%)	<u>24</u> (80%)
Total	<u>173</u>	<u>44</u> (25%)	<u>129</u> (75%)

Additionally, in 104 (58 percent) of the 180 cases reviewed, we found that adoption agencies did not submit a report to the court within 180 days of the date the adoption petition was filed. However, adoption agencies did request and were granted extensions from the court in 92 of the 104 cases. Table 6 on the following page shows the adoption agencies' compliance with the requirement that reports be submitted within 180 days of the petition.

TABLE 6

ADOPTION AGENCIES' COMPLIANCE WITH THE 180-DAY  
REQUIREMENT FOR COURT REPORTS IN INDEPENDENT ADOPTIONS

<u>State Agency</u>	<u>Cases Reviewed</u>	<u>Cases Meeting Requirement</u>	<u>Cases in Which Report Was Not Filed In 180 Days</u>	<u>Cases in Which Extension Was Requested</u>	<u>Cases in Which Extension Was Not Requested</u>
Berkeley	50	18 (36%)	32 (64%)	29 (91%)	3 (09%)
Los Angeles	50	22 (44%)	28 (56%)	26 (93%)	2 (07%)
<u>County Agency</u>					
Los Angeles	50	23 (46%)	27 (54%)	21 (78%)	6 (22%)
San Bernardino	30	13 (43%)	17 (57%)	16 (94%)	1 (06%)
Total	<u>180</u>	<u>76 (42%)</u>	<u>104 (58%)</u>	<u>92 (88%)</u>	<u>12 (12%)</u>

Further, at the Los Angeles state agency, we found that because cases are not promptly assigned to a caseworker, the time necessary for processing independent adoptions is increasing. At this agency, 36 independent adoption cases had not been assigned to a caseworker. These cases had remained unassigned an average of 29 days. The length of time that these cases remained unassigned ranged from 5 to 69 days.

A significant portion of the time allotted to the adoption agency to interview all parties to the adoption and report to the court is consumed by the process used to notify adoption agencies of the adoption petition. At the Berkeley and Los Angeles state agencies, we found that it takes an average of more than 22 days for the adoption agency to receive notification of the adoption petition. Consequently, on the average, the agencies only have approximately 23 days to comply with the requirement that all parties to the adoption be interviewed within 45 days. Then, because the law does not require the names of the natural parents nor the addresses of the natural parents and adopting parents on the adoption petition, the adoption agency has to contact the adopting parents' attorney to obtain this information. This further reduces the time available to interview the parties to the adoption.

## Relinquishment Adoptions

Under the relinquishment adoption program, a child is placed by an adoption agency when the relationship between the natural parents and the child is terminated, either voluntarily or by a court order. The adoption agencies we reviewed use various procedures for processing relinquishment adoptions. Generally, however, prospective adopting parents send to the adoption agency an application that provides general information about the applicants and the type of child they desire to adopt. After the agency receives the application, the case is assigned to a caseworker, and an "intake interview" is held to discuss the adoption process and the types of children that are available for adoption. If the adoption agency accepts the applicant for a home study, the caseworker begins the study. When the home study is completed and a child is placed with the family, the agency supervises the placement for at least six months.

Currently, there are no legal time requirements for completing a home study in relinquishment adoptions. However, both the former Chief of the DSS Adoptions Branch and adoption agency administrators indicated that six months is a reasonable amount of time for completing a home study in relinquishment adoptions. That is, a home study should be completed within six months from the date the case is assigned to a caseworker.

Therefore, we used six months as our criterion for measuring the performance of adoption agencies in completing home studies in relinquishment adoptions.

We reviewed 190 of the 1,842 completed relinquishment cases processed by one state, one private, and three county adoption agencies during fiscal years 1980-81 and 1981-82. In 144 of these there was sufficient documentation to permit us to determine all time intervals. In 60 (42 percent) of the 144 cases, the home study was not completed within six months. The average time interval, however, for four of the five agencies we reviewed was under six months. (Appendix C shows the average time intervals between various phases of the relinquishment adoption process for the adoption agencies we reviewed.) Table 7 on the following page shows the adoption agencies' performance according to the six-month criterion for completing home studies.

TABLE 7

ADOPTION AGENCIES' COMPLIANCE  
WITH THE SIX-MONTH CRITERION  
FOR COMPLETING HOME STUDIES IN  
RELINQUISHMENT ADOPTIONS

<u>State Agency</u>	<u>Cases Reviewed</u>	<u>Cases Completed Within 6 Months</u>	<u>Cases Not Completed Within 6 Months</u>
Santa Rosa	30	23 (77%)	7 (23%)
 <u>County Agency</u>			
Los Angeles	47	27 (57%)	20 (43%)
San Bernardino <sup>a</sup>	27	4 (15%)	23 (85%)
Santa Clara	30	21 (70%)	9 (30%)
 <u>Private Agency</u>			
Children's Home Society	<u>10</u>	<u>9 (90%)</u>	<u>1 (10%)</u>
Total	<u>144</u>	<u>84 (58%)</u>	<u>60 (42%)</u>

<sup>a</sup> Administrative procedures at the San Bernardino agency are somewhat different than those used by the other agencies; this may account for the lower percentage of home studies completed within six months at the San Bernardino agency.

## FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DELAYS IN THE ADOPTION PROCESS

We identified four major factors that have contributed to the delays in the adoption process: insufficient DSS guidelines for adoption agencies; policies and procedures that could be streamlined; inadequate staffing at the state adoption agencies to process current caseloads; and factors such as difficulty in locating the child's natural parents and conducting home studies for hard-to-place children.

### Insufficient Guidelines

Because the DSS has not adequately provided guidelines to adoption agencies, some existing DSS policies and procedures are not always followed. The DSS does not have a policies and procedures manual for its adoption program. The DSS has provided the adoption agencies with adoption laws and policies, but these do not include interpretation or clarification of policies nor do they include procedures for processing adoptions.

The DSS communicates clarifications or changes in policies or procedures to adoption agencies through policy memorandums, letters, or verbal communications. Consequently, some adoption agencies are not aware of certain existing

policies and procedures. The following are examples of current DSS policies and procedures that adoption agencies do not always follow:

- Second Adoptions--Current intercountry adoption policies require four interviews during a home study. However, these policies also allow an adoption agency to conduct fewer interviews during a home study for a family seeking to adopt a second child from the same adoption agency. However, not all agencies are aware of this policy. Consequently, additional interviews may be conducted when they are not needed, and such interviews could contribute to delays in the adoption process. One adoption agency administrator who was not aware of this policy stated that shortening the second home study would reduce the time to process an adoption.
  
- Early Filing of Fingerprints--Not all adoption agencies are following the procedure that allows prospective parents to file the fingerprint portion of the visa petition before a child has been selected through the intercountry adoption program. A visa petition is used to classify an orphan as an immediate relative. Because the visa petition cannot be processed until the fingerprints are cleared, the adoption process can be shortened by at least 60 days when the prospective parents' fingerprints are filed prior to the selection of the child. Only one

of the two state agencies we visited that processed intercountry adoptions notified the prospective parents of this time-saving procedure, but it did this only on a limited basis. In contrast, the private and the county agencies we visited recommend that the prospective parents file the fingerprints early in the process to avoid such delays.

- Intake Interviews--The intake interview is the initial screening interview with an applicant for a relinquishment or an intercountry adoption. During this interview, the adoption agency generally provides information about the adoption process and discusses the types of children available for adoption. DSS policy permits adoption agencies to consider the intake interview as the first of the four interviews required for a home study. Yet some caseworkers are not aware of this policy and require four interviews after the intake interview. One agency administrator stated that the caseworker's time would be saved if the intake interview could be considered the first interview of the home study.
  
- Interviewing Alleged Fathers--Section 226.5 of the Civil Code requires that the parties to an independent adoption be interviewed within 45 days of the filing of the adoption petition. However, in cases where a particular man is not otherwise presumed to be the natural father,

but is alleged by the mother to be the father of the child, adoption agency administrators do not agree on whether the alleged father must also be interviewed within the 45-day requirement. Some adoption agency administrators stated that this requirement pertains to the alleged father, while other administrators believed that it does not. Still, other administrators stated that they were not sure whether the requirement includes the alleged father. Current DSS policy states that while the alleged father must be notified of the adoption petition, he need not be interviewed within the 45 days unless a legal parental right is established.

#### Policies and Procedures That Could Be Streamlined

In addition to identifying certain existing DSS policies and procedures that adoption agencies do not always follow, we also identified certain policies and procedures that could be streamlined to reduce the delays in the adoption process. The following are specific examples of policies and procedures that could be streamlined:

- Notification of the Adoption Petition--As noted earlier in the report, the current process for notifying adoption agencies of an independent adoption petition took an excessive amount of time in the majority of the adoption

agencies we reviewed. Section 226 of the Civil Code requires the clerk of the superior court of the county in which the petitioners reside to notify the DSS that an adoption petition has been filed. The DSS in turn notifies the adoption agency. We found that the interval between the date the petition is filed with the court and the time agencies are notified of the petition averages at least 22 days. The Los Angeles County adoption agency reduces this interval by requiring the adopting parents' attorney to send a copy of the adoption petition to the adoption agency when the petition is filed in court. The attorney sends the names and addresses of the natural parents and the adopting parents to the agency at the same time. We found that in those cases in which the attorney complied with this requirement, the interval between the date the petition was filed and the date the agency received notification was reduced to approximately ten days. A similar procedure for shortening the adoption process is used in Oregon, which requires an adoption petition to be filed with the adoption agency at the same time the petition is filed with the court. An administrator for Oregon's adoption program said that this method provides timely notifications.

- Reducing the Number of Home Study Interviews--Section 30633 of Title 22 of the California Administrative Code requires that a minimum of four interviews be conducted to complete a home study. However, adoption agency administrators stated that in certain situations the minimum number of the interviews could be less than four. Such situations could include a second adoption, a foster adoption, adopting a relative, or an adoption by a single parent.

In the case of a second relinquishment adoption processed by the same adoption agency, the agency could use some of the data collected during the previous adoption study; this could allow the agency to reduce the number of interviews in the second adoption. Current DSS policy already allows a reduction in the number of interviews for a second intercountry adoption processed by the same agency.

For foster adoptions processed through the relinquishment program, the adopting family requests to adopt a child who was originally placed in their home as a foster placement. Since the adoption caseworker may have conducted regular visits to the home during the foster placement, four additional interviews may not be necessary in all cases.

In cases involving the adoption of a relative, the number of interviews may be reduced because the family already knows the child and the child's background.

In a single parent adoption, through the relinquishment or the intercountry program, four interviews may not always be needed. The minimum of four interviews originally comprised an intake interview, a separate interview with both the husband and the wife, and a concluding interview. In the case of a single parent, the number of interviews can be reduced.

Although many of the other states we contacted have requirements that are different from California's, the majority of the states agreed that the adoption agency should have the flexibility to reduce the number of interviews in a second adoption, adoption of a foster child, adoption of a relative, and adoption by a single parent.

- Reducing Supervisory Interviews--Section 30647 of Title 22 of the California Administrative Code requires that the adoption agency conduct a minimum of four interviews with the family from the time the child is placed in the home to the time the adoption is finalized. However, the number of supervisory interviews could be reduced in

certain cases, such as in adoptions involving infants, relatives, or foster children. Adoption agency administrators said that there is less adjustment when an infant or a relative is adopted. There is also less adjustment in a foster adoption because the child has already been in the home for some time. Therefore, under certain circumstances, the number of interviews could be reduced. In our review of other states' adoption programs, we found that Michigan does not require any type of supervisory period for foster adoptions; adoptions are finalized once the home study is completed. Also, for infant adoptions, most states we contacted conduct fewer supervisory interviews than California.

- Location of Interviews--Current policy requires that at least one of the four required home study interviews be held in the applicant's home. We found that some caseworkers conduct all of the home study interviews in the home. In many instances, however, it would save the caseworker travel time and cost to conduct as many of the interviews as possible at the adoption agency rather than in the prospective parents' home. All of the administrators at the adoption agencies we reviewed stated that as many of the interviews as possible should be held at the agency to expedite the adoption process.

- Increasing Applicant Involvement--Some adoption agencies have been able to reduce a caseworker's workload by encouraging applicants to become more involved in the adoption process. For example, some adoption agencies require the applicant to complete an autobiography form prior to or during the home study process; another agency requires the applicants to collect certain documents prior to the interviews. This not only reduces the caseworker's workload, but also makes the applicants more involved. Administrators at these agencies indicated that these procedures helped reduce the caseworker's workload and made the parents feel more involved in the adoption process. In our review of other states' adoption programs, we found that all the states we contacted favor more applicant involvement. For example, the State of New York prepares a timetable within which the applicant is to submit required documents to the adoption agency to assure that the home study process is completed promptly.
  
- Using the Services of Parent Groups--Adoption agencies could reduce their workload by using the services of local organizations of parents who have adopted children. The services provided by parent groups could include meeting children at the airport when they arrive from foreign countries, supplying informational data to prospective adopting parents at adoption orientation meetings, and

providing other supportive services for adopting families. We found that several of the agencies we visited had established an effective system for using the services of parent groups. Those agencies that are using the services of parent groups indicated that such services have reduced their workload. Further, officials of other states we contacted said that using the services of parents helps reduce the workload of their caseworkers.

#### Inadequate Staffing

Another problem that contributes to delays in processing adoptions appears to be inadequate staffing at the state adoption agencies. State adoption administrators stated that existing staff is inadequate to process the current caseload. This condition has contributed to processing delays for all three types of adoptions, especially for intercountry adoptions. Because of staffing shortages, the DSS has given priority to the processing of independent adoption cases since the child is placed in the adopting parents' home before a home study is conducted.

Although the DSS has developed staffing standards for county adoption agencies, it has not developed them for state agencies. Therefore, we could not assess staffing needs for state adoption agencies. However, we did find that the

staffing problem was severe at the Los Angeles state agency: only four of the ten authorized caseworker positions were filled. At the time of our review, 133 intercountry cases had remained unassigned to caseworkers for over six months. In addition, there was a backlog of 36 independent adoption cases awaiting assignment to caseworkers.

To alleviate the problem of insufficient staffing at the state agencies, the DSS Adoptions Branch has requested ten additional staff positions at a total annual cost of \$244,000. However, due to state and DSS hiring freezes, the Adoptions Branch has not been able to obtain these additional staff positions.

The DSS may be able to alleviate the staffing problem during the State's current hiring freeze by requesting an exemption from the freeze or by transferring other DSS caseworkers to the Adoptions Branch. Also, the DSS could seek volunteers to perform clerical functions. State policy encourages state and county adoption agencies to seek volunteer services. One state agency we reviewed is using volunteers to perform clerical functions to help reduce staff workloads.

## Other Factors Causing Delays

In addition to insufficient guidelines, procedures that could be streamlined, and staffing shortages, we identified other causes for the delays in the adoption process. Some of these factors are beyond the control of the adoption agencies. In independent adoptions, for example, before an agency can file with the superior court a recommendation on the adoption petition, the natural parents' consent to the adoption must be obtained. In many cases, however, the adoption agencies were unable to locate the natural parents of the child. In other cases, the agencies were unable to obtain consent to the adoption from the natural mother or father. In such cases, court action must be initiated to terminate the parental rights of the natural parents. This, in turn, causes delays in filing the court report. In 70 percent of the independent adoption cases in which a court report was not completed within 180 days of the date that the adoption petition was filed, the causes of the delay identified by the adoption agencies were beyond the adoption agencies' control.

In the relinquishment adoption program, a number of variables cause delays in the time it takes to complete a home study. Many of the children placed through this program are hard-to-place children. Therefore, the adoption agency may lengthen the period for the home study by spending additional

time with the family to ensure that a family is prepared to adopt such a child. Further, the adoption agencies we visited use different administrative procedures that affect the length of time for the home study. For example, the San Bernardino County adoption agency assigns a case to the caseworker up to three months before the start of the home study. In a foster child adoption or when the family wishes to adopt a particular child, the home study is not completed until the relationship between the natural parents and the child is legally terminated. In some cases, this can take from one to two years.

EFFECTS OF PLACEMENT  
DELAYS ON CHILDREN  
AND ADOPTING PARENTS

Delays in processing adoptions can have detrimental effects on both the child and the adopting family. Delays can also result in increased costs to the State. In one state agency, 34 children had waited for long periods to be placed in adopting homes through the intercountry adoption program; at least three of the children had waited in unfit environments. Additionally, prospective parents become frustrated and anxious during the adoption process; in one case we reviewed, the family decided not to adopt a second child because of the delays they experienced when adopting the first child. While the majority of adopting parents we surveyed rated the overall

services provided by the adoption agencies as above average, some parents indicated that the adoption agencies had not encouraged them to continue the adoption process, had not kept them informed during the adoption process, and had not provided adequate initial information about the adoption process. Finally, delays in relinquishment adoptions increase the State's cost of maintaining and supporting children in the foster care system. Currently, the cost to the State for each foster child averages \$371 a month.

#### Effects on Children and Adopting Parents

Delays in the intercountry adoption process can have a detrimental effect on the child. At the Los Angeles state agency, intercountry adoption requests to adopt 34 children known or related to the adopting families had remained unassigned to caseworkers for six months or longer. In all of these priority cases, the home study should have been completed within six months from the date the preliminary information form was submitted. At least three of the children lived in deprived conditions in the foreign country. One family had waited over a year to adopt a foreign child related to them; the adoption agency still had not assigned the case to a caseworker. The child was living in the Philippines with a family that has eight other children and that was unable to provide for him.

In another case, a family was seeking to adopt a child who is related to them and whom they had already adopted in Mexico. Before the family can adopt the child in the United States, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service requires that the family have a U.S. home study completed. However, because of the backlog of preliminary information forms requiring processing at the state agency, the agency had still not assigned the case to a caseworker 20 months after receiving the preliminary information form. Consequently, the family was unable to start the adoption process. Meanwhile, the child, whose parents are dead, was living in deprived conditions in Mexico.

Another family had submitted the preliminary information form over 21 months prior to our review, and still the case had not been assigned to a caseworker. The family wanted to adopt a child related to them who was living in a foreign country with a family that could barely support the child.

In independent adoptions, children may also live in unfit homes for an unnecessarily long time as a result of delays in processing. As noted earlier, in independent adoptions the child begins living with the adopting family prior to the adoption agency's involvement in the adoption process. To ensure that the child is living in an appropriate

environment, it is extremely important that the adoption agency visit the adopting family at an early stage in the adoption process. We found one independent adoption case in which an adopting father had physically injured the child on several occasions after the child had begun living with the family. Moreover, the mother suffered from depression anxiety and was unable to cope with the child.

In addition to possible physical harm to a child, delays in processing independent adoptions can result in severe emotional trauma for a child. For infants particularly, the relationship to parents during the early stages of life is crucial. During this time, the child develops a strong emotional attachment to the adopting family. When the attachment is disrupted by removing the child from the family, the disruption can impair the child's linguistic and physical development. Therefore, it is important that independent adoption cases be processed promptly to reduce the possibility of removing a child from the family after emotional bonds have been established.

For the adopting parents, the delays in the adoption process cause anxiety and frustration. As previously noted, we found that some families had been waiting over a year and their cases still had not been assigned to a caseworker. As a result of their frustration, some parents have developed negative

attitudes toward the adoption process. We found one family that decided not to adopt a second child because of their experience with the adoption process. In other instances, families have decided not to adopt children through some public agencies.

Parents who seek independent adoptions may be particularly anxious when the caseworker does not expeditiously obtain the consent for the adoption from the natural (legal) parents. Their anxiety is particularly acute during the first six months after the child is placed with them; during this time, the adopting parents are fearful that the natural parents may reclaim the child.

#### Results of Questionnaire Sent to Adopting Parents

To help evaluate the services provided to adopting parents by adoption agencies, we interviewed adopting parents and sent questionnaires to 400 randomly selected parents who had participated in the adoption process. A total of 152 parents responded to our questionnaire. We found that more than two-thirds of the respondents who evaluated the adoption agencies considered the overall services provided by the agencies better than average: 31 percent rated the services good, and 38 percent rated the services excellent. However, these parents did identify problems related to the adoption

process. Some adopting parents identified processing delays as a significant problem. Some of the parents also indicated that the adoption agencies did not provide adequate initial information about the adoption process, did not provide adequate encouragement to continue the adoption process, and did not always keep them adequately informed of the status of their adoption. (Appendix D summarizes the results obtained from our questionnaire.)

We asked adopting parents to evaluate the amount of encouragement that adoption agencies had given them to continue the adoption process. The respondents indicated that adoption agencies did not always provide sufficient encouragement to adopting parents. We found that 39 (43 percent) of 90 respondents who answered this question stated that the adoption agencies provided little or no encouragement to continue the adoption process. The responses to this question were from respondents whose relinquishment or intercountry adoptions were processed primarily by state and county adoption agencies. For example, one family who applied to a state agency for a relinquishment adoption was discouraged from continuing with the adoption. The respondent stated that the caseworker strongly suggested that the family look elsewhere for an adoption because both applicants were teachers and teachers had a high failure rate as parents.

Response to our question about whether the adoption agency kept them informed during the adoption process indicated that both the state and county adoption agencies did not always keep adopting parents adequately informed while processing the adoptions. Of the 139 respondents who answered this question, 41 (29 percent) indicated that the adoption agency did not keep them adequately informed of the status of their adoption. Specifically, some respondents indicated that there was little or no contact from the agency unless the parents initiated the contact. One family whose independent adoption was processed by one of the state agencies had a court hearing delayed because the caseworker had not contacted the family until the day of the hearing to advise them that their physical examinations were not current. In another instance, a family that had adopted a foreign child through one of the state agencies said that the caseworker misplaced the family's immigration and naturalization forms. More importantly, during this time, the caseworker went on a leave of absence. The family was not informed of either of these problems, and the adoption was delayed for several months.

We also asked respondents to evaluate the amount of initial information provided to them regarding the adoption process. Of the 142 respondents who answered this question, 63 (44 percent) indicated that the initial information about the adoption process was only somewhat helpful or not helpful to

them in making their decision to adopt a child. In addition, some respondents commented that the initial information provided to them was either discouraging or too brief or misleading to help them. The response indicates that the county and state adoption agencies are not providing adequate initial information. Some of the respondents indicated that the best information provided to them was from other sources.

In addition to sending a questionnaire to randomly selected adopting parents, we sent approximately 100 questionnaires to selected adopting parent groups that distributed them to adopting parents. We found that these adopting parents expressed concerns similar to those of the randomly selected group. However, these respondents rated some of the adoption agency services more negatively. Services receiving the negative rating included the amount of encouragement to continue the process and information provided by the adoption agency.

ADOPTION FEE SCHEDULE  
MAY NEED REVISION

During our review of the timeliness of the adoption program and the quality of certain adoption services, we found that the current adoption fee schedule may need revision. Section 225p of the Civil Code authorizes state and county adoption agencies to collect a maximum fee of \$500 for

relinquishment adoptions. State adoption agencies may also charge a maximum of \$300 for processing intercountry adoptions. These fees may be reduced or waived if the payment causes economic hardship to the adopting parents or, in relinquishment adoptions, when the child meets hard-to-place requirements. The law does not authorize adoption agencies to charge a fee for independent adoptions.

Although the State's cost for processing relinquishment and intercountry adoptions has significantly increased, the fees for these two programs have not been increased in over 15 years. Consequently, the adoption fee schedule does not reflect the current cost of providing adoption services.

Furthermore, the absence of a fee for processing independent adoptions may result in inequitable treatment of adopting parents. Parents may be required to pay a fee for children adopted through the relinquishment and intercountry adoption programs even though some of these children have special needs such as physical and emotional handicaps. In contrast, according to the former Chief of the DSS Adoptions Branch, most children adopted through the independent adoption program are healthy children, but parents adopting these children are not required to pay a fee to the adoption agencies.

During 1982, the DSS requested legislation to increase the fees for relinquishment and intercountry adoptions, and to establish a fee for independent adoptions. However, the Legislature did not pass the proposed legislation during the 1981-82 session.

### CONCLUSION

Our review disclosed that the State's adoption process is delaying the placement of some children and discouraging some adopting parents. Adoption agencies are not fully complying with the time requirements for processing adoptions. Delays in processing adoptions are due to inefficiencies within the current adoption process, inadequate staffing, and other factors such as difficulties in locating a child's natural parents. Because of the delays in processing adoption cases, the placement of some children is delayed, some children can experience physical or emotional trauma, and some adopting parents are frustrated with the State's adoption program. During the delays, the State continues to pay for the cost of foster care for some children. Because of their unsatisfactory experience with some public adoption agencies, some families have decided not to adopt children through these agencies.

Moreover, the adoption fee schedule may need revision. Although the State's cost for processing adoptions has increased substantially in the last 15 years, the adoption fees have remained the same. Further, no fee has been established for independent adoptions. Consequently, the adoption fee schedule does not reflect the current cost of providing adoption services.

#### RECOMMENDATION

The State Department of Social Services should take immediate action to reduce the delays in the adoption process. Specifically, the DSS should develop and disseminate to adoption agencies a manual that will provide technical assistance and contain all laws and policies pertaining to adoptions. This manual should also clarify policies including the following:

- Under what circumstances the number of interviews required for a home study can be reduced for a second adoption;
- Under what circumstances an intake interview can be included as one of the required interviews for a home study; and

- Under what circumstances must an alleged father be interviewed within the 45-day requirement for independent adoptions.

In addition, the DSS should allow adoption agencies the flexibility to reduce the number of interviews required for a home study under certain circumstances including adoption by a single parent, a foster adoption, or a relative adoption. The DSS should also allow adoption agencies the flexibility to reduce the number of supervisory visits after a child is placed under certain situations such as an adoption of an infant, a relative, or a foster child.

The DSS should also develop a manual containing procedures for prompt processing of each type of adoption. This manual should be provided to all state adoption agencies and should be available to all county and private adoption agencies upon request. The following areas should be included in the manual:

- Early filing of the fingerprint portion of the visa petition whenever possible;

- Conducting interviews at the adoption agencies rather than in the home of the adopting parents whenever possible;
- Increasing involvement of adopting parents in the adoption process;
- Using services available from adopting parent organizations whenever possible;
- Establishing procedures to ensure that preliminary information forms are adequately screened; and
- Providing information and encouragement to adopting parents throughout each phase of the adoption process.

Further, to assess state adoption staffing needs, the DSS should develop workload standards for state adoption agencies. While these standards are being developed, the DSS should review the feasibility of increasing the staff of the Los Angeles state agency where the staffing problem is severe. The DSS could possibly accomplish this within the State's hiring freeze guidelines by requesting an exemption from the hiring freeze or by transferring caseworkers from other units within the DSS.

Finally, to ensure that the adoption fees reflect the current cost of providing adoption services, the DSS should review the adoption fee schedule. Once this review is completed, the DSS should recommend to the Legislature whether the adoption fee schedule needs revision.

To improve the timeliness of the adoption petition notification process for independent adoptions, we recommend that the Legislature enact legislation that requires the petitioners to provide the investigating adoption agency a copy of the adoption petition at the same time the petition is filed in court. Also, the adoption petitioners should be required to provide the names and addresses of all parties to the adoption to the adoption agency at the time the petition is filed in court.

ACTIONS TAKEN  
BY THE DEPARTMENT

To improve its adoption program, the State Department of Social Services has consolidated adoption services at the state adoption agencies and is developing policies and procedures manuals. The DSS has consolidated adoption services at five of the six state adoption agencies. Except for the Los Angeles

agency, each agency now provides independent, relinquishment, and intercountry adoption services; previously each agency provided only one or two kinds of adoption services. As a result of this consolidation, travel costs have decreased, the caseworker's time is used in a more efficient manner, and having knowledge of the three types of adoptions allows the caseworker to provide better services to the community. The consolidation of services should enable state agencies to process adoptions in a more timely manner.

During our review, the DSS issued to all adoption agencies a User's Manual that contains all current policies for the relinquishment and independent adoption programs. The relinquishment policies also apply to the intercountry program. In addition, within the next two years, the DSS plans to incorporate in the manual all interpretations of policies, court decisions, and other pertinent information. The DSS is also developing procedures manuals for the relinquishment, independent, and intercountry programs for the state adoption agencies. These manuals will be available to county

and private adoption agencies upon request. The DSS estimates that its procedures manuals will be completed by July 1, 1983.

## CHAPTER II

### INADEQUATE ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES AND PAYMENT REVIEW FOR THE AID FOR ADOPTION OF CHILDREN PROGRAM

Adoption agencies are using inconsistent guidelines for determining eligibility requirements and payment levels for the Aid for Adoption of Children (AAC) program. Consequently, families are not always receiving equitable treatment regarding program eligibility and payment levels, and the program funds are not always being used in accordance with program eligibility requirements. These conditions exist because the State Department of Social Services has not provided adequate guidelines regarding the determination of program eligibility and payment levels. Also, the DSS has not implemented a mechanism for reviewing the AAC payments.

With the implementation of the Adoption Assistance Program on October 1, 1982, the DSS provided adequate guidelines for determining eligibility for the Adoption Assistance Program, and plans to begin monitoring payments under this program. However, guidelines for determining payment levels are still needed for the Adoption Assistance Program.

INCONSISTENT ELIGIBILITY  
AND PAYMENT LEVEL GUIDELINES

The Aid for Adoption of Children (AAC) program and the Adoption Assistance Program provide financial aid to parents who adopt hard-to-place children. However, adoption agencies we reviewed are using inconsistent guidelines for determining eligibility and payment levels for the AAC program. As a result, recipients are not receiving equitable treatment.

Section 16115 et seq. of the Welfare and Institutions Code authorizes financial assistance to families who adopt a hard-to-place child. Financial assistance is to be based on the needs of the child and the ability of the adopting family to meet those needs. However, the grant shall not exceed the amount that the county would pay for foster care for the child. Under the AAC program, a family may receive aid for up to three years, with an extension of the grant available for an additional two years if the adoption agency determines there is a continuing need. Aid is available for a longer period under the Adoption Assistance Program, under which a family may receive assistance payments until the child reaches the age of 18.

We found that the DSS had not provided sufficient guidelines for determining eligibility and payment levels for the AAC program. Some adoption agency administrators said that

the policies in the California Administrative Code for the AAC program were not specific regarding eligibility requirements or for determining the payment amount. Officials at the DSS told us that the DSS did not consider it necessary to provide guidelines for eligibility and payment levels for the AAC program because it wanted the adoption agencies to have flexibility in determining eligibility and establishing payment levels. Consequently, three of the four adoption agencies we reviewed had developed their own AAC program guidelines. However, these guidelines are not uniform.

We reviewed the administration of the AAC program at the Santa Rosa state adoption agency and the Santa Clara, Los Angeles, and San Bernardino county adoption agencies and found that guidelines for eligibility requirements and payment levels vary. For example, three of the four agencies established an eligibility requirement based on the adopting family's income, while the other agency's policy is to consider all families who adopt a hard-to-place child eligible for the program, regardless of their gross income. In determining payment levels, one adoption agency establishes a payment level based on a review of the specific needs of the child, while another agency automatically awards the maximum amount allowed. Also, one agency reduces the payment level by the care and supervision portion of the foster care payment.

Because the adoption agencies we reviewed are applying the provisions of the AAC program inconsistently, recipients are not always receiving equitable treatment. For example, a family could be eligible for AAC aid at one adoption agency, but not be eligible at another agency. Likewise, a family adopting a child up to four years old can receive the maximum payment of \$261 per month from one agency, while the same family would receive between \$5 and \$237 per month at another agency.

Further, agencies that have established an income criterion for eligibility may have discouraged some parents from adopting hard-to-place children. Our review of case records at one agency that used the income test identified an instance in which a family decided not to adopt a child when the family was denied AAC program benefits because the family's income exceeded the agency's criterion for eligibility.

On October 1, 1982, the Adoption Assistance Program became operational in California. Under this program, aid payments will be available for a longer period than under the Aid for Adoption of Children program, and the State can obtain 50 percent federal financial participation for those hard-to-place children who are eligible.

When the Adoption Assistance Program was implemented, the policies in the California Administrative Code were changed to reflect the provisions of the new aid program. These policies prohibit an income test for eligibility. Therefore, the differences we found in eligibility guidelines for the AAC program are eliminated under the Adoption Assistance Program. However, in our opinion the new policies are not specific enough regarding the determination of payment amounts, and the DSS has not provided guidelines. For example, the policies do not address how the adoption agency is to determine the need of the child and the family's ability to meet this need. Therefore, each adoption agency may continue to develop its own guidelines, and inconsistencies in determining payment levels in the AAC program may continue in the Adoption Assistance Program.

#### LACK OF PAYMENT REVIEW

The DSS has not instituted a mechanism for reviewing AAC payments. Good management practices dictate that a review mechanism be in place to ensure that program payments are made only to eligible recipients. After awarding an AAC grant, the adoption agencies forward the approval documents to the county's accounting department, which then makes the monthly payment. According to the Chief of the DSS Fiscal Policy and Procedure Bureau, the counties submit monthly claims to the DSS

for reimbursement. After the mathematical accuracy of the claim is verified, the claim is paid. The DSS does not review the records of the adoption agencies to verify that the recipients were eligible to receive assistance. Since the DSS does not conduct audits of the adoption agencies' records, it is relying on the internal controls over these payments at the adoption agencies.

However, our review of the internal controls at one state and three county adoption agencies disclosed weaknesses in controls over AAC program payments. We found that one county agency did not establish sufficient controls over AAC program payments. For example, the agency's annual review of program eligibility does not include procedures to ensure that the child still meets eligibility requirements. At this county agency, we found two cases in which the children were no longer eligible, yet the families continued to receive payments. The total overpayments at the time of our review for these two cases amounted to \$1,800. In both cases the adopted child was over 18 years old and not a full-time student. Program regulations require that a child over 18 years old must be a full-time student to be eligible for the AAC program. Since our review, the agency has initiated corrective action to address this problem. Controls over AAC payments at the other three agencies appeared to be adequate.

Because there is no mechanism for reviewing AAC program payments, the DSS may be unable to determine that payments are made to eligible recipients only. However, because federal financial participation in the Adoption Assistance Program requires the DSS to conduct reviews of the program, this weakness in the DSS control over AAC program payments should be corrected in the future. The DSS is currently planning to establish a review mechanism to comply with the federal requirement.

#### CONCLUSION

The State Department of Social Services has not provided adequate guidelines for the Aid for Adoption of Children program regarding eligibility and payment levels. Consequently, some adoption agencies have developed their own guidelines. These guidelines, however, are inconsistent. As a result, recipients are not receiving equitable treatment. Also, the DSS has not implemented a mechanism to review payments under the Aid for Adoption of Children program.

Under the Adoption Assistance Program, the DSS has provided adequate guidelines for eligibility, but it has not provided sufficient guidelines for

determining the amount of the payment. However, the DSS plans to implement a mechanism for reviewing Adoption Assistance Program payments.

#### RECOMMENDATION

To address the weaknesses we identified in the Aid for Adoption of Children program and the Adoption Assistance Program, the State Department of Social Services should take the following actions:

- Develop guidelines for determination of payment level for the Adoption Assistance Program; and
- Implement a review mechanism for the Adoption Assistance Program payments to comply with federal requirements. The DSS should also review payments under the Aid for Adoption of Children program at the same time that it reviews payments for the Adoption Assistance Program.

We conducted this audit under the authority vested in the Auditor General by Section 10500 et seq. of the California Government Code and according to generally accepted government auditing standards. We limited our review to those areas specifically contained in the audit request.

Respectfully submitted,

  
THOMAS W. HAYES  
Auditor General

Date: March 28, 1983

Staff: Robert E. Christophel, Audit Manager  
Dennis L. Sequeira  
Ann Reicherter, CPA  
Cora L. Bryant  
James Lawrence Butera  
Dawn Dauphine



HEALTH and WELFARE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
1600 NINTH STREET, ROOM 460  
Sacramento, California 95814  
(916) 445-6951

March 23, 1983

Mr. Thomas W. Hayes  
Auditor General  
Office of the Auditor General  
660 J Street, Suite 300  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Mr. Hayes:

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL TO THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE AUDIT COMMITTEE ENTITLED, "THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES' ADOPTION PROGRAM NEEDS IMPROVEMENT", MARCH 1983

Thank you for providing our Agency with the opportunity to respond to your audit of the Adoptions Program. We appreciate the efforts of your staff in the development of specific recommendations for program improvement.

The Department of Social Services (DSS) has made significant progress in recent years to improve the Adoptions Program. However, the DSS recognizes that further work is needed. Your report will assist them in the development and implementation of necessary policy and procedural changes, some of which will require legislative and regulatory proposals.

As stated in your report, the DSS has already implemented many of your recommendations and action steps are being developed on the other recommendations. Attached you will find comments prepared by the Department for inclusion in your report. The staff of the DSS will be pleased to meet with you at your convenience to discuss any of the subject areas in the report.

Sincerely,

  
For: DAVID B. SWOAP  
Secretary

cc: Jerold A. Prod, Interim Director, DSS

Attachment

SDSS RESPONSE

The State Department of Social Services (SDSS) comments regarding the draft report of the Office of the Auditor General (AGO) entitled, "The State Department of Social Services' Adoption Program Needs Improvement", March 1983.

(1) AGO Conclusion:

"Because of delays in the adoption process, adoption agencies are not always processing adoptions within legal time requirements. These delays are due to inefficiencies with the current adoption process, inadequate staffing, and other factors related to the adoption process, such as difficulties in locating the child's natural parents, and in conducting home studies for families requesting hard-to-place children".

SDSS Response:

We concur with the factors listed and are in the process of removing these inefficiencies as outlined in other SDSS responses within this attachment.

(2) AGO Conclusion:

The report also concludes that: "Delays in processing adoptions can have detrimental effects on children and the adopting family...For the adopting parents, these lengthy delays cause anxiety and frustration. As a result, some families are discouraged with the adoption process...."

SDSS Response:

Most certainly, delays in the adoption process can result in anxiety and frustration for adoptive parents. Improvements in the development of procedures and the availability of resources should result in a more efficient process for parents. We are pleased, however, to learn about the extent of applicant satisfaction with services in light of increasing problems in the Intercountry Program due to case backlog.

We would like to point out the difference among program, in terms of the effect on the family and child which are not clearly assessed in the report:

- A. In the Independent Program the inability to meet the requirements for interviewing all parties to the adoption within 45 days is not the critical factor in the termination of a placement. The parent who places a child can reclaim the child at any time prior to signing the consent, and even after signing the consent can petition the court for withdrawal of the consent, prior to the granting of the adoption. In the case of adopting parents, an evaluation by the agency that a home is unsuitable usually requires an extensive investigation over a long period of time and in most instances the court does not concur with the agency recommendation. Nevertheless, it is important to interview the petitioners and, if possible, the birth parents early in the process. Any unfavorable recommendations obviously result in tension and conflicts among the families involved, the agency, and the court. Considerable expertise is necessary in these instances.

- B. In the Intercountry Program we share the concern about the effect of delays but in this program, a distinction must be made between child selection and known child cases. A California family is clearly disadvantaged in child selection cases if the application is not processed promptly but typically the family is seeking a healthy infant who can be placed through another agency or in another country. On the other hand, inability to study a family for a known child unquestionably creates a hardship if the family lacks access to private agency services or cannot afford the private agency fees.
- C. We disagree that the current relinquishment home study process results in delays in the placement of children.\* In this program delays in placement are due primarily to the difficulty in recruitment of adoptive homes and the difficult court process involved in the termination of parental rights.

(3) AGO Conclusion:

To reduce delays in the adoption process, it is recommended that DSS develop a manual which will provide technical assistance to adoption agencies and contain all laws and policies pertaining to adoptions, including clarification of requirements for home studies, post-placement supervision and interviews with alleged natural fathers. In addition, it is recommended that DSS develop a procedures manual for state adoption staff which would include provision for early filing of fingerprint, conducting interviews at the agency rather than in the home whenever possible, greater involvement of adoptive parents in the adoption process, using adoptive parents more as a resource for services, establishing procedures to ensure that preliminary information forms are adequately screened, and providing information and encouragement to prospective adoptive parents throughout each phase of the adoption process.

SDSS Response:

It is an excellent suggestion that the Adoptions Branch disseminate a statewide manual and procedures handbook for the district offices. We have already initiated work on a technical procedures manual, with the expectation of its completion by July 1, 1983. However, a longer period of time is required for the development of a statewide regulatory manual due to the fact that all existing policy interpretations must be analyzed, legal opinions must be obtained, certain regulatory changes may have to be initiated, and the proposed content should be reviewed by the California Association of Adoption Agencies, the County Welfare Director's Association and other involved groups.

With regard to the specific recommendations on policy changes suggested in the report, we would like to make the following comments:

- A. The proposal for more flexibility on the number of home study and post-placement visits merits serious consideration by all involved groups. Since this is clearly regulatory in nature it will have to flow through the normal public hearing process. The proposal for modification of the interview requirements for a home study has already been submitted to the Office of Regulations Development within

\* AUDITOR GENERAL NOTE: The report does not state that the relinquishment home study process results in delays in the placement of children. On page 41, the report notes that delays in relinquishment adoptions increase the State's cost of maintaining and supporting children in the foster care system.

the Department of Social Services, with the expectation that a change can be implemented in nine months. Work is also underway on the post-placement visit issue. This revised policy will be incorporated into a larger package of regulations on the context of the home study and of post-placement supervision.

- B. The proposal to clarify the policy of alleged natural fathers must also be given consideration. This issue is extremely complex, the law is unclear, and there is disagreement within the social work community on the extent to which the alleged father is a party to the adoption. In our view a legislative direction will be necessary for resolution of this problem and we are in the process of developing proposed legislation at this time.
- C. We concur with the other recommendations for the handbook. They reflect sound child welfare practices that must be exercised by the staff within the Adoption Program. Implementation of these recommendations, coupled with closer supervision of the district offices and improved administration in the central office will result in, we believe, a more effective and efficient adoption process.

(4) AGO Conclusion (Paraphrased):

To reduce delays in interviewing all parties to an independent adoption, Civil Code Section 226 should be amended to require that petitioners provide the Department or delegated agency with a copy of the petition at the time of filing. Also, petitioners would include the names and addresses of all parties involved in the petition.

SDSS Response:

We concur with the suggestion for legislation and have developed proposed legislation. Because most attorneys are seldom involved with independent adoptions, considerable staff work will be required to make any new requirements known to the legal community. The impact of the statute, if enacted, would not be immediately evident, but information dissemination, judicial training and consultation would improve the current system.

(5) AGO Conclusion (Paraphrased):

Inadequate staffing contributes to adoption processing delays, especially in the Inter-country Program. The Department should request an exemption from the hiring freeze or transfer other DSS workers to the vacant positions. To determine an adequate level of staffing, the Department should develop staffing standards. Currently, the standards available are limited to county agencies.

SDSS Response:

We concur. All possible avenues for remedying the situation, including a request for a hiring freeze exemption and redirection of departmental staff is currently being explored. Constraints for transferring and hiring of

staff are the lack of qualified social work staff where the need exists, the adoption caseworker class is an entry level position with the Department, and the Adoptions Program is funded 100 percent with General Funds.

The Department concurs with the recommendation for a staffing standard. However, it is evident from existing information that if all positions were filled the state staffing standard (cases per worker) would be higher than the counties. This assumption does not take into consideration the additional travel time, compared to county agencies.

(6) AGO Conclusion (Paraphrased):

The adoption fee schedule as established in Civil Code Section 225p may need revision for relinquishment and intercountry adoptions and consideration should be given to fees for independent adoptions.

SDSS Response:

The Department feels this is an excellent suggestion. As noted in the report, a legislative proposal was introduced in the prior legislative session (AB 3235 Moore). Plans are underway to reintroduce fee legislation this year.

It should be pointed out that this is a sensitive issue. This issue has been debated for years in that there is a point of view that increases in fees may discourage adoptions; therefore, increasing state participation in the Foster Care Program. It is important to note that the waiver of fees would continue to be an option where an economic hardship exists. Further, even if an amended fee schedule is enacted, public adoptions will remain a heavily subsidized program.

(7) AGO Conclusion:

"Adoption agencies are using inconsistent guidelines for determining eligibility requirements and payment levels for the Aid for Adoption of Children (AAC) Program...Also, the DSS has not implemented a mechanism for reviewing the AAC payments. Although the DSS has provided adequate guidelines for determining eligibility for the Adoption Assistance Program (AAP), and plans to begin monitoring these payments, guidelines for determining payment levels are still needed for the Adoption Assistance Program."

SDSS Response:

We concur with the findings and recommendations on the AAC/AAP Programs. We are in the process of reviewing current program policies and procedures and anticipate program and systems refinements that are consistent with the intent of this section of the report. Included in these program and system refinements will be appropriate guidelines on the determination of payment levels for the Adoption Assistance Program. Once these refinements are implemented, we will negotiate with the State Controller's Office (SCO) for inclusion of the AAP Program into the SDSS/SCO audit contract.\*

---

\*In addition, it should be noted that the SCO, through this contract has in prior years performed some tests of AAC payments and recorded some exceptions for this program.

TIME INTERVALS BETWEEN PHASES  
OF THE INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION PROCESS  
Average Number of Days  
(Range)

	6-Month Requirement			12-Month Requirement			
	State Agencies			County Agency			
	Berkeley	Los Angeles	Ventura	Berkeley	Los Angeles	Ventura	
Date preliminary information form received to date assigned to caseworker	59.0 (7-106)	88.7 (21-220)	--a --	134.5 (5-341)	74.1 (20-155)	--a --	0 (0-0)
Date assigned to caseworker to date home study begins	34.8 (0-74)	24.5 (6-85)	--a --	41.6 (0-131)	36.1 (11-87)	--a --	32.5 (8-62)
Date home study begins to date of fourth or last visit	94.3 (84-109)	85.9 (12-226)	17.0 (1-37)	140.5 (26-327)	108.8 (26-252)	29.8 (2-255)	155.0 (15-307)
Date of fourth or last visit to date home study completed	126.3 (20-318)	38.6 (10-76)	21.8 (2-47)	29.4 (6-139)	83.3 (9-263)	21.7 (0-114)	38.0 (4-124)
Time interval from date preliminary information form received to date home study completed	288.0	245.3	188.4	335.9	262.8	186.1	250.9
Date home study completed to date of child placement	394.4 (151-670)	255.4 (34-593)	194.3 (126-347)	340.7 (79-1,002)	311.7 (105-640)	154.1 (76-275)	358.2 (80-953)
Date of child placement to date of adoption granted	435.6 (256-640)	452.7 (279-738)	382.4 (251-616)	365.8 (218-590)	424.2 (172-701)	309.0 (200-427)	423.1 (96-785)
Time interval from preliminary information form received to date adoption granted	1,178.7	933.2	765.2	1,055.3	978.2	649.8	1,032.2

a The time interval could not be determined for this phase of the home study due to insufficient documentation.

b The Children's Home Society did not process any priority cases requiring completion of home study within six months.

TIME INTERVALS BETWEEN PHASES  
OF THE INDEPENDENT ADOPTION PROCESS  
Average Number of Days  
(Range)

	State Agencies			County Agencies		
	Berkeley	Los Angeles	Los Angeles	Los Angeles	San Bernardino	San Bernardino
Date petition filed in court to date notification received in DSS Adoptions Branch	7.6 (1-94)	5.0 (2-13)	--a	6.5 (3-13)		
Date notification received in DSS Adoptions Branch to date notification assigned to adoption agency	7.7 (0-55)	12.1 (1-54)	--a	8.9 (1-61)		
Date notification assigned to adoption agency to date notification received by adoption agency	5.7 (1-31)	5.8 (2-18)	--a	8.8 (5-16)		
Time interval from date petition filed in court to date notification received by adoption agency	21.5	24.1	9.6 <sup>a</sup>	18.3 <sup>b</sup>		
Date petition filed in court to date of last required interview (45-day requirement)	102.6 (10-232)	74.2 (21-203)	77.5 (0-337)	97.1 (32-206)		
Date petition filed in court to date court report completed (180-day requirement)	240.1 (136-731)	240.1 (148-698)	249.0 (107-599)	234.2 (81-683)		

a In the majority of the cases we reviewed, the Los Angeles county agency was notified of the adoption petition by the adopting parents' attorney prior to receiving the DSS notification.

b Due to insufficient documentation, the time interval could only be determined for 4 of the 30 cases reviewed.

TIME INTERVALS BETWEEN PHASES  
OF THE RELINQUISHMENT ADOPTION PROCESS  
Average Number of Days  
(Range)

	State Agency			County Agencies			Private Agency
	Santa Rosa	Los Angeles	San Bernardino <sup>a</sup>	Santa Clara	Children's Home Society		
Date application received to date assigned to caseworker	3.7 (0-19)	16.5 (0-112)	100.6 (0-290)	27.6 (0-124)	23.4 (0-103)		
Date assigned to caseworker to date home study begins	41.1 (0-148)	22.5 (0-140)	98.6 (2-511)	41.2 (0-212)	54.4 (0-113)		
Date home study begins to date of fourth or last visit	104.1 (0-724)	100.2 (13-346)	164.3 (12-651)	52.1 (10-172)	75.7 (2-334)		
Date of fourth or last visit to date home study completed	48.2 (1-243)	47.3 (3-187)	109.7 (6-667)	52.1 (2-157)	33.6 (1-177)		
Time interval from date assigned to caseworker to date home study completed	180.2	179.9	320.5	154.5	131.0 <sup>b</sup>		
Date home study completed to date of child placement	167.0 (0-645)	232.2 (1-1,723)	280.7 (0-1,222)	101.9 (1-347)	207.5 (1-807)		
Date of child placement to date of adoption granted	337.5 (202-657)	482.7 (237-1,306)	440.5 (214-1,172)	429.5 (170-1,172)	422.5 (163-644)		
Time interval from date application received to date of adoption granted	700.5	998.1	1,157.5	769.3	821.7		

<sup>a</sup> The San Bernardino County agency's procedures are somewhat different from those used at the other agencies and may result in longer time intervals for certain phases.

<sup>b</sup> For the Children's Home Society, the time interval could only be determined for 10 of the 40 cases reviewed.

RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE  
SENT TO ADOPTING PARENTS

	Type of Adoption						Adoption Agency						Total <sup>b</sup>			
	Intercountry		Independent		Relinquishment		State Agency		County Agency		Private Agency		Total			
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent		
1. Amount of encouragement to continue the process provided to adopting parents:																
(1) Sufficient encouragement	16	50	NA	NA	35	60	51	57	9	38	28	58	13	81	50	57
(2) Little encouragement	8	25	NA	NA	19	33	27	30	8	33	16	34	3	19	27	30
(3) No encouragement	<u>8</u>	25	<u>NA</u>	NA	<u>4</u>	7	<u>12</u>	13	<u>7</u>	29	<u>4</u>	8	<u>0</u>	0	<u>11</u>	13
Total	<u>32</u>		<u>NA</u>		<u>58</u>		<u>90</u>		<u>24</u>		<u>48</u>		<u>16</u>		<u>88</u>	
2. Adopting parents informed during the adoption process?																
(1) Yes	12	55	39	66	47	81	98	71	23	53	61	75	13	93	97	70
(2) No	<u>10</u>	45	<u>20</u>	34	<u>11</u>	19	<u>41</u>	29	<u>20</u>	47	<u>20</u>	25	<u>1</u>	7	<u>41</u>	30
Total	<u>22</u>		<u>59</u>		<u>58</u>		<u>139</u>		<u>43</u>		<u>81</u>		<u>14</u>		<u>138</u>	
3. Initial information regarding the adoption process:																
(1) Very helpful	19	60	24	45	36	63	79	56	23	52	44	55	11	69	78	56
(2) Somewhat helpful	10	31	20	38	19	33	49	34	16	36	29	36	4	25	49	35
(3) Not helpful	<u>3</u>	9	<u>9</u>	17	<u>2</u>	4	<u>14</u>	10	<u>5</u>	12	<u>7</u>	9	<u>1</u>	6	<u>13</u>	9
Total	<u>32</u>		<u>53</u>		<u>57</u>		<u>142</u>		<u>44</u>		<u>80</u>		<u>16</u>		<u>140</u>	
4. Evaluation of overall adoption services:																
(1) Excellent	5	25	17	29	30	52	52	38	10	25	34	42	8	57	52	38
(2) Good	7	35	19	32	16	28	42	31	12	29	24	30	5	36	41	30
(3) Average	4	20	14	24	9	16	27	19	9	22	18	22	0	0	27	20
(4) Poor/Inadequate	<u>4</u>	20	<u>9</u>	15	<u>3</u>	4	<u>16</u>	12	<u>10</u>	24	<u>5</u>	6	<u>1</u>	7	<u>16</u>	12
Total	<u>20</u>		<u>59</u>		<u>58</u>		<u>137</u>		<u>41</u>		<u>81</u>		<u>14</u>		<u>136</u>	

<sup>a</sup> The questionnaire did not include questions about agency encouragement in independent adoption cases.

<sup>b</sup> Two respondents answering the questionnaire did not indicate the agency which conducted the adoption. As a result, adoption agency totals do not always agree with totals for types of adoption.

cc: Members of the Legislature  
Office of the Governor  
Office of the Lieutenant Governor  
Secretary of State  
State Controller  
State Treasurer  
Legislative Analyst  
Director of Finance  
Assembly Office of Research  
Senate Office of Research  
Assembly Majority/Minority Consultants  
Senate Majority/Minority Consultants  
California State Department Heads  
Capitol Press Corps