

**ADOPTION:
NATIONAL TRENDS
&
VIRGINIA LAW**

**BY
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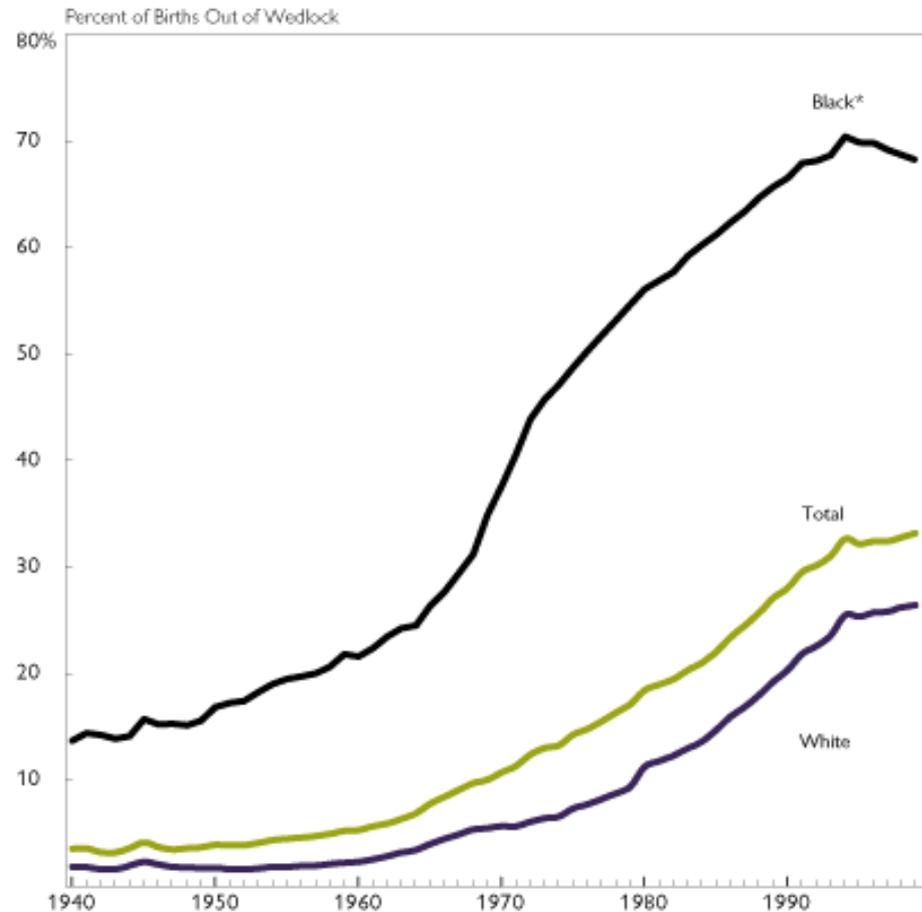
1.35 Million Births
(33 Percent of all
Births) in 2000
Occurred out of
Wedlock

1.7% are Placed for
Adoption

National Center for Health Statistics, 1999

Chart 1: Growth of Out-of-Wedlock Childbearing

OUT-OF-WEDLOCK BIRTHS HAVE RISEN TO A THIRD OF ALL BIRTHS



Out-of-wedlock births were 7 percent of all births at the beginning of the War on Poverty in the mid-1960s, but have risen to 33 percent today.

Note: *1968–1996 data represent black births; 1940–1968 data represent very similar figures for non-white births.

Source: Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Health Statistics, Division of Vital Statistics.



**49% of all
Pregnancies
In the US are
Unintended**

**Half of these
are Terminated
by Abortion***

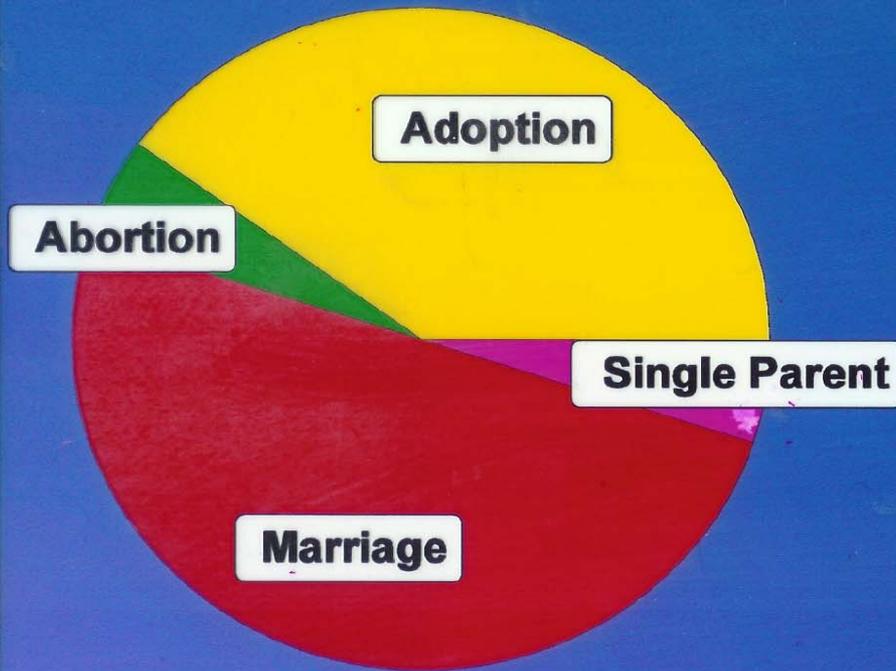
**In 2000, 1.31
Million Abortions
Took Place****

*Henshaw SK, Unintended pregnancies in the United States, *Family Planning Perspectives*, 1998, 30(1): 24-29 & 46.

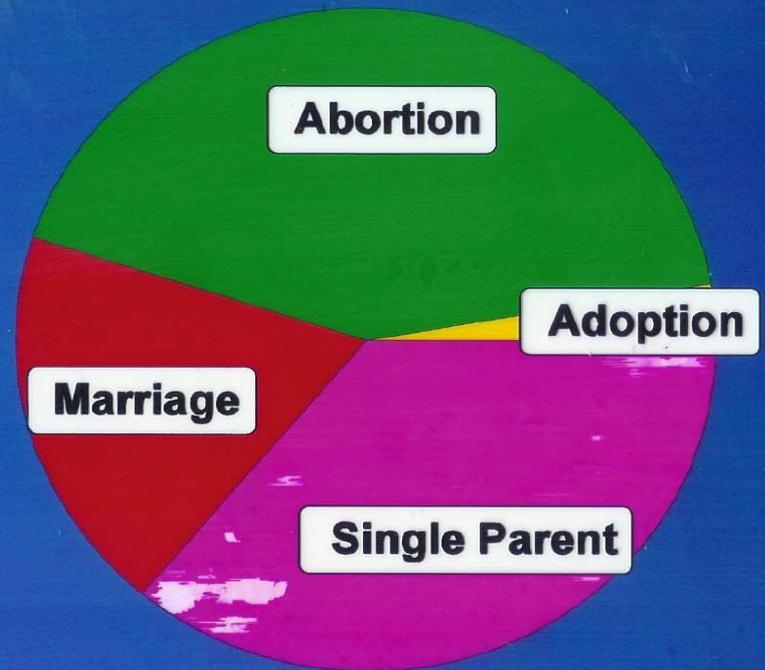
**Jones RK, Darroch JE and Henshaw SK, Patterns in the socioeconomic characteristics of women obtaining abortions in 2000-2001, *Perspectives on Sexual Reproductive Health*, 2002, 34(5):226-235.

COMPARISON OF UNWED PREGNANCY OUTCOMES IN THE U.S.

1947



1997





**Adoption Law in Virginia is
Complicated and can be a Cumbersome Process**

**This Contributes to making Adoption a LESS
Attractive Option than Abortion and
Unprepared Parenting**



**An estimated
896,000
children were
determined to be
victims of child
abuse or neglect in
2002**

National Clearinghouse on Child
Abuse and Neglect Information 2004



**In 2002
approximately
1,400 children
died due to
abuse or
neglect**





In 2003, 800,000 children were placed in foster care homes in the United States.

523,000 children were still in foster care by the end of that year.

www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/Northwest_AlumniStudy.htm



A new study released by Casey Family Programs and Harvard Medical School shows the following:



Rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among adults who were formerly in foster care, were twice as high as U.S. war veterans.



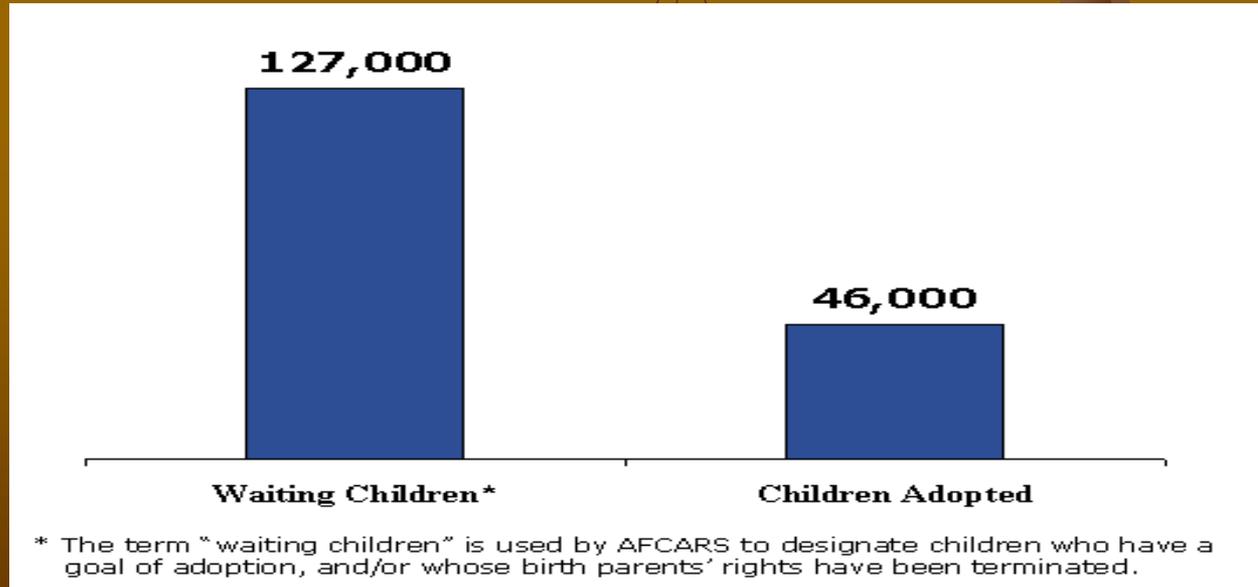
A majority of adults faced major challenges in the areas of mental health, education, and employment. 1/3 had no health insurance and lived at or below poverty. 1/4 experienced homelessness after foster care.



Each year 20,000 young people between the ages of 18 and 21 must leave the foster care system and are left without any support, family connections, or the skills they need to succeed in life.

In 1999, over 127,000 Hurt Children were Waiting for an Adoptive Home

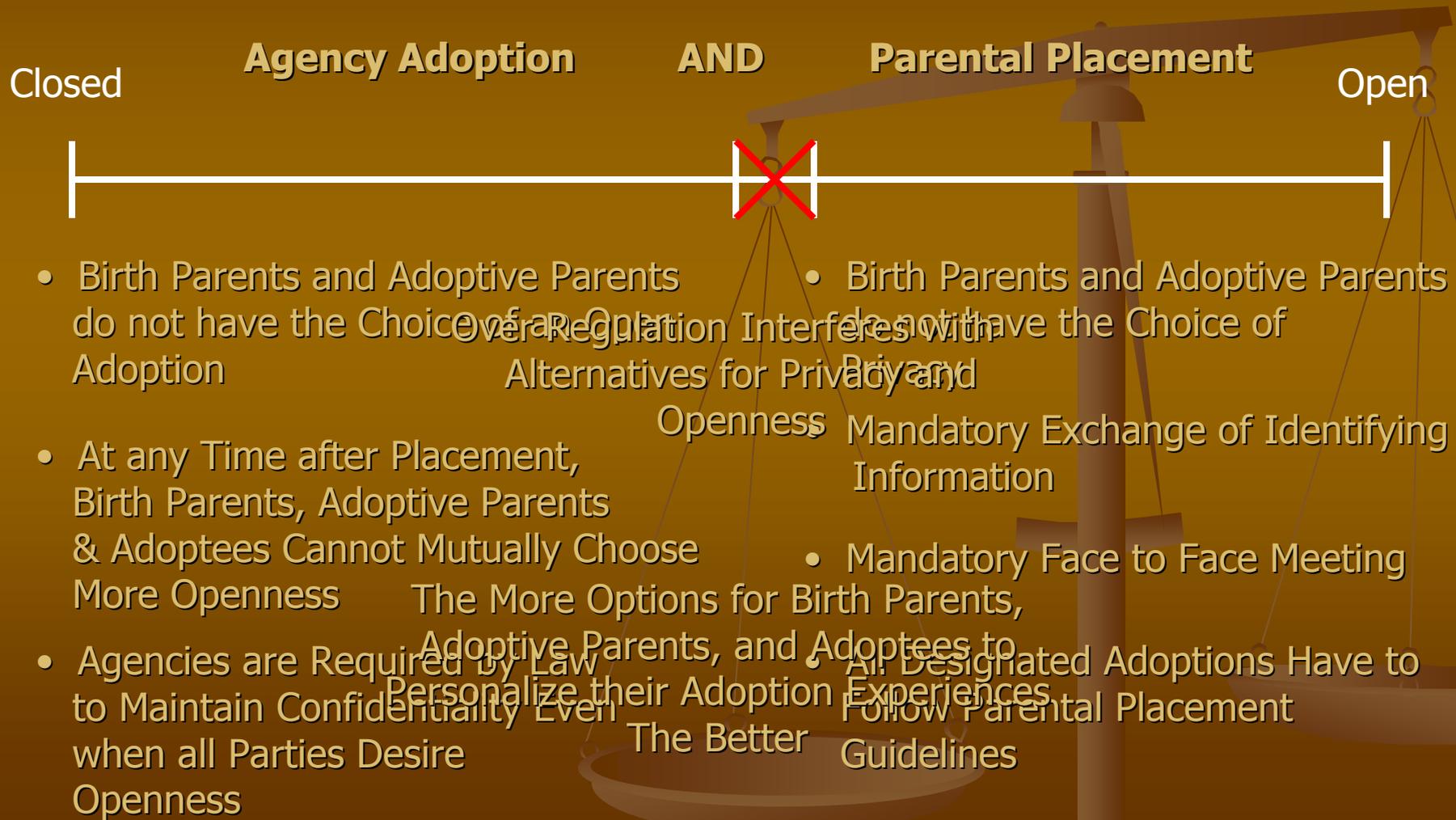
46,000 were Actually Adopted



Problems with Virginia Adoption Law

1. Alternatives for Privacy and Openness are Over Regulated
2. Lack of a Mutual Consent Reunion/Post Adoption Communication Options
3. Birth Fathers have Rights without Responsibilities

Alternatives for Privacy and Openness





Mutual Consent

Current Agency Placement Law:

- Post Placement Sharing of Identifying Information and Possible Reunions Require an Application to the Commissioner or a Court Order

Current Parental Placement Law:

- Adoption Records are Open to the Adoptive Parents, Adoptee (18 or older), and the Birth Parent without Mutual Consent

Birthparents and adult adopted persons who desire to have contact should be able to do so, when both agree.

Mutual Consent Reunion Laws Simplify Post-Adoption Sharing of Information and Protect the Right to Maintain or Waive One's Privacy

Birth Father Responsibilities

For the Best Interests of Children, Birth Fathers Should:

- **Establish a loving/close relationship with their child**
- **Be willing and able to take full custody of the child**
- **Financially support the needs of the child and agree to pay child support**
- **Assist the mother with pregnancy and birthing expenses**

Responsible Birth Fathers do not have an Avenue to Assert their Parental Rights and Demonstrate Commitment to the child without Relying on the Notification of the Birth Mother

Virginia Law does not Sufficiently Protect against Misidentification of Birth Fathers (such as in the Baby Jessica case)

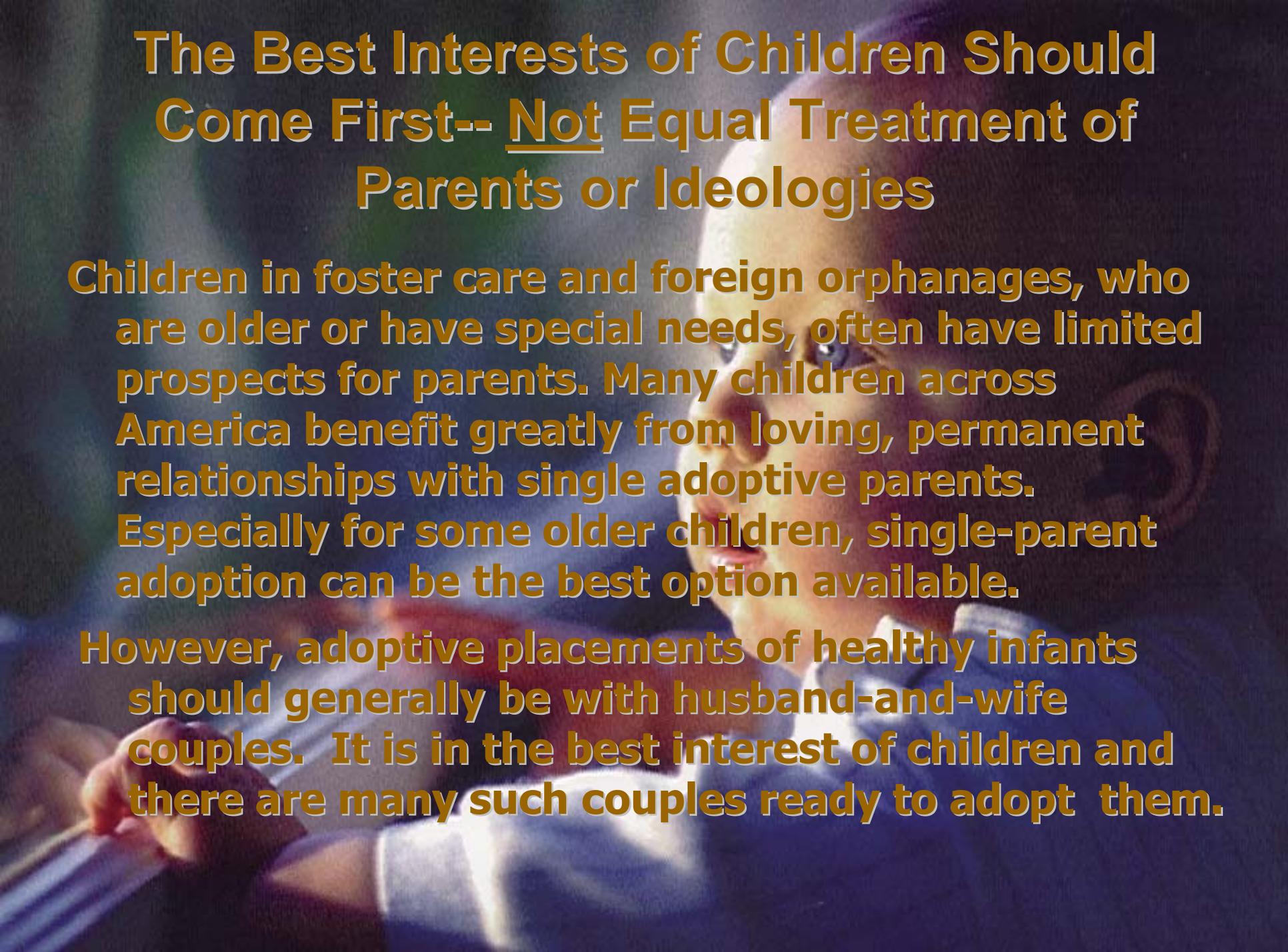
Birth Father Rights

Birth Fathers in Virginia have the Right to Thwart a Birth Mother's Adoption Plan even when they do not Intend to Take Responsibility for the Care of the Child or the Birth Mother

Birth Fathers who Oppose Adoption Typically do it for the Following Reasons:

- **The Birth Father's Parents pressure him to oppose**
- **He loves the Birth Mother and does NOT want to lose her**
- **He wants to Manipulate/Control or Hurt the Birth Mother**
- **He is Prepared, Willing and Desires to Raise the Child Himself**

Approximately 1/2 of the States have a Putative Father Registry that Protects the Rights of Responsible Birth Fathers and may also Protect Children, Birth Mother's and Adoptive Families from the Control or Absence of Irresponsible Birth Fathers

A young child with light skin and dark hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, is shown from the chest up. The child is looking towards the right of the frame with a neutral expression. The background is dark and out of focus.

The Best Interests of Children Should Come First-- Not Equal Treatment of Parents or Ideologies

Children in foster care and foreign orphanages, who are older or have special needs, often have limited prospects for parents. Many children across America benefit greatly from loving, permanent relationships with single adoptive parents. Especially for some older children, single-parent adoption can be the best option available.

However, adoptive placements of healthy infants should generally be with husband-and-wife couples. It is in the best interest of children and there are many such couples ready to adopt them.

In his book, *Life without father*, researcher David Popenoe summarized the following:

“Social science research is almost never conclusive....yet in three decades of work as a social scientist, I know of few other bodies of data in which the weight of evidence is so decisively on one side of the issue: on the whole, for children, two-parent families are preferable to single–parent and step-families”

(p. 176)



**This Committee and Study can Help
Virginia's Children, Birth Parents and
Adoptive Families by:**

- **Simplifying Adoption Law**
- **Making Adoption a more Friendly Alternative with full range of Choices Regarding Privacy and Openness**
- **Emphasizing Birth Father Rights AND Responsibilities**
- **Promoting Law that Serves the Best Interests of Children**