

NEWS FROM CONGRESSMAN BILL DELAHUNT

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DELAHUNT LEADS BIPARTISAN CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION TO INVESTIGATE ALLEGATIONS OF ADOPTION CORRUPTION IN GUATEMALA **Adoptive Parents Locally, Across Nation Distraught Over Delays, Alleged Improprieties**

WASHINGTON, DC -- US Rep. Bill Delahunt (D-MA) will lead a bipartisan congressional mission today to investigate allegations of corruption that are holding up adoptions of hundreds of Guatemalan children by American families – including several in southeastern Massachusetts. With Rep. Dave Camp (R-MI), Congressman Delahunt is traveling to Guatemala City for a two-day review of international protocols that are supposed to ensure the safety of adopted children, and the rights of both biological and prospective adoptive parents.

American parents adopted 2000 children last year from Guatemala, more than from any nation other than China and Russia. But the process, already an emotional rollercoaster, has bogged down dramatically because of alleged improprieties in the Guatemalan adoption process, that have led to at least four countries – Canada, Spain, Ireland and the Netherlands – to suspend adoptions from Guatemala altogether.

Because of these problems, the US Embassy in Guatemala City has taken numerous steps, including DNA testing and interviews of biological mothers, to help ensure that children legally qualify as “orphans”. These measures are important, but the resulting delays have caused enormous anxiety among prospective US adoptive parents, many of whom have already bonded with children they are anxious to welcome into their homes.

The objective of the Delahunt-Camp mission is to clarify the current situation; and offer their help to accelerate the progress of legitimate adoptions, while safeguarding the rights of both adoptive and biological families. The delegation will meet with newly-inaugurated President Oscar Berger, as well as members of the Guatemalan Congress and the central Guatemalan authority for international adoptions, *la Procuraduría General de la Nación* (PGN). They will also visit Guatemalan orphanages for a first-hand perspective of the extreme conditions facing orphaned children. Camp and Delahunt will be joined by senior officials of the US State Department and of the Citizenship & Immigration Services (formerly INS). The mission is sponsored by the Congressional Coalition on Adoption.

Since he was first elected to Congress in 1996, Delahunt has championed efforts to reduce barriers to adoption – both at home and abroad. As an adoptive parent himself, Delahunt has pressed hard to ease the financial, legal and bureaucratic obstacles that make it hard for American parents to help rescue overseas orphans. During the 1970s, Rep. Delahunt’s younger daughter came to the United States from Vietnam as part of Operation Babylift, days before the fall of Saigon.

In the course of his congressional work, Delahunt has sought legal changes to combat alleged abuses in the international adoption process, ranging from baby smuggling to coerced consent from birth mothers. Four years ago, Delahunt was a lead sponsor of the Intercountry Adoption Act, legislation to implement the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption. Once the process to ratify the Convention is completed, the US will join the global legal framework designed to protect adoptive children and their families and to streamline the costly, cumbersome and confusing international adoption process. The Hague Convention contains tough sanctions for fraud and also establishes an accreditation system to ensure that adoption agencies are qualified and trustworthy, thereby reducing corruption and preventing exorbitant fees.

Delahunt was also the principal author of the Child Citizenship Act of 2000, which eliminated the need for adoptive parents to undergo the bureaucratic naturalization process. Under this law, children adopted by US citizens from other countries obtain automatic citizenship. This is especially important for families that have already completed the exhaustive documentation required to adopt a child from overseas.

The Congressional Coalition on Adoption is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to raising awareness about the millions of orphans around the world in need of permanent, safe, and loving homes; and to address concerns about problems that hinder inter-country adoption.