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**BABY BOOTIES, TEDDY BEARS . . . AND LEGAL NIGHTMARES:
ADOPTIVE PARENTS CAN GET HELP FROM LAWYER REFERRAL**

CHICAGO, June 14, 2001 – There is probably no greater joy in a couple’s life together than the birth of their baby. But for potential adoptive parents, the road to bringing baby home is often an emotional roller coaster. Despite the stress, the desire to have children is strong enough for most adoptive parents to do what it takes to make their adoption a success.

And the statistics tell us so. According to the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, there were approximately 120,000 adoptions of children annually throughout the 1990s. It is estimated that about one million children in the United States live with adoptive parents, in roughly 2 to 4 percent of American families.

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BABY BOOTIES, TEDDY BEARS, Add One

“A potential adoptive couple needs good, sound legal advice from a qualified lawyer because issues pertaining to adoption are complicated and extensive, sometimes making it a long, painstaking process,” says Harlan Tenenbaum, chair of the Adoption Committee of the American Bar Association Family Law Section. Special circumstances can make matters more complex in cases of single parent adoptions, private adoptions, surrogate mothers, step-parent adoptions, international adoptions, and more.

The legal procedures for a formal adoption differ from state to state, but each state does provide adoption services. State agencies work with both the biological parents and the adoptive parents throughout the process. In addition, each state licenses private adoption agencies that perform requisite home studies, and provide adoption counseling to biological and adoptive parents. Private adoptions, those done without the use of an agency, are becoming more common but can be even more legally complicated.

For a pending adoption, the prospective adoptive parents are carefully screened by the adoption agency or social worker assigned to the case. “There’s a lot of work to be done,” says Tenenbaum. “Numerous documents are prepared, interviews are conducted, and home visit reports are made – all contributing to a final recommendation for or against the couple’s or individual’s ability to adopt.

“One of the biggest fears adoptive parents have going into such a situation is, ‘What if the birth parents change their minds?’ This is a legitimate concern because most states have a waiting period before the adoption becomes final, so the birth parents may change their minds, even stopping the adoption,” says Tenenbaum.

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BABY BOOTIES, TEDDY BEARS, Add Two

A biological mother has anywhere from 48 to 72 hours after birth, and up to nine months in some states, before her parental rights are terminated. The delay in finality sends many potential adoptive parents out of the country in search of a baby. Although there is no current and comprehensive national data on adoptions, the NAIC reports from various sources a dramatic increase in international adoptions. In 1992 it reported more than 6,500 international adoptions. That rose to more than 20,000 international adoptions in 2000.

International adoptions require even more document preparation than domestic adoptions. It is important to comply with laws of the adoptive parents' state, the United States, and the child's home country. While they can either travel to the country to take custody of the child or have the child escorted to the United States for the legal proceedings, the prospective adoptive parents must be cleared through the federal Immigration and Naturalization Service.

To find a lawyer with experience in adoption law, family law, or any other type of law, visit the ABA's Web site, at www.abanet.org/referral, for a listing of more than 300 Lawyer Referral programs throughout the country, or check your local Yellow Pages[®] under *Lawyer Referral*. Family law issues rank first among legal topics in the number of inquiries to Lawyer Referral services in the United States.

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BABY BOOTIES, TEDDY BEARS, Add Three

Lawyers who are registered with the Lawyer Referral program are in good standing with their state licensing authority and are considered qualified in their areas of practice. Callers to the referral program will speak with trained staff persons who will determine the nature of the legal questions at hand and will suggest lawyers who can answer them.

A caller referred to a lawyer by the service is entitled to a half-hour initial consultation at no charge or for a nominal fee, typically \$30 or less, that helps to fund the local Lawyer Referral program. If additional legal services are needed, the client has the option to hire the lawyer at regular rates.

“Bringing home baby should be an enjoyable experience for adoptive parents, and the best way to start is by finding a bar association qualified lawyer, experienced in all facets of adoption law,” notes Tenenbaum.

State and local bar associations operate more than 300 Lawyer Referral programs throughout the United States. The ABA Standing Committee on Lawyer Referral and Information Service approves public service Lawyer Referral programs that meet its standards for providing consumer help and information through referrals to public agencies and lawyers qualified in particular areas of law.

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