



May 13, 2005

President Vladimir Putin
4, Staraya Square
Moscow 103132
Russian Federation

Dear President Putin:

As a follow up to our letter to you on February 11th, we would like to take this opportunity to express our desire to collaborate together to assist the children of Russia and offer our condolences on the recent death of a young Russian born child in the United States.

As you know, Joint Council on International Children's Services (JCICS) is one of the oldest and largest membership associations of licensed, non-profit international adoption agencies, child advocacy groups, parent support groups and medical clinics in the world. JCICS does not place children for adoption or provide adoption services, but rather advocates on behalf of children in need of permanent families and promotes ethical practices in intercountry adoption.

JCICS believes that all children – regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, medical limitations or other conditions – deserve permanent, loving homes. When children cannot be cared for in their birth families, or in permanent adoptive homes within their country of birth, we believe that intercountry adoption provides the most positive option for children.

First, JCICS would like to express our profound sadness and outrage regarding the recent death of an adopted Russian boy residing in Illinois. We understand the sorrow felt by many Russians and many in the United States. Unfortunately, abuse knows no boundaries from adopted families to birth families; from countries around the world; from single parent families to two parent families. It is a true tragedy and an issue that needs to be consistently addressed in order to protect the rights of a child. JCICS firmly believes that cases of child abuse should be quickly condemned and prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

While this tragic case should not be dismissed, it is also important to recognize that it does not represent the international adoption community. In 2003, the year Alex Pavlis was adopted, 5208 other children from Russia were adopted by United States citizens. The majority of these children are thriving in the permanent, loving and safe homes and their heritage and country of birth are celebrated throughout the year. It is our hope that the actions of one individual will not affect the rights of children waiting to find permanency. Many studies have shown that children growing up in institutional settings in any country face a higher occurrence of poverty, prostitution, drugs and crime. As Ella Pamfilova, head of the President's Human Rights and Civil Institutions Development Council, stated "The accidents, when Russian children die in

foreign families are singular. The situation inside the country is much worse. Only last year, more than 2,500 children died in families from violence.”¹

Currently, there are numerous screening tools used in the U.S. home study process. These include personal and professional references, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) criminal background checks, and in some states, child abuse registries check. In addition, parents receive education and undergo financial and medical examinations to make sure they can properly support the child and are prepared for the responsibility of parenting. A licensed social worker also visits the parent(s) home to assess the living environment. After the adoption, families receive ongoing in-home visits and support.

As in the case of any abuse, the circumstances of this case will be legally reviewed to determine if additional procedures could prevent similar cases in the future. The agency involved in this particular case is not a JCICS member. Our members abide by our Standards of Practices which emphasize a thorough home study and extensive education and training process with the family before the adoption is completed. JCICS will continue to make necessary recommendations to our member agencies concerning the home study and screening procedures to better protect the health and safety of the adopted child.

JCICS shares the commitment of the Russian government to strive for best practices in child welfare; however, we continue to have concerns that the delayed accreditation process is hindering thousands of children's opportunity to find a permanent family. Since the government restructuring in the summer of 2004 no accreditation renewals have been issued. It is our understanding that the Ministry of Education has the authority to issue accreditation but to date this has not occurred. We are concerned that this on-going delay will only extend the time children are in institutional care. We respectfully request that the Ministry begin issuing re-accreditations as soon as possible.

Over the past several years Russia's adoption procedures have been strengthened and organized under your leadership. JCICS extends our compliments to you as you have made the needs of children a priority under your administration. It is our hope that international adoption will continue to be a positive option for children in need of permanent families.

Thank you for your time and kind consideration of our requests.

Sincerely,

Meghan D. Hendy

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¹ "Russia's Prosecutors Take Up Children Adoption." Kommersant Daily. <<http://www.mosnews.com>>. 6 May 2005.