

the Roundtable

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Multiethnic Placement Act requires expanded agency recruitment efforts

The Multiethnic Placement Act was passed by Congress as an amendment to the Improving America's Schools Act, the bill authorizing major federal programs to support elementary and secondary education. President Clinton signed this bill (P. L. 103-382) on October 20, 1994.

While the Department of Health and Human Services has not yet published guidance on the act, states may want to begin considering the provision of the act calling for agencies to "provide for the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed."

The Child Abuse Prevention, Adoption and Family Services Act of 1988, P.L. 100-291, previously called for efforts to recruit adoptive families of color and Adoption Opportunity grants allowed many agencies to develop recruitment programs focused on children of color waiting to be adopted. However, the new law focuses on foster and adoptive parents. It allows agencies to consider the cultural, ethnic, and racial background of the child and the capacity of the prospective foster or adoptive parents to meet the needs of a child of a particular background as one of a number of factors to use to determine the best interest of the child.

With culture, ethnicity or race as a factor that agencies may consider in the placement of children and the provision for recruiting families who reflect the backgrounds of children in care, the Act recognizes the many needs of children-- not just at the time of adoption, but also when they first enter care and throughout their stay in care.

It will now be incumbent on agencies to develop plans to enact the law and document the best interest factors used in making placement decisions. A family's ability to meet a child's developmental, educational, social, psychological, medical, family continuity, and cultural, ethnic, and racial continuity needs would be among such factors to consider.

The Act is printed on the following pages. Staff members of the National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption are available to provide technical assistance or training related to implementation of this Act. Please contact us at (810) 443-7080.

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