

Letters to a President

Winner Year 10 – Maddie Stoll

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Dear Mr. President and Madam Vice President,

This past year has been one of concurrent crises - structural racism, climate change and worsening famine to name but a few - and all in the shadow of, and exacerbated by, a global pandemic. From your positions at the front of the world's stage, there are no doubt countless urgent tasks to tackle.

I want to draw your attention to one more, one which I think is being forgotten. It is a quiet, debilitating crisis that deserves your attention. There is a specific group that is alone, without a voice and so vulnerable to the lack of funding in the social care sector, coupled with the legislation that allows this issue to manifest: the 'disposable children' of the U.S.A..

The adoption system in America is broken. It fails too many children each year. Arguably its worst shortcoming is "re-homing" - the process by which adoptive parents transfer custody of an adopted child to another individual or family without any involvement from the welfare systems that exist to protect these children. This bureaucratic loophole allows adoptive parents to avoid their commitments to children and exposes these children to serious harm. What's worse still is that, in its current form, legislation incentivises re-homing: it is half as expensive as the regular procedure of returning children to an adoption agency, and much faster.

Re-homing can be a process which is repeated. There are cases of children as young as one year-old being rehomed, with others being re-homed multiple times in a year. These unofficial but sanctioned re-homings are often agreed through a few anonymous conversations over Facebook. The emotional toll of such separations from primary care-givers is traumatic and long-lasting. Children who have to endure this process are often already traumatised from previous experiences and a large number were originally adopted from overseas, making them even more vulnerable. This is the 'best' case scenario. In the worst cases, adoptive parents unwittingly hand over responsibility for their children to abusers who exploit this broken system. And, with each rehoming, the chances of these children being exposed to harm increases dramatically.

Understanding that not all adoption arrangements work necessitates a system which can manage "un-adoption". Re-homing, however, takes place outside of the welfare services' vetting process. It is effectively an unregulated market for the exchange of vulnerable children. Trafficking.

This situation is not new, but it is urgent. In 2019, there were 122,216 children awaiting adoption, and over 500,000 in the foster care system. This vulnerable group - and the tragic potential for harm - is vast. Every day that legislation remains the same, is another day longer that thousands of children are potentially exposed to life-changing trauma.

I simply ask that you give it your attention. Elevate the plight of these children in your legislative and political agendas. Give them the chance they deserve. The children growing up today, will be the adults leading our world tomorrow.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Sincerely,

Secondary School Student in the UK