

A D D E N D U M
to
**NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH: STORIES OF
SUCCESS AND MEETING THE CHALLENGES
OF INTERNATIONAL ADOPTIONS**

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Statement for the Record
Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing
National Adoption Month: Stories of Success and Meeting the Challenges of International Adoptions
November 18, 2005

Written Testimony of Katie and Chad Coleman from Charlotte, N.C.

Chad and I talked about adopting for 10 years, and finally decided at the beginning of 2013 that we were financially and emotionally ready to adopt. We hired a home study agency to do a complete report on us --- This included physicals for our entire family, tax returns, three visits with a social worker (including one in our home), where we disclosed everything from our discipline styles to upbringing, and state and FBI criminal background checks.

March 27, 2013: Our adoption agency sent us photos and medical reports for two little sisters who they thought would be a good match for us - Safi and Sifa. Sifa was 22 months old at the time, and Safi was 3 1/2. We decided to accept the referral and begin the process of adopting them. At this point, we also began all of the U.S. immigration paperwork that goes into an adoption. This process included more piles of paperwork that was gathered and sent off to the Congo for our adoption lawyer there to take to court.

August 8, 2013 The final hearing for our adoption in a Congolese court was convened and we received our adoption decree. Safi and Sifa were now legally our children.

After we received our adoption decree, we began the second round of paperwork for USCIS. Once our "I600" was approved in **November 2013**, the US Embassy in Kinshasa began an on-ground investigation of our case, which was done to ensure that our daughters were indeed orphans in need of a family. This process was completed in **April 2014** and Safi and Sifa were approved to receive U.S. visas.

Normally, this would have been the point where our daughters would have come home. Because they are unable to obtain a letter, they remain Kinshasa indefinitely.

At no point has the DR Congo disputed that we were their legal parents. In fact, if we were to give up on this process, we would have to go back to court to terminate our adoption. We are legally and financially responsible for Safi and Sifa. We pay a foster care family to take care of them and we pay for Safi to attend school. To date, we have paid more than \$24,000 *extra* in foster care fees alone because of the exit letter suspension. This \$24,000 is on top of the adoption fees. Far worse than the financial burden is the emotional toll of waiting for over two years to bring Safi and Sifa home.

I visited Safi and Sifa in October 2014 to spend some time in their city, meet the family taking care of them, and to get to know them. We bonded very quickly, and getting on a plane to leave without them was the hardest thing I have ever done. It goes against every instinct I have as a mother to leave my daughters behind, not knowing when I will see them again.

Our daughters are now 4 and 6. We completely missed out on their toddler and preschooler years. Safi was supposed to start kindergarten here this year, and we had plans for her to attend an incredible language immersion school in the French program, which is the national language of the Congo. We are determined that they will grow up speaking French and learning about the beautiful country of their birth. We have done and will continue to do everything in our power to prove our love for Safi and Sifa and our willingness to work with the DR Congo to ensure they are protected, as all children should be. We hope they will honor that commitment in return and allow us to bring them home immediately so that we can do our job as parents.

Senator Portman: Thank you, Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Leahy, and members of the committee for having the hearing today and letting us come before you talking about a critical issue we face in every single one of our states and in practically every community in this country and that's this epidemic of heroin and opioid abuse. Senator Ayotte talked about S. 524, which is a comprehensive addiction and recovery act, CARA. It's a bipartisan bill that addresses this issue head on. And it does so in a comprehensive way, through prevention, through treatment, through recovery. It's one that I've had the privilege to work on with my colleague and co-author, Sheldon Whitehouse, who's on this committee. Along with Senators Ayotte and Klobuchar.

We've been working on this for a few years now. We brought in experts from all around the country to give us their best advice. This committee's done some good work already. I was very encouraged, Mr. Chairman, by your comments earlier and by the ranking member's comments about the importance of addressing this issue in a comprehensive way and about the importance of moving this legislation forward. Again, I thank you for that. I think it's the appropriate federal response to this growing epidemic. I also want to thank those experts out in the field from every area, prevention all the way through recovery who have worked with us over the past few years in putting this together and participated in about a half dozen forums we've had here in Washington, D.C., where they've come in and given us their input. We've all been back home getting input. No matter where I go in my home state of Ohio I hear the same story. I hear it from mothers, I hear it from fathers, brothers, sisters, friends. I hear heartbreaking stories of how addiction is ruining lives, tearing apart families, devastating communities. This epidemic is striking very close to home. And I know you're hearing that too as you go home. Last year 2,482 Ohioans died from a drug overdose. That should demonstrate to all of us how difficult it is to break through this addiction, the bonds of addiction are so strong. Recently I was at a hospital in Cleveland, Ohio looking at the amazing care they're give to addicted babies. I had a chance to talk to some mothers who continued to use during their pregnancy. That's how strong these bonds of addiction are. Thousands more, of course, are surviving these overdoses but they're still struggling. They're struggling to hold a job, they're struggling to take care of their families. Economists tell us that addiction cost this country \$700 billion every year. That's lost productivity, more expensive health care, it's what's happening in our emergency rooms in all of our states, it's more crimes, it's the cost of incarceration, it's the cost of policing. That's a lot of money.

But, of course, it doesn't tell the true cost in human lives. And you all talked about that this morning. It's the cost in dreams that are never fulfilled. I think this hearing will be very effective in helping bring awareness to the severity of the problem, and we've heard it already this morning. But I think it's just as important that we talk this morning about the reasons for hope, that there are alternatives out there, there are ways to address this. There are ways we can make progress in combating this epidemic and lives can be saved. And no one knows this better than Senator Grassley and Senator Leahy cause the've been at this for a couple decades, as was mentioned. I

worked back on prevention strategies that actually work and we have spawned more than 2,000 community coalitions together with the drug-free communities act. But now we need to do more. We need to focus more on not just the prevention and education but treatment and recovery. I've seen some amazing people who lead programs in my state that actually work. I've visited with a lot of men and women who struggle with addiction and have the courage to seek treatment and get on the road to recovery. I've also been fortunate enough to get to know a lot of Ohioans who have taken their personal tragedy and channeled their grief into something constructive. They used their story to help others avoid addiction. Or help others break the stigma of addiction. You're going to hear from one of those women here this morning. Tonda DaRe, I first met last fall. She came here for the rally on the mall against addiction and she told her story to me. And her story is one that breaks your heart. Her daughter, Holly, was 21 years old when she died of a heroin overdose.

Now, to the outside world Holly didn't fit the stereotype of someone who was a heroin addict. She excelled in school ... she was building a life for herself. Then on her 20th birthday at a celebration some friends of hers said, why don't you try this? And they gave her some heroin. She thought she would experiment with it. And she got into the grips of addiction. Tonda did, as you'll hear later, what any mom would do. She helped her daughter try to get into treatment. Holly went to rehab. She gained a period of sobriety. But then the addiction took over. She overdosed. And she died. Tonda again has taken that tragedy and used it in a constructive way to help others. Her group is called Holly's Song of Hope. She now has 40 chapters around Ohio and around the country and it's in the hopes that other daughters will not follow that similar dangerous path. I commend her. There are so many others who have done the same thing. I met in the state of Ohio last week, I visited Marion, Ohio, and I met Bethany who has struggled with heroin addiction. She struggled as a teenager, she was a promising athlete, she was going to college, she had a scholarship but she got sidetracked through her addiction. She was an expecting mom and she used. And she says that tearfully now. She was arrested. Law enforcement tried to deal with her issue by not putting her in jail but finding alternatives. She had to beat opioid addiction because of her kids. And she did it ... She went on to graduate from Marion County family dependency treatment court, an alternative sentencing program, where they provide resources for mothers facing substance abuse. After five years of being sober, Bethany now leads that specialized docket as the court coordinator to help other mothers in recovery. ... People can break this grip of addiction and get into treatment and recovery. It's hard. They need our help. Listening and learning from these families is what helped us inform our work on CARA. Every step of the way, as Sheldon Whitehouse will tell you. From prevention efforts to law enforcement strategies to addressing overdoses and expanding evidence-based treatment to supporting those in recovery, this legislation is comprehensive. It will help communities pursue all of these proven strategies, and we need them all, not just one. I'm committed to passing this bill and getting it signed into law because I truly believe it can make a difference in the lives of the people I represent and in the families you represent. I once again want to thank the nine members of this committee who have co-sponsored

this legislation. I want to thank those who are willing to work on getting this reported out and on the floor for a vote. And, again, I'm encouraged what I heard this morning. I think CARA is an investment. It is an investment. It's not inexpensive but it's an investment where communities are desperate for resources. And expertise. It's a small investment for the future. We will know success by empty jail cells, by the number of people who never have to struggle with addiction in the first place, by the moms and dads who now can be reunited with their kids. The message is very simple. Today, there is something we can do to help. To those who struggle and think they can't overcome to those who believe there is no one out there to help them, you are not alone. We are with you. There is hope. And that hope can be furthered by this committee leading the way by reporting out this legislation. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.