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One of the key questions facing member associations is whether their role is to lead or represent. APHSA faces this dilemma almost daily and relies on the guidance from our leadership to clarify staff roles and responsibilities. There is always a risk that failing to act, or acting too forcefully, will alienate our members or turn into a missed opportunity. Ideally, the agenda and tone are set by the leadership, and staff is empowered to represent members to complete the task. It is gratifying when strong member direction and good staff work converge to produce an effective product. One such example is the development of a new ICPC, the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children.

The ICPC was drafted in 1960 and, APHSA has served as the secretariat since 1974. It was considered a progressive measure designed to bring order and consistency, and to improve the process of placing children across state lines. Since then, however, new laws, greater social mobility and the advent of the Internet have made the current ICPC obsolete. An APHSA task force established to review the compact identified that timeliness, antiquated bureaucratic processes and lack of accountability and enforcement contributed to overall dissatisfaction with the ICPC. As a result, the APHSA National Council of State Human Service Administrators directed that the ICPC be rewritten.

In short order, with few financial resources and no federal support, a diverse volunteer team drafted a new ICPC. These hardworking professionals rolled up their shirt sleeves and dug into the difficult task of developing a consensus product that will modernize procedures and remove many obstacles to the timely placement of children across state jurisdictions. The new compact includes clear language, meaningful enforcement provisions, collection of standardized information, development

of an affordable information system, legal and jurisdictional clarification and administrative review procedures. At the core of the new ICPC is the creation of an Interstate Commission, made up of member states that will have regulatory and administrative authority to oversee and finance the compact. The U.S. Congress has endorsed the new ICPC and has urged states to quickly adopt it.

ICPC: Consider the Children First

Since becoming APHSA executive director nearly six years ago, I have come to believe that the work of the ICPC rewrite team and staff represents one of our most outstanding efforts. The motivation for change and sense of urgency were driven by a genuine concern that interstate adoptions and foster placements can take a year or longer due to the bureaucratic nature of the process. A year in the life of a child in foster care without a permanent home must feel like an eternity. There is a compelling case for change. Interstate placements comprise nearly 5.5 percent of all out-of-home residential arrangements, or about 43,000 children a year. Of those, 61 percent are placed with permanent families.

Unfortunately, the adoption of the new ICPC is in jeopardy due to intense lobbying by a group that specializes in private adoptions, which will face much stiffer oversight under the new compact. Regardless of that fact, the group has mounted an aggressive campaign that primarily contends that the proposed ICPC Commission usurps state authority and adoption of a new compact will add to a state's financial burden. Our response is that a compact by nature is designed to find consensus and common ground among states to avert the chaos of 50 independent state processes (over 200 Interstate Compacts currently exist) and that the costs of ICPC operations will be determined by the state commission

members themselves. A more compelling reason for ratification is the savings accrued from not having unnecessary foster care payments due to more timely adoptions. Ironically, a recently rewritten Interstate Compact for Juveniles, which served as a model for the ICPC and contains many of the same features, has been adopted by more than 30 states without these same objections from this

group. Sadly absent from these discussions is a focus on the child awaiting interstate placement.

I confess that I am passionate about this issue. As an adoptive parent, I had the experience of trying to navigate an impersonal system that misplaced forms and seemed insensitive to the needs of my child sitting in a foster home in South Korea awaiting clearance to join his new family. The thought of any child denied permanency even for one day because of unnecessary paperwork is abhorrent. The needs of the children must trump the concerns of those who arrange private adoptions.

The new ICPC represents the best thinking of the nation's human service leaders, who carefully considered all factors, including the need to oversee private adoptions. It is a vast improvement over keeping the current system, and provisions are in place to allow for continuous improvement and modernization as circumstances change. I urge you to become familiar with this noble effort, and, for the sake of the children, work with your legislative leaders to adopt the new ICPC.