Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

January 18, 2013

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC

Dear President Obama,

We write to express our deep disappointment regarding the Russian government's recent decision to ban all adoptions of Russian children by American families and to request your assistance in engaging with Russia to complete intercountry adoption cases initiated prior to the ban's enactment. Unparented children have no political power or voice, so it falls to us and others to speak on their behalf. This misguided Russian law victimizes thousands of vulnerable Russian children who are now living in dismal conditions in Russian institutions, with little hope of a permanent family except through intercountry adoption.

Russia's own Ministry of Science and Education estimates today that 110,000 children in Russia live in institutions, many of whom have special needs that these orphanages cannot begin to assist. As you know, long-term institutionalization has been proven to lead to neurological and emotional difficulties in children, as the lack of parental bonding damages brain development and a child's ability to form meaningful relationships with others. Russian families adopt about 7,400 of these institutionalized children each year and, until January 1, 2013, American families were opening their hearts and homes to about 1,000 Russian children each year as well.

While concrete numbers are difficult to ascertain due to privacy laws, current estimates from the Department of State and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services indicate that there are 350 to 500 active adoption cases involving Russian children matched with U.S. families prior to the recently enacted Russian ban. News reports suggest that of these cases, more than 50 have already been approved by Russian courts, meaning that the adoption is already legally recognized within Russia. Many of the matched families are desperately calling

our offices asking for help. One such family has already completed the adoption of a 5-year-old girl with spina bifida, only to discover that, even though they have a valid Russian adoption decree, they now cannot bring her home. Another planned to adopt two little boys abandoned as infants in Vladivostok, one of whom has a cleft palate. The American adoptive parents just spent two weeks with the boys, and the future they planned as a family is now blocked. These families, and hundreds of others, already love these children like their own, yet they are now precluded by Russian law from continuing with their cases.

Mr. President, we must immediately find a way forward for the Russian orphans and American families who are caught in this political conundrum. Although we believe that the entire law, which senselessly victimizes unparented children, should be reversed, our first priority must be to ensure that children and families who have already come together and been matched will not be torn apart. We ask you, as a father and a man who cares deeply about the well-being of children, to make this issue a priority in our bilateral relationship with Russia in your personal dealings with President Putin, and to instruct our nation's diplomats to raise it with Russian officials at all levels of government.

Sincerely,

Roy Blunt

Mary L. Landrieu

Frank R. Lautenberg

Michele Bachmann

Jack Reed

Sherrod Brown

Dick Durbin

Barbara A. Mikulski

Tom Harkin

David Vitter

John Cornyn

Jeanne Shaheen

Mark Kirk

Thad Cochran

Pat Roberts

Chuck Grassley

John Boozman

Tom Harkin

[illegible]

[illegible]

Kent Ftianks

Tom Cohen

Mark R Warner

Jeff Sessions

Michael B. Enzi

[illegible]

Karen Bass

Jim Moran

Debbie Stabenow

Ann Klobuchar

[illegible]

Maria Cantwell

Ron Wyden

Al Franken

Daniel Lipinski

Roger Wicker

Patrick Leahy

Kirsten E. Gillibrand

Jerry Moran

Bob Carey, Jr.

Bill Nelson

Julia Brownley

Steve King IA-04

Hank Johnson

Hans A. Wagner

Raul M. Grijalva

Bob Goodlatte

Brian Higgins

Charles B. Rangel

Sam Farr

Bill Foster

McKinney Mallon

Martha Roby

Cynthia M. Lummis

Pat Tiberi

Peter Roskam

Brett Guthrie

Barbara Lee

Stephen F. Lynch

Dave Loebsack

John F. Tierney

[illegible]

[illegible]

Tim Bishop

Alan Nunnelee

[illegible]

Tom Marino

Erik Paulsen

Jim Langevin

Lloyd Doggett

James Clark