



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on December 26, 2012

## Russia's Parliament Passes Ban on U.S. Adoptions

Nearly 50 Russian children who are about to be adopted by U.S. families may be stuck in overcrowded orphanages if Russian President Vladimir Putin signs a ban on such adoptions, passed December 26 by the upper chamber of Russia's parliament. Russia's Federation Council unanimously approved the measure, which political observers say was passed in retaliation for U.S. legislation recently signed by President Obama that places travel and financial restrictions on Russians who have been identified as human rights violators. The U.S. law, called the Magnitsky Act, was named for Russian attorney Sergei Magnitsky, who uncovered a massive Russian tax fraud involving government officials. Magnitsky was reportedly beaten to death in a Moscow jail in 2009.



"The United States is concerned by measures in the bill passed in the Russian Duma that, if it becomes law, would halt inter-country adoptions between the United States and Russia and would restrict the ability of Russian civil society organizations to work with American partners," said U.S. State Department spokesman Patrick Ventrell.

For their part, Russian officials have expressed their concern over the deaths of nearly a score of Russian adopted children who have died under the care of their U.S. parents, some of them from abuse and mistreatment. The [Associated Press](#) reported that the Russian bill is named in honor of a Russian infant, Dima Yakovlev, who died in the United States in 2008 after his adoptive father accidentally left him in an enclosed car for hours on a hot summer day. "The father was found not guilty of involuntary manslaughter," reported the AP. "Russian lawmakers argue that by banning adoptions to the United States they would be protecting children and encouraging adoptions inside Russia."

Over the past couple of years there have been a handful of news stories that supposedly highlight the casual attitude some American parents have shown toward their adopted Russian children. One of the most notorious cases occurred in 2010, when an American woman reportedly sent her adopted son back to Russia alone on a one-way flight, claiming that the seven-year-old had exhibited violent outbursts that caused her family to fear for their safety.

Russian lawmaker Mikhail Margelov, one of the bill's sponsors, said the bottom line is that Russian children "must be placed in Russian families, and this is a cornerstone issue for us." He added, however, that the bill was also "a natural and a long overdue response" to the U.S. law targeting Russian citizens.

One Russian children's rights advocate, Pavel Astakhov, who approves of the measure, said that foreign adoptions discourage Russian families from adopting children in the country. "A foreigner who has paid



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for an adoption always gets a priority compared to potential Russian adoptive parents," Astakhov said. "A great country like Russia cannot sell its children." The measure would allow foreign adoptions only if a Russian family does not express interest in a child.

But there is some major opposition within the Russian government to the bill. "Several top officials, including Russia's foreign minister and education minister, have come out against the ban," reported [ABC News](#). "A leaked memo from another top official suggested its passage would cause Russia to breach several international treaties, including a recently enacted adoption agreement between the United States and Russia."

Putin has hinted that he is inclined to sign the bill into law, which prompted outrage from some opponents of the measure. "This is the most vile law passed since Putin came to power," said opposition activist Boris Nemtsov. "Putin is taking children hostage, like a terrorist."

According to one United Nations report, there are over 740,000 children in Russia without parental custody, and many of the children now in the country's overcrowded orphanages are in need of medical care. These are the children who will suffer most if Putin signs the ban, argue child advocates and foreign adoption officials. "These children are not even offered to foreigners until they get a certain number of [adoption] refusals from Russians," Galina Sigayeva, head of the New Hope Christian Services Adoption Agency, told [Reuters News Service](#). "These are children with complicated diagnoses, really complicated. They are very ill children."

Currently there are some 110,000 children living in Russia's state orphanages, according to the country's Ministry of Science and Education. "By contrast," reported Reuters, "in the United States — which has more than twice Russia's population — about 58,280 children were living in group homes and institutions last year, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services." Reuters added that adoptions by Russian families "remain modest, with some 7,400 adoptions in 2011 compared with 3,400 adoptions of Russian children by families abroad."

U.S. State Department spokesman Patrick Ventrell said that American families "have welcomed more than 60,000 Russian children into American homes over the past 20 years." He also pointed to the recent adoption agreement between the two nations, aimed at improving safeguards for children adopted into U.S. families. "If Russian officials have concerns about the implementation of this agreement," Ventrell said, "we stand ready to work with them to improve it and remain committed to supporting inter-country adoptions between our two countries."

Adoption official Galina Sigayeva recalled that in the six months before the agreement was signed between the two nations, "hospitals were overwhelmed. There was no room in orphanages or hospitals for children whom their parents had rejected." She wondered "what's next?" with implementation of the new ban that Putin is expected to sign.

Hugh Williamson, Europe and central Asia director at Human Rights Watch, said the Russian bill "hits back at Russia's most vulnerable children and could deprive them of the loving families they desperately need." And John Dalhuisen, a spokesman for Amnesty International, attacked the bill as little more than a "childish response to the Magnitsky Act."

*Photo of Federation Council of Russia*



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