



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Lee A. Allen

703-299-6633

Mobile (24/7) 301-693-6513

## **National Council For Adoption Renews Demands for Immediate Changes to Russian Adoption Policies in the Wake of Child's Alleged Murder**

Alexandria, Virginia – August 5, 2005 – Following news of the arrest and manslaughter charges against a Hartford County, Maryland couple resulting from the death of their eight-year old Russian-born son, the National Council For Adoption (NCFA) is renewing its call for prompt actions and implementation of reforms within the Russian adoption system, in order to prevent future cases of abuse.

The tragic news of Dennis Merryman's death is being used by the anti-adoption establishment in Russia as an excuse to impose an immediate moratorium in lieu of bilateral agreements between Russia and the U.S., effectively ending adoptions by American parents. Additionally, a moratorium would reduce the flow of information between adoption officials of both countries, disrupting Russia's ability to conduct post-placement monitoring of adopted children. On behalf of the international adoption community in America, NCFA is once again proposing strategic reforms to Russian adoption policies. When enacted, these reforms will provide safeguards against future tragedies, while still allowing safe and sound adoptions to move forward.

“The U.S. State Department has said that bilateral agreements are not the answer, and we assert that any moratorium would have devastating affects on the thousands of children waiting for loving homes. Also, because children in orphanages are rarely adopted by Russian families, a moratorium would violate the Convention on the Rights of Children, which states that every child has the right to a family,” insists Thomas Atwood, president and CEO of NCFA. “We do not know all the facts in this case, and it is clearly too early to pass a judgment that would irreparably harm so many young lives. Instead, we should concentrate our efforts on taking the steps we know will improve the current process.”

Like the vast majority of alleged homicide cases involving Russian-born adopted children, Dennis Merryman's adoption was, in fact, an independent adoption, facilitated by an agency not accredited by Russian authorities. Russian law continues to allow this type of independent adoptions, which do not meet the same strict requirements as adoptions through agencies accredited by Russia. Independent adoptions do not undergo the same level of scrutiny and often do not provide adequate levels of professional service.

– more –

Once again, NCFA calls for an immediate end to the troublesome practice of independent adoptions in Russia. Since 2001, the Russian government has recognized and accredited highly qualified agencies to work in Russia. These agencies meet the highest standards of accountability and ethical practices, as determined by Russian authorities. Agencies that do not meet these strict standards can lose their accreditation and be prohibited from operating in Russia.

In addition to banning independent adoptions, NCFA also urges the creation of a special independent commission in Russia to convene meetings with adoption professionals from Russia, the United States, and other countries to discuss ways in which risks to children can be further reduced.

“Justice will be served in this case. The facts will be revealed in time,” Atwood continues. “We must be patient in this particular case, while taking all necessary precautions to eliminate even the small risk. Eliminating independent adoptions and enforcing existing laws prohibiting facilitator adoptions would greatly reduce the risk of future tragedies.”

### **About NCFA**

Since 1980, NCFA has been a leading voice among national adoption and child welfare organizations. NCFA is a research, education, and advocacy nonprofit that provides adoption information, promotes ethical adoption practices, informs public policy and opinion about adoption issues, and serves as a resource for women with unplanned pregnancies, adopted persons and their families, those seeking to adopt, and adoption professionals.

#####