

# Florida should crack down on illegal re-adoptions

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Florida lawmakers want to pass stricter child adoption laws in light of a popular — and terrifying — new practice called re-homing.

The term once referred to pet owners who wanted to give up a pesky dog or cat they'd brought home from the pound. Now it describes the act of parents desperate to give up an unwanted adopted child, often brought home from overseas. Many turn to Facebook and other social media sites to advertise their willingness to let the child go — even to those with a history of child abuse.

Few questions are asked. No background checks are performed. And no one notifies state adoption or child-protection agencies.

"This is a sick thing," says state Sen. Eleanor Sobel, who chairs the Senate's Children, Families and Elder Affairs Committee. "This must be stopped."

Sobel is right. The practice of dumping unwanted adopted children — without any oversight — must be stopped.

Legislative fixes proposed by Sobel would make new parents better aware of post-adoption support services and make it easier to prosecute those who use the Internet to get rid of unwanted children.

Typically, online-based child exchanges involve minors who do not speak English and suffer from emotional and mental problems. Custody transfers can involve nothing more than a single, handwritten note that transfers power of attorney of a child. Reuters recently uncovered the dirty secret in an investigative series published in September:

One Liberian girl was given to a couple her legal guardians had never met and soon after, went missing. A 14-year-old girl, crippled by [polio](#), was forced to dig her own grave by her new mother. Another mother returned a 7-year-old Russian boy she had adopted six months earlier by sticking him — alone — on a plane to Moscow.

In another case reported by Reuters, a Florida couple fled the country to avoid questions from child protection officials about why they sought to give up a Russian boy they had taken into their home 11 years earlier. After moving to Scotland, the parents used Yahoo to dump the boy with a couple that had a history of violent tendencies, and who had previously lost custody of both of their biological children.

Most parents who seek adoption have good intentions. And it is easy to understand how some may find themselves overwhelmed, especially by a child in need of extraordinary attention, care and resources.

But using the Internet to privately arrange custody transfers to circumvent existing child-adoption laws is unacceptable.

With Senate Bill 498, Sobel proposes that judges make new parents aware of the resources available to them, and that advertising a child for adoption is a felony, punishable by a stay in state prison.

SB 498 also would close a loophole in state law that demands prosecutors prove criminal intent when a parent illegally offers up a child for adoption. The bill would make it possible for someone to be convicted regardless of intent, a lower and more sensible threshold. Offering a kid to someone you meet on Facebook should be treated like the crime it is, rather than a simple parental mistake.

Protecting children from being advertised for re-adoption without government oversight is a logical step toward protecting the most vulnerable among us.

Now that we know about it, it's time we do something about it.

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