



## Testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee

Good morning. I am Dr. Rick Wilkerson, an orthopaedic surgeon from Spencer, Iowa. I would like to use this opportunity to first thank Senator Grassley and the other members of the Senate Judiciary Committee for the opportunity to visit this morning and provide testimony on my experience in international adoption. From the brief biography already provided to the members of the committee, you can see that my wife, Barbara, and I are the proud parents of nine children. Five of these children have been adopted, with two of them being adopted as international adoptions. It is my youngest child, Junior, who was adopted from Haiti, whom I would like to share information about with the Committee this morning.

In 2010, following the earthquake disaster in Haiti, I was offered the opportunity by the Orthopaedic Trauma Association, to assist in a humanitarian effort to provide care to the people in Haiti following that disaster. I arrived at Hopital Adventiste d'Haiti in June 2010. Upon arrival in Port au Prince, the degree of devastation to this country immediately became quite overwhelming. Upon arrival at the hospital, I found that I was the only physician providing care for the next 3 weeks, but was also fortunate enough to have an excellent Haitian health care staff to assist me. Shortly after arriving to the hospital, I met an 8-year-old young man by the name of Junior who had the misfortune at the age of 4 of losing his mother, and then 3 days before my arrival losing his father. Junior had no remaining family members who could provide care for him. He was, therefore, living in the

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hospital hallway. It was almost immediate that Junior and I struck up a very strong bond, and relationship. At the end of each working day, doing surgery, doing clinic, and making rounds, I always looked forward to my time to be able to sit down with Junior, play some games, and help him with his English. It was also at this time that I learned that Junior had a life-threatening medical condition that was not receiving medical care. On further investigation, I found that despite the World Health Organization efforts to provide the developing world with medical treatments for many different conditions, that these treatments are frequently not received by those in need as a result of the donated medications being diverted from the needy patients and instead being sold on the marketplace.

Upon returning back to Iowa, I discussed with my wife, Barbara, and my other children what their feelings would be about bringing Junior to the United States for needed medical care. Everyone met this idea with enthusiasm, and our efforts in bringing Junior to the United States for his medical care were begun. After 10 months and many thousands of dollars and many hours of effort by a number of people, Junior did successfully arrive here in the United States, and 2 years later was adopted here in the United States by my wife and I. I am happy to report that he is quite healthy today as a result of the medical care he has been provided here in the United States, all of which cost our public health system and government 0 dollars, and I am quite sure he will continue to grow to become a very productive and proud American citizen.

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As a result of our international works, my wife and I have now formed a charitable foundation, Love Takes Root. The mission of this foundation is to “better the welfare of children worldwide”. Our first project is the construction of an orphanage, school, and clinic for 65 Haitian children and school that currently has 165 children in Jacmel, Haiti.

The efforts to bring Junior here and to eventually adopt him made me aware of many concerns that I have with our present system that I would like to share with you today.

- 1) There are many caring, loving families here in the United States who are very interested in providing homes to some of the disadvantaged children throughout the world. Due to a system that currently exists and the cost associated, this is frequently far out of the reach of many potentially loving parents and families.
- 2) The current Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has a system that is beyond the ability of most to navigate. When seeking assistance from INS, it is all too often that the pervasive attitudes displayed by those who are to serve our citizens with the difficult task of international adoption instead are unwilling or untrained to do so. A perfect example was in the episode when I was asked to report to the United States Embassy in Port au Prince to receive judgment upon the Temporary Visa for Medical Purposes that I applied for, for Junior. I received this correspondence 3 days before having to appear, thus making it a very

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difficult and expensive trip, as well as a huge inconvenience to my patients whose surgery had to be canceled for me to be able to do this. Upon arriving, I was greeted by an INS employee who simply told me that the request had been denied. When asked for assistance or guidance, I was told that he was unable to do so. When again asking what recommendation he would have for someone in my situation I was told to leave or security would be called. It was only through the assistance of a senate staff person, Ms. Emily Winterson, who at the time was a staff person for Senator Scott Brown, that I became aware of Humanitarian Parole, which was successfully used to bring Junior here and was the only reason he is alive today. With appropriate training of staff at INS, this difficult journey could and should be facilitated and not obstructed.

Again, I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to speak here today, and I would welcome any questions.

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