



December 2000

Adoption and Financial Assistance: Tools for Navigating the Bureaucracy. Rita Laws and Tim O'Hanlon.

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Recommended Citation

(2000) "*Adoption and Financial Assistance: Tools for Navigating the Bureaucracy.* Rita Laws and Tim O'Hanlon.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 27 : Iss. 4 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol27/iss4/16>

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This is an extremely interesting and readable book. It will stimulate critical reflection not only among sociologists and social workers but among anyone interested in the way tragic social problems are interpreted in the public domain.

Rita Laws and Tim O'Hanlon, *Adoption and Financial Assistance: Tools for Navigating the Bureaucracy*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1999. \$35.00 hardcover.

Permanency for children is a major goal of child welfare policy. However, finding permanent homes for 'special needs' children is difficult. These children often languish in the foster care system resulting in burdensome medical and other costs. Laws, the adoptive mother of eight, and O'Hanlon, a former adoption assistance policy specialist, contend that the biggest obstacle the average family faces when adopting a special needs child is money. Although the Title IV-E adoption provisions allow for state and federal financial assistance for the costs of adoption and for maintenance, not many parents know what to ask for. Furthermore, financial problems often do not surface until the child reaches school age long after the adoption is finalized.

In four well-defined and carefully written parts, this book serves as a guide for prospective parents who are considering adopting special needs children. The first part of the book describes how the intent of PL 96-272 is often deflected by bureaucracy. Part two briefly discusses parental support groups and community capacity building, and then proceeds to show how families can obtain financial assistance to adopt special needs children. The advocacy skills described in this part can be used by parents not only to secure financial assistance but help with medical and educational needs. It also shows how parents can use fair hearings to their advantage. The authors caution that sometimes even hearing officers don't know everything about the law. The third part of the book contains legal documents, including Policy Interpretation Questions (PIQs) which are relevant to parents seeking adoption financial assistance retroactively. The sections of the *Adoption and Safe Families Act* relating to adoption assistance are also covered. The final section of the book offers readers information and resources available at various internet sites for on-line support and advice.

While written for parents who are thinking of adopting a special needs child, this book is an excellent reference for professionals who are responsible for adoptions, or for anyone interested in adoption policy. O'Hanlon and Laws are careful to point out that the book does not substitute for consultation with a knowledgeable attorney. Nevertheless, they have made the process user friendly by citing examples of parents who have overcome problems with adoption financial assistance through persistence and the application of knowledge and advocacy skills described in this book.

Morton Keller and R. Shep Melnick (Eds.), *Taking Stock: American Government in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999. \$54.95 hardcover, \$17.95 papercover.

As the new century begins, is appropriate to consider what government intervention has achieved over the last hundred years. During the 20th century, governments around the world have become involved in economic, social, cultural activities to a historically unprecedented extent. However, the expansion of state intervention has become highly controversial. While many point to the positive achievements of government intervention, others believe that it has been disastrous. They claim that government 'interference' in economic and social affairs has been costly, wasteful, intrusive and oppressive. These criticisms have been widely accepted and today, government programs are often vilified by politicians, academics and the media.

This edited book by Morton Keller and Shep Melnick contains an interesting collection of papers designed to address the question of how state intervention has changed over the last century. The book focuses on five major spheres of government activity, namely trade and tariff policy, immigration, the environment, civil rights and social welfare. The authors show that there are interesting similarities between public policy issues at the beginning of the the 20th century and its end, but that there are also significant differences. These differences are perhaps most noticeable in the fields of environmental protection and civil rights where the role of government has been significantly extended and where the types of programs adopted have had a major influence.