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US Must Take Steps to Rectify Ongoing Injustices Faced by South Korean Adoptees

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Emily Warnecke was just 3 months old in 1964, when she was adopted from South Korea by a Los Angeles-area military family. She has lived in the U.S. for 60 years, but today she faces a harsh reality: Despite paying into Medicare and Social Security for years, she is barred from accessing benefits. Worse, she's at risk of deportation for nonviolent criminal charges — because, unbeknownst to her for much of her life, she is not a U.S. citizen.

Warnecke is in this situation because of a decades-old law that excluded thousands of adoptees from automatically receiving U.S. citizenship. Prior to the passage of the 2000 Child Citizenship Act (CCA), no child received automatic citizenship upon international adoption. Families had to proactively initiate naturalization; otherwise, their adoptive children never became citizens.