Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

January 18, 2013

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC

Dear President Obama,

We write to express our deep disappointment regarding the Russian government's recent decision to ban all adoptions of Russian children by American families and to request your assistance in engaging with Russia to complete intercountry adoption cases initiated prior to the ban's enactment. Unparented children have no political power or voice, so it falls to us and others to speak on their behalf. This misguided Russian law victimizes thousands of vulnerable Russian children who are now living in dismal conditions in Russian institutions, with little hope of a permanent family except through intercountry adoption.

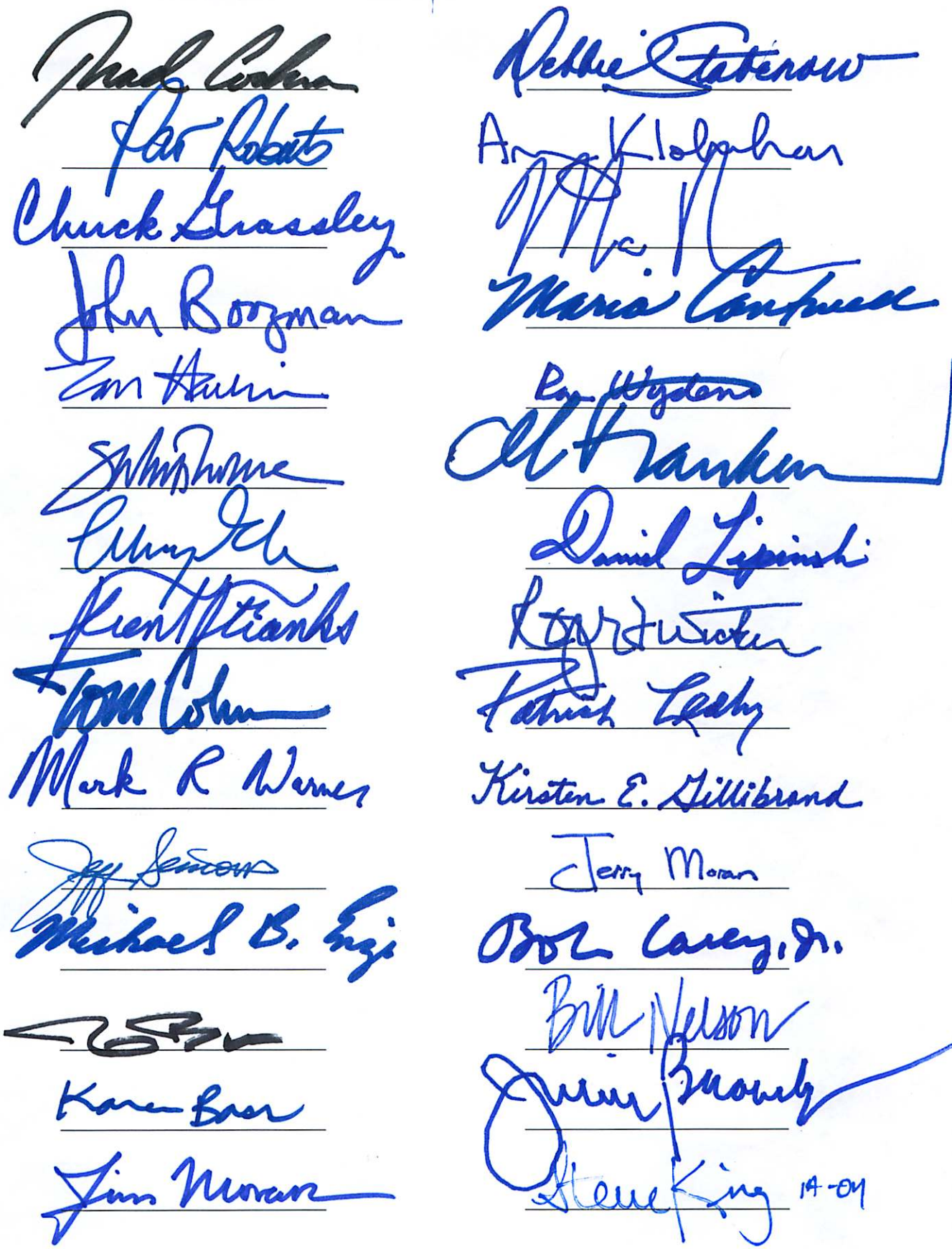
Russia's own Ministry of Science and Education estimates today that 110,000 children in Russia live in institutions, many of whom have special needs that these orphanages cannot begin to assist. As you know, long-term institutionalization has been proven to lead to neurological and emotional difficulties in children, as the lack of parental bonding damages brain development and a child's ability to form meaningful relationships with others. Russian families adopt about 7,400 of these institutionalized children each year and, until January 1, 2013, American families were opening their hearts and homes to about 1,000 Russian children each year as well.

While concrete numbers are difficult to ascertain due to privacy laws, current estimates from the Department of State and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services indicate that there are 350 to 500 active adoption cases involving Russian children matched with U.S. families prior to the recently enacted Russian ban. News reports suggest that of these cases, more than 50 have already been approved by Russian courts, meaning that the adoption is already legally recognized within Russia. Many of the matched families are desperately calling

our offices asking for help. One such family has already completed the adoption of a 5-year-old girl with spina bifida, only to discover that, even though they have a valid Russian adoption decree, they now cannot bring her home. Another planned to adopt two little boys abandoned as infants in Vladivostok, one of whom has a cleft palate. The American adoptive parents just spent two weeks with the boys, and the future they planned as a family is now blocked. These families, and hundreds of others, already love these children like their own, yet they are now precluded by Russian law from continuing with their cases.

Mr. President, we must immediately find a way forward for the Russian orphans and American families who are caught in this political conundrum. Although we believe that the entire law, which senselessly victimizes unparented children, should be reversed, our first priority must be to ensure that children and families who have already come together and been matched will not be torn apart. We ask you, as a father and a man who cares deeply about the well-being of children, to make this issue a priority in our bilateral relationship with Russia in your personal dealings with President Putin, and to instruct our nation's diplomats to raise it with Russian officials at all levels of government.

Sincerely,



Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

January 18, 2013

His Excellency, President Vladimir Putin
President of the Russian Federation
The Kremlin
Moscow, Russia

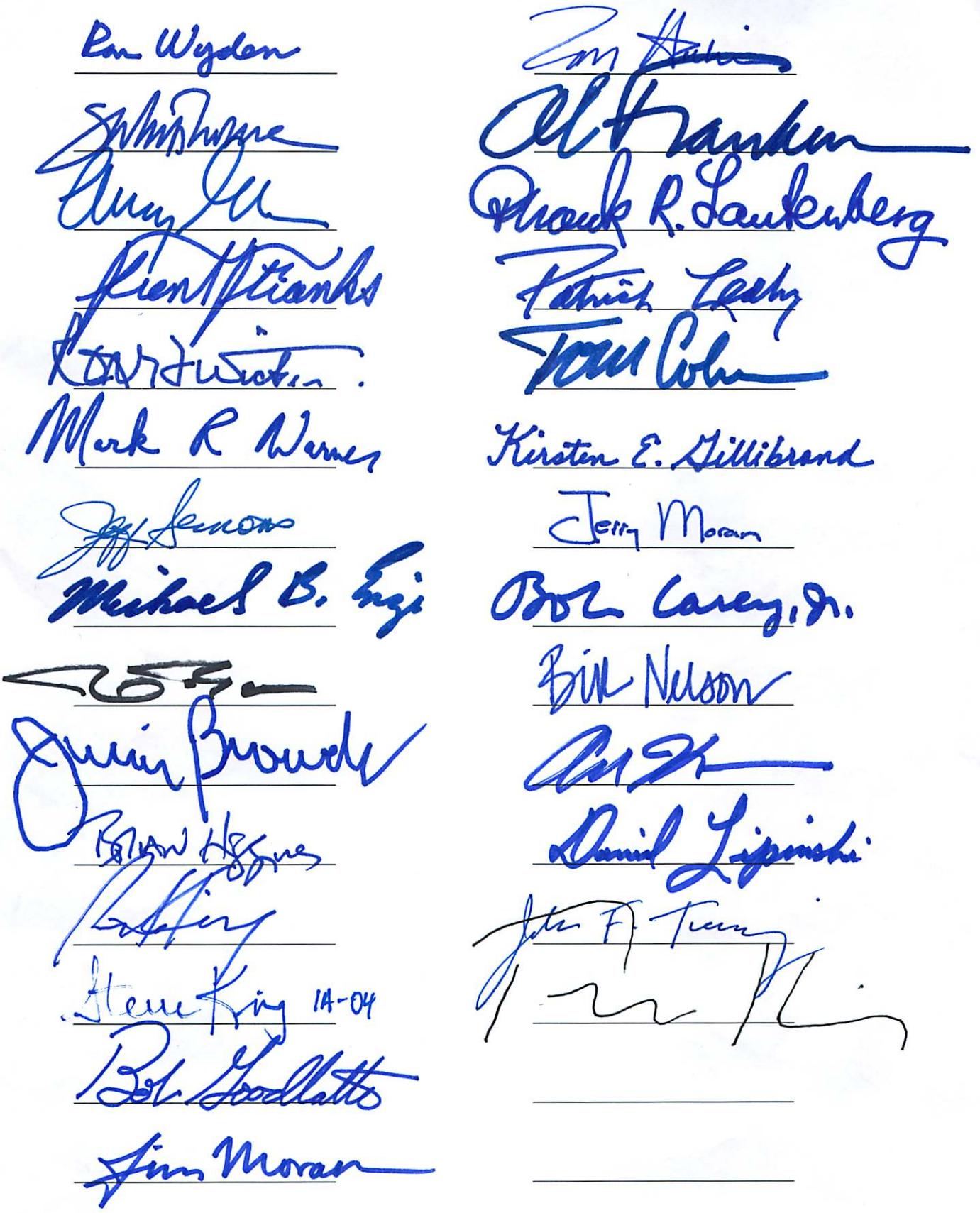
Dear President Putin,

We write to respectfully request that the Government of Russia allow completion of the pending adoption cases involving Russian children who were matched with U.S. families prior to the enactment of the Russian law "On Measures of Coercion on Persons, Involved in the Violation of the Rights of Russian Citizens." As you know, we are concerned with the entirety of the law, which permanently bans adoptions of Russian children by U.S. citizens, but we hope that you agree that it is in the best interests of the hundreds of children who have already met and bonded with a U.S. family to permit their adoption cases to proceed to conclusion.

As you are aware, many of the children involved in these cases have special medical needs and the families with whom they have been matched have been found by Russian officials to be willing and able to accommodate these needs. Experience shows that finding families for older and special needs children is more difficult. Removing the option for these children to be adopted by families in the United States will further exacerbate these challenges, increasing the risk that they will spend their formative years in an institution, and diminishing their hopes for a productive future.

The matched children believed they were soon going to become part of a safe, loving and permanent family. Children everywhere deserve the love and support that only a family can provide. The U.S. families matched with these children already love them like their own and have invested a great deal of time and resources in pursuit of a final adoption. We appeal to you to look beyond politics and see the people this law most directly affects.

On November 1, 2012, our two countries entered into a bilateral agreement. We believe this agreement was based on our shared desire to provide orphaned children safe and loving homes. We remain hopeful that in the spirit of this original agreement and out of concern for the futures of these children, we can complete the final cases of any children who were matched with a U.S. family before the law entered into force.

We ask you, as a father, to make the finalization of these cases a priority.

Sincerely,