

**JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA  
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS**  
455 Golden Gate Avenue  
San Francisco, California 94102-3688

**Report**

TO: Members of the Judicial Council

FROM: Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee  
Hon. Jerilyn L. Borack and Hon. Susan D. Huguenor, Cochairs  
Kelly Beck, Attorney, 415-865-8011,  
kelly.beck@jud.ca.gov  
Stacey Mangni, Staff Analyst, 415-865-7659,  
stacey.mangni@jud.ca.gov

DATE: September 12, 2006

SUBJECT: Adoption and Permanency for Children in California: A Resolution for the  
Courts (Action Required)

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Issue Statement

In 1999, the Judicial Council declared November to be Court Adoption and Permanency Month. Following that first successful observance, the Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee has worked closely with the Governor's office and the Legislature to annually develop resolutions highlighting adoption and permanency by the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The committee is planning to highlight Court Adoption and Permanency Month again this November along with the Legislature, which has issued Assembly Concurrent Resolution 166, declaring November "Court Adoption and Permanency Month." Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger is planning to recognize the month as well.

This year the council can once again actively recognize National Adoption Month in California's courts by proclaiming November to be Court Adoption and Permanency Month and by encouraging courts to take special measures to address the issues of adoption and permanency in their counties. Annually recognizing November as Court Adoption and Permanency Month reinforces the Judicial Council's commitment to finding permanent homes for children.

## Recommendation

The Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee recommends that the Judicial Council adopt the attached resolution, effective October 20, 2006, proclaiming November 2006 to be Court Adoption and Permanency Month.

## Rationale for Recommendation

Each year in California, nearly 500,000<sup>1</sup> reports are made of child abuse and neglect, and approximately 29,000<sup>2</sup> children enter foster care. Currently, about 79,000<sup>3</sup> children in the state are living apart from their families in child welfare–supervised out-of-home care. Some 32 percent<sup>4</sup> of these children do not leave the foster care system within four years. Of the 35,787<sup>5</sup> children exiting foster care in the past year, only 54 percent<sup>6</sup> were reunited with their families and 21 percent were adopted.<sup>7</sup> It is critical that California’s courts continue to make specific efforts to learn and implement new strategies ensuring that each child has located a lifelong connection to a caring adult, as well as continue their efforts to promote placement of all children in safe, loving, permanent homes.

The state has progressively been working toward implementing new and innovative programs that focus on improving the lives of foster care children. One initiative the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is working on with other organizations throughout the state, including the Administrative Office of the Courts, provides pilot trainings to help make sure that any family members or significant others whom a young person knows are able to play a permanent and responsible role in his or her life. Experience shows that without these permanent connections, youth face even more overwhelming odds against a successful adulthood than is already the case when they leave foster care.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> B. Needell, et al., *Child Welfare Services Reports for California* (2005) retrieved July 17, 2006, from the University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research Web site at <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/>. Specific reports on referrals may be found at <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/referrals/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Specific reports on first entries to care may be found at <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/cohorts/firstentries/>.

<sup>3</sup> B. Needell, et al., *supra*. Specific point-in-time reports on children in child welfare–supervised foster care may be found at <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/Pointintime/fostercare/childwel/>.

<sup>4</sup> B. Needell, et al., *supra*. Specific reports on the amount of time in care may be found at <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/cwscmsreports/Cohorts/exits/>.

<sup>5</sup> B. Needell, et al., *supra*. Specific reports on exits from foster care may be found at <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/cwscmsreports/dynamics/exitsPerYr/>.

<sup>6</sup> B. Needell, et al., *supra*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Improving the Lives of California’s Children and Families* (Child Welfare Improvements; Statewide Priorities 2004–2005, CDSS/FC/CWDA, rev. 8/24/04)

Court Adoption and Permanency Month is one vehicle by which courts can raise awareness, demonstrate commitment, and bring about changes in the court system to stabilize these children's lives.

The month of November was selected for the state's observance to coincide with National Adoption Month, when government agencies and nonprofit organizations highlight innovative efforts to expedite adoption and permanency and to raise awareness of the need for safe, permanent homes for children in foster care.

Since California's Court Adoption and Permanency Month was initiated in 1999, many counties have held Adoption Saturdays, in November and throughout the year, to clear their backlogs of adoption cases. The Judicial Council encourages counties to do this as appropriate.

The Judicial Council also encourages counties that do not have backlogs of adoption cases to hold adoption celebrations, open their courthouses to the public and the media, and institute systemic changes as part of the statewide effort to raise awareness of adoption and permanency in November.

Many creative examples (some listed below) show how courts, often in conjunction with county social services, local nonprofit agencies, and others, celebrate and highlight Court Adoption and Permanency Month in November as well as throughout the year:

- Alameda County is planning its 6th Annual Adoption Day on Saturday morning, November 18, 2006, in conjunction with the county's Social Services Department. The events involve a large number of volunteers recruited and trained by Social Services who act as greeters, monitors, food servers, picture takers and other types of volunteers. The CASA staff and probation staff also get involved. All judges in the court are solicited to participate by taking at least 30 minutes to finalize up to four adoptions.
- Los Angeles County, the originator of both California's and the national Adoption Saturday movement, will conduct its 23rd Adoption Saturday on November 18, 2006. The first event was held in April 1998, and more than 7,000 adoptions have been completed in that county on these Saturdays.
- In addition to a yearly Adoption Saturday celebration, Tulare County has been growing a "Family Tree" every year with handprint leaves the first year (2002), and apples, butterflies, and ladybugs in the following three years. Each new symbol represents a child who has found permanency by being adopted into a new family. A picture of the family tree was on the cover of the 2005 technical assistance package.
- The Superior Court of San Bernardino County, Juvenile District, and the Department of Social Services will hold their yearly Adoption Celebration event. This is the 9th year that they have held this event, and they anticipate that approximately 75 children will be adopted. The event is held at a local convention center because of the large

number of participants. The San Bernardino County Children's fund has donated teddy bears for the adopted children at the ceremony in the last two years and for those children who are adopted in juvenile court throughout the year.

- The Orange County Board of Supervisors meeting on November 7, 2006, will hold a celebration to honor adoptive families. The Social Services Agency also conducts recruitment events to promote adoptions throughout the year.
- Ventura County will organize its annual Adoption Fair and Public Adoption Calendar, to which the media is invited. Several service providers participate and share materials and information with adoptive and foster families. The county's Board of Supervisors also passes a resolution in support of Court Adoption and Permanency Month.

In 1999 the Judicial Council collected many of these ideas in the Court Adoption and Permanency Month Technical Assistance Package. It contains general guidelines for planning events during the month and suggests specific projects and actions that promote both adoption and permanency.

The 2005 update added a new chapter with information that included the first information for the package on alternative forms of permanency for children. Ideas about permanency in the foster care community continue to alter over time, a reflection of changes in society. A resource listing of informational Web sites was also included.

This year will include a focus on the stories of judicial and court personnel who were themselves former foster youth or who know children currently in California's foster care system. The courts play a critical role in their lives—no child enters or leaves our foster care system without a judge's decision, and this effort will let foster youth know that there are individuals working in the judicial branch who share their experiences, and that foster youth too have a future.

Another exciting addition to the guide is a foreword by one of the most dedicated of California's judicial officers for his efforts on behalf of children, as well as the original creator of the Adoption Saturday program in Los Angeles: the presiding judge of the juvenile court, Hon. Michal Nash.

In the spirit of these developments, the committee decided to revise the name this year from "Package" to "Guide" to better reflect its role of providing courts ideas for promising practices and resources for promoting permanency for children. The new name illustrates some of these many innovative ideas available to the courts to promote permanency for foster care youth as it is updated again this year.

Some of the other highlighted resources are: the use of modern technology to expand searches for family members; expanded mediation programs to include postadoption contacts; team decision making; family group conferencing and enhanced youth

involvement; as well as other collaborative permanency programs. An expanded Web site and materials list will also be included.

Local courts continue to request additional copies of the technical assistance guide and also to ask for more information and ideas about best practices and procedures that other courts and county agencies have successfully implemented. Events or practices mentioned above and included in the technical assistance guide, such as public adoption calendars and fairs, help to disseminate important information to a broad-based audience and can assist in transferring these practices to other courts. They also increase awareness about the needs of foster children for permanency.

#### Alternative Actions Considered

The Judicial Council could elect not to declare that November 2006 is Court Adoption and Permanency Month and instead rely on the 1999 through 2005 resolutions to promote adoption and permanency activities in November. However, the Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee believes that a new resolution each year highlights the critical need of foster children for permanency.

#### Comments From Interested Parties

The resolution and the Court Adoption and Permanency Month Technical Assistance Guide continue to be well received by courts, court-connected professionals, and the adoption and permanency community, but do not require circulation for comment as part of an official invitation to comment cycle.

#### Implementation Requirements and Costs

Court Adoption and Permanency Month is a voluntary program. Each court can participate at a level appropriate to its jurisdiction. Suggested events range from no-cost activities for promoting adoption and permanency to higher-cost systemic changes.

Participation by families in any special event or project in any court is also voluntary. The emphasis on the month of November is not intended as a rationale for holding a hearing so that it can take place during a special event. Each case should be heard as soon as it can be calendared, although the families involved can still be offered the opportunity to participate in a court's later-occurring special event.

Attachments

# JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA



## RESOLUTION

*Whereas* consistent with its commitment to improving the lives of children and their families, since 1999 the Judicial Council has annually recognized November as Court Adoption and Permanency Month;

*Whereas* each year in California nearly 500,000 reports are made of child abuse and neglect and some 29,000 children enter foster care;

*Whereas* about 79,000 children in California live apart from their families in child welfare-supervised out-of-home care;

*Whereas* 32 percent of the children in foster care in California have been away from their families in out-of-home care for four or more years;

*Whereas* of the nearly 36,000 children leaving foster care between January and December 2005, 54 percent were reunited with their families and 21 percent were adopted;

*Whereas* the Judicial Council is committed to working with the Governor, the Legislature, and local courts and communities to achieve permanency for children who have been abused or neglected; and

*Whereas* local courts and communities throughout California have created programs promoting adoption and permanency that have resulted in a decrease in the number of children waiting for permanent, safe homes;

*Now, therefore*, I, Richard D. Huffman, on behalf of the Judicial Council of California, do hereby proclaim November to be Court Adoption and Permanency Month, during which the courts and their local communities are encouraged to join in activities to expedite permanency.

In witness whereof

I have hereunto set my hand this 20th day of October, 2006.

RICHARD D. HUFFMAN

Justice of the Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District  
and Acting Chair of the Judicial Council of California

Attest:

WILLIAM C. VICKREY

Secretary, Judicial Council of California, and  
Administrative Director of the Courts