

**JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA  
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS**

455 Golden Gate Avenue  
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**Report**

TO: Members of the Judicial Council

FROM: Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee  
Hon. Jerilyn L. Borack and Hon. Susan D. Huguenor, Cochairs  
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DATE: October 9, 2008

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 Senate Concurrent Resolution 127, declaring November 2008 Court Adoption and Permanency Month to encourage courts and local communities to join in activities to expedite permanency for children in foster care. 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. Annual recognition of 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 24, 2008, proclaiming November 2008 to be Court Adoption and Permanency Month.

## Rationale for Recommendation

Each year in California, nearly 490,000<sup>1</sup> reports are made of child abuse and neglect, and approximately 25,000<sup>2</sup> children enter foster care. Currently, about 75,000<sup>3</sup> children in the state are living apart from their families in child welfare–supervised out-of-home care. Nearly half<sup>4</sup> of these children do not leave the foster care system within two years. Of the 34,256<sup>5</sup> children exiting foster care in 2007, only 54 percent<sup>6</sup> were reunited with their families, 22 percent were adopted,<sup>7</sup> and 13 percent were emancipated. It is critical that California’s courts continue to learn and implement new strategies to ensure that each child has one or more lifelong connections to a caring adult and to continue efforts to promote placement of all children in safe, loving, permanent homes.

The state progressively has been working toward implementing new and innovative programs that focus on improving the lives of foster care children. One initiative that the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is working on with the AOC and other state organizations will provide trainings to help family members or significant others play a permanent and responsible role in a youth’s 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>

Court Adoption and Permanency Month is one way 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

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<sup>1</sup> B. Needell et al., *Child Welfare Services Reports for California* (2005) retrieved July 30, 2008, from the University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research Web site at <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/cwscmsreports>. Specific reports on referrals are at [http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb\\_childwelfare/referrals.aspx](http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/referrals.aspx).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Specific reports on first entries to care are at [http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb\\_childwelfare/entries.aspx](http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/entries.aspx).

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

<sup>5</sup> B. Needell et al., *supra*. Specific reports on exits from foster care are 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: Accountability in Action*. (California Dept. of Social Services. Rev. August 2004.

organizations highlight innovative efforts to expedite permanency, including adoption, 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 courts have held Adoption Saturdays in November and throughout the year to clear their backlogs of adoption cases. The Judicial Council encourages courts to do this as appropriate.

The Judicial Council also encourages courts that do not have backlogs of adoption cases to hold adoption celebrations or commemorate other permanent connections for foster children and institute systemic changes as part of the statewide effort to raise awareness of adoption and permanency in November.

Many creative examples (some are 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 and throughout the year. More than 20 counties will honor permanent connections for foster children with events in November of this year, including the following examples.

- The Superior Court of Alameda County is planning its ninth Annual Adoption Day in collaboration with the county's Department of Children and Family Services. Judicial officers, court staff, local dignitaries, and various philanthropic agencies will contribute their time, energy, and resources to make this event a memorable experience for the children and families involved in the adoption finalization process. In addition, Alameda Juvenile Court provides midyear adoption programs in June to reduce the wait time for families that have met all of the requirements and are ready to finalize their adoptions.
- The Superior Court of Los Angeles County will hold its 25th National Adoption Saturday this year with plans to finalize the adoptions of 250 children in foster care. Judicial officers and court staff—along with the assistance of the Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services, pro bono law firms, the Alliance for Children's Rights, and the Public Counsel Law Center—will volunteer their time to finalize the adoptions. The day will include a press conference, refreshments, and activities and entertainment for the children and families. The courtrooms and waiting areas will be decorated with balloons, and the children will all receive teddy bears donated through Comfort for Court Kids. The Superior Court of Los Angeles County also held Adoption Friday afternoons on March 7, April 18, May 30, and September 26. During each of those afternoons, the number of adoptions finalized ranged from 68 to about 150. Another such event is planned for December 12, 2008.

- The Superior Court of Orange County and the county social services agency are planning a joint adoption celebration event hosted in the juvenile court courtroom of the presiding judge. This program will highlight individuals and families who want to participate and share their stories.
- The Superior Court of San Bernardino County and the county Department of Children's Services will host the 11th Annual Adoption Finalization at the Ontario Convention Center. This year's theme, "There's No Place Like Home," will celebrate the adoption of more than 100 court-dependent children. The court will staff five courtrooms for this event. In addition, there will be entertainment, crafts for the children, photo opportunities, and a celebration of the hard work done by the Department of Children's Services and the juvenile dependency court to ensure that every child grows up in a safe and nurturing environment.
- The Superior Court of San Diego County, in partnership with San Diego County Adoptions (SDCA), organizes a yearly court party during November to celebrate all the adoptions finalized throughout the year. Other countywide activities include the SDCA's new 2009 Leap of Faith Adoption Calendar, which features photos of Charger players with the children waiting to be adopted; the Bridges to Parenting educational and resource program, designed to support prospective adoptive parents; the annual Spring Fling Picnic and a Fall Fest Matching Event; and adoption success programs on local media. This year SDCA was selected as a recipient of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2008 Adoption Excellence Award in the area of support for adoptive families.
- The Superior Court of Ventura County will hold a special adoption calendar to promote public awareness. The press is invited to this event, and the adoptive parents are informed of this calendar in advance to decide whether to participate. The court will also hold an adoption fair at the local regional shopping mall where several service providers participate and share materials and information with prospective adoptive and foster families.

Many California courts also support the Heart Gallery, which raises community awareness through professional photography exhibits of children and youth living in foster care who need adoptive families and permanent lifelong relationships. The number of Heart Galleries continues to grow throughout the nation. Heart Galleries in California include those in Alameda, Fresno, Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Shasta, and Solano Counties.

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 permanency, including adoption.

This guide is updated periodically; the 2007 guide provides further ideas and best practices for collaborating with court and community stakeholders to expedite permanency for children in foster care and to raise community awareness of the absolute necessity for safe and permanent homes for all foster children.

In 2006, the Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC) collected stories in *Voices From Within: Experiences of California Court Employees With the Foster Care System* to let foster youth know that there are individuals working in the judicial branch who share their experiences, and that they too can have a bright future. Since 2003, CFCC has been collecting arts and poetry from youth in the juvenile court system. This year, youth and elders can express their court experiences in the *2008 Youth and Elders Art and Poetry Contest*. This year's theme is "Someone Who Helped Me."

#### Alternative Actions Considered

The Judicial Council could elect not to declare that November 2008 is Court Adoption and Permanency Month and instead rely on the 1999–2007 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 for permanency for foster children.

#### Comments From Interested Parties

The resolution and the *Court Adoption and Permanency Month Resource Guide* and its 2007 supplement 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, systemwide 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, and the families involved should 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 about 490,000 reports of child abuse and neglect are made and more than 25,000 children enter foster care;

*Whereas* about 75,000 children in California live apart from their families in child welfare-supervised out-of-home care;

*Whereas* nearly half of the children in foster care in California have been away from their families in out-of-home care for two or more years;

*Whereas* of the approximately 34,000 children leaving foster care in 2007, 54 percent were reunited with their families, 22 percent were adopted, and 13 percent were emancipated;

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

*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* the California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care was appointed by the Judicial Council in recognition that the courts and their partners can improve safety, permanency, well-being, and fairness outcomes for children and families;

*Now, therefore*, I, Ronald M. George, Chief Justice of California, 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 24th day of October, 2008.

RONALD M. GEORGE  
Chief Justice of California and  
Chair of the Judicial Council of California

Attest:

WILLIAM C. VICKREY  
Administrative Director of the Courts



## Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 127

### RESOLUTION CHAPTER 120

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 127—Relative to foster care.

[Filed with Secretary of State September 2, 2008.]

#### LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SCR 127, Steinberg. Foster care.

This measure would designate the month of November 2008 as Court Adoption and Permanency Month and would encourage courts and local communities to join in activities to expedite permanency for children who have been abused and neglected.

WHEREAS, Each year in California nearly 490,000 reports are made of child abuse and neglect, and some 25,000 children enter foster care; and

WHEREAS, About 75,000 children in California live apart from their families in child welfare supervised out-of-home care; and

WHEREAS, Nearly one-half of the children in foster care in California have been away from their families in out-of-home care for two or more years; and

WHEREAS, Of the 34,000 children leaving foster care in 2007, 54 percent were reunited with their families, 22 percent were adopted, and 13 percent were emancipated; and

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

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, The California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care was appointed by the Judicial Council to recognize that the courts and their partners can improve safety, permanency, well-being, and fairness outcomes for children and families; and

WHEREAS, The Senate and the Assembly are committed to working together to improve outcomes for children in the child welfare system; now, therefore, be it

*Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly thereof concurring*, That the Legislature hereby designates November 2008 as Court Adoption and Permanency Month, during which the courts and their local communities are encouraged to join in activities to expedite permanency for children who have been abused or neglected; and be it further

*Resolved,* That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.

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