

**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 25, 2007

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

---

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 65, 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 26, 2007, proclaiming November 2007 to be Court Adoption and Permanency Month.

## Rationale for Recommendation

Each year in California, nearly 485,000<sup>1</sup> reports are made of child abuse and neglect, and approximately 26,000<sup>2</sup> children enter foster care. Currently, about 77,000<sup>3</sup> children in the state are living apart from their families in child welfare–supervised out-of-home care. Some 46 percent<sup>4</sup> of these children do not leave the foster-care system within two years. Of the 36,107<sup>5</sup> children exiting foster care during fiscal year 2006, only 55 percent<sup>6</sup> were reunited with their families and 20 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 one or more lifelong connections 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>

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

---

<sup>1</sup> B. Needell, et al., *Child Welfare Services Reports for California* (2005) retrieved July 11, 2007, 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/ucb\\_childwelfare/Referrals.aspx](http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/Referrals.aspx).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Specific reports on first entries to care may be found 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 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/Pointintime/fostercare/childwel>.

<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)

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 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 as well as throughout the year. More than 20 counties will honor permanent connections for foster children with events in November of this year:

- Alameda County is planning its 8th Annual Adoption Day on Saturday morning, November 17, 2007, 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. Seventy-seven children were adopted during the 2006 celebration.
- Los Angeles County, the originator of both the California and the national Adoption Saturday movement, will conduct its 24th Adoption Saturday on November 17, 2007. The first event was held in April 1998, and more than 7,000 adoptions have been completed in that county on these Saturdays. They also hold other "adoption days" on Friday afternoons throughout the year, with over 1,000 adoptions completed on those days.
- 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 years. A caterpillar was added in 2006 and will continue to "grow" in 2007. 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 *Court Adoption and Permanency Month Technical Assistance Package*. Several other courts commemorate a child's adoption with similar events, and a new idea uses a symbol to mark the permanent connection for a child during a reunification hearing with his or her family.

- The Superior Court of San Diego County organizes a yearly court party during November, as well as a “Spring Fling” and “Fall Fest” to celebrate permanency for foster children. San Diego County Adoptions also conducts recruitment events to promote adoptions throughout the year, including its annual “Leap of Faith” calendar that features full color photos of foster children to increase adoption education and community awareness.
- The Superior Court of 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.
- “Heart Galleries” raise community awareness through professional photography exhibits of children and youth living in foster care in need of adoptive families and permanent lifelong relationships. The number of Heart Galleries continues to grow in California and throughout the nation. Currently eight galleries serve 15 counties in California.

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. The 2005 update added new information on a range of permanency options for children. A resource list of informational Web sites was also included.

In 2006, the committee completely reorganized the technical assistance package to highlight specific themes and programs and to provide an easy reference for each local court system, and the package was renamed the *Court Adoption and Permanency Resource Guide*. The guide provides courts with innovative ideas for promising practices and resources that courts and agencies have used successfully to promote permanency for children, as well as to address identified obstacles to permanency. Some of the highlighted 2006 themes include maintaining family connections, collaborative permanency, training and support for families, and celebrating adoption finalizations. Some of the programs and resources that contribute to these themes include: the use of modern technology to expand searches for family members, expanded mediation programs, and enhanced youth involvement. The resource list was also expanded.

In 2007, the committee learned about new and innovative programs and resources, which have been compiled for your use as a supplement to the guide. The supplement continues to highlight the many state and national programs that promote Court Adoption and Permanency Month for foster-care children, as well as incorporating promising practices and model programs that courts and agencies have used successfully to promote permanency for children. Some of the additions include new and updated family-finding programs; information on keeping siblings in foster care connected to one another; and

programs and resources for finding permanent connections for older foster youth and those aging out of care.

Local courts continue to request additional copies of the resource 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 resource guide 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.

In 2006, the Center for Families, Children & the Courts began collecting stories of judicial and court personnel who were themselves former foster youth or who know children currently in California's foster-care system. These stories are highlighted in *Voices From Within: Experiences of California Court Employees With the Foster Care System*, a publication letting 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.

#### Alternative Actions Considered

The Judicial Council could elect not to declare that November 2007 is Court Adoption and Permanency Month and instead rely on the 1999 through 2006 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 Resource 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 still can 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 485,000 reports of child abuse and neglect are made and some 26,000 children enter foster care;

*Whereas* about 77,000 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 nearly 36,000 children leaving foster care between July 2005 and June 2006, 55 percent were reunited with their families, 20 percent were adopted, and 12 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 26th day of October, 2007.

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

Attest:

WILLIAM C. VICKREY  
Secretary, Judicial Council of California, and  
Administrative Director of the Courts