



JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA

455 Golden Gate Avenue · San Francisco, California 94102-3688

www.courts.ca.gov

REPORT TO THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

For business meeting on: October 28, 2014

Title	Agenda Item Type
Court Adoption and Permanency Month: Judicial Council Resolution	Action Required
Rules, Forms, Standards, or Statutes Affected	Effective Date
None	October 28, 2014
Recommended by	Date of Report
Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee	October 16, 2014
Hon. Jerilyn L. Borack, Cochair Hon. Kimberly J. Nystrom-Geist, Cochair	Contact Audrey Fancy, 415-865-7706 audrey.fancy@jud.ca.gov

Executive Summary

The Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee recommends adopting a resolution proclaiming November to be Court Adoption and Permanency Month. As it has for the past 14 years in observance of National Adoption Month, the Judicial Council can recognize the ongoing efforts of California's juvenile courts and their justice partners to provide children and families with access to fair, understandable judicial proceedings leading to timely, well-informed, and just permanency outcomes. The proclamation will also give courts the opportunity to hold special events finalizing adoptions from foster care and raising community awareness of the importance of finding safe, stable, and permanent homes for every child or youth in foster care.

Recommendation

The Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee recommends that the Judicial Council adopt the attached resolution, effective October 28, 2014, proclaiming November 2014 to be Court Adoption and Permanency Month.

Previous Council Action

The Judicial Council first declared November to be Court Adoption and Permanency Month in California in 1999. Since that successful observance, the council has continued to reaffirm this declaration, demonstrating its commitment to judicial procedures and collaborative practices that promote timely case resolution and permanency for children and youth in foster care. The council's Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee, other advisory groups, and council staff have worked to implement council and legislative directives relating to adoption and permanency, as well as to support the juvenile courts and their local justice partners each November to highlight both ongoing and special adoption and permanency efforts.

Rationale for Recommendation

Each year in California, nearly half a million¹ reports are made of child abuse and neglect, and approximately 23,400² children enter foster care for the first time. Currently, about 62,500³ children in the state are living apart from their families in child welfare-supervised, out-of-home care. Thirty-eight percent of these children have been in foster care for more than two years; 9,800 children remain in "temporary" care after more than five years.⁴ Of the nearly 26,000 children who were able to leave foster care in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2014, 58 percent were reunited with their families, 22 percent were adopted, and 7.5 percent were emancipated.⁵ Permanent placement of a child in a committed relationship intended to last a lifetime—with the child's family if that is possible or another loving family if it's not—is the goal of the juvenile court process. Children and families deserve access to a timely, understandable, and fair process that actively engages them, as well as the placement agency, in the work needed to achieve this goal. It is critical that California's courts continue to learn and implement new strategies to ensure that each child leaves foster care as quickly as possible with one or more lifelong connections to a caring adult and that the courts continue to promote the placement of every child in a safe, loving, permanent home.

The state has been working on innovative programs to improve the lives of foster children. One initiative—a collaboration of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), Judicial Council staff, and other state organizations—provides training to help family members or significant others maintain a permanent and responsible role in a youth's life. Experience shows

¹ Barbara Needell et al., *Child Welfare Services Reports for California* (2014), retrieved September 29, 2014, from the University of California, Berkeley, Center for Social Services Research website at http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare. Specific reports on referrals are at http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/allegations.aspx.

² *Ibid.* Specific reports on first entries to care are at http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/entries.aspx.

³ *Ibid.* Specific point-in-time reports on children in child welfare-supervised foster care are at http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/PIT.aspx.

⁴ *Ibid.* Specific reports on the amount of time in care are at http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/PIT.aspx.

⁵ *Ibid.* Specific reports on exits from foster care are at http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/exits.aspx. The remaining 12.5 percent were placed in guardianships or other types of placement.

that without permanent connections, youth leaving foster care face even more overwhelming odds against a successful adulthood.⁶

Court Adoption and Permanency Month is one way California courts can raise awareness, demonstrate commitment, and bring about changes in the court system to stabilize children's lives. The month of November was selected to coincide with National Adoption Month, when government agencies and nonprofit organizations highlight innovative efforts to promote permanency, including adoption, and to raise awareness of the need for safe, permanent homes for children in foster care.

Since Court Adoption and Permanency Month was initiated in 1999, many individual California courts have dedicated specific adoption days in November—including Adoption Saturdays and Adoption Fridays—as well as other events, to clear their backlogs of adoption cases. The Judicial Council encourages courts to do so as circumstances permit.

The Judicial Council also encourages courts with no backlog of adoption cases to hold adoption celebrations or commemorate other permanent connections for foster children and to institute local system programs as part of the statewide November effort to raise awareness of adoption and permanency.

Many local courts—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. Events honoring permanent connections for foster children this year include the following:

- ***Alameda County***

The Superior Court of Alameda County will join with the Alameda County Social Services Agency to finalize a full calendar of adoptions in celebration of the county's 15th annual Adoption Day.

- ***Los Angeles County***

Los Angeles will celebrate its 15th annual National Adoption Day (and 17th overall) on Saturday, November 22, 2014, at the Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court in Monterey Park. On this special day, more than 120 children's adoptions from foster care will be finalized and celebrated. The day brings together volunteer judicial officers, attorneys, social workers, court staff, and others to complete adoptions, often for hundreds of children and families in a day. Presiding Juvenile Court Judge Michael Nash, who was instrumental in launching the first Adoption Day in 1998, will hold a press conference. The adoption hearings will begin at 9 a.m. and continue until noon. There will be balloons, arts and crafts, books, and refreshments for the children and families.

⁶ Cal. Dept. of Soc. Services, *Improving the Lives of California's Children and Families: Accountability in Action* (rev. Aug. 2004).

In addition, the Los Angeles juvenile court has partnered with the county Department of Children and Family Services and the Children’s Law Center to celebrate Family Reunification Week for the fifth consecutive year from September 8–12. The week recognizes the many families who have successfully navigated the dependency court and child welfare system to emerge healthier, stronger, and intact.

- ***Placer County***

Placer County and PlacerKids will be holding their 13th annual National Adoption Day celebration. There will be music, food, balloons, face painting, crafts, and much more as they celebrate many of their children finding forever homes.

- ***San Bernardino County***

San Bernardino County Children and Family Services and the San Bernardino County Juvenile Dependency Court will collaborate on their 18th annual Adoption Finalization Celebration. This year, four juvenile court judges will conduct individual adoption ceremonies for an anticipated group of more than 65 children at a circus-themed gala, “Celebrating Children and Families Under the Big Top,” which will include music, children’s activities, games, and photo opportunities.

- ***San Diego County***

The Superior Court of San Diego County, the county Health and Human Services Agency, and other partners will celebrate National Adoption Day on Friday, November 21, 2014, at Juvenile Court Central. More than 20 children will celebrate with their forever families on that day. As every year, the court will dedicate two courtrooms to finalizing adoptions and will fill the lobby area full of fun and festivities. This year’s event will include live music, refreshments, and plenty of picture taking and smiles. A clown will paint faces and make balloon figures while everyone enjoys lots of goodies donated by various organizations. Each child also receives a special gift bag with various goodies. Families often spend the afternoon rather than leaving after their adoption hearing.

- ***Santa Clara County***

The Superior Court of Santa Clara County will celebrate its 9th Annual Adoption Day on November 21, 2014, at the Downtown Superior Court.

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

A wide variety of resources on adoption and permanency are available on the [California Dependency Online Guide](#) website, maintained by council staff in the Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC). These materials provide ideas, resources, and best practices for collaboration among courts and their communities to raise awareness of the necessity for safe and permanent homes for all foster children. Available materials on permanency and adoption include articles; research reports; more than 50 California cases; manuals, including the *Court Adoption and Permanency Resource Guide (2006)* and the *California Judges Benchguide 130: Adoptions*; toolkits on concurrent planning, family engagement, and other permanency topics; and links to online courses, fact sheets, and resource libraries. The materials are searchable by type of document or by topic, such as adoptability, adoption assessments, concurrent planning, and permanency. The California Dependency Online Guide is available free of charge to all California judicial officers, attorneys, and child welfare professionals, and it is currently used by more than 4,000 subscribers.

Comments, Alternatives Considered, and Policy Implications

The annual resolution declaring November as Court Adoption and Permanency Month continues to be well received and celebrated by courts, court-connected professionals, and the adoption and permanency community. It does not require circulation for comment as part of an official invitation to comment cycle.

The Judicial Council could choose not to proclaim November 2014 to be Court Adoption and Permanency Month and instead rely on the resolutions of 1999 through 2013 to promote adoption and permanency activities in November. However, the Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee believes that a new proclamation each year highlights the ongoing critical need to seek permanence for foster children.

Implementation Requirements, Costs, and Operational Impacts

Court Adoption and Permanency Month is a voluntary program. Every court can participate at a level it considers appropriate to its jurisdiction. Suggested commemorative events range from no-cost activities for promoting adoption and permanency to higher-cost, systemwide programs.

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 scheduling adoption hearings just so they coincide with 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 event.

Attachments and Links

1. Judicial Council resolution proclaiming November 2014 to be Court Adoption and Permanency Month

JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA



RESOLUTION

Whereas consistent with its commitment to support practices and procedures that promote access to justice and improved case outcomes for California's children and families, the Judicial Council has recognized November as Court Adoption and Permanency Month every year since 1999;

Whereas nearly half a million incidents of child abuse and neglect are reported each year in California, and about 23,400 children enter foster care for the first time;

Whereas about 62,500 children in California live apart from their families in child welfare-supervised out-of-home care;

Whereas 38 percent of the children in foster care in California have lived apart from their families for two or more years;

Whereas, of the 26,000 California children who left foster care in the 12 months preceding July 2014, 58 percent were reunited with their families, 22 percent were adopted, and 7.5 percent were emancipated;

Whereas local courts and communities throughout California have created programs promoting permanency that have resulted in a reduction in the number of children waiting to live in safe, stable, and permanent homes; and

Whereas the Judicial Council remains committed to working with the Governor, the Legislature, and local courts and communities to ensure that every abused or neglected child finds a safe, stable, and permanent home with a loving family as quickly as possible;

Now, therefore, be it resolved that I, Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye, Chief Justice of California, on behalf of the Judicial Council of California, do hereby proclaim November 2014 to be Court Adoption and Permanency Month, during which the courts and their communities are encouraged to join in activities to promote permanency.

In witness whereof

I have hereunto set my hand this 28th day of October, 2014

TANI G. CANTIL-SAKAUYE
Chief Justice of California and
Chair of the Judicial Council of California

Attest:

MARTIN HOSHINO
Administrative Director