



JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA

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REPORT TO THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

For business meeting on: September 14–15, 2017

Title	Agenda Item Type
Court Adoption and Permanency Month: Judicial Council Resolution	Action Required
Rules, Forms, Standards, or Statutes Affected	Effective Date
None	September 14, 2017
Recommended by	Date of Report
Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee	August 25, 2017
Hon. Jerilyn L. Borack, Cochair	Contact
Hon. Mark A. Juhas, Cochair	Daniel Richardson, 415-865-7619 daniel.richardson@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 since 1999, 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 resolution 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 September 14, 2017, proclaiming November 2017 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.

This year, Governmental Affairs staff is working with Assembly Member Monique Limón's office on a Legislative declaration of November as Court Adoption and Permanency month. A bill to declare November Court Adoption and Permanency month was introduced on August 22, 2017.¹

Rationale for Recommendation

Each year in California, nearly half a million² reports are made of child abuse and neglect, and approximately 24,100³ children enter foster care for the first time. Currently, about 60,900⁴ children in the state are living apart from their families in child welfare-supervised, out-of-home care. Forty percent of these children have been in foster care for more than two years; 8,500 children remain in "temporary" care after more than five years.⁵ Twenty-three percent of the youth in care are transitional-age youth aged 16–20.⁶ Of the more than 28,900 children who were able to leave foster care in the fiscal year ending December 31, 2016, 50 percent were reunited with their families, 23 percent were adopted, and 7 percent were emancipated.⁷ Permanent placement of a child in a committed relationship intended to last a lifetime—with the child's family if that's 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

¹ Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 124-Relative to Court Adoption and Permanency Month, see https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180ACR124

² Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Wiegmann, W., Rezvani, G., Wagstaff, K., Sandoval, A., Yee, H., Xiong, B., Benton, C., Tobler, A., White, J., & Kai, C. (2016). CCWIP reports. Retrieved July 11, 2017, from University of California at Berkeley California Child Welfare Indicators Project website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare. Specific reports on referrals are at http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/allegations.aspx.

³ *Ibid.* Specific reports on first entries to foster care are at http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/EntryRates.aspx.

⁴ *Ibid.* Specific point-in-time reports on children in child welfare-supervised foster care are at http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/PIT.aspx.

⁵ *Ibid.* Specific reports on the amount of time in care are at http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/PIT.aspx.

⁶ *Ibid.* Specific reports on the age of youth in care are at http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/PIT.aspx.

⁷ *Ibid.* Specific reports on exits from foster care are at http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/exits.aspx. The remaining 20 percent were placed in guardianships or other types of placement.

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 that without permanent connections, youth leaving foster care face even more overwhelming odds against a successful adulthood.⁸

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 18th annual Adoption Day.

⁸ Cal. Dept. of Soc. Services, *Improving the Lives of California's Children and Families: Accountability in Action* (rev. Aug. 2004).

- ***Butte County***
 Butte County will hold an annual Adoption Day celebration in honor of recent Butte County adoptions. Each year several families on the adoption calendar participate in the Adoption Day event. At the conclusion of the calendar, a reception is held involving court staff, the judge, and staff from Children’s Services and State Adoptions. Activities such as games and arts and crafts are available for the families, and the children are given a backpack or a gift bag.
- ***El Dorado County***
 El Dorado County will finalize between five to ten adoptions on November 20, 2017 and will host a celebration that day including various gifts and family baskets for the children and families.
- ***Los Angeles County***
 Los Angeles County will be celebrating National Adoptions Day on November 17, 2017. The entire afternoon is scheduled for adoptions. A press conference is held to commemorate the event, attended by the families, community partners and the media. Judge Levanas and other judicial officers participate. The directors of Department of Children and Family Services, Alliance for Children’s Rights, and Public Counsel speak. Typically, a celebrity who adopted a child from foster care or who assists with adoptions speaks on behalf of the adoption program. An adoptive family speaks about the process and what it means to add a family member through adoption. All of the courthouse floors are decorated and there are photo booths and face painting.
- ***Merced County***
 Merced County will hold its annual National Adoption Day celebration on November 3, 2017. The theme for this year’s celebration is “Adoption: It’s a Sweet Life.”
- ***Madera County***
 Madera County, in collaboration with several foster family agencies, anticipates finalizing between eight to ten adoptions during its Adoption Day celebration during the first week of November. The celebration, themed “Under the Sea Adoption Day Event,” includes a lunch reception for all families who have adopted this past year.
- ***Riverside County***
 Riverside Department of Public Social Services will celebrate its 10th annual Adoption Finalization Day Event on November 4, 2017. Thirty-five adoptions were finalized at last year’s event and a similar number is expected this year. “This celebration gives our staff and families the opportunity to celebrate adoptions made through Riverside County Children Services. It also gives children who have found a loving, stable, and permanent home a way to celebrate their newly formed families,” said Susan von Zabern, Director of Department of Public Social Services, about last year’s event.

- ***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 in November at Juvenile Court Central. As every year, the court will dedicate two courtrooms to finalizing adoptions and will fill the lobby area full of fun and festivities. Families often spend the afternoon rather than leaving after their adoption hearing.
- ***San Francisco County***
San Francisco County is scheduled to celebrate National Adoption Day on November 3, 2017. The event is registered to the National Adoption Day website. Last year, Senator Mark Leno spoke at the event.
- ***Santa Clara***
The superior court and the county Department of Family and Children’s Services will celebrate the county’s 12th annual Adoption Day event on November 17, 2017 at the Family Justice Center Court House. Approximately 35 adoptions are scheduled to be finalized with 10-12 judicial officers presiding over the adoptions hearings. The event is coordinated with the Department of Families and Children Services (DFCS). Crafts, photos and refreshments for the children and families will be provided following the adoption hearings.
- ***Tulare County***
The superior court will host a mass finalization of adoptions on the Friday before Thanksgiving, as well as an Adoption Day event to celebrate families whose adoptions have been finalized since last November. The event will include a proclamation by the board of supervisors.
- In addition, special events celebrating Adoptions Month involving adoptive families and stakeholders are planned in local courts around the state including San Joaquin and Solano counties this November.

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. There are Heart Galleries throughout the nation, with California locations in Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, Sacramento, San Bernardino, and San Diego 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 60 California cases; manuals, including the [*Court Adoption and Permanency Resource Guide \(2006\)*](#); 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 5,000 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 2017 to be Court Adoption and Permanency Month and instead rely on the resolutions of 1999 through 2016 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 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, system-wide 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 2017 to be Court Adoption and Permanency Month

JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA



ADOPTION AND PERMANENCY MONTH R E S O L U T I O N

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 half a million incidents of child abuse and neglect are reported in California, and about 24,100 children enter child welfare-supervised foster care for the first time each year;

Whereas nearly 60,900 children in California live apart from their families in child welfare-supervised out-of-home care;

Whereas 40 percent of the children in foster care in California have lived apart from their families for two or more years;

Whereas 23 percent of the youth in care are transitional age youth aged 16 to 20;

Whereas, of the more than 28,900 California children who left foster care in the 12 months preceding December 2016, 50 percent were reunited with their families, 23 percent were adopted, and 7 percent exited foster care without reunifying or obtaining a permanent home by the time they reached the age of majority;

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 2017 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 14th day of September, 2017

Attest:

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

MARTIN HOSHINO
Administrative Director,
Judicial Council