



JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA

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REPORT TO THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

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Title

Juvenile Law: Court Adoption and
Permanency Month

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Date of Report

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Submitted by

Family and Juvenile Law Advisory
Committee

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Executive Summary

Since 1999, the Judicial Council has recognized 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. On October 24, 2022, Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye proclaimed November 2022 to be Court Adoption and Permanency Month, at the request of the Family and Juvenile Law Advisory Committee. This resolution gave courts the opportunity to raise community awareness of the importance of finding safe, stable, and permanent homes for every child or youth in foster care.

Relevant 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, and to support the juvenile courts and their local justice partners each November to highlight ongoing and special adoption and permanency efforts.

Analysis/Rationale

In 2021, over 400,000 reports of child abuse and neglect were made in California,¹ and nearly 22,000 children entered foster care for the first time.² Currently, nearly 55,000 children and youth ages 21 and younger in the state are living apart from their families in child welfare–supervised, out-of-home care.³

California’s courts and child welfare agencies have worked to address the needs of these children and youth by creating programs that advance permanency for children and families, and recognizing the ongoing need to help better the lives of children and youth in the child welfare system. The juvenile courts and their justice partners provide children and families with access to fair, understandable judicial proceedings leading to timely, well-informed, and just permanency outcomes. Court Adoption and Permanency Month is one way California courts highlight those programs to demonstrate their commitment to bring about changes in the court system to stabilize children’s lives.⁴

Many California courts worked with county social service agencies, local nonprofit agencies, and other service organizations to celebrate and highlight Court Adoption and Permanency Month throughout November. Some courts dedicated specific adoption days in November, such as Adoption Fridays and Adoption Saturdays, as well as other events to ensure that adoptions are completed and finalized in a timely manner.

Courts continue to exercise caution in holding in-person events due to the ongoing pandemic, but a number of courts built awareness of this important month with celebrations that acknowledged the significance of adoption for children and families. For example:

- Many courts finalized adoptions on designated Adoption Days during November. Following the hearings, celebrations were held at courthouses or nearby parks with decorations and balloons for the children. Families and their guests enjoyed food, snacks, and musical entertainment; families received gifts from organizations such as local CASA programs; and children enjoyed activities such as face painting and meeting fairy ladies, police, and firefighters.
- One court finalized adoptions for 80 families in 10 courtrooms.

¹ *California Child Welfare Indicators Project*, University of California at Berkeley, Daniel Webster, Principal Investigator, <https://ccwip.berkeley.edu>. See California Child Safety Indicators Dashboard at <https://ccwip.berkeley.edu/Dashboard/SafetyDashboard.html>.

² *Ibid.* Specific reports on first entries to foster care are available at <https://ccwip.berkeley.edu/childwelfare/reports/Entries/MTSG/r/ab636/s>.

³ *Ibid.* Specific point-in-time reports on children in child welfare–supervised foster care are available at <https://ccwip.berkeley.edu/childwelfare/reports/PIT/MTSG/r/ab636/s>.

⁴ The work of finding permanency for children has evolved since 1976 when then-Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts announced the first Adoption Week. President Ronald Reagan proclaimed the first National Adoption Week in 1984, and President Bill Clinton expanded the week to the entire month of November in 1995.

- One court had celebrations at two different courthouses.
- One court continued its tradition of having the children add their names to a felt tree.
- One court finalized 25 adoptions and included a short program in its celebration.
- One court held its Adoption Day in November and held its Reunification Day in September 2022.

Many California courts also support the Heart Gallery of America⁵ program, which raises community awareness through professional photography and audio exhibits of children and youth in foster care who need adoptive families and permanent, lifelong relationships. Now in its 21st year, the program has over 80 Heart Galleries throughout the United States, including California locations in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, Sacramento, and San Bernardino Counties.

The annual resolution declaring November to be Court Adoption and Permanency Month continues to be well received and celebrated by courts, court-connected professionals, and the adoption and permanency community.

Fiscal Impact and Policy Implications

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.

Family participation in special events or projects is also voluntary. The emphasis on the month of November is not intended to encourage scheduling of adoption hearings to coincide with special events. Each case should be heard as soon as it can be calendared, and families should be offered the opportunity to participate in court events that occur at a later date.

Attachments and Links

1. Attachment A: Court Adoption and Permanency Month resolution

⁵ www.heartgalleryofamerica.org.

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 annually recognized November as Court Adoption and Permanency Month since 1999;

Whereas the Judicial Council, courts, and justice partners have created programs that advance permanency for children and families, and all recognize the ongoing need to help better the lives of children and youth in the child welfare system;

Whereas nearly 55,000 children and youth ages 21 and younger live apart from their families in child welfare—supervised out-of-home care, and almost 21,800 entered foster care in 2021;

Whereas, although in 2021 more than 24,700 children exited foster care, with nearly half reunited with families, 25 percent adopted, and 11 percent ordered into guardianships, some 10 percent of children who exited foster care in 2019 reentered care within one year of being discharged to permanency;

Whereas the data reflects that impoverished families are the most likely to undergo child welfare agency investigations because of economic and material hardships, and families of color, who constitute the majority of impoverished families, have higher rates of investigation;

Whereas the data reflects that Black and Native American children are roughly four times more likely than white children to enter foster care and Hispanic/Latino children are over 46 percent more likely;

Whereas California's juvenile courts and their justice partners provide children and families with access to fair, understandable judicial proceedings leading to timely, well-informed, and just permanency outcomes; and

Whereas the courts and their justice partners strive to support and promote community awareness of the importance of finding safe, stable, and permanent homes for every child or youth in foster care;

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 2022 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 24th day of October, 2022*

Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye

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

Martin Hoshino
Attest:

MARTIN HOSHINO
Administrative Director
Judicial Council of California