

MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



Office of Public Information

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ADOPTIONS INCREASE OF 14 PERCENT SEEN FROM STATE ADOPTION FORUM; PROJECT TO EXPAND TO EXPEDITE REUNIFICATIONS, GUARDIANSHIPS Top county adoption teams to be recognized at October forum with awards named for late Hon. Robert E. Weiss, Genesee County probate judge and children's advocate

LANSING, MI, May 28, 2009 – Michigan counties with the largest number of adoption cases saw a 14 percent increase in adoptions from March 2008 to March 2009 as a result of a concerted effort by judges, social workers, staff of the Michigan Department of Human Services, attorneys, and others, according to a report released by the [Child Welfare Services](#) division of the [State Court Administrative Office](#).

Daniel J. Wright, director of Child Welfare Services, said that the effort's success "demonstrates that we can give more children the permanency they deserve when we focus on both the systemic obstacles to adoption and the strengths of all those involved, including the courts."

In addition to placing more children in adoptive homes, the effort will help Michigan prepare for the upcoming [Child & Family Services Review](#), a federal audit that reviews the timeliness of adoptions and other aspects of the state's child protection system. Some federal aid for state child welfare programs is based on whether the state passes the federal review, Wright noted.

Kate Hanley, Director of Permanency Services for DHS, said, "Moreover, the lessons we've learned can and will be used statewide, not only to have more timely adoptions, but also to expedite all forms of permanency, including reunification with biological families and guardianships."

The "Adoption Forum I Final Report" focuses on 13 Michigan counties – Berrien, Calhoun, Genesee, Ingham, Jackson, Kalamazoo, Kent, Macomb, Monroe, Muskegon, Oakland, Saginaw, and Wayne – which participated in the forum at the request of Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura D. Corrigan and DHS Director Ismael Ahmed. The counties, which have the state's largest adoption dockets, were given a list of 796 children who had a goal of adoption but were still in foster care. Although an adoptive parent was identified in each case, those children had been waiting for longer than a year following termination of parental rights for their adoptions to be finalized, the report notes.

Each county was asked to assemble a cross-disciplinary team, including family division judges assigned to adoptions, county DHS directors, lawyer guardians ad litem, parent advocates, caseworkers, court-appointed special advocates, and others. The 13 teams, which met for the first

time at a March 2008 forum, were asked to identify and solve barriers to adoption, as well as to develop practices that other counties could follow. The teams updated their progress every six months following the first forum.

The report details the 13 counties' efforts during the 12-month period as well as their recommendations for expediting permanent placements for children.

A March 13, 2009 forum targeted 10 additional counties with the next-largest adoption dockets: Bay, Cass, Clinton, Ionia, Lenawee, Midland, St. Clair, St. Joseph, Van Buren, and Washtenaw. In the months leading up to the next forum on October 30, 2009, the county teams will concentrate on removing barriers and expediting the process for all forms of permanency, such as reunification, guardianship, and adoption. The list of backlog cases that the counties will focus on includes all children who have been awaiting permanency for more than a year after entering foster care, the report states.

The October forum will also feature an awards ceremony to recognize exceptional work by county teams and individuals in 2008, the report adds. The awards, named in memory of the late Hon. Robert E. Weiss of the Genesee County Probate Court, include *Excellence in Working as a Team*, *Excellence in Court Improvement*, and *Excellence in Creative Solutions*.

Corrigan said that the Weiss awards "are a fitting tribute to a judge who championed children. We are pleased and honored that his family plans to attend the awards ceremony and present the awards."

The Adoption Forum I Final Report may be viewed online at <http://www.courts.michigan.gov/scao/resources/publications/reports/AdoptionForumI-FinalReport2009.pdf>.

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