

## **National Adoption Celebration Promotes Safe Families Act**

On a tranquil September morning in Washington, DC, over 500 parents, children, child welfare professionals, advocates and legislators gathered for an unprecedented national celebration of adoption. Less than 24 hours before terror struck in New York City and Washington, the focus of attention here was on the 134,000 children in foster care who are eligible for, and waiting to find, permanent families.

Co-sponsored by Casey Family Services, the Congressional Adoption Coalition Institute, the Children's Action Network, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, and the Freddie Mac Foundation, the Adoption Celebration began on September 10, 2001, with a press conference. The speakers, including Senators and Congressmen, Secretary of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Tommy Thompson, representatives of each of the sponsoring organizations, 14-year-old Debra Supnick who grew up in foster care and was recently adopted, and Casey National Spokesperson Victoria Rowell, herself a former foster child, all called for more recognition and support for adoptive families.

Recognizing the more than 70 Casey family members in attendance, Raymond L. Torres, Casey Family Services executive director, observed, "We know how important post-adoption services are in saving a family from unraveling, and we know that many families who could benefit from those services are not. It's time to remedy that situation for all fragile families and children."

"We're here to celebrate adoption, but it's not our only mission," Douglas W. Nelson, president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, stated. "We're also here to remind Congress and the nation what adoptive families truly need to make the extra commitment that they make and to stay strong and stay together.... The single most important obligation that we owe to our children as citizens, communities, as states, as a nation is to secure and preserve the right of each child, to grow up in a safe, loving, and enduring family. It's fitting that we are here today to celebrate adoption, but it's also crucial that we recognize what still needs to be done."

HHS Secretary Thompson outlined the Administration's proposed "Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act," guaranteeing additional funding for adoption, foster care and post-adoption services. Rep. Wally Herger (R-CA) and Rep. Benjamin Cardin (D-MD) announced that they would introduce the bill in Congress that day. Sen. Larry Craig (R-Idaho), Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-LA), Rep. Ann Northrup (R-KY), and Sen. James Oberstar (D-MN) expressed support.

All of the Casey families visited their delegations' offices following the press conference, and each asked their representatives to sign the Congressional "Adoption Pledge" to "use our energy and positions of public service to help these children [waiting to be adopted] find loving families by promoting adoption."

## **The Facts**

- Right now there are 134,000 children in foster care in the United States who are waiting for permanent, loving families.
- Children in foster care are just like other kids. While some children are dealing with physical or emotional concerns, just like other children, they need the nurturing and support that a permanent, loving family can provide.
- Many foster children are in the system because their birth parents weren't protective and nurturing — not because the children did anything wrong.
- We encourage members of Congress to do all they can to make it easier for waiting children to find loving families by easing the adoption process and strengthening post-adoptive services.
- Adoption is just the beginning of the journey. We need policies and legislation that support families and children after the adoption is finalized.
- We hope that this celebration will encourage and motivate families across America to consider either adopting a child, or becoming an advocate on behalf of children in foster care.