

PRESIDENT CLINTON ANNOUNCES EXPANSION OF THE INTERNET TO INCREASE ADOPTIONS

November 24, 1998

Today, the President will issue a new directive to the Department of Health and Human Services to expand the use of the Internet as a tool to find homes for children waiting to be adopted from foster care. The President will make the announcement with the First Lady at a White House ceremony marking National Adoption Month and celebrating new adoptions in the District of Columbia.

Creating an Internet Registry to Meet the President's Goals for Adoption. In 1996, President Clinton set a goal of doubling, by the year 2002, adoptions and other permanent placements from the public child welfare system. Since then, adoptions have increased; from 1996 to 1997 alone, adoptions increased by over 10 percent, from 28,000 to 31,000. Today, the President is directing the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to develop a plan to expand internet use to share information about children who are legally free for adoption in order to shorten the time needed to find them adoptive families. HHS estimates that approximately 100,000 children in our nation's foster care system cannot return to their birth families and need families to adopt them. An effective national registry will help break down geographic barriers to adoption and assist in meeting the President's adoption goal. HHS Secretary Donna Shalala will report to the President within 60 days on a plan to work with the states and other leaders to carry out this effort.

Building on a Strong Record. Today's announcement builds on a deep commitment by the President, the First Lady, and the Administration to facilitate adoptions and improve the child welfare system. Since taking office, President Clinton has championed efforts to make foster care work better for the children it serves, to find and assist adoptive families, and to break down barriers, including high adoption costs and complex regulations:

✓ **Achieving Landmark Legislative Reform.** On November 19, 1997, the President signed the Adoption and Safe Families Act, reforming our nation's child welfare system and making it clear that the health and safety of children must be the paramount concerns of state child welfare services. This landmark legislation was based in large part on the recommendations of the Clinton Administration's *Adoption 2002* report, which the President requested by executive memorandum on December 14, 1996, to meet his goals of doubling adoptions and permanent placements by the year 2002 and moving children more quickly from foster care to permanent homes. The Act tightened time frames for making permanent placement decisions for children and ensured health insurance coverage for all special needs children in subsidized adoptions. Also, it created new financial incentives for states to increase adoptions, and continued funding for services to keep families together when it is appropriate and safe.

✓ **Making Adoption Affordable for Families.** In 1996, President Clinton signed into law the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, which provides a \$5,000 tax credit to families adopting children, and a \$6,000 tax credit for families adopting children with special needs. This provision has alleviated a significant barrier to adoption, helping middle class families for whom adoption may be prohibitively expensive and making it easier for families to adopt children with special needs. Since President Clinton took office, the number of children with special needs who were adopted with federal adoption assistance has risen by over 60 percent. In the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, President Clinton ensured more support for families who adopt children with the \$500 per-child tax credit.

✓ **Giving States Flexibility and Support.** To test innovative strategies to improve state child welfare systems, the Clinton Administration has granted waivers to 18 states, giving them more flexibility in tailoring services to meet the needs of children and families. In addition, the Administration has provided states with enhanced technical support and helped improve court operations. The President secured \$10 million in FY 1999 in new funds to support state efforts to implement the new adoption law, and has, through the Adoption Opportunities program, supported state and local innovative demonstration projects to promote adoption, provide post-adoptive services, and build new public-private partnerships. To prevent children from entering foster care in the first place, in 1993 the Clinton Administration enacted and secured federal funding for the Family Preservation and Support Program to help states, local governments, and service providers develop effective programs to serve children and families at risk.

✓ **Breaking Down Racial and Ethnic Barriers to Adoption.** New inter-ethnic adoption provisions, passed as a part of the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, ensure that the adoption process is free from discrimination and delays on the basis of race, culture and ethnicity by strengthening the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act which the President signed in 1994.

✓ **Providing Supports for Child Protection and Adoption.** In 1993, President Clinton signed into law the Family and Medical Leave Act, enabling parents to take time off to adopt a child without losing their jobs or health insurance. In addition, the welfare reform legislation signed by the President maintained the guarantee of child protection and adoption, and did not reduce funds for child welfare, child abuse, and foster care and adoption services.

HHS NEWS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HHS AWARDS EXCELLENCE IN PROMOTING ADOPTION

Secretary Shalala, President and Mrs. Clinton recognize individuals and organizations for contributions to helping children find permanent homes

HHS Secretary Donna E. Shalala today announced the 1998 recipients of the Department of Health and Human Services' "Adoption 2002" Excellence Awards. The awards were highlighted at a White House ceremony celebrating November as National Adoption Month. At the event, President and Mrs. Clinton honored the recipients for giving abandoned, neglected, or abused children a loving family and a safe and nurturing home.

Secretary Shalala also called for increased efforts to recruit and strengthen adoptive families and to shorten the time that children spend in foster care. She reported that the President's message to promote adoption is showing some results. From 1996 to 1997, adoptions increased by more than 10 percent -- from 28,000 to 31,000 -- the first significant increase since the federal program was established. However, HHS estimates that there are still more than 100,000 children who cannot return to their birth families and need families to adopt them. Typically, children awaiting adoption spend more than three years in foster care.

To help states and communities meet the goal of doubling the number of adoptions by 2002, HHS intends to develop a plan for expanding the use of the internet. By putting the photos of children who are legally available for adoption on a national internet service, the time that a child waits to find an adoptive family could be shortened. The plan also will identify important issues and strategies for addressing them, and examine ways to build on existing efforts that are underway in some states.

"One year ago President Clinton made history by signing the Adoption and Safe Families Act. That new law built on the administration's track record of breaking down barriers to adoption and established new tools to attain his goal of doubling the number of children adopted from foster care," said Secretary Shalala. "Today we honor the individuals and organizations who have demonstrated commitment and leadership in helping to find permanent and safe homes for children in foster care."

"Adoption 2002" is the HHS response to President Clinton's initiative to double by that year the number of children in foster care who are adopted or otherwise permanently placed. Many of the recommendations of the "Adoption 2002" report were included in the Adoption and

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Safe Families Act. The recommendations included unprecedented financial incentives to states to increase adoptions, put the safety of children first in placement decisions, and set swifter time frames for permanent placement decisions. It also recommended annual honors to those who make exemplary contributions toward meeting the President's goal.

"President Clinton has set an ambitious and critical challenge to the country to provide all children in foster care with permanent homes," said Olivia A. Golden, HHS assistant secretary for children and families. "In the past year we have witnessed an unprecedented collaboration between the federal, state and local governments with foundations, businesses and citizens to work together for adoption. Today's remarkable honorees have earned our most heartfelt appreciation."

The 1998 awards recognized contributions by adoptive families and leadership by individuals as well as outstanding performance by organizations. A committee representing non-profit adoption agencies, child welfare and adoption advocates, adoptive parents, foundations, the business community, and state and federal offices reviewed and evaluated more than 65 nominations and selected eight winners in five categories.

The winners by category are:

Individual or Family Contributions

- **Tim O'Hanlon, Ph.D. Ohio North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC), Columbus, OH.** Dr. O'Hanlon volunteers his time as the state representative for Ohio with NACAC. He created and maintains the Adoption Policy Resource Center web site, and he has authored several books and articles on Adoption Advocacy.
- **Governor and Mrs. Jim Edgar, State of Illinois, Springfield, IL.** Governor and Mrs. Edgar are long-time champions of children's initiatives. They convened Project HEART to advise the state of Illinois in streamlining its adoption system and launched the Corporate Recruitment Initiative with the Illinois Hospital and Health Systems Association. Illinois adoptions have increased from 708 in 1991 to 2,239 in FY98.

Increased Adoptions

- **Georgia Department of Human Resources, Office of Adoptions, Atlanta, GA.** Adoptions have increased 66 percent since FY95. Regional Adoption Coordinators were placed in state service areas to advocate adoption and track the progress of adoptive children; privatization of services and placement was emphasized.
- **Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Springfield, IL.** Finalized adoptions were increased from 2,229 in FY97 to 4,293 in FY98. The "Illinois Permanency Initiative," to enable the department and juvenile courts to act more quickly in moving children to permanency, was enacted.

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Support for Adoptive Families

- **Hope for the Children, Inc., Rantoul, IL.** In FY98, 13 families were supported in adopting 14 children, 13 children are in the process of adoption, and three await court determinations; 53 volunteers provided 17,620 volunteer hours to the families. The agency also partnered with Ronald McDonald House Charities to bring nearly \$8 million to communities for an intergenerational neighborhood care and support model.
- **Three Rivers Adoption Council, Pittsburgh, PA.** The agency partnered with Black Adoption Services to complete family and child profiles and host a Celebration of Families for 600 people. It also joined the Exchange to serve 539 families and 869 children, leading to the placement of over 300 children. Post-placement services were provided to over 70 adoptive and foster families.

Philanthropy

- **Kansas Association of Broadcasters, Topeka, KS.** KAB partnered with Kansas Families for Kids to produce radio and television spots valued at \$314,786, which resulted in an average of 200 calls per month. As a result, the number of children adopted in Kansas increased by 50 percent in just one year. KAB also began the "Kid of the Month, which features increased air time for hard-to-place children, developed an extensive web site, and financed the first sibling reunion camp for 90 children separated in the Kansas foster care and adoption systems.

Judicial Improvement

- **Judge Max Baer, Allegheny Juvenile Court, Family Division, Pittsburgh, PA.** As a result of Judge Baer's activities, Allegheny County doubled the number of adoptions to 457 in FY97-98. He initiated the Statewide Adoption Network Legal Project to eliminate barriers to adoption and expedite adoptions through private and public partnership. He established the One Judge/One Family policy to ensure consistency in judicial oversight and strengthened it with The Masters Project to alleviate overcrowding at the Juvenile Court. He also supported the Family Mediation Adoption Project which involved birth parents to identify solutions that may have delayed adoption.

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Note: HHS press releases are available on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.hhs.gov>.



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**PRESIDENT CLINTON, FIRST LADY, AND D.C. SUPERIOR COURT PROMOTE
EFFICIENCIES IN U.S. ADOPTIONS AT WHITE HOUSE OBSERVANCE**

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- President Clinton and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton will host 24 Washington, D.C.-area adoptive families and their children in the East Room of the White House on Tuesday, November 24, 1998, beginning at 1:45 p.m., in observance of National Adoption Month. The families' adoption decrees will be finalized at the White House by Eugene N. Hamilton, Chief Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. Also participating in the event will be District of Columbia Mayor-elect Anthony A. Williams, who is an adoptee.

The adoptive families, who were identified by the Superior Court and the D. C. Child and Family Services Agency to participate in the event volunteered to share the happy occasion with the public. They reflect the various kinds of adoptive families nationally; they are couples, single parents, persons adopting children of nationalities and ethnicities which differ from their own, persons adopting sibling groups, persons adopting children with special needs, and persons who have adult biological children and are beginning new families through adoption. The group represents a variety of professions, including police officers, teachers, a physicist, and a doctor of veterinary medicine, as well as adoptive parents who are homemakers.

"I am honored that the White House has invited me to represent the Superior Court in this event," says Chief Judge Hamilton. "The Court has worked diligently over the years to ensure that every child in the District of Columbia who needs a loving, permanent home will be provided with one."

Chief Judge Hamilton says the D.C. Superior Court is striving to help meet President Clinton's national goal of doubling the number of adoptions and permanent placements for children to 54,000 by the year 2002. In 1995, 176 adoption decrees were granted by the Superior Court. This year 232 adoption decrees were granted by the end of September, an increase of 32%. New adoption case filings also increased during that period. In 1995, new case filings totaled 297; to date in 1998, new case filings totaled 431, a 45% increase.

President Clinton has directed the Secretaries of Health and Human Services, the Treasury, Labor and Commerce, and the Director of the Office of Personnel Management, to promote efforts to increase the number of adoptions and permanent placements annually, and to move children in foster care more quickly to permanent homes.

Last year, under President Clinton's and the First Lady's leadership, Congress passed the Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997. It is designed to speed up adoption of abused and neglected children who now spend an average of two years in foster homes. Under the law, states are required to begin proceedings to terminate the birth parents' rights after a child has spent 15 months in foster care, almost instantly if a child has been abused. State officials and courts still make the daily decisions about when a child should be removed from a home, and whether a child should be adopted.

PRESS NEEDING WHITE HOUSE CLEARANCE SHOULD CONTACT THE OFFICE OF THE PRESS SECRETARY AT (202) 456-7150 AND PROVIDE NAME, ORGANIZATION, DATE OF BIRTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER.