

Chief Justice declares Nov. 30 as Mississippi Adoption Day

November 4, 2004

Supreme Court Chief Justice James W. Smith Jr. has declared Nov. 30 as Mississippi Adoption Day.

November is National Adoption Month. Chief Justice Smith has asked Chancery Court judges across the state to schedule as many adoption hearings as possible during the month, and to reserve part of their courtroom time on Nov. 30 to finalize adoptions.

This is the first time for Mississippi to sponsor Adoption Day. Chief Justice Smith has sought the cooperative help of Attorney General Jim Hood, Department of Human Services Executive Director Don Taylor, Mississippi College School of Law Dean Jim Rosenblatt, Chancery Court Judges and the Mississippi Bar in an attempt to have a successful Adoption Month.

Rankin County Chancery Judge John Grant III is enthusiastic about the special day. He finalized two adoptions of children from Department of Human Services custody on Sept. 30.

"We felt privileged to be a part of it," Judge Grant said of proceedings that gave children parents. "To see a family made whole when they leave here could only be described as joyous."

Chancery Judge Margaret Alfonso of Gulfport said, "I think it's a great thing to announce this Adoption Day and the judges stand ready to do whatever is necessary to set aside court time to finalize permanent placement of these children."

The Department of Human Services has in its custody 351 children who are eligible to be adopted. Of those, 177 are living in foster homes with families who plan to adopt them, said Gail Young, Director of Placement for DHS. The Department of Human Services is looking for adoptive parents for 174 more children.

These children are wards of the state awaiting adoption as a result of the termination of parental rights of their biological parents. Department of Human Services may seek to terminate parental rights as a result of abandonment, abuse, neglect or voluntary surrender. Young said most children range in age from 9 to 17. Many are siblings that need to remain together.

The children are among about 3,000 who are living in foster care in Mississippi.

Department of Human Services Executive Director Don Taylor said, "That number for a very long time has hovered around 3,000. I find that unacceptable. We have to come up with a real drive to get those children who cannot be returned to their families into adoptive homes. We are exceedingly pleased that people like Judge Smith are willing to help."

Chief Justice Smith, himself an adoptive grandparent, said, "We know where our needs are. We need more foster parents. We need more adoptive parents."

Special adoption observances date back to 1976, when the governor of Massachusetts proclaimed Adoption Week. That same year, President Gerald Ford, who was adopted, made the observance national. In 1990, it was expanded to National Adoption Month in November.

This year, Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Maura D. Corrigan challenged justices nationwide to hold an Adoption Day to provide foster children with stability, security and hope.

The theme for National Adoption Month 2004 is "Answering the Call." Chief Justice Smith has taken up that challenge, and extended it to prospective adoptive parents as well as to attorneys willing to help file adoption papers and represent clients.

Adoption proceedings are conducted in hearings closed to the public under Mississippi law. Some adoptive parents may be willing to speak with reporters at the conclusion of the courtroom proceedings. The Department of Human Services is attempting to identify adoptive parents who are willing to be interviewed, and the dates of their scheduled adoption hearings.

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