

Act One

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Adoption in Child Time, Inc.

November, 1999

ONE YEAR IS A LONG TIME IN THE LIFE OF A CHILD

adoption in child time (Act, Inc) is a not-for-profit corporation that

- promotes early permanence for foster children;
- trains attorneys in adoption law and policies;
- provides information and attorney referrals to foster parents interested in adoption.

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1-877-Act-4kids;
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812-339-7403

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Status of Bill to Give Foster Parents a Voice in Court

Long-term foster parents shall have party status and standing to intervene in and/or pursue all legal action in behalf of their foster child(ren), including but not limited to adoption and guardianship, but excluding filing for termination of parental rights. Long-term foster parents are defined as foster

parents who have had a child in their home for 12 consecutive months or 15 of the past 22 months.

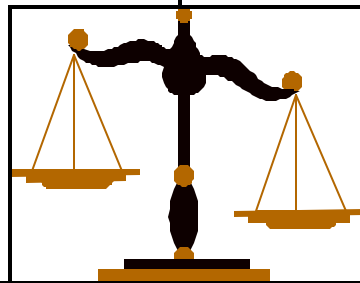
The above statement describes the proposed legislation which is being introduced in the next session of the Indiana legislature. The bill has bi-partisan support in both houses of the legislature and the unanimous support of the board of the Indiana Foster Care and Adoption Association (IFCAA).

The new law is needed to hasten the move to permanence for the thousands of children now in foster care in Indiana.

The law clarifies the posi-

tion of foster parents by limiting legal standing to long-term foster parents. Such foster parents often know the child better than anyone else and can offer valuable information to the court. Frequently they have bonded with their foster child and want to adopt him.

Sixty-five
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Bill proposes that foster parents who have had their foster child for more than one year be given legal party status.

Brochure Explains Cooperative Adoption

Cooperative adoption has been a reality in Indiana since 1994, yet many persons involved with children needing permanent homes are not familiar with it. A new ACT brochure explains this important law. To order this brochure, see Bookstore selections on page 3.

Cooperative adoption provides that post-adoption promises between birth parents and adoptive parents can be recognized and enforced by the Court.
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Brochure on Subsidies Now Out

ACT's newest brochure concerns the complicated subject of subsidies for parents who adopt special needs children.

Current law provides the following subsidies for special needs adoptions: 1) a one-time subsidy for adoption expenses which can be used for attorney fees, court fees, necessary travel and such; 2) a federal subsidy to replace foster parent per diem for the entire period of childhood; 3) a state subsidy, popularly called the county subsidy, in lieu of or in addition to the federal subsidy. In addition special needs

children can be eligible for Medicaid.

Tax subsidies also exist for adoptive parents. These include a special credit for adoption expenses in the year of adoption and the credits which apply to all children: the child credit; the earned income credit; and credit for child care expenses.

ACT's four-page brochure discusses these issues at greater length. To obtain one copy, send a business-size SASE to our address on page four.

Got a Problem? The DFC Wants To Hear From You

If you have had problems as a foster parent dealing with the Division of Family and Children in your county, the DFC wants to hear about it.

DFC director James M Hmurovich proposes meetings in ten counties around the state between foster parents and the staff of the county office. These meetings are to take place at convenient times for foster parents during the months of December and January.

The counties selected for foster parent discussion groups are: Clark, Howard, Jasper, Lake,

Stueben, Tippecanoe, Vanderburgh, Vigo, and Wayne. Discussions are already underway in Marion County.

Discussions are to include a maximum of 20 foster parents, and will last a maximum of 90 minutes. The suggested time is early evening or Saturday morning, subject to the convenience of foster parents. Anyone who wishes to participate is to have the opportunity to participate. The local county director is expected to participate. The object is to work together in such a way as to solve the problems which are interfering with services to foster children.

The discussions are to include the county OFC director, the regional manager, and the Division Director, but no other OFC staff.

According to Hmurovich's directive: "The theme of the meeting is two-fold: a) have an open and honest dialogue on issues important to our foster families so we can address them and continue to improve our foster parent program, and b) discuss practices, procedures, policies or processes that do not serve chil-

dren well, or inhibit full participation of our foster families and/or make them feel alienated or disenfranchised in the case plan development process or in the ability to provide input to a Court for consideration, prior to judicial decision.

These meetings offer an opportunity for foster parents to make their voices heard. Obviously individual problems will not be resolved at the meeting. However, foster parents can present the problem and offer their ideas for changing or improving the situation.

If you want to take part in this meeting, contact the OFC in the listed county nearest to you. The directive states that anyone who wishes to participate should have the opportunity and that "we all must work together to insure that the foster parents have the right to discuss what is important to them without the fear of retaliation."

If you have had problems as a foster parent in dealing with the DFC, the state DFC wants to hear about it.

New Law(cont.)

to 80 percent of foster children who are adopted are adopted by their foster parents.

Critics of the legislation argue that giving legal standing to foster parents will add more people to the proceedings and slow down the move to permanence. In fact, of all participants foster parents are most concerned about moving the child into a permanent home, particularly when they want to be the adoptive parents.

Critics also argue that foster parents already have a voice, as they have the right to be at all reviews and hearings. In fact, while foster parents have a right to attend all hearings, at present they have no redress when they are not informed. Only when they have legal standing can foster parents bring such omissions to the attention of the court. Furthermore, with legal standing foster parents can call witnesses or make other significant points

New Law (cont.)

which the court should know in order to serve the best interests of the child.

No one claims that foster parents are always right. But they do know their foster children, and their information should be presented along with all other information. Only then can the child's interests be served.

See page three for ways you can help this bill become law in Indiana.

Cooperative Adoption (cont.)

Cooperative adoption requires agreement by all parties that this is in the best interests of the child and it is always voluntary.

Cooperative adoption allows birth parents to terminate parental rights voluntarily with the assurance that they need not sever all contact with their child forever.

Why Lobby? How Do I Lobby?

Bills do not automatically become law. When voters care about an issue and make their concerns known to their legislators, the chance of a bill becoming law is greatly enhanced.

Legislators deal with hundreds of issues in each session of the legislature. The legislator cannot know all the concerns of his constituents, nor can he know how each bill will impact constituents unless those constituents make their concerns known.

Foster parents are frequently angered, saddened and discouraged when they

have opinions and recommendations about their foster children but are never consulted. Foster parents now have the right through the Case Conference Policy to voice their concerns to the DFC when any major change is contemplated for their foster child. The new legislation would give foster parents the right to voice their concerns to the court as well.

ACT believes that every child has a right to a permanent home. This bill, if it becomes law, will help foster children achieve permanence. But the bill will not become law unless our legislators know that concerned voters support the bill. In the year 2000 the legislature will be in short session. This means many bills must be considered in a very short period. Most will fall by the wayside.

What Can You Do?

Voter concern is an important consideration for every legislator. Legislators are most concerned about the voters in

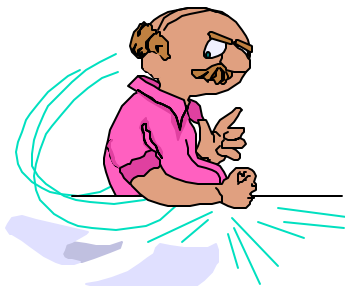
their own area. For this reason the bill needs support from voters all over the state. As a foster parent, CASA or citizen concerned about permanent homes for children, you can be part of this grassroots effort.

First identify your own senator and representative. Every senator and representative can be reached at this address: Legislator's name; Statehouse, 200 W. Washington; Indianapolis IN 46204.

When the legislature is in session, representatives can be reached at 1-800-382-9841. Senators can be reached at 1-800-382-9467. Each legislator can also be reached at his home address in his district.

The bill to give foster parents legal standing will soon have a number in the House and the Senate. It will be sent to committee in each chamber.

As soon as the bill is ready for consideration, ACT ONE will issue a special flyer giving all the information you need to lobby for its support.



(Martha Nord, our intake specialist who usually writes in this space, is fully occupied at this time being a foster mom. Despite her responsibilities she continues to be the friendly, competent voice you hear when you call our ACT phone line. And she'll have some thoughts for us next issue.)

The Bookstore

ACT publishes and offers for sale the following books and pamphlets: See address on page 4.

The Right To a Permanent Home: Stopping Foster Care Drift. (2nd edition) 1998. 52 pages. \$21.50 ppd. Summary of the research on bonding and attachment, new federal and state laws, DFC policies, and adoption subsidies. Written as a legal brief.

The Attorneys' Resource Book. (regularly updated), 1998, 313 pages. \$53.00 ppd. A how-to book for attorneys including the current laws, policies, forms to file, and info on how to get paid.

Bonding and the Right To a Permanent Home. 1999. 16pp. \$5.00 ppd.

ACT informational brochure. 4 pp. One copy free with SASE.

"The Importance of Bonding in Legal Decisions Affecting Foster Children:" 4 pp. Free with SASE

"Questions and Answers About Adoption by Foster Parents" 4 pp. Free with SASE.

"The Case Conference Policy of the Division of Family and Children: An Explanation for Foster Parents." 4 pp. Free with SASE.

"Adoption Subsidies and Tax Issues For Adoptive Parents of Special Needs Children." 4 pp. Free with SASE.

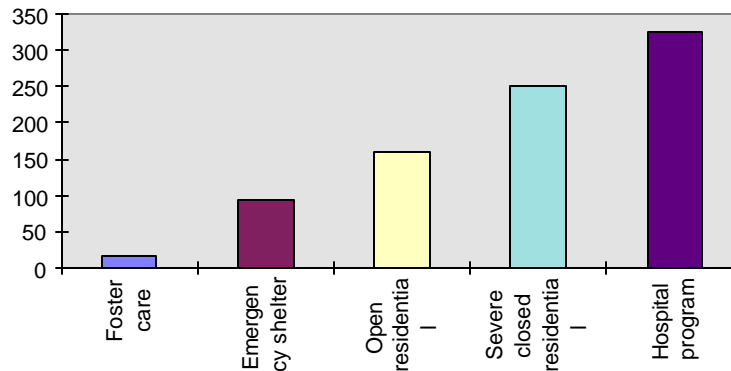
"The Indiana Cooperative Adoption Law and Its Potential for Adoptive Parents and Children." 4 pp. Free with SASE.

Bills become law when voters care about the issue and make their concerns known to their legislators.

In This Issue... The bill to give foster parents legal standing...DFC meets with foster parents...New brochures

Foster Parents A Bargain To the State

Cost per day of out-of-home care



Foster care not only places children in a home setting while they are out of their home of origin. It is also a bargain. Note the comparative per day cost of different settings. Thanks to the Division of Family and Children for the numbers.