



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

NEWS

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

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Deputy Governor Louanner Peters salutes Save Abandoned Babies Day in Illinois

*Safe Havens have saved 41 lives since 2001;
Illinois leading the way in national public awareness effort*

CHICAGO – Deputy Governor Louanner Peters today joined child advocates and police and fire safety officials to salute the efforts of communities statewide, as Governor Rod R. Blagojevich proclaimed April 8 as Save Abandoned Babies Day in Illinois. The Illinois Abandoned Newborn Protection Act, or “Safe Haven Law,” provides for confidential, legal relinquishment of an unharmed infant within seven days of birth to staff at safe havens such as police and fire stations and emergency medical facilities. The child is then adopted by a loving family, with 41 precious young lives saved in this way since 2001. During the same period, 24 newborns’ lives were lost due to illegal abandonment.

“Protecting children is a shared, community responsibility,” said Deputy Governor Peters. “We thank the many safe havens across the state who step up to make their communities a safe place for these precious young lives.”

An amendment to the law signed by Governor Blagojevich in 2007 requires uniform signage on the exterior of all Illinois safe havens. That same sign, developed by the Save Abandoned Babies Foundation in Illinois, is now used in New York, Missouri, Arizona, Maine and Alaska, and is under consideration for use in Colorado and Maryland. Advocate Dawn Geras, leader of the Save Abandoned Babies Foundation, has also been instrumental in securing passage of similar legislation across the country.

“With Nebraska’s Safe Haven Law signed on February 13, we now have 50 states protecting the lives of vulnerable newborns,” said Tracey Johnson, Executive Director of the National Safe Haven Alliance. “We thank the Save Abandoned Babies Foundation, DCFS and Governor Blagojevich for their leadership on this issue. You have been an example for the country.”

DCFS works in partnership with the Save Abandoned Babies Foundation to build public awareness of the Safe Haven Law. Over the last five years, DCFS has distributed and printed over 900,000 brochures, posters and bus cards, in three languages. An amendment signed by Governor Blagojevich in 2006 requires that the Safe Haven Law be incorporated into high school health curricula. Recent initiatives by the Foundation have included the distribution of thousands of educational teacher kits to schools to fulfill that educational requirement. Volunteers and donors are encouraged to contact the Foundation at www.saveabandonedbabies.org, or by calling 312-440-0229.

Today's event at the Chicago Fire Department firehouse at 55 W. Illinois St. in Chicago was just one of many held at safe havens across the state. Similar events calling attention to the Safe Haven Law were held today in Arlington Heights, Aurora, Champaign, Cicero, Decatur, Evanston, Pekin, Peoria, Rockford, Springfield, Waukegan and Woodstock.

Text of the Governor's proclamation follows:

WHEREAS, signed into law in August 2001, The Illinois Abandoned Newborn Protection Act allows parents to relinquish a newborn infant to personnel at a local hospital, police station, fire station, or emergency medical facility anonymously and free from prosecution; and

WHEREAS, relinquished babies then may become custody of the state and are placed in a responsible and nurturing safe haven; and

WHEREAS, the Illinois Abandoned Newborn Protection Act provides a safe alternative to abandonment for Illinois parents who feel they cannot cope with the responsibility of caring for a newborn baby; and

WHEREAS, it is the hope of the State of Illinois that as awareness of this Act increases, it will stop the abandonment of newborn infants, a practice that has led to healthy babies being found harmed, deceased or in unsafe places; and

WHEREAS, since the signing of the Illinois Abandoned Newborn Protection Act, 41 newborn babies have been safely relinquished in Illinois pursuant to this Act, but in that same time frame, newborn infants continue to be unsafely relinquished; and,

WHEREAS, the Illinois Abandoned Newborn Protection Act is a critical statute in Illinois, as it affords the chance of a better life for abandoned newborn babies, but continued public awareness of the Act is necessary to fulfill the goals of protecting all newborn infants and providing parents with a responsible and safe mechanism to relinquish a newborn infant:

Therefore I, Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor of the State of Illinois, do hereby proclaim April 8, 2008 as SAVE ABANDONED BABIES DAY in Illinois, and encourage all citizens to recognize the importance of protecting abandoned infants and giving them the proper care they deserve.