



MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Maryland's Social Services Agency



PRESS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR O'MALLEY ANNOUNCES RESULTS OF HISTORIC REFORMS IN FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION SYSTEM

Innovative 'Place Matters' reform plan results in more than 8,700 children in last three years placed in stable home settings through adoption, guardianship, or reunification with family

ANNAPOLIS, MD (August 18, 2010) –Governor Martin O'Malley joined Lt. Governor Anthony Brown – an adoptive parent himself – as well as Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, foster families, advocates, community leaders and others to announce the results of the Governor's *Place Matters* initiative, a reform program for Maryland's child welfare system that focuses on finding permanent families for children in foster care. Standing in front of the home of Keith and Gladys Fisher, who have adopted two sets of three siblings, Governor O'Malley announced that in the last three years, since the *Place Matters* initiative was put in place, 8,760 Maryland children have found permanent homes through adoption, reunification, and guardianship.

"In our One Maryland, we're united in the belief in the dignity of every individual, that there's no such thing as a spare Marylander," said Governor O'Malley. "For too many Maryland children, circumstances of abandonment, neglect, or abuse have brought them into the State's foster care system. For them, the importance of a stable, safe family-setting for their well-being is all too real, and they depend on a functioning, efficient foster system to work on their behalf."

Since 2008, Maryland's child welfare system has achieved 2,100 adoptions – including a 19.6 percent increase in three years – reunified 5,100 children with their families, and placed 1,500 children under guardianship with another family member. These results have driven down the number of children in Maryland's foster care system by 20 percent, and reduced the number of children in group homes by half.

"The most important factor in a child's life is a stable, loving home in which a child can laugh, learn and thrive. Foster and adoptive parents are our local heroes who provide a fresh start, a second chance and the loving home that so many of our children need," said Lt. Governor Brown, whose 10-year-old son, Jonathan, is adopted. "Governor O'Malley and I share the belief that our children are our future, our next generation of bright leaders who will advance our great State and leave their children with a better world, a better Maryland than we inherited."

"I am grateful to Governor O'Malley for the *Place Matters* initiative, which implemented necessary reforms to the state's child welfare system," said Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake. "I want

- Martin O'Malley, Governor
- Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor
- Brian Wilbon, Interim Secretary

to also thank the foster and adoptive parents who opened their homes and hearts to vulnerable children in need of a loving home. Your commitment to providing them with a stable and nurturing environment will make our communities and City stronger.”

Nearly 1,800 child welfare workers were trained on the family-centered practice model that is at the center of Governor O’Malley’s *Place Matters* initiative. Trainings included instruction on family team meetings, leading to a further reduction in the number of children in the state’s foster system. All front-line social and child-welfare workers were equipped with cell phones and updated computers, making the system more efficient and better able to serve the population. For the first time in 22 years, Governor O’Malley signed into law an update on the state’s child support guidelines.

More than 2,225 new foster parents have been recruited in the last three years. One of those families is the Burnette family. Michele Burnette, President of the Maryland Foster Parent Association, and her husband have been foster parents to more than 30 children, and have four biological children and one adopted child. Michele joined the Governor and Lt. Governor for today’s announcement.

“All of my children are the real unsung heroes. For years they have shared their homes, bedrooms, toys and parents with any child that has come into our home,” explained Michele Burnette, president of the Maryland Foster Parent Association. “Because my husband I decided to open our home to foster children, it has made all of them the wonderful, caring, kind and sensitive members of society that they are.”

Keith and Gladys Fisher, who hosted the Governor for today’s announcement on their front lawn, have six adopted children. The Fisher’s have adopted two sets of three siblings in the last eight years.

Those interested in becoming a foster parent can contact Maryland’s Department of Human Resources at *1-888-MD-KIDS2 (1-888-635-4372)*.

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The Maryland Department of Human Resources is the state’s social service provider. The agency collaborates with 24 local jurisdictions to: provide foster care, adoption, and protective services to children; collect and distribute child support payments; provide protective services, case- management, supportive housing, in-home aide services, and respite care to vulnerable adults; and provide temporary cash, food stamps, and medical assistance to families. It also funds programs for homeless persons, refugees, and migrant- workers, victims of crime and women who are displaced, battered, or assaulted. Last year, DHR served 760,000 people in need. In terms of its annual budget, DHR is Maryland’s fourth largest state agency