



2014 REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR AND THE
LEGISLATURE, PURSUANT TO SECTION 112-A (3)
OF THE DOMESTIC RELATIONS LAW, CONCERNING EXPEDITED
CALENDARING OF ADOPTION PROCEEDINGS

HON. A. GAIL PRUDENTI
Chief Administrative Judge

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INTRODUCTION

This report is submitted by the Chief Administrative Judge pursuant to chapter 294 of the Laws of 1993, which added Section 112-a to the Domestic Relations Law. Chapter 294, effective September 19, 1993, required the Chief Administrator of the Courts to promulgate court rules to expedite the calendaring and disposition of authorized agency adoptions in Family and Surrogate's Courts and to submit annual reports to the Governor and Legislature regarding the implementation and impact of the rules. This report documents implementation of the rules in the Family and Surrogate's Courts for the calendar year 2014.¹

SUMMARY OF THE PROVISIONS OF SECTION 112-A OF THE DOMESTIC RELATIONS LAW AND IMPLEMENTING COURT RULES

In an effort to expedite adoptions filed by authorized agencies, the Legislature, in Chapter 294 of the Laws of 1993, added a new Section 112-a to the Domestic Relations Law. That section provides that an adoption proceeding is deemed "filed" upon receipt by the Clerk of the Surrogate's or Family Court of the documents required by statute and court rule,² as well as an "affidavit of readiness" from the petitioning agency's attorney. D.R.L. §112-a(1).

Once these documents are filed, the Surrogate's or Family Court is required to schedule the proceeding for a "review...to determine if there is adequate basis for approving the adoption." D.R.L. §112-a(2). If an adequate basis is found, the Court is required to direct the appearance of

¹ Data covers the 13 terms of 2014, starting on January Jan 6, 2014 and ending on January 4, 2015.

² Domestic Relations Law §§112(2), (3), (5) and (7), as implemented in Section 207.55 of the *Uniform Rules of the Surrogate's Court* and Section 205.53 of the *Uniform Rules for the Family Court*, set forth the documents required to be submitted in an adoption proceeding, in addition to the affidavit of readiness required by Domestic Relations Law §112-a(1).

the adoptive parents and child for approval of the adoption; if not, the Court "shall direct such further hearings, submissions or appearances as may be required, and the proceedings shall be adjourned as required for such purposes." D.R.L. §§ 112-a(2)(a),(b). The review, appearances for approval of the adoption and any adjournments for further hearings, submissions or reviews are required to take place within time frames established by court rules. D.R.L. § 112-a(3). The Chief Administrator is required to report annually to the Governor and Legislature "on the implementation of such rules and their impact upon adoptions from authorized agencies." *Id.*

This legislation was part of a broader initiative to encourage and expedite the adoption of children by foster parents with whom they have formed bonds. Chapter 294 of the Laws of 1993 also amended Sections 383-c and 384-b of the Social Service Law to require attorneys for authorized agencies to notify prospective adoptive parents promptly of their rights to commence adoption proceedings upon court approval of voluntary surrenders of children and transfers of guardianship and custody through termination of parental rights, respectively. S.S.L. §§ 383-c(8), 384-b(10). The agencies are directed to advise prospective adoptive parents of the procedures for adoption and cooperate "in the provision of necessary documentation." *Id.* The vast majority of prospective adoptive parents approved by authorized agencies for the adoption of children -- generally more than 90% -- are caring for such children as foster parents.

The Chief Administrative Judge promulgated rules for the Family and Surrogate's Court to implement Chapter 294, effective September 22, 1993, which generally establish a 90-day time frame for completion of authorized agency adoptions, absent adjournments for extenuating circumstances. Section 205.59 of the *Uniform Rules for the Family Court* and Section 207.62 of the *Uniform Rules for the Surrogate's Court* require that the initial review by the court to determine the

adequacy of the petition and required documentation, including the affidavit of readiness, shall occur within 60 days of the filing of the documents. If the documentation is deemed adequate and the petition is deemed ready for approval, the court is directed to schedule the appearance of the adoptive parent(s) and child within 30 days of the review. If the petition is not ready for finalization, the court must specify what further hearings, submissions or appearances are necessary and adjourn the proceedings "as required for such purposes." 22 N.Y.C.R.R. §§205.59, 207.62.

SURVEY OF FAMILY AND SURROGATE'S COURT PRACTICES

The experience of the Family and Surrogate's Courts in 2014 once again underscored the effectiveness of the calendaring rules in assuring timely completion of adoptions once the required documentation has been filed. As summarized below, a survey of Family and Surrogate's Courts in all 13 Judicial Districts revealed no problems in judicial compliance with the rules, although some problems persist with respect to incomplete filings by attorneys for prospective adoptive parents and agencies, as well as delays occasioned by the need to obtain up-to-date criminal history, medical and child abuse registry information. As summarized in the following chart, 2264 agency adoption petitions were filed and 2182 were finalized during the 13 terms of calendar year 2014 in Family and Surrogate's Courts statewide. Of the adoption petitions filed, fully 99.8% were in compliance with the requirement that agency adoption filings be reviewed within 60 days; 60.4% of the finalized petitions were able to be completed within 30 days of the review and only 27 % of the adoptions finalized had been pending in excess of 90 days prior to finalization.

**Expedited Adoptions Report: Terms 1-13, 2013 (Jan. 6, 2014 - Jan. 4, 2015)
SUMMARY: ALL DISTRICTS**

DISTRICT	#Agency Adoptions Filed	#Agency Adoptions Finalized	# Agency Adoptions Reviewed by Court Staff Within 60 Days of Filing	# Agency Adoptions Finalized Within 30 Days of Staff Review	# Agency Adoption Finalizations Delayed Beyond 90 Days From Filing Due to Missing Documentation
NYC: 1, 2, 11, 12 AND 13	1123	1091	1123	666	425
THIRD	81	78	81	66	17
FOURTH	113	120	111	57	12
FIFTH	122	114	122	96	8
SIXTH	188	186	186	159	18
SEVENTH	130	121	129	23	37
EIGHTH	228	217	228	104	12
NINTH	149	124	149	52	35
TENTH	130	131	130	96	26
<u>TOTAL</u>	2264	2182	2259	1319	590

The following charts provide information by county, court (Surrogate's and Family Courts) and judicial district:

**Expedited Adoptions Report: Terms 1-13, 2013 (Jan. 6, 2014 - Jan. 4, 2015)
Judicial District: New York City (1st, 2nd, 11th, 12th+ 13th Jud. Districts)**

COUNTY	#Agency Adoptions Filed	#Agency Adoptions Finalized	# Agency Adoptions Reviewed by Court Staff Within 60 Days of Filing	# Agency Adoptions Finalized Within 30 Days of Staff Review	# Agency Adoption Finalizations Delayed Beyond 90 Days From Filing Due to Missing Documentation*
<u>Bronx County</u> Family Surrogate's	363 0	363 0	363 0	242 0	121 0
<u>Kings Co.</u> Family Surrogate's	300 0	288 0	300 0	195 0	93 0
<u>NY County</u> Family Surrogate's	232 7	224 7	232 2	132 2	92 5
<u>Queens Co.</u> Family Surrogate's	175 0	159 0	175 0	76 0	83 0
<u>Richmond Co.</u> Family Surrogate's	46 0	50 0	46 0	19 0	31 0
TOTAL: NYC	1123	1091	1123	666	425

* **Most frequent reason(s) for delay in finalizing adoption:** Missing documents including: adoptive parent and/or child's physical certifications; updated medical information; affidavit of no appeals; putative father registry clearance; back-up guardian information..

Snapshot NYC-wide [Agency Adoptions Pending as of Jan. 5, 2014]: (NYC Family Court) 314 ; NY Co, Surrogate's Court: 5.

Adoption Initiatives:

NY Co. Surrogate's Court: reviews documents within 5 days; contacts attorneys if no action within 30 days.

NYC Family Court: New York City Family Court continued its partnership with the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) in an effort to reduce adoption time. Adoption Clerks send letters to the ACS Permanency Support Unit regarding deficiencies in documents submitted by adoption attorneys and made presentations regarding required procedures and documents at ACS Adoption Exchange Meetings for foster care agency representatives in each borough. Each county convened "Adoption Day" ceremonies, finalizing approximately 184 adoptions, one of which was televised.

Bronx County Family Court implemented a strict protocol regarding the filing and processing of Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) cases and the scheduling of adoptions and conducts permanency hearings with greater frequency than the statute requires in order to ensure a timely adoption process. In the Bronx, Queens and Richmond, judges, rather than referees, conduct all freed child permanency planning hearings and in Queens, judges schedule at least one adoption day per month. New York County Family Court created a Permanency Work Group to focus efforts to increase the proportion of children who reach permanency by 36 months from removal.

The city-wide TPR/Adoption Subcommittee of the Child Protective Advisory Committee to the Administrative Judge revised the "Affirmation of Readiness" form to require certification of the date each required document was prepared in order to prevent documents from becoming stale and thus delaying the adoptions.

**Expedited Adoptions Report: Terms 1-13, 2013 (Jan. 6, 2014 - Jan. 4, 2015)
Third Judicial District**

COUNTY	#Agency Adoptions Filed	#Agency Adoptions Finalized	# Agency Adoptions Reviewed by Court Staff Within 60 Days of Filing	# Agency Adoptions Finalized Within 30 Days of Staff Review	# Agency Adoption Finalizations Delayed Beyond 90 Days From Filing Due to Missing Documentation*
<u>Albany Co.</u> Family Surrogate's	25 0	28 0	25 0	28 0	0 0
<u>Columbia Co.</u> Family Surrogate's	6 0	5 0	6 0	0³ 0	5 0
<u>Greene Co.</u> Family Surrogate's	7 0	6 0	7 0	6 0	0 0
<u>Rensselaer Co.</u> Family Surrogate's	9 1	5 5	9 1	5 1	0 4
<u>Schoharie Co.</u> Family Surrogate's	5 0	4 0	5 0	4 0	1 0
<u>Sullivan Co.</u> Family Surrogate's	8 0	9 0	8 0	6 0	3 0
<u>Ulster Co.</u> Family Surrogate's	20 0	16 0	20 0	16 0	4 0
TOTAL	81	78	81	66	17

* **Most frequent reason(s) for delay in finalizing adoption:** Delays and/or need to obtain corrections in documents filed by attorneys, including cases in which agencies file documents prior to attorneys. One case was delayed because of delay in submitting the home study and others because of special needs of the child, delay in subsidy approval, disruption in family hospitalization of child.
Snapshot District-wide [Agency Adoptions Pending as of Jan. 4, 2015]: 10

³ Three adoptions were finalized within 32 days of the review.

**Expedited Adoptions Report: Terms 1-13, 2013 (Jan. 6, 2014 - Jan. 4, 2015)
Fourth Judicial District**

COUNTY	#Agency Adoptions Filed	#Agency Adoptions Finalized	# Agency Adoptions Reviewed by Court Staff Within 60 Days of Filing	# Agency Adoptions Finalized Within 30 Days of Staff Review	# Agency Adoption Finalizations Delayed Beyond 90 Days From Filing Due to Missing Documentation*
<u>Clinton Co.</u>					
Family	21	25	21	21	0
Surrogate's	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Essex Co.</u>					
Family	0	0	0	0	0
Surrogate's	3	3	3	2	0
<u>Franklin Co.</u>					
Family	0	0	0	0	0
Surrogate's	5	4	4	4	0
<u>Fulton Co.</u>					
Family	2	2	2	2	0
Surrogate's	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Hamilton Co.</u>					
Family	0	0	0	0	0
Surrogate's	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Montgomery Co.</u>					
Family	7	5	7	0	5
Surrogate's	0	0	0	0	0
<u>St. Lawrence Co.</u>					
Family	20	20	20	7	0
Surrogate's	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Saratoga Co.</u>					
Family	27	28	26	1	3
Surrogate's	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Schenectady Co.</u>					
Family	13	15	13	11	2
Surrogate's	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Warren Co.</u>					
Family	6	6	6	0	1
Surrogate's	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Washington Co.</u>					
Family	9	12	9	9	1
Surrogate's	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	113	120	111	57	12

* Most frequent reason(s) for delay in finalizing adoption: delayed and incomplete submissions of documents by agencies and attorneys, including subsidy approvals from NYS OCFS, and service on birth parents.

**Expedited Adoptions Report: Terms 1-13, 2013 (Jan. 6, 2014 - Jan. 4, 2015)
Fifth Judicial District**

COUNTY	#Agency Adoptions Filed	#Agency Adoptions Finalized	# Agency Adoptions Reviewed by Court Staff Within 60 Days of Filing	# Agency Adoptions Finalized Within 30 Days of Staff Review	# Agency Adoption Finalizations Delayed Beyond 90 Days From Filing Due to Missing Documentation*
<u>Herkimer County</u>					
Family Court	13	12	13	12	0
Surrogates Court	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Jefferson County</u>					
Family Court	26	26	26	11	1
Surrogates Court	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Lewis County</u>					
Family Court	0	0	0	0	0
Surrogates Court	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Oneida County</u>					
Family Court	19	16	19	16	0
Surrogates Court	2	2	2	2	0
<u>Onondaga County</u>					
Family Court	55	51	55	48	7
Surrogates Court	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Oswego County</u>					
Family Court	7	7	7	7	0
Surrogates Court	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	122	114	122	96	8

* **Most frequent reason(s) for delay in finalizing adoption:** The most frequent reasons for the delay in finalizing adoptions is awaiting receipt of necessary documents (i.e. criminal histories, child abuse histories, medical histories and issues with regard to the service of orders).

Snapshot District-Wide (Agency Adoptions Pending as of January 4 2015: 8 (Onondaga Co. Fam. Ct.);

Adoption Initiatives: The Fifth Judicial District, spearheaded by Onondaga County Family Court, celebrated its 14th annual National Adoption Day celebration at the OnCenter, Syracuse, NY on November 22, 2013. The Fifth Judicial District finalized a total of 43 adoptions and filled the OnCenter exhibit hall with more than 600 people. Agencies from Central New York and the Onondaga County Sheriff’s Department lined the exhibit hall to offer information about adoption and free photo ID tags for children.

Onondaga County furthered adoption awareness by creating the 3rd Edition of ‘Faces of Adoption in the Fifth Judicial District’. The photo books will be distributed to agencies and courts to encourage support and awareness of the need for foster and adoptive homes

**Expedited Adoptions Report: Terms 1-13, 2013 (Jan. 6, 2014 - Jan. 4, 2015)
Sixth Judicial District**

COUNTY	#Agency Adoptions Filed	#Agency Adoptions Finalized	# Agency Adoptions Reviewed by Court Staff Within 60 Days of Filing	# Agency Adoptions Finalized Within 30 Days of Staff Review	# Agency Adoption Finalizations Delayed Beyond 90 Days From Filing Due to Missing Documentation*
<u>Broome Co.</u>					
Family	45	44	45	44	3
Surrogate	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Chemung Co.</u>					
Family	18	17	18	13	0
Surrogate	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Chenango Co.</u>					
Family	0	0	0	0	0
Surrogate	10	8	10	8	2
<u>Cortland Co.</u>					
Family	0	0	0	0	0
Surrogate	30	33	30	33	0
<u>Delaware Co.</u>					
Family	15	15	15	15	0
Surrogate	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Madison Co.</u>					
Family	16	16	16	4	0
Surrogate	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Otsego Co.</u>					
Family	0	0	0	0	0
Surrogate	8	6	7	6	1
<u>Schuyler Co.</u>					
Family	0	0	0	0	0
Surrogate	12	9	12	9	1
<u>Tioga Co.</u>					
Family	0	0	0	0	0
Surrogate	5	4	4	4	0
<u>Tompkins Co.</u>					
Family	0	0	0	0	0
Surrogate	29	34	29	23	11
TOTAL	188	186	186	159	18

* **Most frequent reason(s) for delay in finalizing adoption:** Delays in submitting criminal record check and fee information.

Snapshot District-wide (Agency adoptions pending as of Jan. 4, 2015): 2 (Broome Fam.Ct.); 3 (Chemung Fam. Ct.); 2 (Chenango Surr. Ct.); 2 (Otsego Surr.Ct.); 2 (Schuyler Surr. Ct.); 1 (Tioga Surr. Ct.)

Adoption initiatives: Delaware Co. Surrogate's Court conducts two or three Adoption Days annually. Otsego Co. Surr. Ct. Reviews adoptions at least every two weeks and sends reminders and checklists to attorneys.

**Expedited Adoptions Report: Terms 1-13, 2013 (Jan. 6, 2014 - Jan. 4, 2015)
Seventh Judicial District**

County	#Agency Adoptions Filed	#Agency Adoptions Finalized	# Agency Adoptions Reviewed by Court Staff Within 60 Days of Filing	# Agency Adoptions Finalized Within 30 Days of Review	# Agency Adoption Finalizations Delayed Beyond 90 Days from Filing Due to Missing Documentation*
<u>Cayuga</u>					
Family	0	0	0	0	0
Surrogate's	11	11	11	11	0
<u>Livingston</u>					
Family	4	2	4	2	0
Surrogate's	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Monroe</u>					
Family	37	36	36	3	5
Surrogate's	14	7	14	0	14
<u>Ontario</u>					
Family	20	17	20	0	6
Surrogate's	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Seneca</u>					
Family	2	2	2	2	0
Surrogate's	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Steuben</u>					
Family	16	21	16	4	12
Surrogate's	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Wayne</u>					
Family	0	0	0	0	0
Surrogate's	25	24	25	0	0
<u>Yates</u>					
Family	1	1	1	1	0
Surrogate's	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	130	121	129	23	37

* Most frequent reason(s) for delay in finalizing adoption: home study, verified schedule + record delays.

Snapshot District-wide [Agency Adoptions Pending as of Jan. 4, 2015]: 19

Adoption Initiatives: **Monroe Family** -convened Adoption Day in Nov., 2014; **Steuben Family** - regular meetings with Dept. of Social Services adoption personnel.

**Expedited Adoptions Report: Terms 1-13, 2013 (Jan. 6, 2014 - Jan. 4, 2015)
Eighth Judicial District**

COUNTY	#Agency Adoptions Filed	#Agency Adoptions Finalized	# Agency Adoptions Reviewed by Court Staff Within 60 Days of Filing	# Agency Adoptions Finalized Within 30 Days of Review	# Agency Adoption Finalizations Delayed Beyond 90 Days from Filing Due to Missing Documentation*
<u>Allegheny Co.</u>					
Family	0	0	0	0	0
Surrogate's	5	5	5	5	0
<u>Cattaraugus Co.</u>					
Family	28	28	28	28	0
Surrogate's	1	1	1	1	0
<u>Chautauqua Co.</u>					
Family	17	11	17	5	0
Surrogate's	1	1	1	1	0
<u>Erie Co.</u>					
Family	122	117	122	40	N/A
Surrogate's ⁴	14	12	14	2	6
<u>Genesee Co.</u>					
Family	11	16	11	1	5
Surrogate's	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Niagara Co.</u>					
Family	15	11	15	10	0
Surrogate's	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Orleans Co.</u>					
Family	6	7	6	3	1
Surrogate's	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Wyoming Co.</u>					
Family	0	0	0	0	0
Surrogate's	8	8	8	8 ⁵	0
TOTAL	228	217	228	104	12

Most frequent reason(s) for delay in finalizing adoptions: Erie Co. Fam Ct.: Missing documents (SSI, criminal record check, mental health evaluation, proof of service of surrender or TPR order, adoption attorney documents).

Adoptions pending as of Jan. 4, 2015: 6 (Chau. Fam.Ct.); 27 (Erie Fam. Ct.); 2 (Erie Surr. Ct.); 4 (Niagara Fam., Ct.)

Special Initiatives: Bi-weekly review of documents by clerk (Orleans Fam.Ct.); periodic meetings with key personnel and status reviews to identify barriers to timely resolution of cases (Erie Co. Fam. Ct.)

⁴ Erie Co. Surrogate's Court processes adoptions from agencies other than the Dept. of Social Services involving children not in foster care.

⁵ Wyoming Co. Surrogate's Court finalized three of the eight within two weeks of filing and finalized a record number of adoptions in the last decade, all within 30 days of filing.

**Expedited Adoptions Report: Terms 1-13, 2013 (Jan. 6, 2014 - Jan. 4, 2015)
Ninth Judicial District**

County	#Agency Adoptions Filed	#Agency Adoptions Finalized	# Agency Adoptions Reviewed by Court Staff Within 60 Days of Filing	# Agency Adoptions Finalized Within 30 Days of Review	# Agency Adoption Finalizations Delayed Beyond 90 Days from Filing Due to Missing Documentation*
<u>Putnam Co.</u> Family Surrogate's	3 0	2 0	3 0	2 0	1 0
<u>RocklandCo.</u> Family Surrogate's	10 0	9 0	10 0	9 0	1 0
<u>Orange Co.</u> Family Surrogate's	25 0	17 0	25 0	9 0	8 0
<u>Dutchess Co.</u> Family Surrogate's	45 0	28⁶ 0	45 0	13 0	16 0
<u>Westchester Co.</u> Family Surrogate's	66 0	68 0	66 0	19 0	9 0
TOTAL	149	124	149	52	35

Snapshot of pending adoptions as of Jan. 4, 2015: 1 (Rock. Fam.Ct.)

Most frequent reason(s) for delay in finalizing adoptions: Delays in submission by prospective adoptive parents and agency of documents, including criminal history reports, State Central Registry and out-of-state documents; Westchester Family Court also reported cases of ambivalence on the part of adoptive parents and contested cases.

Adoption Initiatives: Westchester Family Court finalized 17 adoptions on a successful Adoption Day on Nov. 14, 2013, with entertainment, food and arts and crafts for the children as well as gift packages filled with books, teddy bears and other merchandise. In Rockland Co. Fam. Ct., a court attorney referee presides over permanency hearings, including those of children freed for adoption, in order to provide more efficient monitoring of permanency plans, including progress toward adoption. Dutchess Co. Fam. Ct. periodically reviews adoption files and is a participating county in the Court Improvement Project.

⁶ Dutchess Co. Family Court finalized 28 adoptions and dismissed one case.

**Expedited Adoptions Report: Terms 1-13, 2012 (Jan. 6, 2014 - Jan. 5, 2015)
Tenth Judicial District**

COUNTY	# Agency Adoptions Filed	#Agency Adoptions Finalized	# Agency Adoptions Reviewed by Court Staff Within 60 days	# Agency Adoptions Finalized Within 30 days of Review	# Agency Adoption Finalizations Delayed Beyond 90 Days From Filing Due to Missing Documentation*
<u>Nassau</u> Family Surrogate's	16 8	10 8	16 8	10 8	0 0
<u>Suffolk</u> Family Surrogate's	106 0	113 0	106 0	78 0	26 0
TOTAL	130	131	130	96	26

Most frequent reasons for delays in finalizing adoptions: Suffolk Co. Family Court: challenges to subsidy rates (16 cases); foster parent delays (10 cases); notice father issues (4 cases); Interstate Compact on Placement of Children (3 cases); problems in home (4 cases); pending termination of parental rights appeal (8 cases); notice father issues (2 cases).

Agency adoptions pending as of Jan. 4, 2015: 29 (Suffolk Co. Family Court).

Adoption initiatives: In Suffolk Co. Family Court, the Permanency Planning Coordinator oversees processing of agency adoptions regularly communicates with the Dept. Of Social Services regarding any problems. The Court finalized 15 agency adoptions on Adoption Day (Nov. 21, 2014).

CONCLUSION

In 2014, in 99.8 % of its cases, the Unified Court System fully complied with the court rules requiring review of agency adoption proceedings within 60 days of filing and was able to complete 60.4% of the cases within 30 days after the review. Once all documents have been submitted to the courts, cases are promptly calendared for finalization. These successes reflect the judiciary's continued rigorous efforts to realize the goals of the landmark federal and state legislation. Over time, these statutes are expected to expedite the movement of children out of foster care back to their own families, to adoptive homes or to other permanent living arrangements.

The intensive inter-agency efforts to bring adoptions to finalization quickly have continued to produce impressive results. As in past years, to the extent that delays have been encountered, these have been related to the persistent problem of failures by petitioners' attorneys and authorized agencies to submit complete documentation at the outset, as required by statute and rule, including clearances from the State

Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment, original documents from other states, home studies and criminal history reports from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services.

The prompt resolution of children's cases, whether through family reunification, adoption, guardianship or other alternative, remains a priority for the Unified Court System as it implements the Federal and State *Adoption and Safe Families Acts*, the 2005 New York State permanency legislation and the Federal *Fostering Connections to Success and Adoption Improvement Act of 2008*. Continuing the legacy of former Chief Judge Kaye's "Permanency Now" (formerly, "Adoption Now") initiative, inaugurated in late 2002, the impressive data reflects a continued willingness on both a State and local level to collaborate to expedite adoptions of children freed for adoption, the vast majority of whom have not yet had adoption petitions filed on their behalf. This important initiative produced significant results state-wide, both in the short- and long-term, in significantly reducing the pool of children for whom achievement of a permanent stable home has been an elusive goal.

The rapid phases of child development, particularly the inexorable process by which children form vital bonds and attachments with their caretakers, as well as the critical needs of children for stability in their lives, require expeditious movement of children out of the limbo of foster care into permanent homes. In handling cases involving children, the Unified Court System is cognizant of children's unique senses of time; what may appear to be modest delays are magnified in the lives of children. The successful implementation of the legislation and court rules requiring prompt calendaring and completion of adoption proceedings, as outlined in this report, has furthered the goal of expediting these important cases.

January, 2014