

Child advocacy organization urges courts, agencies to rethink “Adoption Day”

For some children and young adults every mass adoption ceremony is an act of cruelty - like ripping the scab off a wound that never fully heals, NCCPR says

ALEXANDRIA, VA, UNITED STATES, November 18, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Courts and child welfare agencies should stop engaging in “the equivalent of celebrating public executions,” a national child advocacy group said Thursday.

On National Adoption Day, which will happen in most U.S. communities this Saturday, courthouses are opened, and adoptions of foster children are finalized en masse amid cake, ice cream and balloons.

“But there can be no adoptions of foster children without first tearing them from their birth parents forever,” said Richard Wexler, Executive Director of the National Coalition for Child Protection Reform. [“As we explain on our Child Welfare Blog](#), this ‘termination of parental rights’ is often described as child welfare’s ‘death penalty.’ That makes National Adoption Day a joyous public celebration of child welfare’s version of an execution.

“In the criminal justice arena, we at least became civilized enough to ban public executions and the carnival atmosphere that accompanied them,” Wexler said. “No so in child welfare. And, of course, as with those other ‘public executions,’ a disproportionate share of the families ‘executed’ through termination of parental rights are Black.

“Adoption Day reinforces every stereotype about how the system supposedly ‘rescues’ children from horrible birth parents and places them with vastly superior adoptive parents. The same judges who are supposed to decide impartially on termination cases often lead these celebrations,” Wexler said. “And the whole spectacle gets the courts and the local family policing agency (a more accurate term than ‘child welfare agency’) a guaranteed puff piece in local news media.

“Of course, because of COVID, in many places Adoption Day has gone virtual,” Wexler said. “But don’t worry, organizers of one event say, “A pool camera will be permitted at a pre-selected adoptive family’s home for coverage as the family’s virtual adoption ceremony takes place.”

NCCPR previously has argued that the day should be called “National Child Welfare Hypocrisy

Day” because, Wexler said, “while child welfare systems always piously proclaim that their first goal is to reunify a family they’ve torn apart, the outcome that brings them true joy, the one they celebrate, is when that child, overwhelmingly poor and disproportionately nonwhite, is adopted by someone who often is neither.

“Unlike some of my friends in the family preservation movement, I am not opposed to all involuntary adoptions of children taken from their parents,” Wexler said. “I am not opposed to all terminations of parental rights. On those very rare occasions where this is appropriate, I am not opposed to an adoptive family having a quiet, private celebration. But each of these things should take place far less often than they do now.” While a private celebration is one thing, Wexler said, “it should never be a mass public spectacle – it rubs salt into too many open wounds, and not just for parents.

Wexler said that “Before the public Adoption Day celebration there’s sometimes another ceremony, if you can call it that. It’s called the ‘goodbye visit.’ Children are told they will never, ever see their parents again, and now they all must say goodbye. No cake and balloons here; just tears and anguish.

“The children are not always saying goodbye just to their parents,” Wexler said. “If one child is adopted and the others are not, the sibling bond can be severed forever. If a parent later has another child whom s/he is allowed to keep, the child who was adopted amid the ice cream and cake may never know that sibling – unless, when they are adults, they find some way to find each other.

But hey, don’t let that spoil the party.”

Though parents in termination cases often are stereotyped as “the worst of the worst,” Wexler said, “That’s not true. The termination phase is as arbitrary, capricious and cruel as every other decision-point in child welfare. As Prof. Vivek Sankaran, director of the Child Advocacy Law Clinic and the Child Welfare Appellate Clinic at the University of Michigan, [has written](#):

[C]ourts seem to terminate parental rights out of a sense of convenience. A child has been in foster care for 15 months, so let’s terminate. A foster parent prefers to adopt a child, so let’s terminate. A parent hasn’t fully complied with services, so let’s terminate.’

“Still another indication of what’s really behind termination cases can be seen in how different the outcomes are by age,” Wexler said. “Among children torn from their parents during their first year of life, only 36% are reunified; 46% are adopted. Then, year after year, reunification rates inch up almost every year until age 14. Nearly 54% of children taken at age 14 were reunified.

“So are parents of infants vastly worse than parents of 14-year-olds? Or do caseworkers have their own rescue fantasies triggered by a child about whom they can gush, ‘Awwww, he’s so cute!’

“No, we don’t need adoption and the attendant spectacle of mass public family execution to give children ‘permanence,’” Wexler said. “In fact, prioritizing adoption over other options, such as guardianship, puts paper permanence ahead of what Prof. Sankaran aptly refers to as “relational permanence.’

“So this time,” Wexler said, “when National Adoption Day rolls around, remember that for some children and some young adults every mass adoption ceremony, every treacly feature story on the local news is an act of cruelty – ripping the scab off a wound that never fully heals.”

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