

DETROIT FREE PRESS

Courts should use technology already used in pandemic to make adoptions faster, easier

By Sam Beals - December 3, 2020

During this challenging year, many of us have come to appreciate, just a little bit more, the blessing of family. We are truly the fortunate ones. This year alone in Michigan, about **800 children will turn 18 and age out of the foster care system** without having been adopted and finding a “forever family.” Today, about 300 foster children face that potential future. At **Lutheran Adoption Services** alone, for example, nearly 80 foster children are unmatched with adoptive families, with an average age of 14.



Like just about everything, placing children has become harder in the shadow of the pandemic. Adoptive families, doing what they can to adopt a child from foster care, immediately lost the face-to-face support of their case managers, adoptive workers, in-home care specialists and school-based help. Many of these same families experienced an unexpected loss in income, including unemployment. Some parents in families with adoptive placements or temporary placement of unmatched children had to make tough decisions to quit their jobs to ensure the kids were safe as they faced all the additional layers of uncertainty and change COVID-19 brought.

Daycares and schools closed, and parents of young children needed to find a way to provide care for the children in their own homes while balancing work responsibilities. Many of the natural supports for families in transition, such as grandparents, friends and other family members, were unable to support the families in person.

But the children who are so close to their dream of adoption have experienced the greatest impact. The adoption process is heavily reliant on legal proceedings. Courts shut down in the spring and for weeks were only able to manage priority hearings for pressing safety needs, like child removals.





Some courts refused to even receive placement and finalization packet requests, so official placement for some children and finalizations for children at the very end of the adoption process were put on hold. The permanency of children living in a “forever home” was delayed. Some courts that were willing to accept packets still needed legal signatures that could only be obtained in person or had to wait for U.S. mail delivery.

As the world continues to “pivot” to meet the needs of society in new ways as the pandemic drags on, our Michigan courts have the opportunity to lead. Additional court administrators and judges should now consider the best interest of children and make all final adoptions possible Online, if families choose. This would allow adoptions to happen more quickly and make an often complex process easier for the families who have stepped forward during this time.



Courts have taken criminal proceedings Online. Entire jury trials have also taken place virtually. This should extend, consistently and statewide, to family matters that though on the surface may not seem as urgent, truly are to the children who are waiting.

Now is the time to extend the legal use of technology to the adoption system, so hundreds more children can look forward to a future, post-pandemic, in new, forever homes.

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