



CHARLIE CRIST  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF FLORIDA

# Office of the Governor

THE CAPITOL  
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA 32399-0001

[www.flgov.com](http://www.flgov.com)  
850-488-7146  
850-487-0801 fax

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
NOVEMBER 24, 2008

**CONTACT:** GOVERNOR'S PRESS OFFICE  
(850) 488-5394

## **Governor Crist Celebrates Record Success in Florida Adoption Rate**

*~ Recognizes National Adoption Month with reception honoring Florida adoptive families, adoption agencies~*

TALLAHASSEE – Governor Charlie Crist today, as part of ongoing celebrations for National Adoption Month, announced that Florida is on track to exceed last year's record-breaking adoption rate by 20 percent. He announced the numbers during a reception held at the Capitol to honor the many Florida families and adoption agencies that have joined to help achieve the administration's goal of finding loving, permanent homes for children in state care.

"We have seen great progress in our efforts to help children find stable, caring homes, and we could not have achieved so much if not for the families and agencies who have opened their hearts and devoted themselves to this cause," said Governor Charlie Crist. "On behalf of every child, I want to say thank you. And I know we can make even more progress by continuing to work together for these wonderful children."

Between July and October of this year, 1,103 children were adopted from state care, compared to 917 adoptions for the same period last year. That is an increase of 20 percent, and it puts Florida on pace to exceed last year's record 3,674 adoptions - up from 3,079 adoptions in 2006-07.

"Because we know that having a forever family allows a child to thrive and reach their full potential, it is urgent that we find a safe and permanent family for every child in state care," said Jim Kallinger, Florida's Chief Child Advocate. "We are so thankful for the families that have adopted this year and in past years, and hope that others thinking about adoption will hear their stories and want to experience the same joy of welcoming a child into their family."

Governor Crist has made increased adoption awareness and the well-being of all Florida children a priority since taking office. He created the Office of Adoption and Child Protection to establish a comprehensive statewide approach for promoting adoption, supporting adoptive families and preventing child abuse, abandonment and neglect. He appointed a Chief Child Advocate, Jim Kallinger, to help oversee the Office of Adoption's efforts.

The Department of Children and Families also has been integral to the Governor's efforts, finalizing the record number of adoptions and establishing a program that offers employment opportunities to young adults aging out of the foster care system. More than 100 former foster children have been successfully employed.

"Adoption Month has so much meaning," said George Sheldon, Secretary of the Department of Children and Families. "We celebrate the joys of all the families who have come together through adoption, and we hope more loving people will be inspired to come forward and give a permanent and loving home to one of the wonderful children still waiting for their forever family.

The Office of Adoption and Child Protection established a Child Abuse Prevention and Permanency Advisory Council. The 32 members from across the state are developing a plan for better coordination of the goals, activities and funding to support and promote adoption and prevent child abuse, abandonment, and neglect. The Council's plan will be submitted to the Legislature and the Governor next month.

The Governor also established the Florida Children and Youth Cabinet to improve cooperation and communication among the state agencies that serve Florida's children and families. The Cabinet works to promote collaboration, creativity, increased efficiency, information sharing and improved service delivery between and within state agencies and organizations that administer child welfare services. One of the Cabinet's initiatives is the recent designation of "Children's Champions" within state agency that serves children. The champions will help ensure the coordination of services and improved communication among all agencies involved in a child's care.

Through the state's "**Explore Adoption**" campaign, the Governor and other state officials are educating the public about the adoption process, and about the children in Florida who need permanent homes. The Governor's "**Explore Adoption**" promotes the benefits of public adoption and urges families to consider creating or expanding their families by adopting a child who is older, disabled or part of a sibling group.

Every year, about 3,000 Florida children become available for adoption when a court permanently severs ties to their birth parents due to abuse, neglect or abandonment. Of those, 40 percent are adopted by relatives, and another 40 percent are adopted by their foster parents. The remaining children must have recruitment efforts to identify a family previously unknown to them, which is the goal of the "**Explore Adoption**" initiative. Most of the children who wait the longest are teenagers, are sibling groups or have a physical or emotional disability.

Since Governor Crist launched "**Explore Adoption**" in May 2008, the state's adoption hotline, 1-800-96-ADOPT, has received a record number of calls. The new website for "**Explore Adoption**", [www.adoptflorida.org](http://www.adoptflorida.org), features real Florida family stories, the road map to the adoption process, a detailed listing of the benefits to adoption, all campaign materials and much more. The campaign also includes radio and television spots that are airing statewide in English and Spanish, as well as a 30-minute television special featuring the adoption stories of three Florida families. Recently, the Suncoast Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences nominated the series of five "**Explore Adoption**" ads created for an Emmy award.

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