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Governor Crist Announces Record-Breaking Adoption Year

*~ Highlights adoption ceremonies throughout state on **Explore Adoption Day** ~*

~ Florida state government recognized as adoption-friendly workplace ~

www.AdoptFlorida.org

TALLAHASSEE – In recognition of **Explore Adoption Day**, Governor Charlie Crist today announced a record-breaking 3,776 adoptions of children through Florida's public adoption system during the fiscal year ending June 30, 2009. This record follows the previous year's record of 3,674 in 2007-08, up from 3,079 in 2006-07. The previous state adoption record was set in 2003-04 at 3,389. Additionally, also during the fiscal year ending June 30, Florida saw the fewest children entering foster care since 2003. As of July 1, 2009, there were 19,797 children in out-of-home care, down 32 percent (9,483 children) from 29,280 children in January 2007.

"Florida's adoption successes are made possible because of the hard work of our adoption partners and the generous, caring hearts of families across our state," Governor Crist said. "Our success represents much more than numbers and statistics; it represents the restored hopes and dreams of children who now have safe and loving homes."

To highlight the benefits of adoption, Governor Crist kicked off **Explore Adoption Day** by hosting a roundtable discussion in Tallahassee on adoption related issues with several adoptive families, as well as community organization representatives.

Reflecting on their adoption experiences were parents Cyndee Odom and David Johnson, Marlon and Mileya Storey, Fundra Hart, Mirko and Regina Ceska, Florida Supreme Court Justice Ricky Polston and his wife Deborah, Bruce and Erma Slager, and Chuck and Candace Bunker. Other participants included Special Advisor to the Governor on Minority Affairs Adora Obi Nweze of the Florida State Conference of the NAACP, Carol Edwards of the Big Bend Community-Based Care, Guardian Ad Litem executive director Theresa Flury, and North Central Division of the Children's Home Society of Florida board member Sean Pittman and executive director Jane Johnson.

"Governor Crist has raised awareness about adoption, and the people of Florida have opened their hearts to Florida's children," Lt. Governor Kottkamp said. "Under his leadership, we are doing a better job of matching foster children with adoptive parents and of keeping children in a safe environment – with their own families whenever possible."

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Later today, Governor Crist will attend multi-family adoption ceremonies in Jacksonville and Fort Lauderdale and host another roundtable discussion in Fort Myers along with Secretary George Sheldon of the Florida Department of Children and Families and Chief Child Advocate Jim Kallinger. Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp will attend adoption ceremonies in Orlando, Tampa and Miami while Secretary Holly Benson of the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration will join Florida Supreme Court Justice Ricky Polston for an adoption ceremony in Pensacola. For additional details regarding today's **Explore Adoption** schedule of events, visit www.flgov.com/release/10911.

"I applaud Governor Crist's efforts to ensure Florida's children have safe and loving homes," said Adora Obi Nweze. "Adoption gives many of Florida's children the opportunity to be successful, and we want to continue to encourage all Floridians to consider adoption a viable option when they are choosing to either start a family, or to grow the one they have."

General Benefits of Adoption

Governor Crist also highlighted some of the incentives available to families who adopt children from state care. In addition to free health care through the Medicaid program and free college tuition to one of Florida's state universities, colleges or vocational schools, many children adopted from state care are eligible for a monthly stipend to help defray some of the costs related to adding a child to your family.

- **Adoption Assistance** – In Florida, adopted children with special needs are eligible for monthly adoption assistance. The monthly stipend may be negotiated up to the full amount of the child's foster care rate at the time of adoption, depending on the child's needs. Adoption assistance is funded with federal or state funds, depending on the child's eligibility, and continues even when the family moves to another state.
- **Adoption Tax Credit** – Every family's tax situation is different, but if your family's income is below \$204,410, the adoption tax credit is worth looking into. The tax credit is applied to your total tax liability and could increase your refund. The form number is 8893. The form and instructions are available at www.irs.gov.
- **Employer Adoption Benefits** – The National Adoption Center provides a listing of employers who provide adoption benefits. To request a copy, contact the National Adoption Center at 1-800-TO-ADOPT.

"Most Floridians are unaware of the significant benefits of public adoption, and **Explore Adoption** has been a great way to help raise awareness," Kallinger said. "We are finding that families are more likely to consider adoption when they learn what is available."

Families can go online to www.AdoptFlorida.org to learn more about the children who currently are available for adoption.

About the State Adoption Benefit Program

The State of Florida was recognized recently as the "2009 Best Adoption-Friendly Workplace" in government by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption because state and public school employees who adopt a child are eligible for a one-time adoption benefit of \$5,000 or \$10,000. The benefit is also available to employees of community colleges, universities and water management

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districts. The greater benefit is for families adopting older children, sibling groups or children with medical challenges. Open enrollment to apply for the adoption benefit will begin August 1 and end September 30. More information and the adoption benefit application are available at <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/adoption/adoptbenefitprogram.shtml>.

“When state and school employees adopt a child who has been abused or neglected, the adoption benefit is our way of saying thank you,” said Secretary Sheldon. “We appreciate what you’ve done to help children, especially the teenagers, the sibling groups and the medically challenged children who have more trouble finding permanent homes.”

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