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Governor Engages Nonprofits, Faith-Based Community to help find Forever Homes for Kids in Kentucky's Child Welfare System

Gov. and First Lady lead 'Open Hearts/Open Homes' initiative

FRANKFORT, Ky. (March 10, 2017) – Governor Matt Bevin and First Lady Glenna Bevin launched the “Open Hearts/Open Homes” initiative today at the “Summit to Save Our Children” event they hosted in Frankfort. The initiative is part of the Governor’s pledge to improve the state’s adoption and foster care system by mobilizing a network of nonprofits, faith-based organizations and loving families.

More than 200 people from across the Commonwealth attended. Gov. and First Lady Bevin have long been advocates of adoption and foster care; they have nine children, and four are adopted.

“There should not be any child in Kentucky—able to be adopted, ready to be adopted, wanting to be adopted—who does not have a home,” said Gov. Bevin. “We are indeed our brother’s keeper, and I want to challenge us to be bold in our thinking. Let’s do this together; let’s challenge the status quo. If we are to truly become the best version of ourselves on this front, we’ve got to rethink the entire process. It is our determination as a Commonwealth to become the model in America for foster care and adoption.”

The Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS), the agency that administers the state’s adoption and foster care programs, says that almost 8,000 children are in state custody, and of these, more than 6,000 are in a foster care placement.

Open Hearts/Open Homes aims to find permanent placements for those children in foster care with a goal of adoption by relying on the state’s churches and nonprofit groups to engage nurturing families in local communities.

First Lady Bevin said that, as a mother, the issue of child welfare is close to her heart, and that caring for the state’s vulnerable children should be a priority for every community.

“These children have come into state care through no fault of their own,” First Lady Bevin said. “Every child deserves a loving home, and adoption gives them their ‘forever families.’ ”

Gov. Bevin said that he would love to see a “waiting list” of families wanting to adopt rather than of children needing permanency and asked summit participants to commit to working to find adoptive homes in their home communities.

“We are asking members of nonprofit groups, including the more than 6,000 churches in Kentucky, to consider the life-changing journey of foster care and adoption.

“If a family from every church in the Commonwealth could adopt a child or a sibling group, we could meet the challenge of an overwhelmed foster care program and give these children permanent and loving families. These precious kids need homes where they can always feel safe and always return to, even when they are grown. We never stop needing a family to love us.”

CHFS Secretary Vickie Yates Brown Glisson said that Gov. and First Lady’s commitment to children is remarkable.

“Gov. Bevin has made it clear that his priority is to ensure that all of Kentucky’s children are healthy, safe and loved,” she said. “He and the First Lady are ambassadors for adoption and set a wonderful example for prospective foster care and adoptive families. Their servant leadership helps us identify our great need and engage many more loving families in the foster and adoption process.”

Sec. Glisson said foster care is often a temporary setting until families can be safely reunified. But when children cannot return home, CHFS staff works to find loving, permanent homes for them.

“This cannot be a project that we do when we have time,” said Dr. DeForest B. Soaries, who was the keynote speaker at today’s summit. “We have to change the culture. I’ve promised the Governor that we will bring all our experience and capacity to help churches in this state meet the needs of Kentucky’s children. The future of this state is dependent upon our willingness to take this on as our responsibility.”

For more information about how you can become a foster or adoptive parent, or to get more general information simply email: openhearts@ky.gov, go to the state adoption website adopt.ky.gov, which helps families more easily navigate the foster care and adoption process or call 1-800-232-KIDS (5437).

Watch the complete summit on the CHFS Facebook page: www.facebook.com/kychfs/.

The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state’s human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services, the Department for Public Health, and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.