FRIDAY, MAY 22, 2009

May is National Foster Care Month:  In 1988, the National Foster Parent Association persuaded a Senator to introduce a resolution to proclaim May as National Foster Care Month. The event has now become one celebrated on all levels (national, state, county and city). It gives all of us an opportunity not only to thank foster parents for their dedication to foster children, but to also thank the social workers, placement workers, attorneys, judges, and everyone who work so hard all year to support foster youth. Take some time this month to let anyone who works with foster children know you appreciate their efforts.

Federal Bill Providing Mentors for Foster Children:  Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu, a strong child advocate, has introduced new legislation which would promote mentoring of foster care children. Landrieu's bill, called “The Foster Care Mentoring Act of 2009”, authorizes $15 million to begin statewide foster care mentoring programs and $4 million to start a national public awareness campaign to recruit mentors. Under the bill, states are eligible for up to $600,000 to establish or expand foster care mentoring programs. The bill also has provisions making mentors who participate in the program eligible to receive $2,000 in federal student loan forgiveness for every 200 hours they serve (with a maximum of $20,000). Landrieu’s bill is sponsored in the House by Democratic Congressman Joseph Crowley (D-N.Y.), and co-sponsors in the Senate include Senators Evan Bayh (D-Ind.) and Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark).
Senator Landrieu made the following statement in support of the new Act:

There are 550,000 children in foster care, and 100,000 of them are waiting to find a home with a permanent, loving family. Mentoring programs can make a significant difference in the lives of children in foster care. Studies show that children who are mentored are 45 percent less likely to use illicit drugs, 59 percent more likely to succeed in school and 73 percent more likely to attain higher life achievement goals.

**States Continue to Deal with Same-Sex Adoptions:** The various states are still struggling with the issue of adoptions by same-sex couples. Different states are taking entirely different approaches, but much of the differences seem to hinge on whether the issue is addressed by the legislature or by the courts. Here are the latest approaches taken by two states addressing the issue:

**Florida:** According to Advocate.Com (an award-winning LGBT News Site), a Florida appeals court has unanimously agreed that the State must honor second-parent adoptions by same-sex couples granted in other states. The Florida court of appeals reversed a lower court ruling and held that Florida must give full faith and credit to adoptions granted to same-sex couples by other states. About half of all states allow second-parent adoptions by same-sex couples. The American Civil Liberties Union is fighting to end Florida's ban on adoption by same-sex couples within their state. The ACLU has succeeded in striking down the ban in the trial court, and the Florida court of appeals will soon hear oral arguments on that case.

**Louisiana:** The Louisiana Legislature is moving in the opposite direction on same-sex adoptions. According to the Times-Picayune, the Louisiana House voted by a wide margin (77-18) to affirm that the state will not issue birth certificates listing the names of two unmarried parents who adopt a Louisiana-born child in another state. This bill comes amid the state's appeal of a December ruling from a U.S. District Court that sided with two California men seeking a revised birth certificate listing both of them as the fathers of the Shreveport-born toddler they adopted in a New York court in 2006. That case now awaits action by the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals. According to the Times-Picayune, critics of the bill have said parents who are not listed on the birth certificate could struggle registering their adoptive child for school or providing the child with health and life insurance benefits. Those kind of issues would be magnified, they said, if one parent died, leaving the child in the custody of the parent who is not listed on the legal document. The bill now moves to the Louisiana Senate. According to the Times-Picayune, the bill has Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal's support.
Children Living with Substance Abusing Parents: A recent Report from CESAR (Center for Substance Abuse Research) of May 11, 2009 reports some startling statistics about children living with substance abusing parents:

- An estimated 8.3 million children—11.9%—live with at least one parent (biological, step-, adoptive, or foster) who had abused or was dependent on alcohol or an illicit drug in the past year, according to a recent analysis of data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

- Younger children were slightly more likely than older children to live with a substance-abusing or -dependent parent (14% vs. 10%; see figure below).

Percentage of U.S. Children Living with One or More Parents with Past Year Alcohol or Illicit Drug Abuse or Dependence, by Age
(2002 to 2007 Data Combined)

“Children begin by loving their parents; as they grow older, they judge them; sometimes they forgive them.” -- Oscar Wilde