

**Remarks of Justice Marilyn Kelly
Washtenaw County/Michigan Adoption Day
Tuesday, November 20, 2007**

Good morning. It's a pleasure, and a great privilege, to be part of this very special occasion. I thank Judge Shelton, Monica Ireland, and all the others who organized this event, and I especially thank the adoptive families for allowing me and others to participate in this memorable day.

Today families throughout Michigan celebrate the addition of new family members by adoption. Over 220 adoptions are being finalized in 33 counties. The organizers of National Adoption Day have confirmed that, for the fifth year in a row, Michigan's is the largest Adoption Day event in the entire country.

But, while I'm proud of our state's participation, the point of this event is certainly not to see who can rack up the highest numbers of adoptions or organize the biggest event. One of our goals is to educate the public about the adoption process, and to encourage potential parents to learn more and perhaps adopt. That is why today's adoption hearings in this court, and in most of those courts participating in Adoption Day, are open to the public, whereas such hearings are usually limited to the families, the judge and adoption workers. By opening their adoption proceedings to the public, the courts and adoptive families are offering potential adoptive parents a wonderful view into the adoption process. This is truly a public education effort, and I thank this court and the families for their part in it.

We celebrate adoptions today, but we also remember those children who are still waiting for permanent, loving homes. I think there is a general perception that we in the United States have very few children available for adoption, and that is simply not the case. In Michigan alone, we have about 4,300 children who have the goal of adoption. Preliminary data for Fiscal Year 2007 indicates that approximately 2,481 children were placed into adoptive homes out of the foster care system between October 1, 2006 and September 30, 2007. That's commendable, but as you can see, those numbers mean that there are still children waiting for homes. We need many more adoption days, not only today, but all through the year. As my Court said in its resolution regarding Michigan Adoption Day, we need to "draw attention to the needs of these children and youth, particularly their need for permanent families, and also to encourage efforts to help those who are not adopted."

In that regard, I would like to say a few words about someone who has been a tireless and dedicated advocate for Michigan children. There are many people who work in the child welfare system, often heroically, and they deserve our thanks. This person, however, isn't a judge or a social worker or adoption worker or children's lawyer. But he is a father, and a grandfather. In fact, he has a new grandchild as of this morning's proceedings in this courtroom. His name is Jack Kresnak, and he has been, for many years, the children's welfare reporter at the Detroit Free Press.

Mr. Kresnak is one of those very rare journalists who not only advance the public's understanding of the child welfare system, but also help the system critique and change itself. Through his intelligent and compassionate coverage, Jack Kresnak reminds us that the true measure of a society is how well it cares for its children. His work is journalism at its best: holding those in authority accountable and giving a voice to those who have none.

It would be impossible to detail all Mr. Kresnak's accomplishments without having much more time to do so. Here are just a few highlights: In 2000, his series of articles entitled "Murder by Neglect: Ariana's Story," led to the passage of Ariana's Law in 2004, to strengthen the Office of Children's Ombudsman's ability to take legal action to protect children. In 2002, his reports about foster children who are "absent without legal permission" from their foster care placements helped to spur a statewide effort to find missing foster children, including the Michigan Supreme Court's creation of special dockets in family courts. In 2007, his coverage of the Ricky Holland case and his series entitled "Losing Isaac" inspired actions that will help prevent future such tragedies. His articles about the problem of "legal orphans" spurred a package of legislation that was introduced this year with bipartisan support. I could go on, but I think the National Association of Child Advocates, which presented Mr. Kresnak with one of his many awards, said it best: "Your investigative reporting so often brings about amazing results for Michigan children who need relief most."

I and my fellow Justices couldn't agree more, and that is why I have a special presentation to make to Mr. Kresnak on behalf of the Court. If he would please come forward ...

I have here a resolution, signed by all the Justices, in honor of Jack Kresnak. I should point out that this is the first time in its history that the Michigan Supreme Court has singled out a journalist for special recognition. It reads in part "We, the Justices of the Michigan Supreme Court, honor Mr. Kresnak for ... his work as a gifted and compassionate reporter on children's issues, and for the many reforms that his work has inspired, for which he has rightly received national recognition."

Mr. Kresnak, congratulations, and thank you for being the voice for Michigan's most vulnerable children.
