



## THE SUPREME COURT *of* OHIO

### **Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton - A Leader in Adoption Reform**

For the past several years, leaders on both the state and national levels have sought to reduce the length of time that it takes to place adoptive children in permanent homes so that children in need can be in caring homes as soon as possible. Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton has been at the forefront of these efforts.

Legislatively, Congress enacted the Adoption and Safe Families Act in 1997 to reduce the length of time courts take to find permanent homes for children removed from the custody of their birth parents. A similar Ohio statute, the Ohio Adoption and Safe Families Act, became law in 1999.



Justice Stratton has become a leader in adoption reform in the legal system both in Ohio and nationally. In 2000, she authored the appellate rules and amendments to the Ohio Supreme Court's Rules of Practice that expedite appeals in adoption and termination of parental rights cases. As a result, all Ohio appellate courts now work to shorten timelines in these sensitive cases. These improvements in Ohio's appellate system have had a substantial impact. They also provide a recognized model for other states to follow.

At the request of the National Center for State Courts, Justice Stratton chaired a national effort to assist appellate courts nationwide in developing and enacting their own expedited appellate rules for adoption and child welfare cases since only a handful of states had an expedited process. Chief Justices in all 50 states responded to her request to designate a key leader to work with her committee on improving the adoption process in their respective states.

The project has now been completed and the Committee is very pleased to report that 42 states have an expedited appeals process in place. The Expedited Adoption Committee has also just released its final report and study, entitled "Expediting Dependency Appeals: Strategies to Reduce Delay." The report provides a practical guide to best practices for expedited appeals, studies on how different states have handled expedited appeals, their successes and road blocks. It may be accessed online at [http://www.ncsconline.org/WC/Publications/KIS\\_ExpDepAppealsPub.pdf](http://www.ncsconline.org/WC/Publications/KIS_ExpDepAppealsPub.pdf).

Also, as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, Justice Stratton has been dedicated to the Foundation's efforts, particularly as to reforms in the legal system, and in the establishment of the Dave Thomas Center for Adoption Law at Capital University Law School. The Center is unique with its exclusive focus on adoption and child welfare legal reform.

She has received many awards for her service. Among them are: Angels in Adoption Award, Congressional Coalition on Adoption, 2001; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services-

Adoption Excellence Award, 2001 and the St. Joseph Orphanage, Scholar of Life Award, 1998.

Regarding her efforts to shorten the appeal time in these cases, Justice Stratton stated, "We must focus on a goal of a permanent home as soon as possible for a child. We cannot afford to lose time in the appellate process. An appeal may considerably extend a child's placement in foster case," Stratton said. "While several months or a year may seem a reasonable period for an appeals process to an adult, it is an eternity in the life of a child."