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ODJFS SAFE HAVENS PROGRAM PROVIDES SOLUTIONS TO MOTHERS IN NEED

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) has announced that 63 babies have been safely surrendered since Ohio's Safe Havens for Newborns law was enacted in April 2001. The figure is based on a recent survey of Ohio's county public children services agencies.

A total of 9 infants were surrendered during state fiscal year 2008, which ended June 30, including five in Cuyahoga County, two in Franklin County, and one each in Summit and Van Wert counties. In SFY 2007, 11 infants were surrendered in Cuyahoga, Lorain, Wayne, Lucas and Summit counties.

"The state's and its county partners' mission is to protect children who cannot protect themselves, and the more that we promote this program, the more Ohio infants' lives will be saved," said ODJFS Director Jan Allen. "It is imperative that we continue to educate the public about Safe Havens, and the positive choices that mothers have available to them, and most importantly their babies."

Under the Safe Havens law, a parent (without fear of prosecution) may deliver his or her unharmed newborn to a medical worker at a hospital, a peace officer at a law enforcement agency or an emergency service organization.

In December 2008, State Senator Gary Cates (R-Butler County) introduced legislation that greatly improves Ohio's Safe Haven Law. SB 304 Infant Surrenders, passed by the Ohio House of Representatives, extends the time that a parent may voluntarily deliver a newborn child to a safe haven from 72 hours to 30 days. At least 31 other states have similar limits, giving desperate parents more time to surrender their infants. The bill also would require ODJFS to develop an educational plan for informing at-risk populations of the provisions of the law.

"Ohio's Safe Haven's law has been a godsend, saving dozens of children's lives and giving desperate parents a real alternative to harming or abandoning their baby," Cates said. "By extending the amount of time that a parent has to deliver their newborn to a safe haven, SB 304 would only improve what is already a very successful program and, hopefully, allow more parents to make the right choice with their child."

Once a baby has been received by a Safe Havens provider, the newborn is placed in the custody of a county public children services agency. The agency then looks for an adoptive family. To learn more about the Safe Havens program, visit jfs.ohio.gov/safehavens/.

