



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

News for Immediate Release

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Berks County Courts Celebrate Adoption Day

READING – Berks County Courts celebrated National Adoption Day earlier this month on Nov. 11 with a special ceremony overseeing the adoptions of five happy children whose foster families became their forever families.

Since the Berks County Courthouse was closed in observation of Veterans Day, families were able to safely attend their hearings together in-person, without the increased fear and risk of potential COVID exposure that would've been heightened on any other court day. Despite an almost empty building, all COVID-preventive measures were observed throughout the day – but the masks couldn't hide all the smiles.

Berks County Common Pleas Judge James M. Bucci, with his passion for foster-care adoptions, presided over the ceremony.

“In the midst of so much uncertainty, this was a day filled with immense joy and relief for all parties,” said Judge Bucci. “Uniting families has been the highlight of my time serving on the bench over the past 16 years and I am deeply honored and grateful to have been a part of so many heartwarming family stories.”

His prioritization and unwavering dedication to these cases, even during periods of highly-restricted access to the courts, has not gone unnoticed in the community.

“When widespread court closures were first announced in March, those handling foster-care adoptions felt the families’ devastation at the expected delay, but judges rose to the challenge – especially Judge Bucci who took every single adoption we filed without question,” said Susan N. Denaro, Esq., an attorney with Georgeadis Setley who has represented over 100 foster families in adoptions so far this year.

After serving 16 years on the Berks County Court of Common Pleas Bench, Judge Bucci will retire next month. Since April 1 of this year, over 90 foster-care adoptions have been granted in Berks County, and nearly 125 foster-care adoptions have been completed since this time last year – of which Judge Bucci oversaw over 75.

As a further testament to the dedication of all involved, and especially to President Judge Thomas G. Parisi, Judge James M. Bucci, Judge Madelyn S. Fudeman, Judge Jeffrey K. Sprecher, and Judge J. Benjamin Nevius, 196 adoptions have been handled in Berks County since this time last year.

A couple of these new parents described their emotions on the day that their child's adoption was finalized and officially became a permanent member of their family.

One of these new parents was Sirry Mbong Alang, who adopted her daughter, Liliana, in July. They had one of the first in-person hearings after the courtrooms reopened -- dressed in matching T-shirts that read "PEACE OUT FOSTER CARE." The wording was chosen by Liliana, who since 2017, has resided in 11 different homes, until she found her forever home with Alang in 2019. Alang, a native of Cameroon, Africa and an Associate Professor at Lehigh University, said she always wanted to be a parent and was not concerned about being a single mother because her own single mother was the perfect role model.

"When the closure happened, I was worried that it would prolong the adoption process but I was pleasantly surprised when it did not. We were both ready for permanency and I was ready to have full control over organizing the services she needs without having to go to the social workers for approval of every prescription refill. The County and the adoption agency workers helped make the experience of adopting my daughter the best thing I've ever done in my life," said **Sirry Mbong Alang**.

Another two happy parents were Jason and Elisa Cintron, who were overjoyed to adopt their second child during the Nov. 11 ceremony and didn't mind not being able to invite other friends and family.

"It didn't matter to us as it was still special. There's an emotional journey that you go through adopting a child that you don't have with your biological kids. The important thing was the relief of knowing no one can take him away from us now," Elisa said.



* The 2020 photos above without masks were either taken pre-COVID-19, were just of the family, or were socially distanced per CDC guidelines.

Collage [available here](#).

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Editor's Note:

Susan N. Denaro, Esq., provided content for the following background:

Even a global pandemic did not stop foster-care adoptions from being a priority in Berks County. In the 2019 calendar year, 133 foster care adoptions were granted in Berks County. It appears as that by the end of 2020, that number will be equaled if not exceeded.

COVID restrictions not only affected the scheduling of parental right termination hearings, but it also affected the ease with which Berks County Children and Youth Services (CYS) caseworkers could meet with foster care families and children to keep these matters progressing forward.

When word first got out to the CYS offices in other counties that hearings in Berks County were proceeding, attorneys here received several cases that could be legitimately filed in Berks County if the referring agencies have offices in Berks County. Attorneys in Berks have handled foster-care adoptions for families in Lancaster, Lehigh, Northampton and Montgomery Counties since March. Everyone involved has been beyond grateful to our courts for getting these precious kids out of limbo during the time the courts in their home counties were not scheduling adoptions.