

## Safe Havens law for unwanted newborns touted

By Laura F. Alix, Journal Inquirer

State officials celebrated the success of the Safe Havens law Thursday at St. Francis Hospital in Hartford, where a baby was taken this past Christmas Day.

"We tell people over and over again, 'You have an option,'" Gov. M. Jodi Rell said at Thursday's gathering.

Since the Safe Havens law took effect on Oct. 1, 2000, eight babies have been brought to hospital emergency rooms under the law. The most recent baby was brought to Danbury Hospital just last Saturday, April 19.

"It's breathtaking to know that as recently as last weekend, another baby's life was saved," State Rep. Pamela Z. Sawyer, R-Bolton, said. Sawyer has advocated spreading the message of the Safe Havens law and worked to get the law passed.

"One of the toughest things I found was trying to convince the legislature to pass this very simple law," she said.

The Safe Havens law enables a parent to bring an infant 30 days old or younger to a hospital emergency room without any risk of prosecution for abandonment.

In a typical case, a nurse will ask the parent for the name and medical information about the infant and parent, but the parent does not have to give that information. Then the Department of Children and Families obtains custody of the baby and places it with a licensed family who intends to adopt the infant.

"No questions will be asked. No police will be called. You don't even have to give your blood type," Rell said. "You say, 'Good luck' and walk away."

Rell acknowledged that many people may find it hard to understand why a mother would give up a newborn baby, but said, "No matter the circumstances, whoever brought that baby really loved that baby."

Since the law took effect, four babies have been abandoned, but all have survived. Two were adopted, and two were placed with relatives.

Abandonment is what state officials are hoping to reduce by promoting the Safe Havens law, Rell said.

An adoptive mother of a Safe Havens baby also spoke.

"We both felt like we had just won a million dollar lottery," the mother — identified only as Dottie —

said of the day in 2004 when she and her husband adopted the baby.

Dottie is from southeastern Connecticut, but prefers not to disclose her last name or town of residence out of concerns for her two adopted children.

The baby was born in a Connecticut hospital and given the medical care it needed, she said. Then the mother simply gave up the baby.

“She remains anonymous,” Dottie said. “She’s protected by the Safe Havens law.”

“I’m very, very grateful the Safe Havens law exists,” she said.

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