



Pass the word: Babies needn't be abandoned

By [Kenton Robinson](#)

Hartford - As if on schedule, baby number 8 arrived at Danbury Hospital last Saturday.

The schedule in this case being the annual effort of the state Department of Children and Families to promote the Safe Havens Act.

The law, which took effect eight years ago in October, allows mothers or fathers to bring their newborn babies to hospital emergency rooms and drop them off. Its purpose: to prevent babies from being abandoned where they might be injured or die.

Or as Gov. M. Jodi Rell put it at St. Francis Hospital Thursday, "Too many times we've heard about babies being dumped off in Dumpsters, literally, left in a bathroom at a McDonald's, left somewhere out in a basket ...

"When you have this law in place, you can bring that baby to any hospital's emergency room and say, 'I cannot keep this baby,' and walk out the door. No questions will be asked, no police will be called, you don't even have to give your telephone number, your blood type, you don't have to give anything. You say, 'Good luck,' and walk away."

The Safe Havens law, said state Rep. Pamela Sawyer, R-Bolton, who sponsored the legislation, is "a very simple law, one that young people would be able to understand and be able to pass along to a friend in distress, so simple that it could be passed along as a message at a school bus stop, it could be passed along as a text message."

Since the law was passed, eight babies have been dropped off at hospital emergency rooms and are now living with foster parents or family. But four others have also been abandoned, in Branford, Greenwich, Brookfield and Groton. Fortunately, all four survived.

And so the state is placing brochures in all middle schools and high schools and publicizing the law on radio stations targeting younger listeners.

Thursday's press conference was held at St. Francis because that's where Safe Havens baby number 7 arrived in the wee hours of this past Christmas Day.

Danica Hamilla, the nurse who received the baby from the mother that day, said the mother arrived just after midnight. She had delivered the baby alone, in her own home, no more than an hour before.

"The mother came to triage with this baby girl that she had delivered at home herself, and she brought her to us, saying she wanted to give the baby a safe place and an opportunity for a good life that she would not be able to provide," Hamilla said. "She said she knew about the law, no questions

being asked, and she wanted to do that. We all just kind of stopped. It really made us think and appreciate the miracle of what had just taken place.”

The law allows parents to drop off a baby 30 days old or younger. The parents will be asked for information about their family medical history, but they are not required to provide it. Then the hospital calls DCF, which arranges for temporary foster care and begins looking for a permanent adoptive family.

The mother of one of those families, who to protect her privacy would identify herself only as Dottie from southeastern Connecticut, shared her own story Thursday.

Four years ago, she and her husband had signed up with DCF to become adoptive parents. They had waited a month without hearing anything. And then, late one afternoon, “I was vacuuming and the telephone rang,” Dottie said. “It was a social worker from DCF calling to tell us a baby had been born and wanting to know if we would adopt it. We both felt like we had just won a million-dollar lottery.

”I feel this mother knew the baby she had been carrying for nine months would be given a chance at a good life. She protected this baby and gave us one of the greatest gifts we will ever know. We are very, very grateful that the Safe Havens law exists.”

Today, her son is a happy 4-year-old who's very much into riding his bike and playing in his playscape with his little brother, 17 months younger, also adopted through DCF.

“We are trying to prevent the death of so many babies because someone is overwhelmed and cannot keep that baby,” Rell said. “On Christmas Day at St. Francis you get this Christmas present. What better present in the world than to have a baby and to have this baby brought to a safe haven. Whoever brought that baby really loved the baby. ... What mother's love doesn't shine through on that?”

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