

Safe Haven Information for Birthmothers

Dear Birthmother:

The Abandoned Infant Protection Law, also known as the “Safe Haven Program,” helps parents who may have hidden a pregnancy and feel they are unable to care for a newborn infant. Parents can surrender their newborn at a hospital in every state in the country. Other locations such as fire department, police station may be Safe Haven providers depending upon state law. This law protects parents from being charged with any crime for abandonment, as long as the baby does not show signs of abuse or neglect. It also protects the parent’s privacy because they may remain totally anonymous. This letter answers some common questions and explains how the Safe Haven law works.

Can someone help me decide what to do?

Call the Safe Haven Hotline at 1-888-510-BABY(2229) for a referral to someone who can help in your area.

Where do I take my infant?

If you decide that you cannot care for your newborn, you can go to a hospital, or other Safe Haven locations depending upon state law. The hospital will take care of your newborn until he/she is medically cleared. The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) will temporarily place your infant with appointed agency that will care for the child, this can either be with a foster family until a permanent placement is arranged or an adoptive family per state directed policy and process.

What information must I provide when I relinquish my infant?

No information is required. Any information you provide voluntarily will be kept completely confidential, and will help DCFS keep your infant safe and healthy. The following information is important but again, it is your choice whether you wish to provide it:

- The date and time of the birth of your infant
- Any health problems of the infant, you or the father of the infant
- Does either parent have an Indian tribal affiliation? If yes, what tribe? (If your baby has a tribal affiliation, the Indian Child Welfare Act will apply)
- Any other information about your infant's medical, social and family history

What will happen to my infant?

DCFS will take temporary custody of your baby from the hospital and will place the baby with a

family. This family will take care of your infant until he/she is adopted either by them or another family.

What if I decide later that I want to get my infant back?

Call your local county Department of Children and Family Services right away so a social worker can assist you. Look in your local phone book under "County Agencies" for the Department of Children and Family Services. If you cannot find the number, call the Safe Haven Hotline at 1-888-510-2229 and inform them of your wishes. DCFS will open your case to start the process. Be aware that the longer you wait to file a request with the court to regain custody the more difficult the process will become and the infant may not be returned to you. Many states allow a window only a few days to 30 days after surrendering infant.

What happens after I surrender my infant?

The hospital will take care of your infant and you will not be responsible for the cost. You will be protected under the "Safe Haven Law", as long as your infant was not abused or neglected. If your infant shows signs of abuse or neglect, DCFS must conduct an investigation.

A court hearing must be held to legally terminate your parental rights before your infant can be adopted. If the court terminates your parental rights, it will give custody to DCFS which will then place your infant for adoption. You will not receive personal notice of the court hearing.

What does it mean when my parental rights are terminated?

The court must legally terminate your parental rights before your infant can be adopted. If the court terminates your parental rights, you will no longer be considered the infant's parent. This means that you will not be able to make decisions about your infant. DCFS will place the child with an adoptive family.

Does the father have rights to the infant?

If a newborn is surrendered at the hospital or with other service providers, the law requires that DCFS do a "diligent search" for the parents. This includes a search of the "Putative Father Registry." If a father is registered on this list, DCFS will ask the father if he will request the court for custody or make an adoption plan for the newborn. If he chooses neither, DCFS will inform the father of the intent to go to court to terminate his rights. DCFS will also ask if he would voluntarily provide his social and health history. If DCFS cannot locate the father, they will place a public notice in the local newspaper or magazine. The notice will say when and where the court hearing will be held to terminate parental rights.

Protecting your health and your infant's health.

You can protect your health and your infant's health by seeing a doctor as early in your pregnancy as possible. This is called prenatal care. The best and safest place to deliver your newborn is in a hospital. All medical information will be kept confidential. You can get help from your local hospital, county health department or any medical clinic. Local pregnancy centers may have medical services as well. You can get a referral and counseling by calling our Hotline 1-888-510-2229.

Voluntary Medical History Form

Dear Birthmother:

Thank you for bringing your baby to a Safe Haven. You have taken the first step in assuring that your newborn will be safe and well cared for. We know this has been a difficult decision and want to assure you that we will do everything we can to give your newborn the best possible care.

We are asking you to help your baby by providing some information *voluntarily* that may be important in his/her future. This information will be used only for this purpose. It will not be used to identify you or find you. You may not know all of the answers, but please provide as much information as you know.

What is the baby's birth date? _____ Was the infant premature? Yes / No

Were there any problems with your pregnancy or delivery? Yes / No If yes, what were they? _____

Did you smoke, use drugs or take any medication during the pregnancy? Yes / No

If yes, what were they? _____

Do you have any medical conditions, such as (please circle any that apply):

Diabetes
Asthma
Allergies _____
Seizures
Cancer
Heart Disease
High Blood Pressure
Mental Illness
Other _____

Does the infant's father have any medical conditions, such as (circle any that apply):

Diabetes
Asthma
Allergies _____
Seizures
Cancer
Heart Disease
High Blood Pressure
Mental Illness
Other _____

What is your:

Age _____

Race _____

Native American Indian Yes__ / No__

(Tribal Name) _____

Religion _____

Approx. Height/Weight _____

Eye/Hair Color _____

What is the infant's father's :

Age _____

Race _____

Native American Indian Yes__ / No__

(Tribal Name) _____

Religion _____

Approx. Height/Weight _____

Eye/Hair Color _____

Postpartum Checklist

QUESTIONS: CHOOSE YES or NO

1. Is your vaginal bleeding increasing and not slowing down when you rest?
Yes No
2. Is your vaginal bleeding soaking through two maxi pads in a half-hour or are you passing large blood clots?
Yes No
3. Does your vaginal bleeding or discharge have a bad smell?
Yes No
4. Is your temperature 101 F or higher?
Yes No
5. Do you have abdominal pain that is not relieved by *Tylenol* or *Motrin*?
Yes No
6. Are you urinating often? Do you feel a burning sensation?
Yes No
7. Is your pain increasing?

Yes No

*If you answered **YES** to any of these questions, you may be having a medical problem. Call your doctor immediately.*

If you do not have a doctor, seek care at an emergency room or call 1-888-510-2229. Tell them that you are in the Safe Haven Program and need help.