



**FOR RELEASE:  
10AM ET, December 7, 2006**

For further information contact:  
Betsy Hyder, FCI, 404-713-0943  
betsy@fosteringcourtimprovement.org

## **New National Initiative Says Key to Improving U.S. Foster Care System is Data Analysis**

*Fostering Court Improvement provides a shared data system that courts and child welfare agencies can collaboratively utilize to achieve better outcomes for children in foster care*

**ATLANTA** – A new, national initiative dedicated to improving the lives and outcomes of the 500,000 children currently in foster care by improving the data systems that capture, track and assess their progress while in the system held a national forum today. Fostering Court Improvement (FCI) focuses on the need for courts and child welfare agencies, the primary custodians for children in care, to collaboratively engage in tracking and monitoring outcomes through shared data analysis.

“The ability of courts and child welfare agencies to work together, monitor performance, share data and make changes has a profound impact on the safety, permanency and well-being of children in the foster care system,” stated FCI Child Welfare Expert Mark Testa, also of Fostering Results at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Social Work. “FCI promotes collaboration and information sharing between these two entities. Further, collecting this information and making it publicly available helps ensure that courts and child welfare agencies are accountable for their action, or inaction, on behalf of the children in their care.”

Supported by The Pew Charitable Trusts in collaboration with the State Justice Institute and the Barton Foundation, FCI uses existing Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data submitted by every state in the nation to the federal government and links it together, creating a longitudinal file that can be used to assess child outcomes from the time of removal to the time of discharge. Available free of charge on a website that can be accessed by both courts and child welfare agencies, the reports can be reviewed at the micro level – by county, judicial circuit or child welfare region – or at the macro level - examining the performance of the entire state.

“In addition to providing courts and child welfare agencies with the data they need to help track and monitor their progress, FCI will offer technical assistance so that courts can interpret these data, and use them to implement changes that will have a real impact on the lives of children in foster care,” stated Andy Barclay, FCI Statistical Expert and founder of the Barton Child Law and Policy Clinic at the Emory University School of Law. “This will help ensure that courts and child welfare agencies learn together, from

their own data, about where they excel and where they should focus their efforts to provide the best outcomes for children in foster care.”

As the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care noted in its 2004 report, *Fostering the Future: Safety, Permanence and Well-Being for Children in Foster Care*, “although child welfare agencies and the courts share responsibility for improving outcomes for children in foster care, institutional barriers and long-established practices often discourage them from collaborating. Effective collaboration requires that both entities change the way they think about their respective roles, responsibilities and priorities and engage in a new way of doing business together. Jurisdictions in which courts and agencies have been able to make this shift have yielded better results for children.”

In its recommendations to reform the foster care system, the Pew Commission emphasized not only the critical importance of collaboration between courts and child welfare agencies, but the need to collect and share all relevant data and information that can lead to better decisions and outcomes for children.

“As a former judge responsible for oversight of children in foster care, I know that the type of information that FCI will give judges and child welfare agency personnel access to will make a tangible difference in the lives of the children in their charge,” said the Honorable Nancy Salyers, FCI Judicial Executive, co-director of Fostering Results and former Presiding Judge of the Cook County (IL) Juvenile Court’s Child Protection Division. “FCI will provide access to measures like: why children are removed from their homes and enter foster care in the first place; how long they stay in foster care; and how long it takes for them to be placed in a safe, permanent home. This not only improves the access to, and ability of, courts to better manage their caseloads and monitor the progress of the children in their care, but ensures greater accountability. Now we will truly know how the system is performing and where it needs to be improved so that we do not fail the children in our care.”

Fostering Court Improvement has a number of leading national and state child welfare and judicial agencies and organizations as its partners and collaborators. These include: the American Bar Association; the Justice Management Institute; the Child Welfare League of America; the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges; Children’s Action Alliance (Arizona); the Barton Child Law and Policy Clinic at the Emory University School of Law; the Georgia Supreme Court; the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Family and Children Services; the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Social Work; the Missouri Children’s Division; the Missouri Courts; Home At Last; the Arizona Administrative Office of the Courts, Dependent Children Services Division; the Arizona Department of Economic Security; the Arkansas Division of Children and Families Services; the Arkansas Administrative Office of the Courts; Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families; and the Children and Family Research Center of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

**For more information about Fostering Court Improvement, visit its website at: [FosteringCourtImprovement.org](http://FosteringCourtImprovement.org). To download a copy of the Pew Commission’s recommendations, visit [PewFosterCare.org](http://PewFosterCare.org).**