

## CHAPTER 294

AN ACT establishing the Safe Haven Awareness Promotion Task Force.

**BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. The Legislature finds and declares that:
  - a. The "New Jersey Safe Haven Infant Protection Act," P.L.2000, c.58 (C.30:4C-15.5 et seq.) is intended to provide for the emergency possession of certain abandoned newborn infants in such a manner as to ensure the anonymity, confidentiality and freedom from prosecution that may encourage a parent who may be under severe emotional stress to leave an infant at a safe haven and thereby save that infant's life;
  - b. This statute requires the Commissioner of Human Services to establish an educational and public information program to promote safe placement alternatives for newborn infants, the confidentiality offered to birth parents and information regarding adoption procedures;
  - c. Pursuant to the Safe Haven law, the Department of Human Services established a multifaceted media campaign to inform the public about its provisions, and this effort has included: a 24-hour toll-free telephone hotline; public service announcements on radio and cable television; posters for display in social service agencies, high schools, stores and churches; pocket cards and brochures in both English and Spanish; and advertising in local and college newspapers and on billboards and buses;
  - d. Despite these efforts to promote public awareness of the Safe Haven law, unlawful abandonment of newborn infants continues to be a problem in New Jersey, as evidenced by the finding of three newborn infants who were unlawfully abandoned during a three-week period in January 2004, instead of being dropped off safely as provided under P.L.2000, c.58, with the consequent loss of life for one of those infants; and
  - e. The indications of this continuing problem raise questions about whether the existing efforts to disseminate information about the provisions of the Safe Haven law can create sufficient public awareness to alleviate the problem of unlawful baby abandonment and thereby achieve the intent of the "New Jersey Safe Haven Infant Protection Act."
2. There is established the Safe Haven Awareness Promotion Task Force in the Department of Human Services. The purpose of the task force shall be to study and evaluate the efficacy of existing efforts to promote awareness among the general public of the provisions of the "New Jersey Safe Haven Infant Protection Act," P.L.2000, c.58 (C.30:4C-15.5 et seq.), and develop recommendations relating to specific actionable measures to support and enhance efforts that would improve the effectiveness of the campaign to promote public awareness of the Safe Haven law.
3. a. The task force shall consist of 19 members as follows:
  - (1) the Commissioners of Health and Senior Services, Human Services and Education, the Director of the Division on Women in the Department of Community Affairs and the Child Advocate, or their designees, who shall serve ex officio; and
  - (2) 14 public members, who shall be appointed by the Governor no later than the 30th day after the effective date of this act, as follows: one person upon the recommendation of the Association for Children of New Jersey; one person upon the recommendation of the New Jersey Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers; one person upon the recommendation of the School of Social Work at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey; one person upon the recommendation of Foster and Adoptive Family Services; one person upon the recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatrics-New Jersey Chapter; one person upon the recommendation of the New Jersey Education Association; one person upon the recommendation of the New Jersey State School Nurses Association; one person upon the recommendation of the New Jersey Hospital Association; one person upon the recommendation of the Mental Health Association in New Jersey; one person upon the recommendation of the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect, one person upon the recommendation of the New Jersey Catholic Conference; one person upon the recommendation of New Jersey Right to Life; and two members of the public with a demonstrated expertise in issues relating to the work of the task force.

Vacancies in the membership of the task force shall be filled in the same manner provided for

the original appointments.

b. The Commissioner of Human Services or the commissioner's designee shall serve as chairperson of the task force. The task force shall organize as soon as practicable following the appointment of its members and shall select a vice-chairperson from among the members. The chairperson shall appoint a secretary who need not be a member of the task force.

c. The public members shall serve without compensation, but shall be reimbursed for necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties and within the limits of funds available to the task force.

d. The task force shall be entitled to call to its assistance and avail itself of the services of the employees of any State, county or municipal department, board, bureau, commission or agency as it may require and as may be available to it for its purposes.

e. The task force may meet and hold hearings at the places it designates during the sessions or recesses of the Legislature.

f. The Department of Human Services shall provide staff support to the task force.

4. The task force shall report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature, along with any legislative bills that it desires to recommend for adoption by the Legislature, no later than six months after the initial meeting of the task force.

5. This act shall take effect immediately and shall expire upon the issuance of the task force report.

Approved January 9, 2006.