

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

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**NEWS RELEASE****FOR RELEASE****10 a.m. Wednesday August 21, 2002**Contact: Mike Botula, Public Information Officer
(916) 464-5188**CALIFORNIA'S VOLUNTARY PATERNITY OPPORTUNITY
PROGRAM ACHIEVES RECORD 750,000 SIGNED
DECLARATIONS***Voluntary Paternity Program Sets Record For Fathers Connecting With Their Children*

(SAN DIEGO)— The California Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) today announced that more than 750,000 parents have voluntarily signed declarations of paternity as part of the Paternity Opportunity Program (POP), a major milestone in its continuing effort to strengthen the bond between fathers and their children.

The milestone was celebrated at a special signing ceremony at Sharp Mary Birch Hospital for Women in San Diego.

"Given the opportunity, fathers will contribute to the lives of their children," said DCSS Director Curtis L. Child. "We provide fathers that opportunity through the POP Program."

The POP Program allows fathers to establish legal paternity without having to go to court. Under legislation enacted in 1997 an unmarried father is required to sign a paternity declaration at the hospital at the time of the child's birth in order for his name to appear on the child's birth certificate.

(More)

The Declaration of Paternity is a legal document signed by both parents. By establishing paternity, a child receives the legal rights and privileges of a child born within a marriage. Paternity makes the father responsible for the support of his child and gives the father parental rights such as the right to seek custody and visitation in a future court action. Children gain inheritance rights, access to benefits such as social security, health and life insurance and the right to both parents medical history. Children also gain legal documentation of who their parents are.

Establishing paternity is the first step in the process of establishing orders for Child Support, said Child. Child support substantially increases the economic well being of low and moderate-income families. Child said. Studies show that child support improves the likelihood that children will finish high school and go on to college.

Sharp Mary Birch Hospital for Women is the leading women's hospital in San Diego County, delivering more than 7,000 babies per year. Dr. Thomas Boardman, Director of the San Diego County Department of Child Support Services said the hospital contributes the largest number of voluntary paternity declarations in San Diego County. Of the , 8,652 POP Declarations signed in San Diego County hospitals in calendar year 2001, 1,565 were signed at Sharp Mary Birch Hospital for Women. Statewide 134,621 POP Declarations were signed in 2001.

"Sharp Mary Birch takes every opportunity to support new parents," said Dan Gross, CEO of Sharp Mary Birch Hospital for Women. "As a committed community partner, we recognized the value of the Paternity Opportunity Program not only here, but throughout the state."

While the POP declaration is an important element in establishing a child support order, there are other benefits for both the child and the parents. Legal paternity establishes the

child's right to inheritance and access to the father's social security and other benefits. Legal paternity also gives the child access to both parents' medical histories.

"Knowing a patient's medical history can be extremely valuable when it comes to timely diagnosis and treatment of a hereditary ailment," said Jack Schneider, M.D., and Chief Medical Officer for Sharp Mary Birch Hospital for Women. "If a POP form is signed and both parents medical history is available, diagnosis can be made easier and less time consuming than if you only have access to one half of the puzzle."

Under the Paternity Opportunity Program, a paternity declaration is presented to parents in the hospital or birthing center at the time the child's birth certificate is presented. Signing the Declaration of Paternity is voluntary. Either parent may cancel the declaration within 60 days. After that parents must go to court to have the declaration rescinded. If the parents do not sign the declaration at the hospital or birthing center they may do so afterward at the local child support agency, welfare office or Vital Records Office.

The success of the POP Program is demonstrated by the 750, 000-signed paternity declarations. Sharp Mary Birch Hospital for Women's contribution to the program and working partnership with the Department of Child Support Services has brought added awareness to the importance of parental responsibility in the lives of children throughout the state.

NOTE: More information on the Paternity Opportunity Program may be obtained from the DCSS Internet site: <http://www.childsup.ca.gov>

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