

# A Secret Safe Place For Newborns<sup>SM</sup>: Safe for Mothers - Safe for Newborns



## Replication Manual for District Attorneys

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October 9, 2001

**Message To All District Attorneys  
From Mobile County District Attorney John Tyson, Jr.**

Please consider using the program described in this manual to help save newborns in your jurisdiction from violence, murder and abandonment.

The program was born from tragedy. In 1998, our Office convicted a newborn's mother and grandmother of murder. The two women drowned the hour-old child in a toilet. They were both sentenced to 25 years in prison.

These women didn't want the baby. They saw no alternative besides murder. After the prosecution, Jodi Brooks, a former WPML-TV reporter, asked me a question that suggested there might be a way to create an alternative for mothers in this situation. She asked if we would waive prosecution for abandonment of new mothers in crisis if they brought their babies unharmed to a safe location such as a hospital emergency room.

Because our Office focuses on crime prevention programs as well as aggressive prosecution, we were receptive to the idea. We believed it had potential for saving the lives of newborns and the futures of their mothers. We announced the program in November, 1998. I believe it saves lives in our jurisdiction and can save lives in yours. We call it A Secret Safe Place For Newborns.

It is difficult to measure results about what could have happened. But we know that in 1997 and 1998 there were six babies killed in our jurisdiction, including one newborn. Since the launch of A Secret Safe Place For Newborns we have had no newborn murders in Mobile County. There has been only one unsafe abandonment. Nine mothers have participated in the program. Area social workers report an increase in inquiries about adoptions and an increase in adoptions.

The Board of the National District Attorneys Association unanimously endorses A Secret Safe Place For Newborns Program. It has been recognized as a finalist for an Innovations In American Government Award, the premier program of the Institute for Government Innovation (part of a larger effort of the Ford Foundation and Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government) in partnership with the Council for Excellence in Government.

The program makes two promises. First, if a mother in crisis will bring her newborn unharmed to a designated location, we will not prosecute her for abandonment and we will allow her to remain anonymous. Second, if a newborn is injured, thrown away or killed, those responsible will be targeted for a determined prosecution.

As District Attorney, you are the best person to lead this program and save lives in your area. You have the authority to decide not to prosecute abandonment. You have a working relationship with public social services agencies. You have access to the news media. To help implement it, we have used a grant from Innovations In American Government to prepare this manual.

Please put this manual to work in your community. It will help create an alternative to violence, murder and abandonment in your area. At the same time, it will help standardize A Secret Safe Place For Newborns concept so that mothers in crisis around the country will know what they can count on from A Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations. Consistently communicating similar promises to mothers in crisis and identifying these promises with one recognizable name is the key to helping the most newborns and mothers. We will be glad to assist you with your questions.

Thank you in advance for taking this step to help save lives. I look forward to hearing about your results.



John Tyson, Jr.  
Mobile County District Attorney

## **A Secret Safe Place For Newborns Concept**

Newborn abandonment and violence to newborns, including murder, can be the result of mothers in crisis. These mothers – whether they have hidden their pregnancies or can't cope with their children for other reasons – believe they have no alternatives.

After the conviction of a mother and grandmother of murdering the mother's hour-old infant, Jodi Brooks, a former WPMI-TV reporter asked Mobile County District Attorney John Tyson, Jr., if he would consider not prosecuting a mother for abandonment if she brought her unharmed newborn to a safe location. With Tyson's agreement, the concept for A Secret Safe Place For Newborns was launched.

Tyson set a policy that provides mothers in crisis with an alternative to abandonment or violence while emphasizing their responsibility for the safety and welfare of their children. Mothers who bring their unharmed newborns (within 72 hours of birth) to hospital emergency rooms in his jurisdiction are not prosecuted for abandonment and can remain anonymous. If they harm or abandon their newborns they are prosecuted.

With the District Attorney authorizing the program, additional government and private partners readily volunteered to participate. The Alabama Department of Human Resources agreed to take custody of the newborns, arrange foster care and adoptions and supervise the restoration of the child to its mother if she changed her mind. All area hospitals agreed to serve as safe locations where mothers in crisis

could bring their newborns. The hospitals established protocols. They trained their staffs on how to accept newborns, capture voluntary medical history information, offer voluntary counseling and medical assistance to the mothers and summon child protection services personnel from the Alabama Department of Human Resources. Reporter Jodi Brooks and WPMI-TV covered the story, advocated the program and Station Manager Sharon Maloney aired public service announcements valued at \$75,000. Helpline telephone operators provided information to callers twenty-four hours a day, 7 days a week. Other volunteers developed pamphlets and distributed them, sewed clothes for the newborns and provided other services.

## **Local District Attorneys Hold The Keys To Saving Lives**

Keys to the success of the Secret Safe Place for Newborns concept are the promises of conditional freedom from prosecution and anonymity. These promises are extended by the District Attorney to the mother. The District Attorney's power to promise no prosecution comes from either specific statutes or the District Attorney's inherent authority to charge a crime or not. The District Attorney's power to promise a mother in crisis that she can remain anonymous and no one will ask her questions comes from the Fifth Amendment privilege against self-incrimination. Typically the Fifth Amendment is viewed strictly as a limitation on the power of the state. This program reverses that view by embracing the privilege against self-incrimination and using it to affirmatively promise the mother that she

### ***Promises to Mothers***

*No questions asked.*

*No prosecution of mother for abandonment.*

*Right to change your mind about giving up your newborn.*

*Health exam for your newborn.*

*Foster home/adoption for your newborn.*

### ***Requirements***

*Newborns must be brought unharmed to A Secret Safe Place For Newborns location identified by the Secret Safe Place For Newborns sign soon after birth (72 hours in Mobile County) for mothers to receive these promises.*

### ***Enforcement***

*Mothers who harm or abandon their newborns will be prosecuted.*

will not be asked questions when she elects to participate in the program. Constitutional authority overrides any statutory instructions to the contrary. Just as vital is your support and leadership. Without it, safe places won't be established quickly, and mothers in crisis will remain in crisis and their children will continue to be in danger.

Involvement of the local District Attorney attracts and maintains the cooperation of local hospitals or other safe locations (alternative locations may be necessary in areas where there are few or no hospitals). District Attorneys are usually familiar with the local media and can work with them to publicize the program. The District Attorney's role as the chief law enforcement officer in a jurisdiction encourages involvement and support from law enforcement agencies that can communicate information about the program through their outreach and provide law enforcement services if needed. The program fits with the goals of District Attorneys because it prevents crimes. Prevention is always a better alternative to prosecution.

### ***District Attorney's Promise***

*The Mobile County District Attorney's Office will not prosecute mothers of newborns if they bring their newborns unharmed to emergency rooms at authorized Secret Safe Place For Newborns emergency room hospital locations in Mobile County within 72 hours of birth. The Mobile County District Attorney's Office will vigorously prosecute anyone who harms, kills or abandons a newborn.*

In addition to anonymity, mothers in crisis want the best for their infants. Mothers are encouraged to provide as much information as possible about their (and the father's) health history and family health history. A sample form to gather this information is provided. Mothers can also be reassured that their infants will receive medical care as needed, foster home care and adoption services.

Mothers who utilize A Secret Safe Place For Newborns Program are in crisis. Most feel alone and isolated. They can

benefit from counseling and other social services. In Mobile County these services are made available through the Department of Human Resources. Area Helpline operators are familiar with the Secret Safe Place For Newborns Program, know the locations and can explain the promises to mothers as well as the responsibilities of mothers. They can help guide mothers to authorized locations and to social services agencies.

### **A Secret Safe Place For Newborns Locations**

Commitment from area hospitals to provide medical care for the newborns was essential to success in Mobile County. All six hospitals in this county accept the newborns and provide a medical examination and any care the child requires. All hospitals in a jurisdiction should be approached and asked to participate in the program. Experience in Mobile County indicates that as one hospital becomes involved, other hospitals are motivated to participate.

Emergency room personnel who are often familiar with the tragedy of infant abandonment and violence are strong advocates for hospital participation. The contact information of personnel at participating hospitals can be requested (call Kris Schaffer at the Mobile County District Attorney's Office 251-574-8400) so that hospital personnel considering participation can contact them directly about their experiences. Distinctive A Secret Safe Place For Newborns signage identifies participating hospitals. The signage helps relieve doubt in the mother's mind that she is at a "safe place" for her and her newborn.

Hospitals are ideal safe places. They are easy to identify. They are often open 24 hours a day. Medical professionals staff them. Based on experience in Mobile County, hospitals are recommended as the best locations. In areas where hospitals are not readily accessible, other locations can be used. Police, sheriff and fire stations are good alternatives because they usually have personnel trained in first aid and can provide transportation of the newborn to medical facilities if required. When non-hospital locations are used, it will be important to make arrangements with local hospitals or other medical facilities to provide the physical examination of the newborn and any necessary medical care.

Personnel at all places designated as A Secret Safe Place For Newborns location should be trained in how to protect the anonymity promised to mothers and obtain medical history information from the mother when possible. A letter detailing the promises to mothers and their newborns and explaining the mother's right to change her mind has been developed. It should be given to the mothers whenever possible. The letter used in Mobile County was prepared by the Mobile County Department of Human Resources and is included in this manual. Contact information within the local Department of Human Resources should be included in the letter. Be sure to include a stamped, self-addressed family medical history request. In addition, information regarding local counseling, medical and other social services should be emphasized.

All locations must be instructed in the steps to take when an infant is brought to them. The protocol used with hospitals in Mobile County is provided. Protocols may need to be different for other types of locations. For example, if a police station is designated as A Secret Safe Place For Newborns location a uniformed police officer should accept the infant and the newborn should be brought to the officer in charge and the procedure initiated by him or her. It is recommended that in instances where A Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations are not hospitals, the infant be immediately taken to a hospital or physician's office for examination and any required medical help. Regardless of the type of location, a medical examination and medical care for the newborn should be provided.

It is essential that only authorized locations offer the promises to mothers and infants. A Secret Safe Place For Newborns signage reassures mothers in crisis that they are at a safe location. To gain and maintain the confidence of mothers (so that future mothers will bring their children to safe locations) the promises to mothers must be provided consistently.

### **National Reputation Will Help Save More Infants**

The standards set by Tyson in Mobile County create a model for similar programs authorized by District Attorneys across the nation. By adopting promises to mothers that are essentially the same in all jurisdictions, District Attorneys can help build a strong, national reputation for A Secret Safe Place For Newborns. With standardized promises to mothers, a standardized theme, standardized logo and standardized signage, A Secret Safe Place For Newborns can develop a strong national reputation that will be more effective than a variety of promises, names and logos. Use of A Secret Safe Place For Newborns name, logo, theme and signage is authorized for programs that offer the standardized promises to mothers. There are no charges for these materials.

The Secret Safe Place For Newborns guidelines protect the lives of newborns because they meet the concerns of mothers in crisis for their infants and for themselves. They are simple:

- The mother's identify is protected.
- The infant is given a medical examination and care if needed.
- Any necessary medical care for the newborn is provided at no cost to the mother.

- The mother may change her mind within a limited time frame determined by the Department of Human Resources (legal proceedings begin after 30 days in Mobile County).
- The mother is offered voluntary counseling and medical care.

Mothers must meet easily understood criteria:

- The mother must bring her newborn to A Secret Safe Place For Newborns location within 72 hours of birth.
- The newborn must be unharmed.
- Mothers are responsible for the safety and welfare of their newborns until they have brought them to A Secret Safe Place For Newborns location and will be prosecuted if they fail to meet these obligations.



The time period within which mothers must bring newborns to A Secret Safe Place For Newborns location may vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction; however, we believe it should be at least 72 hours or longer to give the mother an opportunity to participate. Information on

authorized time can be made available locally and will be published by jurisdiction on the Secret Safe Place For Newborns web site ([www.mobile-da.org](http://www.mobile-da.org)).

It is essential that only authorized locations offer the promises to mothers and infants. A Secret Safe Place For Newborns sign reassures mothers in crisis that they are at a safe location. To gain and maintain the confidence of mothers (so that future mothers in crisis will bring their children to safe locations) the promises to mothers must be provided consistently.

**A Secret Safe Place For Newborns Location Procedures**

Newborns should be accepted with no requirement for the mother to answer questions. The mother should be assured anonymity and asked if she will provide information that could benefit the newborn’s health now and in the future. Information about the infant or the mother should be disclosed on a “need to know” basis only. For example, medical information provided by the mother should be disclosed only to appropriate medical personnel and Department of Human Resources personnel. Requests for information about the newborn should be referred to the Department of Human Resources.

The Department of Human Resources should be recognized as the guardian for the newborn. This organization takes responsibility for foster and adoption services; coordinating post-discharge medical care; communicating with police, District Attorney, other authorities and media, and filing necessary petitions with the Juvenile Court.

A letter from the Department of Human Resources should be given to the mother when the infant is relinquished. The letter should inform the mother of her right to reconsider her decision and provide her with a confidential way to provide medical information. In Mobile County, a questionnaire is included that can help medical professionals and the Department of Human Resources provide the best possible care for the infant. The letter should also inform the mother of counseling, medical and other social services that may be available to her.

### **Sample Hospital Protocol**

Any child brought to the hospital property and left with a staff member will be brought to the emergency department.

The person bringing the infant to the facility will not be questioned. Personnel should record voluntary medical history that could enable better or emergency care of the infant. The mother will be given a pamphlet on A Secret Safe Place For Newborns Program promises, counseling services available, and her right to change her mind and the limitations on that right.

The Emergency Room admissions clerk will give the infant a number or a name.

A bracelet with the name or number will be put on the infant.

The mother will be given a bracelet with the name or number.

The Emergency Room physician will evaluate the infant.

The pediatrician on call will be notified in order to admit the infant.

Emergency Room staff will notify the nurse manager/supervisor that an infant has been left.

The supervisor/nurse manager will notify the hospital social worker/case manager on call.

The social worker will notify the Child Protective Services of the Department of Human Resources (Alabama's Social Services Agency).

The infant will be admitted to the nursery for routine newborn care. If unwell, the infant will be admitted to the special care nursery or Pediatric Intensive Care Unit.

The infant will be discharged to the custody of the Department of Human Resources when the pediatrician deems appropriate.

The infant will receive post-hospital care if requested by the Dept. of Human Resources.

### **The Role Of The Department Of Human Resources**

The Department of Human Resources with the assistance of the District Attorney's Office should initiate an investigation to determine the status of the child as A Secret Safe Place For Newborn child and rule out kidnapping. During this process, the Department of Human Resources communicates with the District Attorney's Office and local law enforcement as necessary. Appropriate information – i.e.: the state of the infant's health – should be released to the media only by the Department of Human Resources or the District Attorney's Office and only following these agency's media guidelines.

Discharge of the infant from the hospital is made to the Department of Human Resources and the department becomes responsible for transportation and care of the child. Foster placement and adoption are arranged.

It is news when a newborn is brought to A Secret Safe Place For Newborns location. Announcement of this event helps to publicize the availability of the program to other mothers in crisis or friends who could advise them. However, the announcement of a newborn being brought to A Secret Safe Place for Newborns and the release of information about the event and the newborn must be handled carefully so that the mother's anonymity is not compromised. In Mobile County, Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations inform the Department of Human Resources and the District Attorney's Office when a newborn is received. The District Attorney's Office releases information to the media that is limited to the fact that the newborn was received and initial information about its health. Media inquires about the newborn are referred to the Department of Human Resources media office.

## ***Letter/Questionnaire to Mother From Department Of Human Resources***

Date

Dear Concerned Mother:

By placing your baby safely at this hospital, you have taken the first step to making sure that your baby is safe and secure. In making this decision, you were acknowledging your crisis and your inability to provide the care necessary for you child for whatever reason. If, after taking this step, you feel it was not the right choice, you have the opportunity to contact us at the Department of Human Resources within 30 days to reconsider your decision. You may contact Hank Jordan, assistant director for child welfare (450-9150), Angela Tanveer, foster care division manager (450-9125) or Erin Wheeler, Mobile County Department of Human Resources director (415-3508). Identify yourself as the mother of the baby, the hospital and the date the baby was left. Your situation will be assessed with you and the necessary steps towards possible reunification will be considered. If we have not heard from you within 30 days, the Department of Human Resources will begin the legal process through the court for your child to have a permanent home with adoptive parents.

If you continue to believe that adoption is the best plan for your child, you can help us in planning for your child's future by providing background and medical information. This is best done in person and a confidential appointment can be arranged by you calling one of us. If you are not willing to have personal contact with us, we ask that you provide the information on the enclosed form and return it to us in the stamped self-addressed envelope. We appreciate your time and the opportunity to join you in securing a safe place for your newborn, and the best possible future. If we can assist you in any other way, please call us.

Sincerely,  
Erin Wheeler  
Director

Enclosed form:

Medical history questionnaire/return envelope  
Counseling, Medical, and Financial assistance available in your area

## Confidential Questionnaire for Secret Safe Place

To help us care for your baby we would like you to complete the questionnaire below. Any information obtained will be confidential and will be used only to help us care for your baby.

1. To which hospital did you bring your baby? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the gender of your baby? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What was the date and time of your baby's birth? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What date and time did you place your baby at the hospital? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How many minutes did it take the baby to cry after birth? \_\_\_\_\_
6. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is your race? \_\_\_\_\_ hair color \_\_\_\_\_ eye color \_\_\_\_\_ ht. \_\_\_\_\_ wt. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Race of the baby's father? \_\_\_\_\_ hair color \_\_\_\_\_ eye color \_\_\_\_\_ ht. \_\_\_\_\_ wt. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Did you go to the doctor during your pregnancy? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, how many times? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Did you smoke during your pregnancy? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, how many cigarettes did you smoke a day? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Did you smoke crack during your pregnancy? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, how many times a day? \_\_\_\_\_
12. Did you drink alcohol during your pregnancy? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, what did you drink? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Did you take drugs during your pregnancy? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, what were they? \_\_\_\_\_  
Please list drugs that you bought in a store: \_\_\_\_\_
14. If you can, please tell us why you brought your baby to the hospital : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. Please check any illnesses that pertain to you, a family member or the baby's father.

Illness	Relationship to your baby	Age of onset
Cancer (please list type)		
Tuberculosis (TB)		
Epilepsy		
Heart disease		
Mental illness (what type)		
Emotional problems		
High Blood Pressure		
Diabetes		
Kidney Problems		
Sexually Transmitted Disease		
HIV or AIDS		
Hearing or Vision problems		
Sickle Cell Disease		
Asthma		
Allergies to food or medicine (please list)		

If you would like to tell us anything else, please use the back of this page.

Return to Mobile County Department of Human Resources: P.O. Box 1906, Mobile, AL 36633-1906

## **Department of Human Resources Protocol for A Secret Safe Place For Newborn Babies\***

1. The mother delivers the child to the hospital emergency room. The mother is given a packet of information by emergency room staff (each hospital has packets and should notify their contact at the Department Human Resources if more are needed).
2. The hospital calls the Department of Human Resources intake office during the day or After Hours Child Protection Services (CPS) worker in the evening to inform the agency that a baby has been dropped off and the condition of the baby.
3. If the baby is dropped off after work hours, CPS will contact the on-call supervisor and then proceed to the hospital to see the infant and assess the immediate situation. The supervisor will contact Mobile County District Attorney John Tyson, Jr. and CPS Division Manager Beth Nelson. Ms. Nelson will contact Foster Care Division Manager Angela Tanveer. If the hospital discharges the baby that night, the CPS worker will place the baby in an emergency foster home for safe keeping. The CPS after hours worker will notify intake by 8:30 AM of the next business day.
4. If the baby is dropped off during working hours, the hospital will call the Mobile County Department of Human Resources Intake Line. Intake will notify Ms. Nelson, who will notify the District Attorney, Assistant Director of Child Welfare Hank Jordan and Ms. Tanveer. Intake will complete A Secret Safe Place For Newborns Referral form and hand-deliver it to Ms. Nelson. Ms. Nelson will deliver the form to Ms. Tanveer who will assign it to the adoption unit. Adoption Supervisor Catherine Teal will assign an adoption worker to immediately go to the hospital to and assess the situation.
5. The adoption worker will file the petition for custody on the same day as s/he receives the case. The adoption worker will initiate a search for an appropriate legal risk placement within the state and local resources. If the call comes during business hours and the child can be released, the adoption worker will place the child in either an emergency foster home or approved legal risk adoptive placement. If the child cannot be released, the adoption worker will still file the petition and find placement once the hospital clears the child for release. If the child cannot be released, it is imperative that the adoption worker obtain temporary custody immediately so the hospital may be given permission to provide medical treatment.
6. The adoption worker will file for permanent custody or Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) at the Merit Hearing (approximately 30 days after obtaining temporary custody).
7. The judge will set a TPR hearing (approximately 60 days).
8. Juvenile Court will advertise the TPR proceedings in the Legal Notice Section of the Mobile Register for four consecutive weeks.
9. There is a 30-day waiting period after the advertising time period for the parents/interested parties to respond to the legal notice.
10. If no response is received from the advertisement, a TPR hearing is held.
11. A formal permanent custody order is issued by Juvenile Court (at least one month from TPR hearing).
12. Adoption process begins after Dept. of Human Resources secures permanent custody.

*\*Note: This protocol covers the procedure for A Secret Safe Place For Newborns. If during the initial assessment, it is determined that the baby was abused, neglected and therefore is not a Secret Safe Place For Newborns baby, the adoption worker will not complete the protocol. The adoption worker will write up a child abuse/neglect form and the case will be forwarded to CPS and the District Attorney's Office for further investigation.*

## **How Law Enforcement Agencies Can Help**

Because of their constant contacts with citizens, law enforcement officers can help make people aware of A Secret Safe Place For Newborns Program. Information on the program was provided to the management of all law enforcement agencies in Mobile County. Literature on the program can be made available through police stations. Most important, individual officers can make sure those who could benefit from the program are aware of it by explaining it to the people they meet on a daily basis. A Secret Safe Place For Newborns information should be included in outreach presentations by law enforcement agencies.

Law enforcement officers could also provide transportation to A Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations for mothers and their newborns. It is important for law enforcement officers to understand the conditions of the promise of anonymity and the limited protection from prosecution for abandonment offered to mothers. An effective way to communicate the program to law enforcement officers is to make brief presentations at their shift changes.

In areas where hospitals do not provide enough accessibility, law enforcement offices can be designated A Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations. Fire stations could also be designated A Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations. When police stations and fire stations are used, it is imperative that uniformed police officers or uniformed firemen trained in the procedure for dealing with the mother and initiating care for the infant receive the infants.

## **Communications – Key to Saving Lives**

The more people who know about A Secret Safe Place For Newborns Program the more likely mothers in crisis will take advantage of it.

Information about the problem of newborn abandonment and violence is your best ally in enlisting help launching and maintaining the program. The magnitude of the problem of newborn abandonment and violence is a surprise to most people. The Mobile County District Attorney's Office gathers facts about the problem and publishes them on its web site ([www.mobile-da.org](http://www.mobile-da.org)). While detailed information on the problem on a national basis is not easily found, the following information is available:

- The United States Department of Health and Human Services reported over 30,000 babies were abandoned in the United States in 1998.
- The United States Department of Health and Human Services reported 105 babies abandoned in public places in 1998.
- 267 babies (under the age of one year) were known to be murdered in 1998; 468 were known to be murdered in 1999. According to federal statistics, their parents or close caregivers were the murderers. No separate statistics are kept for newborn murder.
- Neglect rates for infants and toddlers ages 0-3 years were the highest for all children, according to 1998 and 1999 statistics. They were 9.7 (1998) and 13.9 (1999) per thousand in the population.

A Secret Safe Place For Newborns web site publishes media reports on newborn abandonment and violence. Information from these reports often helps people recognize the problem and motivates them to participate in providing this solution.

Review of media reports during contacts with organizations that could participate in the program, and with the media can help spur local involvement. Most people are unaware of the extent of the problem. The statistics also help generate media coverage.

Reaching the people who make the decisions that save lives – the mothers in crisis – requires a continuous effort as young women reach childbearing age. It is vital to establish a **yearly** communications program that reaches these women and the people who may influence them. Communications programs that utilize several different communications techniques simultaneously are usually the most successful. The techniques available to A Secret Safe Place For Newborns include publicity, public service announcements, speaker's bureau and posters.

## **Publicity**

One of the most important ingredients in the success of A Secret Safe Place For Newborns in Mobile County was the involvement of WPMI-TV. The initial idea for the program was suggested when former WPMI reporter Jodi Brooks asked Mobile County District Attorney John Tyson, Jr. if mothers who turned over unharmed newborns could be offered protection from prosecution for abandonment. Ms. Brooks and WPMI provided extensive publicity when the program was announced and as newborns were brought to A Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations. The Mobile County District Attorney's Office meets its obligation to provide information on the program to all news media through news releases and interviews. All local media is informed by the District Attorney's Office when A Secret Safe Place For Newborns baby is received.

It is recommended that news releases on the announcement of the program, addition of hospitals and other A Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations and arrival of Secret Safe Place For Newborns babies be made to all the local media. Interviews can be provided to media that take a special interest in the program. Subjects for interviews include: how the crime prevention aspects of the Secret Safe Place For Newborns Program fits with the mission of the local District Attorney's Office; the training of hospital and other volunteers; what it is like for a nurse who receives a child.

## **Publicity Opportunities**

Publicity for A Secret Safe Place For Newborns can be generated through announcement of these events:

- Newborn brought to a Secret Safe Place For Newborns location.
- New Secret Safe Place For Newborns location designated.
- Recognition of A Secret Safe Place For Newborns volunteers.
- Invitations to news media to cover speeches about the problem of infant abandonment and violence and A Secret Safe Place For Newborns to civic groups and other organizations.
- New legislation.
- Establishment of new program.
- Newborns discovered abandoned, injured or killed.

## **Sample News Release**

For release: Immediately

Contact: (your name and phone number)

### **(Jurisdiction) District Attorney's Office Authorizes Program to Protect Newborns**

The (jurisdiction) District Attorney's Office has authorized a program called A Secret Safe Place For Newborns in an effort to prevent the crime of newborn abandonment and violence.

The program provides an alternative for mothers in crisis who keep their pregnancy secret or for some other reason can't cope with their newborns. These mothers may bring their newborns to a designated Secret Safe Place For Newborns location and turn them over to personnel at these locations without revealing their identify and with assurance that the newborn will receive medical care, foster home care and adoption services.

The program became available when (jurisdiction) District Attorney (name) said he/she would not prosecute mothers who brought their newborns unharmed to a designated Secret Safe Place For Newborns location within 72 hours of the infant's birth. The District Attorney pointed out that all mothers are responsible for the safety and welfare of their children and those mothers who abandon or harm newborns will be prosecuted.

"We have authorized A Secret Safe Place For Newborns Program in (jurisdiction) because it can save lives," (name) said. "Although not widely recognized, newborn abandonment and violence is a serious problem in our nation. Prior to A Secret Safe Place For Newborns only the threat of prosecution for abandonment or violence protected newborns and prosecution is too late because it takes place after the baby has been placed at risk or injured. A Secret Safe Place For Newborns provides an alternative that can prevent the crimes of infant abandonment and violence. It can save the lives of newborns and the futures of their mothers."

A Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations in the (jurisdiction) are at the emergency rooms at the following hospitals: (locations). Newborns must be turned over to personnel in the emergency rooms. Mothers will be allowed to remain anonymous. Emergency room personnel will request that the mother voluntarily provide significant health information about her family and the father's family.

(Name) said that the infant will receive a medical examination and any required medical attention. The child will become the ward of the Department of Human Resources.

"Giving up the newborn is not an irreversible decision," (name) said. "The mother may change her mind within (time period) and reclaim her infant by contacting the Department of Human Resources. Mothers may also ask for counseling and other social services. We want to do everything we can to help the mother and protect the newborn."

Information about A Secret Safe Place for Newborns program is available at (your web site or) [www.mobile-da.org](http://www.mobile-da.org) or by calling: (local phone number).

## Use Of A Secret Safe Place For Newborns Logo/Theme

A Secret Safe Place For Newborns name, logo and theme line were developed to provide quick identification of A Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations and materials. The baby footprint instantly communicates the message that the program is for infants. The name announces that it is "secret" and "safe"—two major reasons for mothers in crisis to use it. The theme demonstrates that it offers benefits for mothers in crisis and their infants. As in any materials used in marketing, it is important to use the name, logo and theme line as they are designed so they become quickly recognizable to the public. These art elements can be downloaded from the Secret Safe Place For Newborns web site ([www.mobile-da.org](http://www.mobile-da.org)) and may be used by any local A Secret Safe Place For Newborns program that offers the standard promises to mothers presented in this manual.

The materials were professionally designed. They are available without cost to any District Attorney's Office that will agree to offer the Secret Safe Place For Newborns Program with the promises to mothers presented in this manual. By completing the following form, District Attorneys can receive authorization to use these materials to promote A Secret Safe Place For Newborns Program in their jurisdictions. Mobile County District Attorney staff members and A Secret Safe Place For Newborns volunteers in Mobile are available to share their experiences. New information about infant abandonment and violence received by the Mobile County District Attorney's Office from A Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations throughout the United States will also be shared with participating District Attorneys. Please complete the form on the web site or fax this completed form to Kristine Schaffer of the Mobile County District Attorney's Office at 251-574-3311.

## Authorization Form To Use A Secret Safe Place Name, Materials

District Attorney's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Jurisdiction: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes. We would like to use A Secret Safe Place For Newborns name, logo, theme line and other materials in our effort to help mothers in crisis and their newborns. We will provide the basic promises to mothers and newborns of:

- Anonymity for mother.
- No prosecution of mother for abandonment.
- Right of mother to change her mind about giving up her infant within specified time.
- Health exam for newborn.
- Healthcare for newborn.
- Foster home for newborn.
- Adoption services for newborn.
- Option of voluntary counseling for mother.

## Literature

A Secret Safe Place For Newborns literature is designed so it emphasizes the benefits to mothers in crisis and their infants. It is prepared at the local level so it can feature local A Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations. One of the most effective ways to offer the literature is to say that it is available to anyone and that individuals are encouraged to pass the literature along to friends. Suggested copy for literature is provided.

### *Copy For A Secret Safe Place For Newborns Literature*

*Do You Need A Place That Is  
Safe For You?  
Safe For Your Baby?*

*Have you kept your pregnancy a secret? Are you unable to cope with your newborn?*

*A Secret Safe Place For Newborns can help. You may give up your unharmed newborn to personnel at these Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations within 72 hours of birth without identifying yourself. Your baby will receive medical care and be placed for adoption.*

*Secret Safe Place For Newborns provides these promises for mothers in crisis:*

- No identification of mother*
- No prosecution of mother for abandonment*
- Right of mother to change her mind about giving up her infant within (time period)*

*Secret Safe Place For Newborns provides these benefits for their newborns:*

- Health exam for newborn*
- Healthcare for newborn*
- Foster home for newborn*
- Adoption for newborn*

#### *Requirements*

- Newborns must be brought unharmed to a designated Secret Safe Place For Newborns location within (time period) of birth for these promises to apply.*

*Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations in the (jurisdiction) are at:*

-

**Your Local Experience Can Help With National Problem**

Information about the problem of newborn abandonment and violence is scarce. As more information becomes available additional solutions to the problem may be found. The Mobile County District Attorney’s Office is attempting to collect this information. In addition, this Office is working to call attention to the problem and the alternative offered by A Secret Safe Place For Newborns by announcing to the national media when infants are brought to A Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations. A Secret Safe Place For Newborns babies can be reported electronically by using the form on the Safe Place For Newborns web site ([www.mobile-da.org](http://www.mobile-da.org)) or by faxing this form to Kristine Schaffer of the Mobile County District Attorney’s Office at 251-574-3311.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Your community: \_\_\_\_\_

Your state: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Zip code: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of local District Attorney: \_\_\_\_\_

Jurisdiction: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Condition of the newborn: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Posters

A Secret Safe Place For Newborns posters can be used in many places. They can be displayed at schools, churches, Boys and Girls Clubs or anywhere young people congregate. Because posters displayed continuously may lose their impact, it is suggested that posters be used for short intervals each year. An example would be to put posters in schools each year for two weeks after presentations about A Secret Safe Place For Newborns are made. The baby footprint in A Secret Safe Place For Newborns logo catches attention. The message is brief and distinct. Posters can be printed locally. Suggested information for the posters is provided.

### *Suggested Copy For A Secret Safe Place For Newborns Posters*

*Save A Baby's Life*

*Unable to cope with your newborn? You may give up your unharmed newborn to personnel at these Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations within (time period) of birth without identifying yourself. Your baby will receive medical care and be placed for adoption.*

*Locations*

*Secret Safe Place For Newborns logo  
Safe For Newborns  
Safe For Mothers*

*local phone number  
www.mobile-da.org (or local web site)*

## Public Service Announcements

Broadcast media – radio and television – must run a certain amount of public service announcements as part of their qualification for their FCC license. Usually stations have one individual with the responsibility for these announcements. Identify this individual, contact him or her, explain the program and ask for advice on developing a public service announcement. This involves the broadcaster in the process and can result in the station preparing the public service announcement from basic information about A Secret Safe Place For Newborns. Furnish the station with the promises to mothers and their newborns and A Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations. Television stations are always on the lookout for good visuals. A Secret Safe Place For Newborns offers these opportunities with visuals such as nurses accepting a newborn at a hospital emergency room. This can be done without identifying the newborn. Logo identification is important to building a consistent reputation for A Secret Safe Place For Newborns. Provide television stations with A Secret Safe Place For Newborns logo and theme line for them to use in public service announcements. Radio stations preparing public service announcements should be asked to use the correct A Secret Safe Place For Newborns name and the theme line.

## Speakers Bureau

Public speaking opportunities provide a way to reach many people who can carry the message of A Secret Safe Place For Newborns to many other people. Often local Chambers of Commerce publish the names and contacts for local civic clubs and other organizations. If this information hasn't been published, it can be gathered by calling local contacts for these groups and asking for the names of their program chair people. Program chair

people are often looking for interesting speakers for their groups. The best approach is to write them offering a speaker and then follow up with a telephone call.

### **Sample Letter Offering Speaker**

*Dear Program Chairperson:*

*The problem of infant abandonment and violence is an American tragedy. Many infants are abandoned by their mothers under unsafe conditions each year. Some are sick. Some are injured. Some mothers murder their newborns. Mothers involved in these incidents are usually in crisis – they have kept their pregnancy a secret or they are unable to cope with their newborn.*

*The traditional way to try to prevent these tragedies has been the threat of prosecution. Now a new solution – that can prevent these crimes before they take place – is available in our community. It is called A Secret Safe Place For Newborns and it provides a safe place for mothers in crisis and their newborns.*

*(Name) of the District Attorney's Office is available to explain how A Secret Safe Place For Newborns can save lives in our community. (He or she) will also review the promises A Secret Safe Place For Newborns makes to mothers and the requirements of mothers under our laws.*

*I'll call you to arrange an opportunity for (name) to be available to speak to your group.*

*Sincerely,*

\_\_\_\_\_

### **Faith Community Visits**

Faith communities can help spread the word about A Secret Safe Place For Newborns. Opportunities to present to faith community groups can be arranged by contacting the clergy. It is helpful to explain that the objective of speaking to the group is to make as many people as possible aware of the problem of infant abandonment and violence and this alternative so they can tell others who might be in need.

### **Yearly School Visits**

Yearly school visits are probably the most important technique for communicating about A Secret Safe Place For Newborns. School administrators can help select student groups to select. Some suggestions are entire grades such as ninth and tenth, sex education classes, physical education classes. When making arrangements to address students, it is important to stress the value of talking with student groups each year. Through yearly addresses new young people will be reached and young people who have already heard about A Secret Safe Place For Newborns will be reminded. It is important to make the point that while most individuals will never need A Secret Safe Place For Newborns they may have a friend or acquaintance that they can tell about it. District Attorney personnel make excellent presenters to student groups because they have the authority to offer the

help of A Secret Safe Place For Newborns and stress the responsibilities parents have under the law.

School guidance counselors should receive initial briefings on A Secret Safe Place For Newborns and yearly updates. Literature on the promises offered to mothers and the locations should be provided to them so they can make it available to students. Guidance counselors can point out to students that being aware of the program and its locations can equip students to help a fellow student in a crisis through a reference to A Secret Safe Place For Newborns location.

### **Telephone Inquiries**

In Mobile County, Helpline telephone volunteers have been trained to identify callers who may be in need of A Secret Safe Place For Newborns. They explain the promises to mothers and provide directions to A Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations. They help mothers in crisis know they are at a safe place by describing A Secret Safe Place For Newborns signs. Similar telephone assistance organizations in your community can provide information to callers about your A Secret Safe Place For Newborns Program and locations.

### **Fund Raising**

Establishing A Secret Safe Place For Newborns Program is not expensive. In Mobile County, it was done with the help of District Attorney personnel, Department of Human Resources staff and volunteers and the in-kind contribution of \$75,000 in public service announcements from WPML-TV Station Manager Sharon Maloney. Funds to meet some expenses were provided by the District Attorney's Office as part of their crime prevention effort. A grant from the Innovations in American Government Awards Program helped with the development of materials to make the program available through District Attorneys across the nation. Raising funds for incidental expenses can be achieved by establishing a nonprofit corporation and presenting A Secret Safe Place For Newborns concept to citizens and foundations that look for ways to help people in need. Those with an interest in crime prevention are the best candidates. The Mobile County District Attorney's Office is currently asking attorneys and business people in the Mobile area to consider helping to support the program with financial contributions.

## **Letter To Potential Contributors**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

*Preventing crime is an important step in protecting the citizens of (jurisdiction). The (jurisdiction) District Attorney's Office is working to help prevent one of the most horrific of crimes – abandonment, injury or murder of a newborn by its mother – through A Secret Safe Place For Newborns Program.*

*Although difficult to comprehend, abandonment, injury and murder of newborns by mothers who are in crisis because they have kept their pregnancy a secret or cannot cope with their child happens frequently. In the past, fear of prosecution has been the only deterrent. Prosecution is too late.*

*Now the (jurisdiction) District Attorney's Office is supporting a new approach that prevents the crime from happening. Called A Secret Safe Place For Newborns, it provides places where mothers in crisis can bring their newborns and turn them over to the Department of Human Resources for foster care and eventual adoption. Medical examinations and care are provided for the newborns. The mothers are offered counseling and an opportunity to change their mind about giving up their babies. When the newborn is brought to a designated A Secret Safe Place For Newborns within (time period) of birth, unharmed, the mother will not be prosecuted for abandonment and she will be allowed to remain anonymous if she wishes.*

*We need your help providing this life saving alternative. A Secret Safe Place For Newborns of (jurisdiction) has been qualified as a tax-exempt corporation. Donations will be used to offset expenses such as printing information about the program, transportation of volunteers who present the program at our schools and other expenses.*

*I'll call you within the next week to personally ask for your help.*

*Sincerely,*

*(signature)*

## **Media Coverage of Newborn Abandonment/Violence**

It can be helpful to people establishing A Secret Safe Place For Newborns locations to have access to media coverage of newborn abandonment and violence. Media coverage of these subjects is published on the Secret Safe Place For Newborns web site ([www.mobile-da.org](http://www.mobile-da.org)).