



PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Friday, May 20, 2016

May is National Foster Care Awareness Month

Maryland's Human Services Agency Celebrates by Fostering Faith, Hope and Love

Baltimore City, Baltimore, Howard, Montgomery & Prince Georges Counties (May 20, 2016)

State child welfare professionals are implementing family centered focus strategies to enhance the child welfare service delivery as it relates to Maryland's Foster Care Program. Children placed in the care of the state are faring better because of the type of services they are receiving. As a result of abuse and neglect, children must be removed from their homes. In Maryland, we are fortunate to have caring citizens who make a difference in young lives by welcoming them into their hearts, lives and home making them feel safe and protected. "It's the quality of care that is making the real difference in the lives of these children," said Governor Hogan.

May is Foster Care Awareness month. It is a time to reflect on the needs of our children and to ensure that they have a safe place to call home. In Maryland, we are taking time out to recognize some of the outstanding citizens who are providing safety and wellbeing during such a critical time in their lives. "When a child needs protection, we intervene with a plan of safety and ongoing security," said DHR Secretary Sam Malhotra. "Our foster homes provide a safe nurturing environment for children in need of stability during a traumatic time."

The DHR child welfare professionals are taking time to recognize those unsung heroes who step up in defense of children and have identified foster parents from around the state who has gone beyond answering the call for help.

On Sunday May 22, 2016 **Baltimore City** will honor Foster Parents **Georgi and Nina Funderburke** for their 2 years of service to the BCDSS foster care program. This family has gone the extra mile to keep a sibling group together. This is remarkable because the children are 16 months, two, three and six years old. The family has recently purchased a home where the children will have plenty of room to grow and enjoy their lives as growing children. The couple is very supportive of the children and love them all.

The Maryland Department of Human Resources protects the State's vulnerable children and adults and provides temporary economic assistance. DHR strengthens Maryland families and improves communities through its 24 Departments of Social Services, community partnerships and its four administrations: the Social Services Administration, Family Investment Administration and Child Support Enforcement Administration.

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- Boyd k. Rutherford , Lt. Governor
- Sam Malhotra, Secretary

Baltimore City will also recognize Foster Parents **Christopher Heacock and Karen Burks** For 2 years of Service. The family was able to take a Safe Haven baby when she entered care. The family was extremely supportive of taking on a newborn with no background information. They were able to adopt her on 2/17/16 and have been gracious enough to take on another child and again have accepted him into their hearts. If things go as planned their second child will become a permanent member of the family next year.

Also, in **Baltimore City, Emma & Kenneth Gaines** have been foster parents for over 11 years. They are always willing to accept children into their home. They have taken in many children over the years and continue to enhance their skills as foster parents to meet the needs of the children in a positive fashion. They attend various trainings and other related programs. They make sure the children keep in close contact with their families by transporting them to visits when necessary. They are committed to doing what's in the best interest of the children.

In **Baltimore County, LaTasha and Maurice Minter** over the last two years have cared for a (now) 3 ½ year old girl with multiple issues. The child had bounced around due to her difficult behaviors, even at such a young age. The Minters have been working to address. Many of her issues and their ability to work with children with intense needs, the Minters have demonstrated compassion and respect toward the birth families of the children in their home. When the child left their home after almost 2 years, they continued to offer support to the birth mother. Mr. and Mrs. Minter capture the qualities that we hope for in foster parents, which is why we have nominated them as Foster Parents of the Year.

The **Howard County DSS** recognizes **Nicole "Nikki" Corba** for her dedication since July, 2008. Since that time, Ms. Corba has had several children (some teens) placed with her, including a sibling set of two boys. Her commitment to her foster children instilled hope by going above and beyond to provide a loving and stimulating environment for them. One of the most compelling reasons for the nomination is her unconditional love for a foster child that she had in her home from July, 2014 until January, 2016. The child entered foster care due to severe burns and was hospitalized for an extended period of time, Ms. Corba visited him every day in the hospital and learned how to take care of his burns. She actively pursued becoming his foster parent because she knew him from the school where she teaches and wanted him to be with someone that he already knew and trusted. In the final analysis, Ms. Corba provided invaluable love and instilled hope for a boy who had been through extreme trauma. She is a true hero.

The local department in **Montgomery County** will honor **Jennifer and Benjamin Milton** who have been licensed treatment foster parents for over 7 years specializing in the care of medically fragile infant and toddlers. They have provided numerous children in the foster care system with a safe and nurturing environment on a variety of basis including emergent, respite, and long term

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placements. They exemplify unconditional love and care; and have treated all of their foster children as their "own". The Milton family has been particularly instrumental in helping heal infants who have endured the most egregious cases of physical, emotional and sexual abuse. The Miltons have advocated for the children placed with them ensuring all services and supports are put in place to the specific needs of a child to support the permanency plan. They state that they are grateful that they provide a "safe home" for a child in need.

Prince Georges County Foster Parents Todd Bailey and Lamont Lomax have been licensed since January 2015 and have participated in at least two panels at the department. They attend trainings as a family because they are committed to their role as foster parents. They always work towards permanency goals for the youth placed in their home that's what makes them such awesome advocates. They are loving, caring, invested and committed to the youth placed our programs. They remain hopeful that there is good in all youth.

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