



PRESS RELEASE

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Agencies come together to save newborn babies

Kansas City-area police departments, fire departments, health departments, hospitals and social service agencies are banding together to protect newborn babies.

These agencies have worked together to develop a metro-wide Safe Havens for Newborns community awareness campaign. They are launching the bi-state campaign with a press conference at 10 a.m. Thursday, Sept. 16, in the parking lot west of Ward Parkway Center at 87th Street and State Line Road. (In the event of rain, the press conference will take place inside the mall on the Ward Parkway [east] side near the Old Navy store.) Featured speakers at the event will include Kansas City Police Chief James Corwin, Leawood Fire Chief Ben Florance, and Florida's Safe Haven for Newborns founder Nick Silverio.

Both Missouri and Kansas have passed laws designed to protect newborn children from injury and death caused by abandonment. Missouri's law passed in 2002, and Kansas' law passed in 2006. But little has been done to educate the public about the laws or notify parents about where they can safely hand over their baby without fear of prosecution. As a result of the Safe Havens initiative, there are now Safe Havens signs available to all Safe Haven agencies in the Kansas City area to post near each building's entrance.

In Missouri, infants 5 days old or younger can be handed over to an employee at a hospital, police station, fire station or ambulance station. In Kansas, infants 45 days old or younger can be handed to an employee at a fire station, hospital, or city or county health department. The law is intended to protect newborn babies from being abandoned or harmed by their unprepared parents.

Organizers of the Safe Haven initiative believe it could prevent cases like that of a 25-year-old Overland Park woman who gave birth to a baby girl in her parents' basement on May 31, 2009. She was accused of killing the newborn by asphyxiation and then putting the baby's body in a refrigerator. She was convicted of second-degree murder in April 2010. Her parents' home was three blocks from a fire station, where she could safely have handed over the baby and faced no legal repercussions.

The press conference will feature 148 pink and blue balloons representing every life saved by the Safe Haven for Newborns program launched by Nick Silverio in Florida. Silverio has been integral to helping the Kansas City metro area replicate the program. Press conference attendees will be encouraged to take a balloon or two with them to remind them throughout the day of the difference the Safe Havens program can make.

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