**Expedited Appeals in Termination of Parental Rights Cases**

Linda A. Szymanski, Esq., Director of Legal Research, NCJJ

As of the end of 2004, all jurisdictions except Massachusetts, South Carolina, Vermont, and Wyoming had procedures under statute and/or court rule providing for an expedited appeal in termination of parental rights cases. Such expedited appeals have priority over all other business of the appeals court. Some states use the term accelerated review or accelerated appeal instead of expedited appeal.

Currently, expedited appeals in termination of parental rights cases can occur under two sets of procedures involving children: under statutory termination of parental rights procedures and as part of child custody proceedings under the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act.

More than half of the jurisdictions have currently enacted some version of the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act. One of the Act’s purposes is to discourage continuing controversies over child custody in the interest of greater stability of home environment and of secure family relationships for the child.

The following 23 jurisdictions have expedited appeals for termination of parental rights cases under both sets of procedures: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Nebraska, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia.

Effective May 3, 2004, Utah enacted legislation that created expedited appeals in termination of parental rights cases. Previously, such appeals had to be received within 30 days from the entry of the original order. The new legislation reduced this time to 15 days.

Under Michigan Appellate Rules, appeals in most civil actions must be taken within 21 days. However, an appeal in a termination of parental rights case must be taken within 14 days after the entry of the Family Court order.

Sixteen states have expedited appeals only under their termination of parental rights procedures: Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

However, under Wisconsin Rules of Appellate Procedure, expedited appeals are available only at the discretion of the appellate court.

In 2004, the New York Family Court Advisory and Rules Committee proposed such legislation to the Chief Administrative Judge of the state Courts, but it has not yet been adopted.

Delaware, Georgia, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, and Pennsylvania only expedite appeals in termination of parental rights cases under their state’s version of the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act.

In the New York version of the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act, such an appeal may be granted preference in the discretion of the court to which the appeal is taken.

The legislation described above recognizes the fact that the prompt achievement of permanent homes for children requires expeditious resolution of cases, not only at the trial level, but also at the appellate level.