

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND PHRASES

**Adoptee:** The minor child who is being adopted.

**Best Interest of the Child (BIC):** The Court considers a number of factors (as listed in the law) while making decisions regarding parental rights and responsibilities. The primary goal is to ensure the safety and well-being of the child.

**Birth Parent:** The birth/biological parent of a child.

**Child Care Vouchers:** Vouchers are funded by the federal Child Care Development Fund and state funds. The program is designed to help eligible families afford child care while caretakers are at work.

**Contested:** One or both of the parties involved in a legal case do not agree to the action (i.e. the adoption or guardianship of their natural child).

**Custodial Relationship:** The relationship between the child and an adult who has full or part parental rights and responsibilities over the child. This relationship can happen through: a DHHS placement; a Power of Attorney; a temporary, informal arrangement with a non-parent relative; or court action such as adoption or guardianship.

**Due Process:** A person's right to know what legal action is being taken against him or her, to hear the evidence, to confront witnesses, and to be heard.

**Expulsion:** A very serious punishment that forces the removal of a student from classes and does not allow the student to be on the school property. A student may be expelled for: being deliberately disobedient, disorderly and violent, having a gun or other weapon on school grounds, or for the possession, selling, giving away, or being under the influence of drugs. Students with special education plans have some protections when faced with expulsion.

**Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):** This federal law ensures that a child's school records are kept private. It also gives birth and adoptive parents the right to see and amend their child's school records.

**Final Decree:** A final decision made by a Court, which can usually be appealed.

**Grandfamilies:** Families headed by an extended family member: grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling or other relative, or friend of the family.

**Guardian:** The legal/permanent guardians of a child are normally the child's parents. However, sometimes another person becomes legal guardian in place of a child's parent. Legal guardians have most of the rights and responsibilities that a parent would have toward a child. They can request and accept medical treatment on a child's behalf, enroll the child in public school in the guardian's community, and provide for the general welfare of the child.

**Subsidized:** A guardianship subsidy, paid by DHHS from federal funds, is available for permanency guardians who have *special needs* children placed with directly from DHHS custody.

**Temporary:** Temporary guardians receive the same amount of rights and responsibilities concerning the child as a legal/permanent guardian does. However, these guardianships only last for up to 6 months.

**Guardian ad Litem (GAL):** A person appointed by the Court to “protect and promote the best interests” of a child. The GAL interviews the child, the parents, and others involved with the child. Then the GAL files a report with the Court, recommending what they believe to be in the child’s best interest.

**Indigent:** A person in such extreme poverty that he or she is lacking the necessities of life.

**Intervenor Status:** The Court may give this status to someone who has personal investment in a child protection, guardianship or adoption case. An intervenor has the same rights as other parties to the case.

**Kinship Care:** Grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, and other non-parent relatives who are raising children.

**Legal Stability:** Refers to a situation where the caregiver can fully provide for and protect the child long term.

**MaineCare:** (*formerly known as Medicaid*) MaineCare provides health insurance benefits to specific groups or categories of low-income people. Children qualify at higher income levels.

**Notary Public:** A person who can be a witness when you sign papers that have to be “sworn to” or “notarized” (i.e. an affidavit). When a court form calls for this, go to your “notary,” (a bank or law office, or the court clerk) to find a person who can watch you sign the form.

**Permanency Plan:** A plan created and told to the Court that states the long term plan for a child in foster care. DHHS presents this plan to the Court in a child protective case.

**Permanent and Irrevocable:** Refers to the length of the adoption relationship. Unlike a guardianship, an adoption cannot be terminated. It is considered permanent and irrevocable, because after the Court has finalized the adoption, it cannot be altered.

**Pro Se:** Representing yourself in Court without a lawyer.

**Rights and Responsibilities:** A Court will decide who has the “rights and responsibilities” of a child. These may include, but are not limited to, where the child will be living, under what conditions another parent may visit the child, and who is allowed to make any major decisions regarding the child’s life, such as their education, health, and religion.

**Termination of Parental Rights and Responsibilities (TPR):** To end a parent’s rights, a judge must decide that the child is in jeopardy and that the best interests of the child are being served. If the judge grants the TPR petition, the parent loses all parental legal rights and responsibilities.

**Surrogate Parent:** Someone who is acting in place of the birth or adoptive parent. This role becomes important in the special education context, if a parent or guardian cannot participate.

**Suspension:** A temporary prohibition from going to school and receiving education services. A child is usually suspended for: being deliberately disobedient, disorderly or violent, having a gun or other weapon on school grounds, or for the possession, selling, giving away, or being under the influence of drugs. Students with special education plans may have some additional procedural protections.

**Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF):** The TANF program provides cash assistance to low income children and/or families.