

# Cass County Courts



## CASS COUNTY COURTS HOLD 20<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY ADOPTION DAY CELEBRATION

**Cassopolis, Michigan, November 30, 2022** – The Cass County Circuit Court courtroom was full of smiling faces on Tuesday, November 22nd as court staff and community members gathered for the Cass County Courts’ 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Adoption Day Celebration. The event was sponsored by the Cass County Bar Association, Cass County CASA, and the Kotz Sangster law firm. This was the first in person Adoption Day Celebration held in the Cass County Courts since the pandemic. It was also the first adoption day celebration presided over by Chief Judge Carol Montavon Bealor.

“Adoption Day is a special day for me as I’ve seen the process of adoption from different angles – as an attorney for children and parents, as an adoptive parent – and now as a Judge finalizing a forever home for a child through adoption. Adoption Day is a wonderful reminder for our community of not only the need for adoption for children looking for their forever family, but also the joys and benefits of expanding our definition of family by being open to adoption,” said Chief Judge Bealor.

To mark the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Cass County Courts’ Adoption Day Celebration, Justin and Alexis Black, the authors of the book, “Redefining Normal: How Two Foster Kids Beat the Odds and Discovered Healing, Happiness and Love,” attended the event and spoke to those in attendance. Justin and Alexis both experienced growing up in foster care and shared an inspirational message about redefining the definition of family based on their experiences. Justin encouraged people to look at their expectations and what it truly means to have a family. Justin challenged people to consider that family is not about being the best version of yourself but about being with people who will lift you up when you are weak. Alexis spoke about meeting her adoptive parents at age 17 and asking them to adopt her on her 26<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her adoptive parents helped her redefine her definition of family and the formalization of their family through adoption helped her definition of family feel more permanent.

Foster parent, Heather Zile, also spoke to those present about the opportunity foster parents have to create a sense of belonging for children who have that need. Zile talked about a foster home providing safety, stability, and belonging for foster children through even simple things like letting a foster child call you “mom.” By providing a sense of safety and belonging, foster parents create a foundation for foster children to grow from.

According to a proclamation issued by Governor Whitmer establishing Tuesday, November 22, 2022, as adoption day in Michigan, there are currently approximately 10,000 children in Michigan living in foster care with an estimated 2,100 of these children having the goal of adoption and being legally ready to be adopted. During the 2022 fiscal year, approximately 1,600 children in Michigan were provided permanency through adoption. Adoption Day in Michigan was established in 2003 by the Michigan Supreme Court and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to celebrate adoption and to bring attention to the need for adoption for children waiting for their forever homes.

If you are interested in more information on adoption, you can contact the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) at 1-800-589-6273 or check out information on their website: <https://www.mare.org>.



Left to Right: Justin Black, Chief Judge Carol Montavon Bealor, and Alexis Black



Heather Zile speaking at adoption day.



Justin & Alexis Black speaking at Adoption Day.