

## Time for a Baby Bailout?

By Michael Piraino, CEO, National CASA Association

I have seen plenty of children enter foster care because the adults responsible for their well-being failed them. But in most cases, these parents aren't failures - they just don't have the resources to do right by their kids. The same might be said for Nadya Suleman.

In cases like this, children's advocates like to say the best interests of the children come first. But the parent and other family members still have legitimate interests. Rather than vilify the mom for a past decision, we should think about her in relationship to the kids.

These children did not ask to come into a world where their welfare is in question. They are at the center of a moral and ethical controversy of which they had no part. But, here they are. And we have a responsibility to them.

I really wrestle with the idea of those who advocate separating this family. Are they— and we— better off putting them in an overburdened child welfare system that is not necessarily equipped to guarantee a better outcome?

Better, perhaps, to have a structured, emergency plan centered on keeping this family together and helping them succeed. In essence, a baby bailout plan.

How might the plan work? It's hard to say exactly, but here are some ideas that might give the children the jump-start they deserve.

First, they need appropriate housing. There are still plenty of generous Americans who would contribute to make that possible. There might even be some banks holding appropriate properties who would be happy to cooperate. The house could even be put in trust for the kids.

Second, we get volunteers involved. Habitat for Humanity, for example, could fix up and expand the home for the babies.

Third is child care help. On this, we could make a deal with the state of California. Instead of spending \$320,000 or so a year on foster care for the babies, put less than a third of that into full-time in-home help. This would pay for a couple of professionals who could then coordinate added help from volunteers, from churches and the neighborhood.

This might give mom some breathing space. Anyone in a position like hers needs plenty of help to make a plan and stick to it. And that means everyone else should stop demonizing her and give her a chance - the chance to, as Dr. Phil said in one of his interviews with her, "make her decisions right."

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