



## Safe Babies, Strong Families, Healthy Communities The Safe Babies Court Teams Project

*For far too long the courts in Mississippi just applied a Band-Aid to the problems presented by abused and neglected babies. We didn't have the knowledge or tools to put together an effective approach. Now our small community has really come together to ensure babies are getting what they need to develop medically, socially, and cognitively.*

~Judge Michael McPhail, Forrest County Youth Court, Hattiesburg, MS

The Safe Babies Court Teams Project is a systems change initiative, spearheaded by ZERO TO THREE. It is focused on improving how the courts, child welfare agencies, and related child-serving organizations work together, share information, and expedite services for young children. In local communities in 12 states, Safe Babies Court Teams have collaborated to:

- **Protect babies** from further harm and address the damage already done.
- **Tackle the structural issues** in the child welfare system that prevent families from succeeding.

### Safe Babies Court Teams:

**Champion Children:** The Safe Babies Court Teams have worked with over 800 infants and toddlers across 12 sites. With each child we ensure they benefit from child-focused services to address medical problems and developmental delays, quality early learning experiences, and frequent family time.

**Encourage Parents:** Safe Babies Court Teams place a high priority on supporting birth parents in what we hope is a healing journey toward reunification with their young children. To date we have worked with more than 900 parents.

**Engage Communities:** Safe Babies Court Teams are led by judges who collaborate with child development specialists to create teams of community stakeholders. Together they provide services to abused and neglected infants and toddlers and their families so the children can reach safe, loving permanency swiftly. Safe Babies Court Teams are only as effective as the engagement level of the community leaders involved. When the right community leaders are at the table and are fully committed to addressing the needs of these young children, amazing things have happened.

Research about Safe Babies Court Teams demonstrates their effectiveness:

- 97% of the identified service needs of infants and toddlers served by the Safe Babies Court Teams had either been fully met or were in the process of being met.
- Children served by the Safe Babies Court Teams exited the foster care system approximately one year earlier than children in a matched comparison group and they are more likely to reach permanency with a member of their biological family.

- 99.05% of the infants and toddlers served were protected from further maltreatment.

*The Court Team model has revolutionized the way we do business in this courthouse. And I can't imagine ever doing it any other way. It is so valuable in helping me make the best decisions I possibly can and to know that the work that we're doing is backed up by the science of what's best for children. It's very comforting for someone who puts her name on the line and decides where a child will spend the night because that can be a life and death decision.*

~Judge Constance Cohen, Associate Juvenile Judge, Iowa Courts, District 5, (ret.)