Agreement reached in Gabriel Allred adoption case

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

NEWPORT, Ore. -- The Oregon Department of Human Services announced this evening that an agreement has been reached in the mediation between Gabriel Allred's paternal grandmother and his foster parents. Gabriel, a 2-year-old child born in Oregon who holds dual U.S.-Mexican citizenship, has been at the heart of a contested adoption between his biological family in Mexico and his foster family in Oregon. In brief, Sra. Martinez, Gabriel's paternal grandmother, will withdraw her request to adopt Gabriel. As a result, Gabriel will be freed for adoption by Steve and Angela Brandt, the foster parents who have raised Gabriel for the past 22 months. In return, the Brandts will commit to continued contact with Gabriel's biological family as well as other specific terms agreed to in the mediation settlement. "I was very pleased to see both parties come together to reach a decision that I believe ultimately will be in Gabriel's best interests," said Bryan Johnston, interim DHS assistant director for the Children, Adults and Families Division, who mediated the daylong session today in Newport. Johnston noted that he has asked the Oregon Department of Justice to take the legal steps necessary to give the mediated agreement full legal effect. "This agreement gives Gabriel the best of all worlds," said DHS Director Bruce Goldberg, M.D., who, along with Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski, had directed Johnston to seek common ground between the two families. "Gabriel will have the stability of remaining with the Brandts in a safe environment and will be able to grow up knowing his grandmother and extended family in Mexico." Oregon, which is a pioneer in mediated adoptions, brought Martinez and the Brandts together as the final step in a process that included two adoption committees and an administrative review of the committees' recommendations. "Typically an adoption process doesn't proceed to this final stage, but mediation is always an option when two families both hope to adopt a child, and particularly when grandparents or other biological family members want to remain part of a child's life," said Johnston. "What we have learned from this unique case is that we need more tools to deal with the increasingly complex world of open adoptions, extended families, multicultural families and geographically dispersed families." "This adoption decision drew a lot of attention because of the international aspect of the case," said Goldberg, "but in actuality it moved through each step of the normal adoption review process that serves as a guide for all adoptions. I support the efforts of the staff and volunteers who made this process work." Goldberg added that Oregon continues to need more families interested in providing permanent homes to children in the state's care. "While the process in this particular case gathered a lot of interest, the truth is that we successfully place three children each day in permanent adoptions," said Goldberg. "And, more importantly, right now several thousand children are waiting for permanent homes. Gabriel was fortunate to have two good families seeking to adopt him. I would hope to see more children receive the same attention." The mediation was requested by Johnston. Martinez was able to attend through the cooperation of the Mexico Consulate of Portland. She was supported in the process by a representative of the Consulate. Judge Robert Huckleberry of Lincoln County offered his courtroom and requested Judge Paul Lipscomb of Marion County to facilitate the session. Judge Lipscomb met with the parties Tuesday at the Toledo, Oregon, home of the Brandts, then convened the mediation session at the Lincoln County Courthouse Wednesday morning. By Wednesday evening, he had led the parties to a mutually acceptable resolution. "Gabriel Allred will have parents in Toledo, Oregon, and an extended family in San Jose Miahuatlan, Puebla, Mexico," said Johnston. "He will grow up loved and protected by many people. It is an excellent outcome." The details of the mediated agreement include: * Sra. Martinez, Gabriel's paternal grandmother, will withdraw her request to adopt Gabriel. * Steve and Angela Brandt, Gabriel's foster parents, will be allowed to proceed with the process to adopt Gabriel. * The Brandts will provide Gabriel with Spanish-language lessons to enable him to become fluent in both spoken and written Spanish. * An ongoing regular schedule of telephone calls and e-mails between Martinez and Gabriel will be established. * Martinez will have continued visitation rights to see Gabriel in Oregon.