



## Abandoned Newborn Babies

Infants' abandonment is a growing problem. Some die or suffer unnecessarily before they are discovered. Nationally, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the number of newborns found abandoned in public places jumped from 65 in 1991 to 108 in 1998.

Of these children, nearly one-third were found dead. According to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 32-34 infants were found abandoned each year between 1997-1999. Of these infants, almost 60% were abandoned in the first 24 hours of life. Experts suspect that these reported cases represent only a fraction of all infant deaths that result from abandonment.

The cruel, lonely deaths of innocent newborn babies are preventable. Last year the state of Texas enacted legislation in response to newborn abandonment. Twenty-four states, including Illinois, California, Florida and New York, are now considering legislation that provides protection from prosecution for parents who choose a responsible alternative to abandonment. Legislation will significantly reduce the risk that a newborn will be abandoned in a perilous environment that may result in death. It will protect parents who feel that they have no other option than abandonment and provide them with an alternative to compassionately deliver their newborn to a safe shelter.

Because of the magnitude of abandoned babies and their deaths, Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago supports the implementation of a program and/or legislation that:

- Rescues and protects newborn babies from abandonment, injury, or death.
- Allows the parent(s) to voluntarily and confidentially relinquish the custody of his/her newborn infant.
- Provides emergency care and shelter for every abandoned newborn.
- Provides reimbursement for the emergency medical care and other health care provided to this child prior to adoption.
- Provides appropriate placement for the child as soon as the child is medically ready for discharge.