

Autumn's Law prevents rapists from claiming 'parental rights'

COLUMBIA, S.C. -- With a bright-eyed little girl named Autumn and members of her family present, Gov. Mark Sanford held a ceremony August 22, 2005, to sign Autumn's Law that prevents rapists from claiming "parental rights" to a child conceived as a result of criminal sexual conduct.

Autumn's Law is named for the child who was conceived when her mother was raped at the age of 14. When Autumn's grandparents, Jimmy and Ginger Foisey of Sumter, attempted to adopt Autumn, the rapist threatened to claim parental and visiting rights unless they agreed to drop the criminal charges. The Foiseys refused and were forced to hire an attorney to fight the rapist in court. Ultimately Mr. and Mrs. Foisey adopted Autumn for the child's protection.

"We want to make sure that nothing like this happens to someone else," Mrs. Foisey told the governor during the ceremony in his office. Governor Sanford complimented the family for having the strength to overcome a tragic situation with positive efforts to create a better society.

The Foiseys had considered abortion but decided against it after Mr. Foisey heard former South Carolina Citizens for Life staff member, Aimee Green, debating a Planned Parenthood employee on an afternoon radio talk show. Mr. Foisey who was driving through Columbia at the time called the show and asked why his daughter should not have an abortion. Mrs. Green explained that the baby was not at fault and that abortion would not erase the rape, but would make it worse.



Governor Mark Sanford congratulates Jimmy and Ginger Foisey after signing Autumn's Law. Mr. Foisey holds Autumn as Holly Gatling of SCCL looks on. (Photo courtesy of Gov. Sanford' office.)

Seven months later, little Autumn was born. She celebrated her 5th birthday in September.

"No family who chooses to keep a child conceived in rape should be threatened with having to share parental rights with the rapist," said Holly Gatling, executive director of South Carolina Citizens for Life. "The idea that a 13-year-old rape victim, or any victim of violent crime, would be forced to interact with her attacker is unthinkable."

Ms. Gatling complimented the work of former staff member Lisa Harris Shafer for her tireless efforts lobbying the South Carolina General Assembly to pass Autumn's Law.

South Carolina Citizens for Life is the state affiliate of the National Right to Life Committee, the nation's largest single-issue pro-life organization with over 3,000 chapters nationwide. For more information contact SCCL at 803-252-5433 or sclife.org.