

NACC

National Association
of Counsel for Children

48TH NATIONAL CHILD WELFARE LAW CONFERENCE

**NACC
2025
CLEVE
LAND**



**CLEVELAND,
OHIO**

AUG 11-13, 2025

Pre-Conference Aug 10

**Hilton Cleveland
Downtown**

NACCchildlaw.org

Conference@
[NACCchildlaw.org](mailto:Conference@NACCchildlaw.org)

Catalysts for Change: Innovating Advocacy through Power Sharing and Transformational Leadership

THE CONFERENCE

The annual conference bring together professionals from child welfare law and intersecting fields and further NACC's mission by exchanging ideas, information, and collective efforts.

The theme of this year's conference is *Catalysts for Change: Innovating Advocacy through Power Sharing and Transformational Leadership*. This theme underscores the need to rethink traditional advocacy models, actively share power, and harness the creativity and resourcefulness of all involved in child welfare systems to drive lasting, meaningful practice and policy reform.

Conference sessions are designed for a national audience, including attorneys who represent children, parents, agencies, and kinship caregivers, as well as judges and multidisciplinary professionals working in child welfare. Sessions will expand attendees' understanding of the law, provide practical tools, and lend information and strategies for systems improvement.

WELCOME TO THE 48TH NATIONAL CHILD WELFARE LAW CONFERENCE



Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Welcome to Cleveland and the National Association of Counsel for Children's 48th National Child Welfare Law Conference!

We are thrilled to gather with advocates from across the country for three days of learning, community-building, and inspiration in the heart of Northeast Ohio. Thank you to our expert faculty, generous sponsors, and dedicated exhibitors who make this gathering possible.

This year's theme – *Catalysts for Change: Innovating Advocacy through Power Sharing and Transformational Leadership* – calls on each of us to reflect on how we lead, how we collaborate, and how we can reimagine systems of support for children and families. Transformational change requires bold ideas and shared action. It requires the humility to listen, the courage to challenge traditional power structures, and the creativity to co-design advocacy with young people, families, and colleagues from all disciplines.

We are proud that this year's program centers youth-led movements, lived expertise, culturally responsive practice, and new tools to elevate the legal profession. Whether you work in the courtroom, classroom, clinic, or capitol, this conference offers concrete strategies to advance justice, strengthen representation, and protect family integrity.

As always, **your practice is our purpose**. The NACC Board and staff are here to support your experience. Visit with us at the registration desk, connect with colleagues in the exhibit hall, and take time to recharge whenever you need to. We hope you'll enjoy all Cleveland has to offer – from the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame to Lake Erie sunsets.

Thank you for your work, your passion, and your leadership. Together, we are promoting excellence, building community, and advancing justice.

With appreciation,



Kim Dvorchak, JD
Chief Executive Officer



Dawne Mitchell, JD
Board President



CLEVELAND LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We respectfully acknowledge that the land on which we gather – in Cleveland, Ohio – is the ancestral homelands of the Erie, Shawnee, Lenape, Miami, Odawa, Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Haudenosaunee Nations among others. We invite attendees to learn about the historic treatment and contemporary experience of Native Americans in the region and support local Native-led organizations such as the [Lake Erie Native American Council](#).



SAY HER NAME: MA'KHIA BRYANT

We remember the life of Ma'Khia Bryant, an honors student placed in foster care who was shot and killed by police after calling 911 in Columbus, Ohio in 2021. As we #SayHerName, we renew our commitment to combating the adultification of Black girls and reducing racial disproportionality in the child welfare system. We invite you to learn more by visiting the [Race Equity Hub](#) on NACC's website, and support community-based organizations like [RealSituations](#).



**NACC EXTENDS A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR
2025 CONFERENCE SPONSORS AND EXHIBITORS!**

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Finding Forever Families for Children in Foster Care



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PLEASE BE SURE TO VISIT THESE EXHIBITORS





ABOUT NACC [↗](#)

Founded in 1977, the National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC) is a nonprofit professional membership and advocacy organization dedicated to advancing justice for children, youth, and families. NACC has led the evolution of child welfare law from a cause to a profession by establishing child welfare as a specialty field requiring distinctive training, skills, and support. NACC trains and certifies attorneys who represent children, families, and agencies; supports a diverse community of professionals; and advocates for policy reform alongside young people and families. NACC helps lawyers provide quality legal representation to children, parents, and agencies, and advances policies that protect the rights of children, youth, and parents impacted by the child welfare system. Accredited by the American Bar Association to certify attorneys as Child Welfare Law Specialists (CWLS), NACC is nationally renowned in the legal community and the child welfare sector.

Our Mission: NACC advances children’s and parents’ rights by supporting a diverse, inclusive community of child welfare lawyers to provide zealous legal representation and by advocating for equitable, anti-racist solutions co-designed by people with lived experience.

Our Vision: Every child, parent, and family is well-supported in their community and has equitable access to justice through culturally responsive, client-centered legal representation.



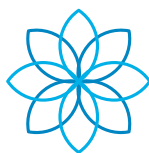
THE HOTEL [↗](#)

We are pleased to have our onsite conference at the Hilton Cleveland Downtown at 100 Lakeside Avenue East, Cleveland, OH 44114.

THE CITY [↗](#)



Cleveland is a vibrant city that blends rich history, cultural attractions, and outdoor adventures. Nestled on the shores of Lake Erie, the city is home to the world-famous Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and a thriving food scene with top-notch restaurants and local breweries. Sports fans can catch a game at Progressive Field or Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse, while nature lovers can explore the scenic trails of the Cuyahoga Valley National Park just outside the city. With its mix of urban charm and natural beauty, Cleveland offers something for everyone!



TAKE CARE

Dress in Layers Cleveland summers can be warm and humid, with daytime temps in the 70s–80s, but the Hilton will be well air-conditioned. A light sweater or blazer will come in handy.

Stay Hydrated Bring a refillable water bottle! Whether you’re walking between sessions or exploring the city, hydration is key.

Check the Weather Before You Pack August can bring pop-up thunderstorms. A compact umbrella or light rain jacket is a smart addition to your bag.

Protect Yourself from the Sun If you plan to explore outdoors (like the Lake Erie shoreline, Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, or the Guardians game), sunscreen, sunglasses, and a hat are useful.

Bring Business Cards or a Digital Contact App Networking is a big part of the conference! Be ready to connect with colleagues from across the country.

Take Breaks When You Need Them Stepping out of the conference for a few moments can help recharge your focus.

Explore Cleveland Safely Downtown Cleveland is walkable and welcoming, but like any city, it’s best to explore in pairs or groups, especially in the evening.

Try the Local Eats Cleveland has an amazing food scene! Don’t miss out on local favorites like pierogis, Polish Boys, or a meal at West Side Market.



CONFERENCE BADGES

These must be worn at all times while attending the conference sessions and breaks. Please visit the registration table if you lose your badge or have any questions.



THANK YOU TO OUR CONFERENCE ABSTRACT WORKGROUP!

Shannon Felder

Currey Cook

Kyana Pierson

Josephine Vanderhorst

Chelsay Finney

Tequilla Washington

Kathryn Banks

Kimberly Jordan

Gina Cabiddu

alistair goodson smith



SPONSOR, EXHIBIT, ADVERTISE

Sponsorship, exhibiting, and advertising are excellent ways to promote your organization, products, and services to a wide range of multidisciplinary legal professionals serving children and families.

We offer the option to designate all or a portion of your sponsorship to scholarships for attendees with financial need, who are students, and/or who advance diversity in the child welfare legal profession.



SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

We strive to make our conference inclusive and accessible to all attendees. If you have dietary restrictions, mobility needs, or other accommodation requests, please contact us at Conference@NACCchildlaw.org so we can best support your experience.



CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION CREDITS

NACC has applied for and received CLE accreditation in 5 states (CA, CO, MS, OH, and PA) for onsite participation in Cleveland conference events. Details about total available credits and sessions with special credits can be found on [page 24](#). Stay tuned for more information about CLEs for the online conference in November. Contact CLE@NACCchildlaw.org with questions.



THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private philanthropy that creates **a brighter future for the nation's children and youth** by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work, and grow.

[LEARN MORE AT WWW.AECF.ORG](http://WWW.AECF.ORG)



NACC CONGRATULATES THE 2025 PROMOTING EXCELLENCE AWARD RECIPIENTS!

NACC honors the champions who set the standard for excellence in child welfare legal advocacy. We present the Promoting Excellence Awards annually to individuals and organizations making significant contributions to the rights and wellbeing of children and families through excellence in legal representation.



"Melissa exemplifies competence, dedication, and zeal for advancing client interests – all done with her trademark warm and approachable demeanor."

OUTSTANDING LEGAL ADVOCATE : **MELISSA COLANGELO**

Appellate Director, Children’s Law Center, Washington, DC

Since starting at Children’s Law Center in 2011, where she serves as Appellate Director, Melissa Colangelo has worked tirelessly to improve the course of child welfare law in Washington, DC – and increasingly influences appellate practice in our field across the country. Melissa’s work reflects a deep commitment to ensuring that legal decisions about children’s lives are reached with sufficient process and rigor, as well as grounded in evidence instead of assumptions – particularly around mental health, poverty, and race. She is guided by the principle that when you know better, you do better; and she has made it her mission to help courts, lawyers, and systems do just that.

Melissa has been the primary author of nearly 50 appellate pleadings and has led oral arguments – or mentored the attorney making oral arguments – for nearly every appellate case Children’s Law Center has worked on during her tenure. She approaches each case as an opportunity to have a dialogue with judges and ultimately advance the law in ways that improve children’s lives. In 2023, Melissa and her colleagues worked to overturn their client’s unnecessary removal into stranger foster care, and Melissa convinced DC’s highest court to publish its opinion, thereby establishing DC’s first binding precedent for what evidence is insufficient for the state to justify the harm of removing children from their families. This now serves as a national model.

Melissa is also a generous mentor and coach for the next generation of child welfare lawyers. She cares deeply about sharing her passion for and knowledge of appellate practice and principles. Her many nominators noted her kindness, strategic thinking, and sharp intellect. Melissa Colangelo embodies the very best of the vital, often-unsung work of appellate law that shapes precedent – and the lives of children – for the better.



*"She is wise beyond her years, a leader who commands respect and admiration."
"She continues to wow us every day not just with her fierce advocacy... but with the causes she has championed and the leadership she has demonstrated so early in her career."*

OUTSTANDING NEW LAWYER : **SAMANTHA ZABO**

Attorney, Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada

As an attorney with the Children’s Attorneys Project of Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, Samantha Zabo provides the empathetic and client-centered representation for children that NACC hopes every child welfare lawyer will achieve.

Despite carrying a large caseload, Samantha takes the time to build rapport with each client and steadfastly advocates for that child’s expressed wishes. She is a thoughtful attorney who researches best practices to improve her advocacy and who ensures she understands each client’s culture, hopes, and needs before stepping into the courtroom. She does not hesitate to respectfully hold all stakeholders, including the court, accountable to their responsibilities to the child. Samantha’s personal experience in the foster care system means she truly understands how important it is for the voice of a young person to be heard, and she is driven to help young people beyond an individual case. In addition to her direct representation, Samantha helped establish a youth advisory board to elevate youth voices and improve Nevada’s system. She also works on a team that helps youth and young adults aging out of the system prepare to live independently, and organizes career fairs to help them connect to community and job opportunities. It is a testament to her dedication and skill that Samantha received many nominations from colleagues, supervisors, judges, and even opposing counsel. One nominator said, "She is precisely the kind of lawyer this award was meant to recognize." NACC agrees!



OUTSTANDING LAW STUDENT : JENNA MATTHEWS

Nashville School of Law

Jenna Matthews has focused her legal education and burgeoning legal career on helping survivors of child abuse and neglect. As a law student at Nashville School of Law, and through her work at Dana Looper Law, she provides trauma-informed, client-centered support that focuses on the dignity and agency of the office's clients. Jenna's lived experience drives her empathetic approach and her dedication to elevating the voices of young people the system marginalizes.

Going beyond what is expected of a law student, she volunteers to lead community outreach, and guides the office to a more tailored approach to help find equitable solutions to systemic problems. Jenna is a natural leader who embodies the qualities that NACC hopes to see in the next generation of child welfare lawyers.

"Her work reflects not just promise, but action – real, sustained action toward a more just and compassionate system for vulnerable children and families."



**OUTSTANDING CHILDREN'S LAW OFFICE :
CHILD ADVOCACY UNIT, DEFENDER ASSOCIATION OF PHILADELPHIA**

MIMI LAVER, CHILD ADVOCACY UNIT CHIEF

The Child Advocacy Unit of the Defender Association of Philadelphia is a model of client-centered, holistic advocacy for children and families. The Child Advocacy Unit operates on the foundational principle that family integrity is fundamental to the wellbeing of children. The organization's multidisciplinary teams of attorneys, social workers, and peer advocates reflect a commitment to NACC's best practices in both trauma-informed representation and also youth engagement. Their work shows that centering the voices of youth improves outcomes for young people and the organization.

The Child Advocacy Unit also helps improve the system – in the present and the future. It collaborates with sister organizations on vital appellate work, and with Drexel University Law School in a new legal clinic to train the next generation of advocates. The Child Advocacy Unit's amicus work also helps combat racial injustice, including on how termination of parental rights harms Black families. NACC salutes this office and its tremendous efforts.

"The Child Advocacy Unit shows what a children's law office can achieve with the right vision, commitment, and community partnerships... The results are visible in Philadelphia Family Court every day."



DISTINGUISHED ACHIEVEMENT : HOWARD TALENFELD

Partner, Justice for Kids Division, Kelley Kronenberg Attorneys at Law; Board President, Florida's Children First

For three decades, Howard Talenfeld has led efforts to seek justice and improve the child welfare system alongside young people in Florida. As an attorney, he works tirelessly on behalf of young people – particularly those harmed while in foster care, group homes, and institutions. Howard brings energy and care to his legal work, and he was a champion for elevating youth voice long before it was nationally recognized as best practice. As a leader, he has founded or co-founded multiple organizations that advocate for children and their rights including his law firm's Justice for Kids Division. Since 2002, Howard has been the founding Board President of Florida's Children First and helped create Florida Youth SHINE, an organization of lived experience experts working to change the culture of Florida's child welfare system.

As a policy advocate, Howard has improved Florida's system in countless ways. He drafted the legislation to create Florida's first children's law office pilot project, secured funding to help Legal Aid Service of Broward County create children's law offices, and wrote Florida's Foster Children Bill of Rights. Howard led legislative advocacy to help young people with lived experience in the system get stable housing in college and in life. He also led the legislative fight that created mandatory appointment of attorneys for kids with disabilities, children who are medically fragile, and victims of human trafficking. He continues to be a champion for the right to counsel in one of the largest states that does not guarantee it to all children. His many achievements are a shining example of the positive impact a relentless advocate can have on the lives of young people.

"Howard Talenfeld has not only shaped the child welfare landscape in Florida – he has inspired a generation of advocates nationwide to never stop fighting for justice on behalf of our most vulnerable children."

"Thousands of young people like myself who could have become another statistic instead gained the confidence, leadership skills, and opportunities to pursue their dreams because of Howard's vision and volunteer efforts."

Read more about the awardees at NACCchildlaw.org/2025-awardees.

 **CLEVELAND | PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS**

Onsite at the Hilton Cleveland Downtown

ONSITE Pre-Conference : Sunday, Aug 10, 2025 All Rooms on 3rd Floor

7:30am - 5:30pm	Registration Desk Open	Lakeside Foyer
9:00am - 4:30pm	<p>RED BOOK TRAINING</p> <p><small>PRESENTER</small> BETSY FORDYCE, JD, CWLS - Upstream Shifts, LLC</p> <p>The Red Book Training is NACC's signature training, designed to provide a comprehensive overview of child welfare law and practice as well as to assist attorneys in preparing for the Child Welfare Law Specialist (CWLS) certification exam. This one-day training is based on the 4th edition of <i>Child Welfare Law and Practice: Representing Children, Parents, and Agencies in Neglect, Abuse, and Dependency Cases</i> – more commonly known as the Red Book.</p> <p>The training will cover the following areas of the Red Book, as well as practice exam questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Overarching Legal Structure and Themes ■ Legal Case from Beginning to End ■ Discrete Issues ■ Lawyering Roles ■ Essential Lawyering Skills <p>Separate registration required ↗ · Lunch included</p>	Hope A
9:00am - 4:30pm	<p>RED BOOK TRAINING TIER 2: TRIAL SKILLS FOR CHILD WELFARE ATTORNEYS</p> <p><small>PRESENTERS</small> SHANNON FELDER, JD, CWLS - National Association of Counsel for Children JOSEPHINE VANDERHORST, JD, CWLS - National Association of Counsel for Children AMBER WALDEN, JD, CWLS - Family Law Office of Training and Education Services, LLC</p> <p>Take your trial advocacy skills to the next level with RBT Tier 2: Trial Skills for Child Welfare Attorneys – an exclusive training designed to elevate trial practice for child welfare attorneys, including agency attorneys, prosecutors, parent attorneys, GAL attorneys, and children's attorneys. This intensive program distills key principles from Chapters 35 and 36 of the Red Book (<i>Child Welfare Law and Practice, 4th Edition</i>), providing you with essential strategies to enhance your courtroom performance. Learn how to conduct effective examinations and navigate evidentiary issues with confidence. Don't miss this opportunity to strengthen your advocacy and deliver better outcomes for children and families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Prerequisite: Completion of the in-person Red Book Training or online Red Book Training Course (Tier 1) or CWLS Certification <p>Topics to be covered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Strategic Witness Preparation - Techniques to enhance witness credibility and confidence. ■ Maximizing Pretrial Motions and Stipulations - Leveraging procedural tools to strengthen your case before trial. ■ Mastering Direct and Cross-Examination of Fact Witnesses - Effective questioning strategies with emphasis on testimony by parents and agency social workers. ■ Expert Witness Examination Techniques - Building and challenging expert testimony to support your case. ■ Evidence Essentials: Admissibility and Objections - Navigating evidentiary rules to protect and present key evidence. ■ Navigating Child Testimony - Handling the complexities of questioning child witnesses with care and sensitivity. <p>Separate registration required ↗ · Lunch included · Limited to 40 attendees</p>	Center Street A

10:30am - 4:15pm CHILDREN'S LAW OFFICE PROJECT CONVENING

Hope Ballroom D

NACC's Children's Law Office Project Convening provides specialized training for the leaders and managers of nonprofit children's law offices, government agencies, and private firms providing children's legal representation. This convening offers opportunities for senior leaders and emerging leaders to learn best practices in organizational representation of children and youth.

Separate registration required · Lunch included · Limited to 75 attendees

10:30am - 12:00pm SESSION 1**CLOC1 The Power of Partnership: Judges and Lawyers Uniting to Transform Legal Representation of Children**

PRESENTERS **HON. THOMAS COLE** – Chatham County Juvenile Court
ANGELA ORKIN, JD – True North Child Advocates

Children's lawyers have the power to transform the child welfare system one case at a time. But with high case-loads, low pay, inadequate training and support, what is a lawyer to do? In this session attendees will learn concrete ways to address common roadblocks and to empower children's lawyers to provide the kind of representation that every child client deserves. The presenters will share how they utilized Title IV-E funding to transform representation of children in Chatham County, Georgia, and how this experience informed statewide improvement efforts. The presenters will deconstruct the process, so attendees learn a proven method of change. Attendees will apply the lessons to their specific roadblocks (large or small) and will leave inspired and ready to take action.

12:00pm - 1:00pm LUNCH AND NETWORKING – LUNCH INCLUDED**1:00pm - 2:30pm SESSION 2****CLOC2 Show Me the Money: Effectively Using Program Evaluation to Secure Program Funding**

PRESENTERS **KATHERINE HAZEN, JD, PHD** – Northeastern University
MICHELLE PAXTON, JD – University of Nebraska

The Nebraska Children's Justice Programs have secured more than \$13 million dollars over 8 years to fund new and innovative attorney education programs. Program evaluation – the systematic process for assessing program implementation and impact – has been an essential tool for securing and maintaining program funding. Through evidence-based storytelling, program evaluation elevates program activities and impacts to communicate the value of a program. Public and private funders increasingly require program evaluation to demonstrate the program and funder's impacts. In this session, the Nebraska Children's Justice Programs' program director and evaluator will discuss how they collaborate to obtain and sustain program funding.

2:30pm - 2:45pm BREAK**2:45pm - 4:15pm SESSION 3****CLOC3 Making Representation a Reality through Co-Design: Leveraging Lived Experience to Inform Policy and Secure Legal Representation for Foster Youth**

PRESENTER **SAMUEL MARTIN, MPA, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT** – SDM Consulting (Co-Design Institute)

In 2021, in collaboration with The Mockingbird Society, the SDMC successfully advocated for the passage of Washington State's HB 1217, legislation that ensures legal representation for young people in foster care. This workshop will discuss the framework of the SDMC-developed co-design process, emphasizing how integrating the lived experiences of foster youth can inform and transform policy. Participants will gain insights into the co-design methodology, understand its application in legislative advocacy, and receive actionable steps to initiate similar advocacy efforts in their respective states. Participants will learn how to effectively incorporate lived experiences into advocacy strategies to influence legislation, as well as how to assess policy gaps, build coalitions, and navigate legislative processes to advance legal representation for foster youth.

5:00pm - 6:00pm **CWLS RECEPTION**

Lakeside Foyer

NACC extends a warm invitation to Child Welfare Law Specialists, CWLS applicants, Red Book Training attendees, Trial Skills attendees, and participants from the Children's Law Office Project Convening to attend this special reception. This is a unique opportunity to come together, celebrate your remarkable achievements, and connect before the conference begins.

6:00pm - 8:30pm **SELF-COMPASSION HIKE - Sponsored by Casey Family Programs** [↗](#)

Meet in Hilton Lobby

HIKE GUIDES

- SHERI FREEMONT** - Casey Family Programs
- ROB WYMAN** - Casey Family Programs
- BROOKE SILVERTHORN** - Casey Family Programs
- RACHEL KONRAD** - Casey Family Programs
- ALLISON GREEN** - NACC



Back for a second year is our Self-Compassion Hike experience offered by our friends at Casey Family Programs. This experience will be a safe and stress-free way to spend an evening while at Conference. Our sponsors arrange everything, including transportation to Squire's Castle, a tranquil location where we can enjoy and experience nature, a boxed dinner, and a brief discussion on the benefits of nature experiences and connecting with our colleagues. Research is clear that humans benefit from time in nature, calming our minds and stimulating the senses. We also hope you will have some chats if you choose to meet new people, but also make room for silence if that is what you need on your walk.

Important details: This experience is not intended to be a vigorous hike; so if you are looking for a serious burn, this one may not be for you. We will walk at a comfortable pace. The distance will be reasonable for about an hour's time, but it can be shortened at any time with no worries. You will need comfortable shoes and water. You may want to consider long sleeves for bug-bite prevention. Temperatures average between 62-81 degrees.

Separate registration required for this free, limited-capacity event [↗](#)
Meet in the lobby at 6:00pm; leaving promptly at 6:15pm

SIBLINGS BELONG TOGETHER

Thank you for sharing our belief
that a permanent family is possible
for **all siblings** waiting in foster care
... no matter their story.



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for Adoption

davethomasfoundation.org

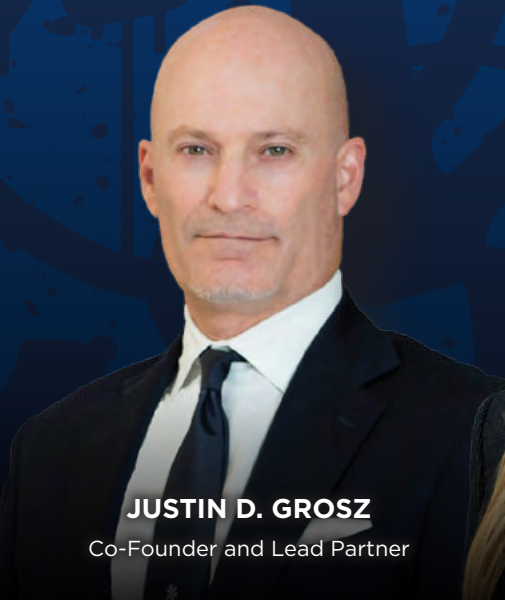




A Division of
Kelley Kronenberg
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Who We Are? *We fight for children*

Justice for Kids®, a division of Kelley Kronenberg, is the premier law practice dedicated to protecting abused, disabled, and injured children who are harmed in child welfare and disability systems. Our mission is to be fierce advocates for children's rights and to drive systemic change in child welfare throughout the United States using innovative legal strategies. Unlike most personal injury law firms, JFK specializes in representing children who've been injured by the very child protection and disability systems meant to protect them. We bring personal injury and civil rights claims on behalf of children, through their guardians and next friends, including attorneys ad litem, guardians ad litem, biological parents, adoptive parents and others, against the child welfare agencies who were responsible to protect them but failed through their negligent or intentional conduct. Our mission is to give these children a voice and a chance at the future they deserve.



JUSTIN D. GROSZ
Co-Founder and Lead Partner



STACIE SCHMERLING
Co-Founder and Lead Partner



HOWARD M. TALENFELD
Co-Founder and Lead Partner

10360 W. State Road 84 | Fort Lauderdale, FL 33324 | 844-4kidlaw | 844-454-3529 | justiceforkids.com

ONSITE Conference Day 1: Monday, Aug 11, 2025 All Rooms on 3rd Floor

7:30am - 5:30pm	Registration Desk Open	Lakeside Foyer
8:00am - 5:00pm	Exhibits	Lakeside Foyer
8:00am - 8:30am	Breakfast	Lakeside Foyer
8:30am - 8:45am	Welcome KIM DVORCHAK, JD - NACC Chief Executive Officer DAWNE MITCHELL, JD - NACC Board President	Hope Ballroom D & E
8:45am - 10:15am	PLENARY 1 P1 Youth-Led Advocacy in Action: Creating and Advancing Foster Youth Bills of Rights <i>PRESENTERS</i> KAYANA BRADLEY, PSS, MHFA, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT - Southeast Louisiana Legal Services, Louisiana Elite Advocacy Force GINA CABIDDU, MSW, LSWAIC, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT - NACC's National Council on Children's Legal Representation ASHLEY CHASE, JD, CWLS - Colorado Office of the Child's Representative CHRIS HENDERSON, JD - Colorado Office of the Child's Representative <p>Across the country, young people with lived experience in foster care are leading powerful movements to define and defend their rights through statewide Foster Youth Bills of Rights. In this dynamic plenary session, youth advocates and legal professionals from Colorado, Louisiana, and Washington will share their experiences in advancing these rights through community-building, coalition work, and legislative advocacy. The session will also highlight NACC's NACCLR <i>Your Case, Your Rights</i> project - a national initiative supporting youth in understanding and exercising their legal rights in child welfare cases. Together, we'll explore why this work matters deeply to youth and youth advocates, what rights they prioritized and fought to include, and the compromises required to move these efforts forward. Panelists will reflect on lessons learned through negotiation, mediation, and strategic decision-making, including when to take a loss to gain a win. Attendees will leave with practical guidance on how to support youth-led policy in states without a Foster Youth Bill of Rights and tools for self-reflection on their role in either upholding or obstructing youth rights in legal practice.</p>	Hope Ballroom D & E
10:15am - 10:45am	Coffee Break	
10:45am - 12:15pm	PLENARY 2 P2 Lived Experience Experts Hold the Key to Transformational Leadership and Power Sharing in the Child Welfare System <i>PRESENTER</i> ALISTAIR GOODSON SMITH, MSW, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT - NACC's National Advisory Council on Children's Legal Representation <p>It is no secret that the current child welfare system more often than not wounds everyone involved. The child welfare system is riddled with pain and power dynamics. Children and families are the most impacted. Communities watch families and children hurting and are at a loss for what to do. Professionals try to help and are often wounded from vicarious trauma and top-down models of power. Come to this session to learn from a Trans(formational) leader who is a lived experience expert about how to build, release, and share power together.</p>	Hope Ballroom D & E
12:45pm - 1:45pm	Lunch on Your Own or Affinity Group Lunch Session Breaking Bread and Building Bridges - Sponsored by Lambda Legal	Hope Ballroom A-C
	Connect with like-minded colleagues during our Affinity Group Lunch Sessions. Grab your lunch and join a group that aligns with your interests, experiences, or areas of focus. It's a great opportunity to build community, share ideas, and engage in meaningful conversation with peers who understand your work.	

2:00pm – 3:30pm **BREAKOUT SESSION A****A1 Permanency Planning for Indigenous Children:
Cultural Continuity Agreements and Tribal Customary Adoptions**

Hope A

PRESENTERS **ANGI CAVALIERE, JD, MJ, CWLS** – Casey Family Programs Indian Child & Family Well-Being Program
CHRISTINA ENTREKIN COAD, JD – Woodward & Company
MARIA ENTREKIN, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT – Student, University of British Columbia

Adoption is not the only legal permanency choice; nor does it need to be provided in only one standardized form. For Indigenous children, how can the family and community best be supported in determining the lifelong interaction between a child and their extended family? Options include Tribal Customary Adoption, providing the tribe with the ability to finalize an adoption within their customs, and Cultural Continuity Agreements, providing the families with promise of maintaining the cultural connection of the Indigenous child. Join this session to learn about permanency options under ICWA and how to tailor those options to each family and their community, and benefit from the first-hand knowledge of the importance of cultural connectivity that will be shared through the eyes of a lived experience family.

**A2 Asserting, Arguing, and Appealing the Constitutional Rights
of Children in Foster Care**

Hope B

PRESENTER **TIM KELLER, JD** – Center for the Rights of Abused Children

Based on the Center for the Rights of Abused Children's 2024 practice manual, "Asserting, Arguing, and Appealing the Constitutional Rights of Children in Foster Care," this session will equip attendees to preserve and present appellate arguments to protect children's constitutional rights to safety, family integrity, permanency, emotional security, and an education. This session is ideal for attorneys who represent children, parents, agencies, tribes and kin; judges; court improvement program directors; and others concerned with protecting children's constitutional and legal rights, such as CASAs, social workers, and case managers. The presenter will actively engage participants through interactive discussions, polls, and questions, case study analysis, and a question-and-answer period.

**A3 Not a Law, Just an Order: Protecting Marginalized Youth
Amidst Political Overreach**

Hope C

PRESENTERS **SHAPLAIE BROOKS** – Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth
RAYNA HILL, MPP – Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth

Participants in this roundtable-style discussion will be a part of a facilitated conversation around navigating intersectional service provision in the current political climate while centering the experiences and needs of QTBIPOC and other marginalized youth. With consideration to unique state policy, funding, and administrative landscapes, participants will help brainstorm potential strategies to address challenges facing child welfare professionals working with multisystem-involved marginalized youth.

**A4 Creating Informational Equity and Amplifying Voices:
Language Access and Inclusion for Latinx and Beyond**

Center Street A

PRESENTERS **LIZ LOPEZ, JD, CWLS** – Children's Law Center of California
JEANNETTE RODRIGUEZ-BUSH, JD – Children's Law Center of California
ELVIA VARGAS GUTIERREZ, MPA – Children's Law Center of California

In many municipalities, monolingual Spanish-speaking families (MSSF) are disproportionately represented in a dependency system created and implemented by primarily English-speaking custodians. The presumption that simply providing translation ensures equitable access to justice fails to recognize that true accessibility extends beyond direct translation. This session reframes interpretive services as both cultural and social practices that require an awareness of families' intersectional identities, including educational background, socioeconomic status, and other lived experiences. Multidisciplinary presenters, both monolingual and bilingual, will provide practical tips to participants to shift the informational balance to provide equity to monolingual Spanish-speaking families.



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A5 Whose Job Is It Anyway? The Court, Lawyers, and Youth Working Together to Support Family Reunification

Center Street D

PRESENTERS **HON. KAREN BRAXTON, CWLS** – 3rd Judicial Circuit Court of Michigan
ESTHER FLOWERS, JD – Rose Legal Services
ROSHUNDRA SIMMONS, JD, MSW – Michigan Department of Attorney General – CYS Division

In the child welfare system, parents face having their children removed and their parental rights terminated for issues such as homelessness, mental health disorders, domestic violence, substance abuse, and many others. There are organizations that address these issues that could prevent removal and termination, but many are left with the question of how do you find them, how do you get the agency to agree to those not on the “list” of approved providers, and how do you get the court to force the agency to pay? More importantly, there is often the dilemma of whose job it is to find these organizations for the families. In this session, the presenters will provide information on how judges, lawyers (agency and defense), and the family can work together to find resources that will support reunification.

3:30pm – 4:00pm **Break**

4:00pm – 5:30pm **BREAKOUT SESSION B**

B1 Concurrent Planning: Engaging Families to Strengthen Resiliency

Hope A

PRESENTERS **DARNESHIA ALLEN** – Safe Babies - A Program of ZERO TO THREE
CAMILLE GLANZMANN, MSW – Safe Babies - A Program of ZERO TO THREE

Traditional approaches to concurrent planning set the tone for competition among parents and other caregivers. This session aims to elevate the importance of engaging all viable supports in a manner that maximizes the presence of protective factors and buffers both the child and family as they navigate the child welfare system. The session will explore challenges, viewpoints, and practices that contribute to how families and professionals experience concurrent planning, including practices that promote tangible shifts toward a relationally centered approach to safety-driven decision making that builds on protective factors. The presenters and participants will also examine strategies to increase the integration of intentional transitions that enhance advocacy and minimize adversarial engagement in concurrent planning.

B2 Emergency Removals: The Exception that Swallowed *Stanley v. Illinois*' Rule

Hope B

PRESENTERS **EMMA BROWN-BERNSTEIN, JD, CWLS** – Public Defender, Atlanta Judicial Circuit
CHRISTOPHER CHURCH, JD, MS, CWLS – Emory University School of Law
DE'CHARAE KEY, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT – Client of the Georgia Public Defender Council, Juvenile Division

Over fifty years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court held in *Stanley v. Illinois* that a parent is entitled to a hearing on their fitness before their children are removed. Yet today, most removals occur without any pre-deprivation due process under the auspices of an emergency. The Georgia Public Defender Council and Emory's Appeal for Youth Clinic challenged this practice in Georgia, bringing two appeals to contest the routine use of *ex parte* removals absent exigent circumstances. This session will explore how legal advocacy, research, data, and the voices of impacted parents can be woven together to expose and challenge systemic due process violations. Panelists will share insights on litigation strategies, amplifying parent voice, and using empirical evidence to push for reform.

B3 The Competing and Complementary Interests of Children, Parents, and the State with Respect to Medical Care

Hope C

PRESENTERS **HARNEET PANNU, BA.LLB, LLM** – Dependency Legal Services
AMYSTOLL, JD, CWLS – Dependency Legal Services; BASF

This session will provide attendees with an understanding of the rights and duties of the various parties and stakeholders for families involved in child welfare with regard to medical care for youth. Participants will learn to frame and analyze the issues and understand how to navigate advocacy within the legal framework in this evolving area of law. Attendees will learn how to balance the rights and duties of all the parties involved in child welfare proceedings

when making decisions for medical care. Discussion will focus on meeting professional and ethical responsibilities in making legal arguments on behalf of parent, child, and agency clients (Model Rules of Professional Conduct 1.2 and 3.1). Particular attention will be paid to marginalized youth (including medical care concerns for LGBTQIA+ youth who are systems involved) and strategies for how to advocate for clients' rights when there may be possible state over-reach involving medical care.

B4 Building Bridges: How Navigators Successfully Connect Kinship Caregivers with Legal Services Providers in Southwest Ohio

Center Street A

PRESENTERS SYEDA NAQVI, PHD – Chapin Hall
MOLLY RUSSELL, JD – Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati
JO ELLEN SIMONSEN – Kinnect

When youth come into the home of a kinship caregiver, their arrival may be accompanied by more complex needs than anticipated. Kinship caregivers express many challenges in navigating legal services. Murky legal relationships leave caregivers without necessary documentation or authority to make educational or health decisions for the child. It can prevent access to benefits, complicate dicey relationships with birth parents, and leave caregivers unsure about rights and responsibilities or eligibility for financial support. 41% of Ohio Kinship and Adoption Navigator program (OhioKAN) callers report legal challenges, yet traditional referral models have dismal results. Learn how a redesigned partnership between OhioKAN, Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati, and Chapin Hall is advancing civil justice and wellbeing for kinship families.

B5 The Future of Child Welfare: A Creative Visioning Lab

Center Street D

PRESENTERS RIMY MORRIS, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT, FOUNDER, AUTHOR – The Collective; Foster Greatness
ISABEL STASA, MPA, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT – Foster Greatness; Doing Good Works

This interactive workshop invites child welfare professionals, advocates, and individuals with lived experience to reimagine a child welfare system that prioritizes equity, collaboration, and innovation. Through design thinking principles, participants will engage in structured creative exercises to identify systemic challenges and generate actionable solutions. Centering lived experience ensures that solutions are informed by real-world perspectives, creating a pathway for meaningful and sustainable reform. The session will identify key strategies for integrating peer-to-peer collaboration and lived expertise within child welfare advocacy efforts including methods to embed equity, inclusion, and belonging across child welfare systems.

6:00pm – 9:00pm **Welcome Reception · Sponsored by Justice for Kids**

Rock & Roll Hall of Fame

Join us as we kick off the conference with our Welcome Reception, generously sponsored by Justice for Kids, a Sapphire Sponsor. A ten-minute walk from the Hilton, the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame offers an unforgettable venue to connect with colleagues, enjoy light fare, and celebrate the start of a great conference. Don't miss it! Shuttle service will also be available.

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ONSITE Conference Day 2: Tuesday, Aug 12, 2025 All Rooms on 3rd Floor

7:30am - 5:30pm **Registration Desk Open** Lakeside Foyer

8:00am - 5:00pm **Exhibits** Lakeside Foyer

8:00am - 8:30am **Breakfast - Sponsored by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption** [↗](#) Lakeside Foyer
 Start your day right with a hot breakfast, generously sponsored by our Platinum Sponsor, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. Fuel up, connect with fellow attendees, and get ready for a full day of learning and collaboration.

8:30am - 10:00am **PLENARY 3** Hope Ballroom D & E

P3 **Ending Congregate Placement through Advocacy, Intergenerational Partnership, and Lived Expert Leadership**

- PRESENTERS* **CHRIS WU, JD** - NACC Emeritus Board President
RASHIDA ABUWALA, MSC - New Tomorrow
JOSE PEREZ, MPS - Children's Defense Fund - New York
JONATHAN DEJESUS, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT - Children's Rights

Thousands of children in foster care remain institutionalized in group homes, psychiatric hospitals, and other congregate settings – isolated from families, communities, and healing-centered care. This panel brings together lived experts, advocates, and researchers to expose the systems, narratives, and policy decisions that maintain reliance on congregate placements. Speakers from the *Are You Listening?* campaign and broader movements will explore first-hand accounts and legal, policy, and legislative strategies that center family, dignity, and community-driven alternatives. Participants will leave with actionable tools to challenge institutional placements through storytelling, policy change, and power-sharing with those most impacted.

10:00am - 10:30am **Coffee Break**

10:30am - 12:00pm **PLENARY 4** Hope Ballroom D & E

P4 **Digital Advocacy: Harnessing Mobile Apps to Empower Families and Youth in Child Welfare**

- PRESENTERS* **GWENDOLYN CLEGG, JD** - Oklahoma Office of Family Representation
RYAN O'DONNELL, FORMER FOSTER PARENT - Your Case Plan by Sunlight
DINA SANTOS, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT - Bay Area Legal Services
TAYLOR SARTOR, JD - Bay Area Legal Services

Together we will explore how cutting-edge mobile technology is transforming child welfare advocacy in this dynamic, solution-focused plenary. Featuring the creators and implementers of the *Your Case Plan* and *FosterPower* apps, this session highlights how lived experience and digital innovation are bridging critical gaps in communication, legal access, and client engagement. Attendees will see live app demos, hear powerful origin stories, and learn how these tools are driving better outcomes for families and youth. Whether you're seeking to empower clients, improve efficiency, or scale impact, this session offers practical inspiration and actionable strategies.

12:15pm - 1:45pm **NACC Annual Luncheon and Promoting Excellence Awards** Hope Ballroom D & E

Join us for a celebratory lunch as we honor outstanding individuals and organizations who promote excellence, build community, and advance justice. This is a highlight of the conference you won't want to miss.

2:00pm - 3:30pm **BREAKOUT SESSION C**

**C1 SOUL Family in Kansas: A New Legal Permanency Option
Designed by Lived Experts in Foster Care**

Hope A

PRESENTERS **MARY BISSELL, JD** - ChildFocus
ALEXANDRIA WARE, MS, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT - Culture Creations, Inc.

In 2024, Kansas became the first state in the nation to pass SOUL (Support-Opportunity-Unity-Legal Relationships) Family Legal Permanency, a new permanency option designed by and for older youth with lived experience in the foster care system. The District of Columbia and several other states will soon be following suit. This innovative permanency pathway allows young people to identify one or more non-related legal caregivers to share legal decision making, recognizing a broader network of caring adults, while maintaining biological relationships. Learn the origin story of SOUL Family, from its initial design by a group of national lived experts to its community-wide legal collaboration in Kansas - and how young people are changing the way laws and policies are made in the United States.

**C2 How to Successfully Navigate Representation of a Victim of
Intimate Partner Violence and/or Coercive Control in the Child Protection Field**

Hope B

PRESENTERS **MICHELLE CRUZ, JD** - Attorney at Law
KALLY WALSH, M.ED, JD - Attorney at Law

Child abuse cases often involve survivors of intimate partner violence. Do you ever wonder how you can work with this population more effectively? Do you feel confused about how to assess safety while developing your defense? In this session you will become proficient in understanding coercive control and intimate partner violence as well as

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how to work with this fragile population. You will understand how to interview your client about their experiences as a survivor in a way that helps you develop your attorney/client relationship. You will learn how to develop your theory of the case and address intimate partner violence at trial. You will understand and be able to present at trial the dynamics of intimate partner violence and know when and if to get an expert involved.

C3 Let's Talk about You: How Your Client's Identity Impacts Zealous Advocacy

Hope C

PRESENTERS

GINA CABIDDU, MSW, LSWAIC, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT – NACC's National Advisory Council on Children's Legal Representation
CURREY COOK, JD – Lambda Legal

Attorneys for children represent clients across the spectrum of identity and life experience which can impact their placement, safety, wellbeing and overall case. Given these realities and the importance of knowing every client as a whole person, including their passions and aspirations, conversations about identity and experiences are a critical part of zealous advocacy. Presenters will focus on practical skills around client interviewing, and participants will engage in role plays and have a chance to view client interviewing videos developed by lived experts. Attendees will also learn how to empower their clients to learn and exercise their rights with resources developed by, for, and with lived experience experts.

C4 Presumption of Presence: Improving Attendance (& Engagement) of Children and Youth in Court

Center Street A

PRESENTERS

KAYANA BRADLEY, PSS, MHFA, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT – Southeast Louisiana Legal Services, Louisiana Elite Advocacy Force
FRANCESCA HAMILTON-ACKER, JD – Acadiana Legal Service Corporation; Louisiana Children's Trust Fund
HON. BRENT PATTISON – Iowa Judicial Branch

Laws and policies, including ABA policies, encourage or require that youth be present in court; but, since COVID, youth are attending their court hearings less frequently. In addition, there are still lawyers, judges and social workers who do not see the value in youth participation in court or may even oppose it because they believe that it is harmful. In this session, presenters will discuss why youth presence in court is necessary for the youth and the court, as well as share practical tips to change courtroom practice and ensure meaningful participation and engagement.

C5 Strengthening Family Advocacy: Collaborative Strategies Between Social Workers and Attorneys to Challenge Expedited Termination of Parental Rights

Center Street D

PRESENTERS

NIKI TARTAL, MSW, NCPS – Office of Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsel
MICHAEL WOODWARD, JD – Office of Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsel

This presentation will highlight how forensic social workers collaborate with attorneys to challenge expedited termination of parental rights petitions and advocate for dismissals through evidence-based assessments, parent support, and systemic issue analysis. Drawing on case examples and interdisciplinary frameworks, the session will outline strategies forensic social workers use to support attorneys in building robust defenses. These strategies include gathering and analyzing evidence and compiling documentation that demonstrates a parent's engagement in services, active participation in treatment programs, researching and consulting with experts, and sustained efforts to improve parenting capacity. Presenters will cite specific examples from their own caseloads that led to successful dismissals of expedited TPRs.

3:30pm - 4:00pm Break

4:00pm – 5:30pm **BREAKOUT SESSION D****D1 Considerations When Representing Non-Citizen Children and Families: Strategies for Preserving Family Unity and Promoting Permanency**

Hope A

PRESENTERS **EMILY BARTHOLOMEW, JD, LLM** – Acacia Center for Justice
RACHEL KONRAD, JD – Casey Family Programs
FRANZ LIEM, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT – Foster Club

Incorporating the perspective of a former foster youth with lived experience as a member of a family with undocumented parents and/or caregivers, this session will develop participants' understanding and empathy for the migrant child or family's journey, and provide guidance on navigating multiple systems, including immigration systems and child welfare systems. Presenters will also discuss topics including forced vs. voluntary migration, impacts to child well-being, family separation, and barriers to achieving permanency due to immigration challenges. Presenters will offer top tips and considerations for child welfare professionals serving children who are non-citizens or members of mixed-status families and will provide updates on new policies and orders related to immigration.

D2 School Discipline Advocacy for Students in Foster Care: A Local & National Perspective

Hope B

PRESENTERS **SARAH FLOHRE, JD, MPH** – Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati
CAROLYN LIPP, JD – American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law

This session will provide advocates with tools on how to support children in foster care facing school discipline, and provide an overview of the current national landscape and national data around school discipline for students in foster care. Attendees will learn about the basic rights of students facing school discipline – including protections afforded to students with disabilities. The session will also cover federal guidance and exemplary state and local practices to support students in foster care with challenging behaviors and reduce exclusionary discipline, including the Kids in School Rule (KISR!) program in Ohio. Finally, the session will provide concrete advocacy tips for what attorneys can do when a child they work with is proposed for suspension or expulsion.

D3 Legal Advocacy for Transgender Youth in Out-of-Home Care: Tools for Improving Legal Representation and Client Relationships

Hope C

PRESENTERS **LUNA ISAAH FLOYD, JD** – Lambda Legal Defense & Education Fund
ELLIOTT HINKLE, BS – Unicorn Solutions, LLC
ALISTAIR GOODSON SMITH, MSW, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT – NACC's National Advisory Council on Children's Legal Representation

Attorneys representing children in dependency, delinquency, and other legal proceedings must be equipped with the knowledge, tools, and resources to effectively advocate for transgender, nonbinary, and gender-diverse young clients. This interactive session, led by legal advocates and lived experience experts, will provide a foundational understanding of best practices for informed and affirming representation, including a hands-on review of a practical toolkit with model language and key resources. This session is designed for attorneys of all experience levels who represent young people and want to ensure their advocacy is gender-affirming, trauma-informed, and legally sound. Participants will leave with practical skills and resources they can implement in their practice.

D4 Navigating the Aftermath: Supporting Child Welfare Legal Defense Professionals and Families During Natural Disasters

Center Street A

PRESENTERS **ASHLEY N. JACKSON, MSW, LCSWA** – North Carolina Office of the Parent Defender
ANNICK LENOIR-PEEK, JD, CWLS – North Carolina Office of the Parent Defender
SHARICE ZACHARY, MSW – North Carolina Office of the Parent Defender

In 2022, North Carolina began providing parents with a social worker who is a part of their legal team. The program addresses the practical, social, and emotional needs of the family, along with the legal aspects. We never anticipated how profoundly a natural disaster would disrupt the lives of our families, and the challenges for attorneys and social workers. When Hurricane Helene devastated communities, we had to re-imagine our roles as attorneys and social workers. We explore how disasters affect practice, decision-making, and service delivery. We share practical

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Kim Dvorchak, CEO, NACC

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Kim Dvorchak, JD, CEO

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Imagine a child...

...who faces a court of law that will determine the future of their family. A child depending on the legal system – to listen, to understand their needs, and to do the right thing.

Each year, thousands of children in foster care experience court proceedings because their caregivers have been accused of abuse or neglect. Too often, decisions are made without the child’s knowledge, participation, and preferences. Children in court have already endured the trauma of family separation, which is often compounded by inadequate services, disrupted education, and further maltreatment in certain foster care settings. But we can disrupt this trajectory – with legal advocacy, action, and your support.

Children in court:

- have a right to express themselves;
- need lawyers to stand up *with* them and *for* them;
- need their civil rights respected and protected.

Today, those rights are under attack. The **Children’s Justice Fund** is designed to protect the rights of children and youth by building NACC’s capacity to advance needed policy reforms and challenge attacks on children’s rights.

Why This Fund? Why Now?

For nearly 50 years, the National Association of Counsel for Children has been working to ensure that children are treated fairly and have a voice in court. We’ve made historic progress in advancing children’s rights, but now, political pressures and funding threats jeopardize the hard-won protections for vulnerable youth.

NACC’s Children’s Justice Fund will fight back – supporting zealous children’s advocacy in the face of growing challenges. NACC will continue to stand up for the civil rights of all youth, including racial justice, LGBTQ+ justice, gender justice, reproductive justice, and more.

Join Us in Defending the Rights of Children

This is our opportunity to stand up for children’s justice. Your support today will help create a world in which every child has the legal protection and advocacy they deserve.



strategies for maintaining continuity of care and advocacy. Participants will learn how to address the emotional impact on professionals, engage trauma-informed responses, and prepare for future disasters with resilience-focused planning.

D5 Rethinking TPR: How Children’s Attorneys Can Advocate for Family Preservation and Challenge Involuntary TPR

Center Street D

PRESENTERS HON. BRENT PATTISON – Iowa Judicial Branch
ALYSE WILBANKS, BSW – Defender Association of Philadelphia
HANNAH WYATT, JD – Defender Association of Philadelphia

This session will examine the often-overlooked harms of TPR for youth, including the creation of legal orphans, failed adoptions, and the lasting trauma of family separation. Led by an experienced children’s attorney and a juvenile court judge, this session will equip attendees with practical tools to challenge unnecessary TPRs and advocate for family preservation. Presenters will identify key moments in a case where children’s attorneys can intervene, advocate for reasonable efforts, and push for alternatives like guardianship and kinship placement. Attendees will leave with actionable strategies, case examples, model briefs, and pleadings to strengthen their advocacy and achieve better outcomes for youth clients.

6:00pm **EVENING EVENT: Take Me Out to the Ballgame**

Meet in Hilton Lobby



Join us for a fun night under the lights at Progressive Field as the Cleveland Guardians take on the Miami Marlins at 6:40pm. We’ll head over as a group on foot from the Hilton Cleveland Downtown – a 20-minute scenic walk to the stadium. Whether you’re a die-hard baseball fan or just in it for the snacks and skyline views, this is a perfect chance to unwind, connect, and enjoy a classic Cleveland summer evening. *Wear your team colors and bring your game-day spirit!*

You are responsible for purchasing your own tickets to the baseball game from the Guardians or other platforms. We suggest tickets in or around section 183 if you’d like to sit near other conference attendees!

ONSITE Conference Day 3 : Wednesday, Aug 13, 2025 All Rooms on 3rd Floor

7:30am - 12:00pm	Registration Desk Open	Lakeside Foyer
8:00am - 12:00pm	Exhibits	Lakeside Foyer
8:00am - 8:30am	Breakfast	Lakeside Foyer
8:30am - 10:00am	PLENARY 5	Hope Ballroom D & E
	P5 Power in Partnership: Transforming Child Welfare through Lived Expertise and Collaborative Leadership	
PRESENTERS	KODI BAUGHMAN, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT – Foster Care Alumni of America ISABEL STASA, MPA, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT – Foster Greatness; Doing Good Works	
	In this interactive session, members of the National Foster Care Youth and Alumni Policy Council will share how they harness peer-to-peer collaboration, roundtable insights, and collective leadership to drive systemic change in child welfare. Drawing on a series of national roundtables addressing mental health, lifelong belonging, and thriving post-foster care, participants will learn how to integrate lived expertise into policymaking and advocacy. Presenters will highlight the Council’s structure, priorities, and peer review processes, illustrating how power-sharing can transform organizational culture and lead to concrete policy recommendations. Attendees will leave with practical strategies for centering youth leadership, cultivating equity, and sustaining meaningful partnerships that improve outcomes.	
10:00am -10:30am	Break	

10:30am - 12:00pm **PLENARY 6**

Hope Ballroom D & E

P6 From Trauma to Thriving: Developing an Intentional Community Environment That Strengthens Families

PRESENTER JUSTIN BLACK, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT – Redefining Normal

What does it mean to truly support families in building safe, nurturing, and resilient homes—especially in the aftermath of trauma and system involvement? This session challenges child welfare legal professionals to reimagine their roles not only as advocates within the system but as partners in helping families transform the conditions of their households for future generations. Drawing on the lived experience of those impacted by trauma and child welfare intervention, this session explores how intentional relationship-building, cultural healing, and community-centered support can interrupt harmful generational patterns. Participants will gain insight into how legal professionals can support true transformation and not just compliance. Whether in the courtroom or through policy reform, this plenary will help us share power to shift narratives, challenge assumptions, and create pathways to thriving families and strong communities.

12:00pm-12:05pm **Closing and Raffle**

Hope DE

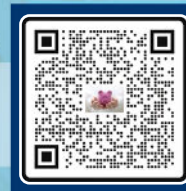
Join us as we draw the raffle winner of a complimentary registration to next year's Child Welfare Law Conference in Portland, Oregon.

Children's Advocacy Institute

Did you know that your client may be entitled to thousands of dollars in federal benefits?

If your client has a disability or a deceased parent, they may be entitled to Social Security benefits. But across the nation, child welfare agencies intercept these benefits and use foster youth's funds to reimburse themselves for the youth's care. This is money that could help a youth transition successfully to adulthood — providing the means to rent an apartment, fund their education, or buy a car. The Children's Advocacy Institute at the University of San Diego School of Law is working to stop states from taking foster youth's money, rather than using or conserving the funds to benefit the child.

To learn more about this issue, our advocacy, and how YOU can help protect your client, please scan the QR code.



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CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION



CLE Accreditation Status and Details for ONSITE Events in Cleveland

NACC has applied for and received CLE accreditation in 5 states (CA, CO, MS, OH, and PA) for onsite participation in Cleveland conference events. Details about total available credits and sessions with special credits are included in the chart below. More information can be found in the upcoming CLE FAQs and Details Guide. Email CLE@NACCchildlaw.org with questions.

For Jurisdictions Not Listed Below

It is the responsibility of attendees to independently apply for CLE credit in any jurisdiction where NACC, as the sponsor, did not seek CLE accreditation. We encourage you to review the individual CLE application requirements in your jurisdiction as soon as possible.

Jurisdiction	CLEVELAND CONFERENCE:	PRE-CONFERENCE EVENTS: Sunday, August 10, 2025		
	Monday, August 11 thru Wednesday, August 13, 2025	Red Book Training	RBT Tier 2: Trial Skills for Child Welfare Attorneys	Children's Law Office Project Convening
CALIFORNIA	ACCREDITED	ACCREDITED	ACCREDITED	ACCREDITED
	This course has been accredited by the State Bar of California for a maximum of 15 hours of credit , including a maximum of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.5 hours of Ethics credit (Session B3) • 3 hours of Implicit Bias credit (Sessions C3 and D3) • 1.5 hours of Technology credit (Session P4) 	This course has been accredited by the State Bar of California for a maximum of 6 hours of General credit only.	This course has been accredited by the State Bar of California for a maximum of 6 hours of General credit only.	This course has been accredited by the State Bar of California for a maximum of 4.5 hours of General credit only.
COLORADO	ACCREDITED	ACCREDITED	ACCREDITED	ACCREDITED
	This course is accredited by the Colorado Board of Continuing Legal and Judicial Education for a maximum of 18 units of credit , including a maximum of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5.4 units of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion credit (Sessions A1/A3/A4, C3, and D1/D3) • 1.8 units of Ethics credit (Session B3) 	This course is accredited by the Colorado Board of Continuing Legal and Judicial Education for a maximum of 7.2 units of General credit only.	This course is accredited by the Colorado Board of Continuing Legal and Judicial Education for a maximum of 7.2 units of General credit only.	This course is accredited by the Colorado Board of Continuing Legal and Judicial Education for a maximum of 5.4 units of General credit only.
MISSISSIPPI	ACCREDITED	ACCREDITED	ACCREDITED	ACCREDITED
	This course is approved by the Mississippi Commission on Continuing Legal Education for a maximum of 15 hours of credit , including a maximum of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.5 hours of Ethics/ Professionalism credit (Session B3) 	This course is approved by the Mississippi Commission on Continuing Legal Education for a maximum of 6 hours of General credit only.	This course is approved by the Mississippi Commission on Continuing Legal Education for a maximum of 6 hours of General credit only.	This course is approved by the Mississippi Commission on Continuing Legal Education for a maximum of 4.5 hours of General credit only.

Jurisdiction	CLEVELAND CONFERENCE:		PRE-CONFERENCE EVENTS: Sunday, August 10, 2025	
	Monday, August 11 thru Wednesday, August 13, 2025		Red Book Training	RBT Tier 2: Trial Skills for Child Welfare Attorneys
OHIO	ACCREDITED	ACCREDITED	ACCREDITED	ACCREDITED
	This program is approved by the Supreme Court of Ohio Commission on Continuing Legal Education for a maximum of 15 hours of CLE credit , including a maximum of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 hours of Professional Conduct credit (Sessions A1/A3/A4, B3, C3, and D1/D3) 	This program is approved by the Supreme Court of Ohio Commission on Continuing Legal Education for a maximum of 6 hours of General CLE credit only.	This program is approved by the Supreme Court of Ohio Commission on Continuing Legal Education for a maximum of 6 hours of General CLE credit only.	This program is approved by the Supreme Court of Ohio Commission on Continuing Legal Education for a maximum of 4.5 hours of General CLE credit only.
PENNSYLVANIA	ACCREDITED	ACCREDITED	ACCREDITED	ACCREDITED
	This program is approved by the Pennsylvania Continuing Legal Education Board for a maximum of 15 hours of CLE credit including a maximum of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.5 hours of Ethics credit (Session B3) 	This program is approved by the Pennsylvania Continuing Legal Education Board for a maximum of 6 hours of Substantive CLE credit only.	This program is approved by the Pennsylvania Continuing Legal Education Board for a maximum of 6 hours of Substantive CLE credit only.	This program is approved by the Pennsylvania Continuing Legal Education Board for a maximum of 4.5 hours of Substantive CLE credit only.

CLE INSTRUCTIONS

Contact CLE@NACCchildlaw.org with questions.

Submit an **ATTENDANCE** form after every session.

Scan QR code or use the link on the conference website to **submit an attendance form after every session** you attend.

Submit all attendance forms by Friday, August 22, 2025. Forms will not be accepted after that date.

NACC will report credits on behalf of attorneys in the states above (except for CO which is a self-report state) based on these attendance forms.

If you are from a different jurisdiction and plan to self-apply for CLE credits, you must still fill out these forms. If your CLE application or transcript is audited by your CLE authority, NACC will not be able to confirm your attendance unless you filled out forms for the sessions you attended.



EVALUATE each session you attend.

Share your feedback right after each session while impressions are fresh in your mind. Your insights help our presenters develop and learn.



Access all conference **HANDOUTS** and **MATERIALS**.

Certificates of attendance for your personal records will be available through the *Handouts and Materials* link after the conference concludes (scan QR code or use the link on the conference attendee webpage).



TELL US how we did!

Complete this **SURVEY** after the conference wraps up.

Give us your thoughts on what went well, what could be changed, and how NACC can improve your conference experience in the future.



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BUILDING COMMUNITY
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**SAVE THE
DATES FOR
2026 & 2027!**



2026

**August 12
thru August 14**

Pre-Conference Aug 11

Portland, Oregon



2027

**August 5
thru August 7**

Pre-Conference Aug 4

Denver, Colorado

