

Spotlight on STATE CWLS CHAMPIONS

CWLS-SSC-2507



The CWLS credential is granted only to experienced attorneys who successfully complete a rigorous application and examination process; it is the highest testament to the practitioner's dedication and demonstrated expertise in child welfare law. The CWLS credential is endorsed by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the Conference of Chief Justices/Conference of State Court Administrators, and the U.S. Children's Bureau. When a jurisdiction or office invests in CWLS practitioners, it signals a fundamental commitment to advancing justice and protecting the rights of those involved in the child welfare system. Here we spotlight a few of those champions and the varied ways they have used the CWLS program to improve the quality of legal representation in their communities.



GEORGIA's Court Improvement Program

Georgia's Court Improvement Program (CIP) provides financial assistance with the CWLS application fee, renewal fees, and scholarships for CWLS to attend state and national conferences. Georgia sponsors an annual CWLS retreat and hosts a CWLS-specific listserv. These efforts encourage attorneys to specialize and excel in this practice area, aligning with the CIP mandate to promote hearing quality and quality legal representation (ex. increasing the number of CWLS is part of the CIP strategic plan to support quality legal representation, so funding for this comes from the federal grant). Georgia's CIP also helps boost a sense of community in a state where legal representation is mostly private/local and not yet centralized. They explain, "Having a CWLS community gives attorneys who are passionate about this work a peer group to consult with questions, discuss ideas, and seek support. This sense of community and belonging helps to sustain our CWLS practitioners." Judges also appreciate the support for CWLS credentialing; some even pay a higher rate to CWLS-credentialed attorneys.



LOUISIANA's CIP Sponsorship and Child Representation Partnership

In Louisiana, the Court Improvement Program (CIP) and one of the state's child representation agencies (MHAS/CAP) both support and celebrate the CWLS community. The CIP underwrites the cost of registration for the Red Book Training Course, CWLS application fees for children's attorneys, parent's counsel, agency counsel, assistant district attorneys as well as juvenile court judges, and recertification fees. Support is provided from CIP funds as a part of its goal of improving the quality of legal representation for attorneys in child welfare cases.

Since 2014, MHAS/CAP has offered attorneys time to take the Red Book Training Course and study for the exam, as well as providing mentors/tutors upon request. Additionally, MHAS/CAP gives a one-time bonus of \$2,500 (funded by federal Title IV-E monies) when an attorney becomes a CWLS, as well as an additional \$2,500 bonus for recertification. MHAS/CAP explains, "We have found that the CWLS attorneys have more success in finding otherwise untapped resources and ideas to help the children and families we serve. They are able to be creative with problem-solving, which is valuable to the clients."

CWLS-certified attorneys are also recognized at Louisiana's annual child welfare conference.



Children's Law Center of CALIFORNIA

Children's Law Center (CLC) of California reimburses CWLS application fees, funds Red Book Training costs for eligible employees, and covers all annual dues and recertification fees for CWLS staff. In 2023, CLC recorded a training that walks applicants through each step of the process. CLC has also organized study groups to help attorneys prepare for the CWLS exam; others may choose to work one-on-one with a volunteer CWLS mentor. CLC has also used CWLS status when considering promotional opportunities for their attorneys. CLC explains, "Our attorneys are in court and in the field practicing child welfare law every day; their practice is elevated when they are exposed to and develop expertise in child welfare law, policy and regulations in addition to that which they typically see in their busy practice. The certification serves as a way to earn distinction and recognize achievement. Any additional skill, perspective or enhancement an attorney can bring to their practice makes them better situated to be the best advocate they can be — and thus inspires confidence within their clients — confidence that the client's wishes will be represented to the court, that the client's interests will be respected and protected, and that the client's case will be handled with professionalism, sensitivity, and loyalty."

NACC

National Association
of Counsel for Children

NACCchildlaw.org

Interested in being a champion for CWLS?

Email Certification@NACCchildlaw.org for more info about how supporting CWLS practitioners supports high-quality legal representation.