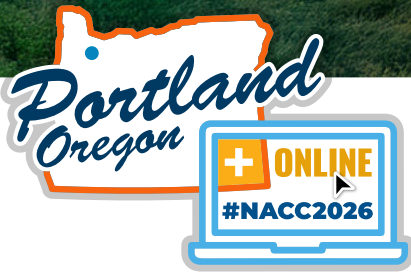


# NACC

National Association  
of Counsel for Children

## 49TH NATIONAL CHILD WELFARE LAW CONFERENCES



**PORTLAND,  
OREGON**

**AUGUST 12-14, 2026**

Pre-Conference August 11

**Hilton Portland  
Downtown**

**BOOK NOW!** 



**ONLINE**

**OCTOBER 14-16, 2026**

**[NACCchildlaw.org](https://NACCchildlaw.org)**

**Conference@  
NACCchildlaw.org**

### **Solutions That Sustain: Cultivating Community, Advancing Practice**

#### **THE CONFERENCES**

The annual conferences 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 **Solutions That Sustain: Cultivating Community, Advancing Practice**. This year's theme invites child welfare professionals to move beyond identifying problems and toward uplifting and co-creating systems and practices that work. Sustainable practice equips professionals to serve effectively and resiliently amid ongoing challenges, while sustainable community builds collaboration, mentorship, and shared purpose.

The conference will explore how to cultivate communities of practice that empower clients and colleagues, bridge gaps across disciplines and jurisdictions, and inspire compassionate, lasting solutions for children and families.

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.



## 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 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.

The child welfare system often separates children from parents or guardians accused of abuse or neglect. A judge in family court determines whether to remove a child from their family and place them in the foster care system.

The court decides where a child will live, where they will go to school, and what contact they will have with their family. The system affects hundreds of thousands of young people in the United States each year — disproportionately children from low-income families and children of color.

Family separation is often traumatizing. A child involved in these proceedings needs a well-trained lawyer to ensure the court hears their voice, protects their rights, and keeps them safely with their family when possible.

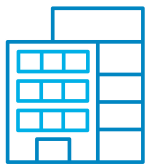
With a child’s safety and connection to family at stake, court proceedings work best when all parties — children, parents, and agencies — have legal representation. NACC helps lawyers do this important work. NACC is the only national organization accredited by the American Bar Association to certify attorneys as Child Welfare Law Specialists.

### 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 will have our conference at the Hilton Portland Downtown, with lodging at the Hilton Portland Downtown and across the street at The Duniway Portland. Book at the link above to receive our discounted conference rate of \$199/night.

Hilton Portland Downtown • 921 SW Sixth Avenue • Portland, OR, 97204

The Duniway Portland • 545 SW Taylor • Portland, OR, 97204



## THE CITY [↗](#)

Portland is a creative, green-minded city where rivers, forests, and food carts happily coexist. Set between the Willamette River and snow-capped Mount Hood, the city is known for its vibrant arts scene, iconic Powell’s City of Books, and an endlessly inventive culinary culture fueled by local farms, breweries, and coffee roasters. Visitors can stroll the waterfront at Tom McCall Park,



wander the lush trails of Forest Park, or explore neighborhoods filled with independent shops and murals. With its blend of urban energy and Pacific Northwest natural beauty, Portland offers a refreshing mix of inspiration, exploration, and laid-back charm.

NACC’s hotel block includes three days before and after the conference, so now is the time to book your stay and start making plans for a NW getaway.



## **SPONSOR, EXHIBIT, ADVERTISE**

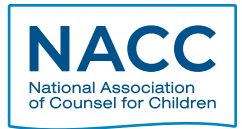
Sponsorship, exhibiting, and advertising are excellent ways to promote your organization, products, and services to a wide range of multidisciplinary legal professionals serving children and families.

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](mailto:Conference@NACCchildlaw.org) so we can best support your experience.



## Portland | Conference Highlights

Onsite at the Hilton Portland Downtown

REGISTER NOW TO SAVE \$100! [↗](#)

### ONSITE Pre-Conference : Tuesday, Aug 11, 2026

9:00am - 4:30pm **Foundations of Child Welfare Law and Practice** *REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!* [↗](#)

Foundations of Child Welfare Law and Practice is NACC's signature training, designed to provide a comprehensive overview of child welfare law and practice, and to help attorneys prepare for the Child Welfare Law Specialist certification exam. This one-day, live training is based on the 4th edition of *Child Welfare Law and Practice: Representing Children, Parents, and Agencies in Neglect, Abuse, and Dependency Cases* – more commonly known as the Red Book.

The training will cover the following areas of the Red Book, as well as practice exam questions:

- Overarching Legal Structure and Themes
- Legal Case from Beginning to End
- Discrete Issues
- Lawyering Roles
- Essential Lawyering Skills

**Separate registration required - Lunch included**

9:00am - 4:30pm **Trial Skills for Child Welfare Attorneys** *REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!* [↗](#)

Take your trial advocacy skills to the next level with Trial Skills for Child Welfare Attorneys – an exclusive pre-conference 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 *Child Welfare Law and Practice*, 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.

- **Prerequisite: Completion of Foundations of Child Welfare Law/Red Book Training Course or CWLS Certification.**
- **Topics Covered:**
- 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.

**Separate registration required - Lunch included - Limited to 40 attendees**



10:00am - 4:30pm **CHILDREN'S LAW OFFICE PROJECT CONVENING** *REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!* [🔗](#)

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**

10:00am - 10:30am **Welcome and Introductions**

10:30am - 12:00pm **SESSION 1**

**CLOC 1** **Healing-Centered Lawyering: Sustainable Advocacy with Youth, Families, and Lived Expertise**

*PRESENTER* **APRIL M. CURTIS, MSW** – Foster Care Alumni of America

Child welfare attorneys are trained to litigate – but rarely to practice in ways that sustain clients, communities, and themselves. This session introduces healing-centered, trauma-informed legal advocacy that integrates lived expertise, relational permanence, and cross-system awareness. The presenter will share concrete tools for partnering with youth and families, addressing secondary trauma and bias in practice, and building sustainable courtroom and out-of-court strategies. Participants will leave with frameworks, scripts, and practice tools that strengthen legal representation while advancing equity, belonging, and long-term well-being.

12:00pm - 1:00pm **Lunch (included) and Networking**

1:00pm - 2:30pm **SESSION 2**

**CLOC 2** **Recruiting and Training Attorneys to See Children as Clients: Lessons from Expressed Interest Representation of Children in Oklahoma**

*PRESENTER* **GWENDOLYN CLEGG, JD** – Oklahoma Office of Family Representation

Oklahoma law provides children at the Emergency Custody Hearing an attorney to represent their expressed interests, or if a child cannot express an interest the child's attorney shall represent the child with substituted judgement and follow the statutory factors for substituting judgement. CASAs or GALs represent a child's best interest in Oklahoma. The law specifically states that an attorney for the child shall not be the GAL for the child, meaning they may not represent the best interest of the child. The Judge determines what is in the best interest of the child. The Oklahoma Office of Family Representation is approaching our second anniversary. We have learned over the past two years that child representation in Oklahoma has not been following our amazing statutes. Recruiting and training attorneys who understand and want to represent the expressed interests of children and/or who understand how to use substituted judgement representation remains challenging.

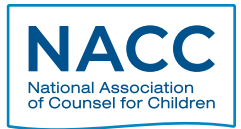
2:30pm - 3:00pm **Break and Networking**

3:00pm - 4:30pm **SESSION 3**

**CLOC 3** **Leading through the Hardest Work: Compassion as a Management Strategy**

*PRESENTER* **VIVEK SANKARAN, JD, CWLS** – University of Michigan Law School

Leaders of offices representing children, parents, and the state are asked to do the impossible: build teams capable of sustained, high-quality advocacy in a system defined by suffering, scarcity, and impossible caseloads. This session draws on emerging research and applied practice to make a practical case: compassion is not a wellness add-on but a core leadership competency for child welfare offices. We will explore why empathy alone burns teams out, how compassion produces a different result, and what specific moves leaders can make to keep talented advocates in this work and capable of doing it well.



5:00pm - 6:30pm **CWLS 20th Anniversary Reception**

More details to come.

## ONSITE Conference Day One : Wednesday, Aug 12, 2026

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

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

8:00am - 8:30am **Breakfast**

Join colleagues from your home state during breakfast. Tables will be marked with U.S. state names. Sit at your state's table to connect with others who practice in the same jurisdiction, share experiences, and meet new colleagues.

Prefer a mixed group? Feel free to sit anywhere. This is an informal networking opportunity with no agenda or facilitation.

8:30am - 8:45am **Welcome**

8:45am - 10:00am **PLENARY 1**

### **P1** Revisiting the Best Interest of the Child Standard in Termination of Parental Rights Hearings

*PRESENTERS* ALISTAIR GOODSON SMITH, MSW  
HON. BRENT PATTISON - Iowa Judicial Branch  
VIVEK SANKARAN, JD, CWLS - University of Michigan Law School

Despite its ubiquity, the "best interest of the child" standard in termination of parental rights proceedings often lacks clear definition, leading to inconsistent, adult-centric outcomes that conflict with developmental science. This session critiques the current legal landscape and proposes a reconstructed inquiry based on "affirmative need". We will explore why the current standard fails to account for the trauma of severance and the vital importance of relational permanency. Presenters will outline a rigorous, evidence-informed framework that requires courts to weigh the concrete costs and benefits of preserving parent-child bonds and to fully consider less restrictive alternatives before terminating rights.

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

10:30am - 12:00pm **BREAKOUT SESSION A**

### **A1** Making Policy Stick: Turning Federal Child Welfare Policy into Stronger Advocacy and Courtroom Practice

*PRESENTERS* MELISSA CARTER, JD - Barton Child Law & Policy Center, Emory University  
CHRIS HEMPFLING, JD, MBA, CHC, CWLS - BrightSpring Health Services

Child welfare attorneys practice in a landscape of constant change. Federal law updates, evolving funding requirements, permanency, and well-being shape create uncertainty and inconsistent implementation across jurisdictions. This session will examine key federal statutory and regulatory developments affecting child welfare cases and connect policy intent to courtroom implications. Participants will work through practical scenarios and learn tools they can use immediately, including policy-based argumentation, systematic issue-spotting, and strategies to strengthen the record. Attendees will leave with reusable methods to track policy change, translate mandates into legal strategy, and build collaborative courtroom practices that sustain the workforce and improve outcomes.



## **A2** Reimagine Reasonable Efforts: A National Rethinking

PRESENTERS

**HON. VINCENT CRAWFORD** – Dekalb County Juvenile Court  
**MEGAN DEELEY, JD** – Committee for Public Counsel Services, Child and Family Law Division  
**DANIELLE LACHANCE, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT** – Committee for Public Counsel Services, Child and Family Law Division  
**AMBER WALDEN JD, CWLS** – Family Law Office of Training and Education Services, LLC

This session reimagines “reasonable efforts” in child welfare cases, examining what agencies are being called upon to do to prevent family separation and support safety and timely reunification. After a brief federal law refresher, we will explore key case law from across the country to identify national trends and develop a clearer picture of what reasonable efforts can and should look like. Attendees will gain tools to strengthen advocacy from pre-removal through appeal. The session closes with insights from a Massachusetts parent advocate and a Georgia juvenile court judge on bridging the gap between legal requirements and daily practice.

## **A3** A Blueprint for Child Welfare Financing and Accountability Reform: Lifting Up and Investing in Family Courts

PRESENTER

**ROB GEEN** – CWPpolicy

Hear and provide feedback on a set of consensus policy recommendations for federal child welfare financing and accountability reform developed by an expert workgroup facilitated by the Bipartisan Policy Center. The recommendations call for increased investment in, and accountability of, family courts. In addition, the workgroup recommended that states be required to provide legal representation for all children and parents involved with child protective services. Learn about and help shape how these recommendations and possible alternatives are communicated to Congressional and Administration officials.

## **A4** Beyond the Case File: Using Social Capital to Strengthen Legal Advocacy and Relational Permanency

PRESENTERS

**APRIL M. CURTIS, MSW** – Foster Care Alumni of America  
**AOGUZI MCDONALD, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT** – National Foster Care Youth and Alumni Policy Council  
**NATHANIEL WILLIAMS, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT** – National Foster Care Youth and Alumni Policy Council

Child welfare courts routinely assess safety, services, and compliance – but they rarely examine the broader web of relationships that young people and families need to thrive beyond the life of a case. Drawing from a national Social Capital Poll and a multi-state policy roundtable led by people with lived experience, this session reframes social capital as essential to justice and permanency, not an optional add-on. Presenters will highlight how attorneys and judges can look beyond required findings about placement or permanency to identify and strengthen lifelong connections – mentors, relatives, peers, and community members who provide belonging, guidance, and opportunity. Participants will gain practical tools to ensure court practice centers an end goal that extends past case closure.

## **A5** Strengthening Families: Identifying and Advancing Solutions to Prevent Separation and Support LGBTQ+ Children at Home

PRESENTERS

**ESI HUTCHFUL, MPP** – Center for the Study of Social Policy  
**JILL JACOBS, MA** – Family Builders

LGBTQ+ youth are significantly overrepresented in systems of care. They face heightened risks of discrimination, instability, and suicide attempts. Too often, the lack of upstream support leads to family separation: either removal by child welfare or a young person becoming homeless. This session invites participants to consider a critical shift in practice and policy, moving from reaction and remediation to prevention, family support, and early intervention. This presentation will explore both policy and practice strategies across the full continuum of state administrative and legislative policy that create conditions for standing up and scaling successful programs like the Youth Acceptance Project which has successfully prevented family separation for LGBTQ+ youth and their families.



## **A6** Tech-Empowered High-Quality Representation: Innovative Tools That Elevate Parent & Youth Advocacy

*PRESENTERS* VALERIE FROST, M.ED – Sunlight  
TIMOTHY MICHAELS-JOHNSON, JD – Oklahoma Office of Family Representation  
RYAN O'DONNELL, FORMER FOSTER PARENT – Sunlight

This session is an interactive roundtable showing how emerging, family-centered technologies – like Your Case Plan, Sunlight Health, and CasaManager – help families and support teams successfully and collaboratively navigate complex systems to achieve their goals – family reunification, securing healthcare benefits, transitioning out of care. Attendees will illuminate common pain points (e.g., locating critical case documents, difficulties contacting clients, identifying agency contacts). The panelists will share use cases of how technology innovations complement zealous advocacy and strengthen day-to-day practice.

## **A7** Representing Families Impacted by Immigration Enforcement: Child Welfare & Immigration Advocacy at the Intersection

*PRESENTERS* LOSMIN JIMENEZ GREGORY, JD – Jimenez Gregory Law, LLC  
FABRIZIA RODRIGUEZ, JD – Committee for Public Counsel Services

This interactive session will equip child welfare attorneys with practical strategies for effective representation of parents and children affected by immigration enforcement. Drawing from extensive frontline experience in juvenile and immigration courts across multiple jurisdictions, presenters will explore key legal frameworks, trauma-informed advocacy, and culturally responsive practices. Latina, Spanish-fluent attorneys will use real-world scenarios to highlight systemic challenges and solutions for protecting family unity, due process, and access to services. Attendees will leave with actionable tools to address the intersection of immigration and child welfare in daily practice.

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12:00pm – 1:30pm **Lunch on Your Own**

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1:30pm – 3:00pm **BREAKOUT SESSION B**

## **B1** Who Gets to Define “Better”? Liberation and Community Power in Child Welfare

*PRESENTERS* NYASHA N. JUSTICE, JD – ABA Center on Children and the Law  
DeCLARA TRIPP, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT – Keeping Families Connected Minnesota  
JOANNA WOOLMAN, JD – Keeping Families Connected Minnesota

Child welfare reform efforts often begin by naming harm yet rarely create space for those most impacted to define what transformation looks and feels like. This session introduces a community-driven ecosystem model that convened Black women, once strangers, with varied lived experiences across community, culture, and systems into a structured process of collective reflection, visioning, and leadership. Rather than starting with “what needs to change,” the work centers a community-defined inquiry: What would it look and feel like for our communities to honestly say interactions with the child welfare continuum have improved? Through facilitated identity exploration, liberation-centered visioning, and shared guiding principles, participants articulate conditions for trust, healing, and authentic interaction.

## **B2** Introduction to the ABA Kinship Legal Toolkit: The Role of Legal Partners in Implementing a Kin-First Culture

*PRESENTERS* EMILY PEELER, JD, MSW – ABA Center on Children and the Law  
HEIDI REDLICH EPSTEIN, JD, MSW – ABA Center on Children and the Law  
GLENDA WRIGHT, JD, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT – Wright & Hunter Consulting

Research is clear – when children can't stay with their parents, they do best with kin. However, kin do not have automatic legal rights – they often step in unexpectedly without a formal legal relationship. Additionally, kin often do not have an attorney to assist them in making decisions about their options. This session will introduce the kinship legal toolkit created to assist judges and attorneys in understanding the value of kinship and their role in supporting

kin who open their hearts and homes. We will provide practical tips and real-life examples to assist agency, children, and parent attorneys, as well as judges, to understand their role in honoring and supporting kinship care not just as a placement, but also a relationship rooted in love, resilience, and connection.

### **B3** Nothing About Me Without Me: Moving Youth Voice from Tokenism to Power in Child Welfare Court

PRESENTERS **GINA CABIDDU, MSW, LSWAIC, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT**  
**CRISTAL RAMIREZ, MS, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT**

Youth voice is frequently cited in child welfare court, but too often is filtered, summarized, or sidelined. This session challenges professionals to move beyond symbolic participation toward youth engagement that meaningfully shapes legal advocacy and judicial decision-making. Drawing from lived experience and cross-system practice, presenters explore how identity disruption, ambiguous loss, and power dynamics affect youth participation. Attendees will learn concrete strategies to ethically engage youth in case planning, hearings, and court reports without forcing disclosure or re-traumatization. Through practical tools and real-world examples, the session equips attorneys and judges to center youth voice in ways that are developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, and outcome-driven.

### **B4** Making Room at the Table for Dads – Practical Strategies to Enrich the Role of Fathers in Child Development, Attachment, and Engagement

PRESENTERS **DARNESHIA ALLEN** – Safe Babies, A Program of ZERO TO THREE  
**MICHAEL HUESCA, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT** – Safe Babies, A Program of ZERO TO THREE

This session is designed to allow participants to explore influences that enhance or impede family engagement with an elevated focus on fathers. Through interactive community conversations and the exploration of tools offered to support more enriched partnerships with families, the audience will unpack strategies to promote authentic engagement that can optimize parent voice and increase capacity in providing trauma informed representation.

### **B5** Challenging Institutional Placements: Advocacy Tools to Keep Children Out of Residential Care and Address Harm in Care

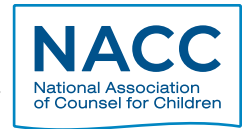
PRESENTERS **MICHAEL DAVIS-THOMAS, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT** – MDDTSpeaks Holdings, Inc.  
**BETHANY R. MUNSON, JD** – Pima County Office of Children's Counsel  
**CADON SAGENDORF** – Utah Department of Health and Human Services

Harm to children in institutions and the over-representation of marginalized populations in those settings are well documented. Yet, institutionalization is presented as inevitable or clinically necessary when service gaps, lack of family support, and risk-averse culture are at play, and leads to lack of school credit, homelessness, trafficking, and criminalization. Presenters with national policy advocacy, direct representation, and lived experience in institutions will share tools and resources including client-interviewing and relationship-building tips, as well as advocacy strategies (like in-court advocacy, licensing complaints, and targeted motion practice), to help practitioners collaborate with youth to ensure they remain with family when possible and to combat harmful conditions for institutionalized youth.

### **B6** Amplifying Voice and Gathering Data: A Workshop on Conducting Surveys of Clients and Colleagues

PRESENTERS **CLARK PETERS PHD, JD, MSW** – University of Missouri  
**FAITH SHARP, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT**  
**STERLING WALDMAN-SCHEIN, JD, MSW, KINSHIP LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT** – The Center for Growing Justice

Practitioners and policymakers across professional fields routinely draw on survey data drawn from clients and colleagues to inform key decisions. Developing effective surveys “in house,” however, requires careful attention to ethical concerns, question framing, and design architecture. Free or low-cost online tools have opened the door to sophisticated means of collecting reliable and accurate data and safeguard important “human subjects protection” ethical concerns. This workshop-style session will involve hands-on practice in conceptualizing, developing, and deploying online surveys for gathering actionable information to inform policy and practice in attendees’ professional settings.



**B7** Raising Native Youth Voices: Perspectives on Youth Attorney Representation in Tribal Court Dependency Cases

PRESENTERS REBECCA CIARAMITARO-ROGSTAD, JD – Tulalip Tribes  
CHRISTINE FRAUSTO, JD – Tulalip Tribes  
JESSICA POULEY, JD, MJ – Tulalip Office of Civil Legal Aid

How can we assure that the voices of Native youth are heard when considering the best interests of the child in a dependency proceeding? This presentation will emphasize the importance of culturally competent legal representation for Native youth in dependency cases and highlight the success of this work in the Tulalip Tribal Community. Through the perspectives of youth and agency attorneys, Tribal court judges, and Native youth testimonials, attendees will learn how effective collaboration can center and raise Native youth voices in dependency proceedings. It will highlight considerations for culturally appropriate and holistic representation of Native youth in Tribal communities as well as provide suggestions for implementing similar practices in other courts and communities.

3:00pm – 3:30pm **Break**

3:30pm – 5:00pm **In Community Sessions**  
More details to come.

Evening **Welcome Reception**  
More details to come.

**ONSITE** Conference Day Two: Thursday, Aug 13, 2026

7:30am – 5:30pm **Registration Desk Open**

8:00am – 5:00pm **Exhibits**

8:00am – 8:30am **Breakfast**

8:45am – 10:00am **PLENARY 2**  
**P2** More information coming soon!

10:00am – 10:30am **Break**

10:30am – 12:00pm **BREAKOUT SESSION C**

**C1** Building Partnerships Between Civil Legal Aid Attorneys and Juvenile Court Attorneys to Support Youth and Families

PRESENTERS MARISA LOPEZ-SCOTT, JD – Youth Law Center  
REBECCA MARCUS, JD – San Francisco Public Defender’s Office  
ANN QUIRK, JD, CWLS – Children’s Law Center of California

Many youth and families in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems have civil legal needs that dependency attorneys and juvenile defenders are not trained to address or lack the capacity to handle. Examples include housing assistance, public benefits, healthcare access, education, credit repair, domestic violence protection, and immigration legal services. Panelists will present ways that juvenile court and legal aid attorneys can work in partnership to support youth and families, engage court partners to create pathways to legal aid services, and highlight opportunities

for cross-training and cross-system collaboration. Together, attorneys can help prevent entry into the child welfare and juvenile justice systems and improve outcomes for youth and families within these systems.

## **C2** When School Isn't Working: A Toolkit for Legal Advocacy in Foster Youth Education

PRESENTERS **JENNIE ALBARADO, JD** – Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, Inc.  
**DANA ALMBERG, JD** – Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, Inc.  
**MARINA DALIA-HUNT, JD** – Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, Inc.

Children in foster care face significant and compounding barriers to educational success – from disrupted enrollment to disproportionately high rates of exclusionary discipline. They are also overrepresented in special education, yet frequently underserved. This session will provide an overview of key federal and state legal protections for students in care, including the IDEA. Presenters will highlight the critical role that children's attorneys can play in supporting their clients' education, offering practical tools and strategies for addressing IEP violations, discipline problems, and access issues. The session will conclude with a case study of impact litigation in Clark County, Nevada, challenging systemic violations of the right to read for foster youth with dyslexia.

## **C3** Disability Does Not Mean Incompetence: Exploring the Intersection of Parent Representation and Disability Rights

PRESENTERS **CHRISTINA CURTIS, JD** – Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers, Inc.  
**KAVYA PARTHIBAN, JD** – Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund

In many jurisdictions, courts liberally assign guardians ad litem (GALs) to parents solely because the parent has a mental health condition or developmental delay. Studies have shown that black parents have a higher number of GALs and conservators being assigned to their cases than their white counterparts. Many times, GALs are being assigned at the urging of their counsel, when in most situations, the lawyer should instead be making a special effort to avoid a GAL being assigned. This training will teach participants how to adjust representation to accommodate the client's limited capacity. This training will also examine what reasonable efforts mean for a parent who has a disability and how to successfully advocate for your clients when services provided fall below expectations.

## **C4** No Ride, No Right? Using Law and Litigation to Secure School Transportation for Youth

PRESENTERS **CHARLEY CROSS, JD** – Children's Law Center of California  
**CLARISSA PEÑA, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT** – HopSkipDrive  
**JORDAN SOSA, MPPA** – HopSkipDrive

Educational stability is a federal right, yet lack of safe, reliable transportation remains one of the most persistent barriers facing children involved in the child welfare system. This session equips attorneys with concrete legal and advocacy strategies to secure school transportation as an essential educational service for youth in foster care, students experiencing housing instability, and youth in kinship care. Presenters will analyze school-of-origin laws through a framework grounded in California's Assembly Bill 490 and federal requirements, integrate lived expertise from a HopSkipDrive Youth Advisory Board member and kinship caregiver, and highlight cross-system strategies attorneys can use to obtain transportation orders, reduce school disruption, and increase agency accountability.

## **C5** Understanding, Responding to, and Working with Youth with Problematic Sexual Behaviors and Their Families

PRESENTERS **KERRY DAWYOT, LMSW** – JCCA - Center for Healing  
**TRICIA GARDNER, JD** – University of Oklahoma Health Center, Center on Child Abuse and Neglect  
**JESSICA SCHUTTE, PSYD** – JCCA - Center for Healing

Youth and families who are impacted by problematic sexual behaviors (PSB) are often misunderstood and frequently have significant trauma histories, placing them at increased risk for involvement in child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Community responses to PSB are often either overly punitive or insufficient, leaving families and professionals without clear guidance. This presentation emphasizes the importance of multidisciplinary collaboration and provides guidance about more appropriate community responses for families to illustrate how legal systems, child



welfare, juvenile services, and other professionals can work together to improve outcomes and promote healthy development. This workshop also provides an overview of normative sexual development and the continuum of sexual behavior concerns, along with key risk and protective factors associated with PSB. Participants will learn developmentally appropriate, evidence-based strategies for responding to PSB and supporting youth and their families.

### **C6 CWLS Certification at 20: Proof, Impact, Next**

**PRESENTERS** ALLISON GREEN, JD, CWLS – National Association of Counsel for Children  
DANIEL TRUJILLO – National Association of Counsel for Children  
STEF SLOAN, PHD – Participatory Action Research Collective

Since 2006, the Child Welfare Law Specialist (CWLS) credential has aimed to raise the quality of attorney practice. Does it work? A year-long independent evaluation says yes. Hear the evidence, what it means for courts and families, how CWLS will evolve, and practical steps to bring certification to your jurisdiction.

### **C7 From Awareness to Action: The Five Habits of Cultural Competency, Implicit Bias, and Anti-Racist, Empowered Advocacy in Child Welfare**

**PRESENTER** PIERREA WALLACE, JD – Children's Law Center

This highly interactive training examines cultural competency tools developed by law school professors, including the Five Habits framework, to support attorneys and child welfare professionals. Participants will explore implicit bias and anti-racist practice within the historical and ongoing racialized environment of the child welfare system. The session addresses how unconscious assumptions and systemic racism influence decision-making and outcomes. This session gives particular attention to professionals of color and those with lived experience, who advocate while navigating internalized racism, vicarious, and secondary trauma. Through reflection and dialogue, all participants will gain language, practical tools, and strategies to support personal well-being and effective advocacy.

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12:15pm – 1:45pm **Membership and Awards Luncheon**

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2:00pm – 3:30pm **BREAKOUT SESSION D**

### **D1 Children Are Not Disposable: Challenging Rehoming in Child Welfare**

**PRESENTERS** FRANCESCA BLANCO, JD – NJ Office of the Public Defender, Office of Parental Representation  
MARIA HERNANDEZ, JD, MSW – NJ Office of the Public Defender, Office of Parental Representation  
MALING MIRANDA, JD, LLM – NJ Office of the Public Defender, Office of Parental Representation

This session examines the harmful practice of rehoming – informal transfers of children outside legal and child welfare oversight. This training explores how gaps in accountability, placement instability, and systemic pressures place children at risk of abuse, trafficking, and lifelong trauma. Participants will analyze the root causes that allow rehoming to occur, including inadequate support for caregivers and children with complex needs. The session centers child safety, dignity, and rights while offering concrete strategies to prevent rehoming, strengthen oversight, support permanency, and advance ethical, child-centered child welfare practice.

### **D2 Children Tell the Truth Sideways: Interdisciplinary Listening in Child Welfare Advocacy**

**PRESENTERS** ESTHER FLOWERS, JD, MSW – The New Foster Care  
INDIA YOUNG-JOHNSON, LMSW-C, DP-CAADC – The New Foster Care

Children and transition-age youth in child welfare often communicate safety concerns, fear, and unmet needs indirectly – through behavior, silence, or fragmented narratives rather than direct disclosure. While children are taught that feelings come before words, child welfare systems often require words before responding to feelings. This interdisciplinary session is led by experienced legal and clinical professionals with deep expertise in child welfare advocacy. Using real advocacy examples, presenters examine how trauma shapes communication, how survival strategies are misread as risk, and how disrupted safety affects developmental presentation. Participants will learn to recognize indirect disclosures, interpret silence, and advance legally sound, trauma-responsive advocacy.

**D3 Separated by Design: Sibling Loss, Parentification, and Caregiver Identity Disruption in Child Welfare**

*PRESENTERS* **IVORY BENNETT, M.ED, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT** – Fostering Media Connections: Youth Voices Rising  
**LILY COLBY, JD, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT** – Fostering Sibling Connections  
**ERICA HICKEY, BA, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT** – Fostering Sibling Connections  
**TORI SHULER, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT** – Fostering Great Ideas  
**ISABEL STASA, MPA, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT** – Foster Greatness

This panel discussion centers the lived experiences of individuals separated from their siblings through foster care and adoption, highlighting harms to identity, permanency, mental health, and cultural connection. While sibling relationships are widely recognized as important, legal frameworks often fail to capture the full impact of separation. Introducing concepts such as Caregiver Identity Disruption and Parentified Sibling Loss Response, this session reframes sibling separation as not only relational loss, but the disruption of an established caregiving role. Participants will learn how to identify parentified dynamics, strengthen advocacy, and incorporate lived expertise to more effectively identify, articulate, and mitigate this fallout. The session will also equip attorneys, judges, and advocates with concrete strategies to prevent sibling separation, challenge adoption practices that sever critical ties, and meaningfully incorporate youth voice into legal advocacy. Participants will leave with practical tools for litigation, policy reform, and ethical representation that prioritizes sibling bonds.

**D4 Making Family Time (Visitation) Work for Families: Centering Decisions in Safety**

*PRESENTERS* **JEFFREY ADAMS, JD, CWLS** – Washington State Office of Civil Legal Aid  
**TARASSA FROBERG, MSW** – Administrative Office of the Courts, Family and Youth Justice Programs  
**LEAH LEGEE, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT** – Parents for Parents/Multicultural Child & Family Hope Center

This training explores the importance of early, frequent, and meaningful family time in child welfare cases through legal, research-based, and practical perspectives. Participants will review research showing the benefits of least restrictive family time to reduce harm from child removal while maintaining safety, and learn the practical implications from a person with lived experience. Using the American Bar Association’s Guide to Child Safety for Judges and Attorneys, participants will practice determining appropriate supervision levels and structuring safe family time orders. The training also addresses assessing parental progress when visitation is unsupervised and how Washington law supports positive family time practices.

**D5 Thriving through Challenge: Building Resilience and Maintaining Competency in Emotionally Demanding Work**

*PRESENTERS* **JANELLE BATTA, JD, CWLS** – Children’s Law Center of California  
**CHEROKEE PEREZ ROGERS, LCSW** – Children’s Law Center of California  
**BRIAN THOMPSON, JD** – Children’s Law Center of California

Learn practical techniques for building resilience and thriving in your emotionally demanding job. Attorneys and a licensed clinical social worker will share tips and expertise on managing your mind and emotional health while under stress. Combat burnout and compassion fatigue and learn how to sustainably maintain a competent practice that you are proud of. Participants will walk away with a clearer sense of their personal vision of thriving, strategies for progressing towards it, and tools to maintain healthy boundaries that support resilience.

**D6 More information coming soon!**

**D7 Beyond the Silos: Addressing the Intersectional Realities of Exploited Youth**

*PRESENTERS* **MAE ACKERMAN-BRIMBERG, JD, MSW** – National Center for Youth Law  
**MARÍA CONTRERAS, MPP** – National Center for Youth Law

Youth impacted by commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) do not exist in a vacuum; their experiences are shaped by the intersections of poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, colonialism, and xenophobia. Overlapping failures across child welfare, youth justice, immigration, health, and education systems contribute to vulnerability, and often



miss critical windows for prevention and response. But there is hope. This session explores CSE via an intersectional lens. Participants will learn to identify trafficking within their roles and move beyond siloed responses toward deep community, lived experience, and cross-sector partnerships. Attendees will gain practical strategies for advocacy, ensuring responses center youths' multifaceted identities and experiences to drive meaningful change.

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3:30pm - 4:00pm **Break**

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4:00pm - 5:30pm **In Community Sessions**  
More details to come.

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6:00pm **Self-Compassion Hike (Forest Park) *REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!***   
**Sponsored by Casey Family Programs**

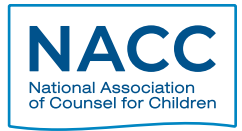
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- SHERI FREEMONT - Casey Family Programs
  - BROOKE SILVERTHORN - Casey Family Programs
  - VIVEK SANKARAN - University of Michigan Law School
  - SHELDON SPOTTED ELK - Casey Family Programs
  - ROB WYMAN - Casey Family Programs
  - ALLISON GREEN - NACC



Back for its third year, join our Self-Compassion Hike experience sponsored by 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 Forest Park, a tranquil location where we can enjoy and experience nature, a boxed dinner, and a brief discussion on the benefits of nature experiences and compassion for self and others. We 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.

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 lobby at 6:00pm; leaving promptly at 6:15pm**



## ONSITE Conference Day Three: Friday, Aug 14, 2026

7:30am - 12:00pm **Registration Desk Open**

8:00am - 12:00pm **Exhibits**

8:00am - 8:30am **Breakfast**

8:45am - 10:00am **PLENARY 3**

### **P3** From Harm to Accountability: Litigation Pathways to Help Transform Child Welfare Systems

*PRESENTERS* **JUSTIN GROSZ, JD** – Justice for Kids, a Division of Kelley Kronenberg  
**IRA LUSTBADER, JD** – Children's Rights  
**JOHN WALSH, JD** – Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County, Inc.  
**RAYMOND WILLIAMS, JD** – DLA Piper

When systems fail the children and families they are supposed to help, litigation can serve to protect and vindicate rights and as a lever for change. This plenary examines how advocates are using class action injunctive cases, personal injury damages cases, and amicus advocacy to confront systemic harm and push for structural reform. Practitioners will understand the different types of cases, claims and strategies that can be brought on behalf of children harmed in care, and strategies for effective collaboration with private or pro bono counsel. Panelists will reflect on the role of litigation within the broader evolving movement for children's rights and family integrity, including how to partner with impacted communities and front-line advocates and practitioners, align legal strategies with lived experience, and sustain momentum beyond the courtroom.

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

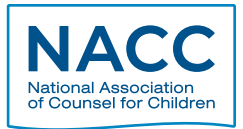
10:30am - 11:45am **PLENARY 4**

### **P4** Ethical Storytelling as a Tool for Child Welfare Advocacy

*PRESENTERS* **IVORY BENNETT, M.ED, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT** – Fostering Media Connections: Youth Voices Rising  
**ERICA HICKEY, BA, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT** – National Network for Fostering Sibling Connections  
**TORI SHULER, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT** – Fostering Great Ideas

This session explores how ethical, trauma-informed storytelling strengthens sibling rights advocacy and deepens understanding among courts and attorneys. Drawing on Youth Voices Rising (YVR) and the InnerViews podcast, we examine how lived experience narratives illuminate the gaps between foster youth rights and real-world practice. Participants will learn to prepare families to share stories with dignity, how legal professionals can collaborate responsibly with media, and how storytelling informs legal advocacy while advancing relational permanency. Sibling separation is one of the most harmful experiences in care, yet families are rarely supported to tell these stories to drive systems change. This theme serves as a model for broader social and youth justice advocacy.

11:45am - 12:00pm **Closing and Raffle**



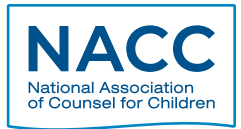
# Online | Conference Highlights

From the comfort of your home or office

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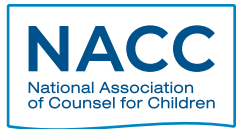
## ONLINE Conference Day 1: Wednesday, Oct 14, 2026

<p>9:00am - 9:15am PACIFIC 10:00am - 10:15am MOUNTAIN 11:00am - 11:15am CENTRAL 12:00pm - 12:15pm EASTERN</p>	<p><b>Welcome</b></p>
<p>9:15am - 10:45am PACIFIC 10:15am - 11:45am MOUNTAIN 11:15am - 12:45pm CENTRAL 12:15pm - 1:45pm EASTERN</p>	<p><b>Online Plenary 1</b></p>
<p>11:15am - 12:45pm PACIFIC 12:15pm - 1:45pm MOUNTAIN 1:15pm - 2:45pm CENTRAL 2:15pm - 3:45pm EASTERN</p>	<p><b>Online Breakout A</b></p>
<p>1:15pm - 2:45pm PACIFIC 2:15pm - 3:45pm MOUNTAIN 3:15pm - 4:45pm CENTRAL 4:15pm - 5:45pm EASTERN</p>	<p><b>Online Breakout B</b></p>
<p>3:15pm - 4:45pm PACIFIC 4:15pm - 5:45pm MOUNTAIN 5:15pm - 6:45pm CENTRAL 6:15pm - 7:45pm EASTERN</p>	<p><b>Online Plenary 2</b></p>



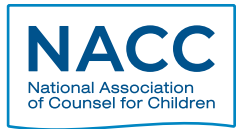
# ONLINE Conference Day 2: Thursday, Oct 15, 2026

8:00am - 9:30am PACIFIC 9:00am - 10:30am MOUNTAIN 10:00am - 11:30am CENTRAL 11:00am - 12:30pm EASTERN	<b>Online Breakout C</b>
10:00am - 11:30am PACIFIC 11:00am - 12:30pm MOUNTAIN 12:00pm - 1:30pm CENTRAL 1:00pm - 2:30pm EASTERN	<b>Online Breakout D</b>
12:00pm - 1:30pm PACIFIC 1:00pm - 2:30pm MOUNTAIN 2:00pm - 3:30pm CENTRAL 3:00pm - 4:30pm EASTERN	<b>Online Plenary 3</b>
2:00pm - 3:30pm PACIFIC 3:00pm - 4:30pm MOUNTAIN 4:00pm - 5:30pm CENTRAL 5:00pm - 6:30pm EASTERN	<b>Online Breakout E</b>



# ONLINE Conference Day 3: Friday, Oct 16, 2026

8:00am - 9:30am PACIFIC 9:00am - 10:30am MOUNTAIN 10:00am - 11:30am CENTRAL 11:00am - 12:30pm EASTERN	<b>Online Plenary 4</b>
10:00am - 11:30am PACIFIC 11:00am - 12:30pm MOUNTAIN 12:00pm - 1:30pm CENTRAL 1:00pm - 2:30pm EASTERN	<b>Online Breakout F</b>
12:00pm - 1:30pm PACIFIC 1:00pm - 2:30pm MOUNTAIN 2:00pm - 3:30pm CENTRAL 3:00pm - 4:30pm EASTERN	<b>Online Plenary 5</b>
2:00pm - 3:00pm PACIFIC 3:00pm - 4:00pm MOUNTAIN 4:00pm - 5:00pm CENTRAL 5:00pm - 6:00pm EASTERN	<b>Closing and Awards</b>



## Portland | Registration

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### ONSITE AT THE HILTON PORTLAND DOWNTOWN

	THROUGH 6/30/2026	STARTING 7/1/2026
CWLS	\$ 495	\$ 495
NACC Member	\$ 525	\$ 625
Nonmember	\$ 750	\$ 850

### PORTLAND ADD-ON EVENTS (MORE TO COME!)

#### PRE-CONFERENCE: FOUNDATIONS OF CHILD WELFARE LAW AND PRACTICE

CWLS & NACC Member	\$ 225
Nonmember	\$ 300

#### PRE-CONFERENCE: TRIAL SKILLS FOR CHILD WELFARE ATTORNEYS

CWLS	\$ 495
NACC Member	\$ 550
Nonmember	\$ 645

#### PRE-CONFERENCE: CLOP CONVENING

CWLS & NACC Member	\$ 100
Nonmember	\$ 150



## Online | Registration

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# In 2027, NACC is Celebrating Our 50th Anniversary!

**Save the Date** for the 50th National Child Welfare Law Conference.

Pre-Conference: Wednesday, August 4, 2027

Conference: Thursday–Saturday, August 5–7, 2027

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