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THE GUARDIAN

FROM PROTECTION TO PREVENTION: AN ATTORNEY'S ROLE IN PREVENTING CROSSOVER

By Bri Crawford, JD, MPP



INTRODUCTION

For many children, involvement in the child welfare system becomes a pathway to criminalization, where the impact of trauma, instability, and unmet need is misconstrued as delinquency, resulting in court involvement and confinement. In fact, youth involved in the child welfare system are significantly more likely than their peers to become involved in the juvenile legal system,¹ an experience commonly described as “crossover.”² However, crossover is not driven by individual delinquency, but rather by system exposure.³ Placement instability, reliance on congregate care, disciplinary practices within foster placements, school-based referrals to law enforcement, and unmet mental health needs play a central role in funneling child welfare-involved youth into the juvenile legal system.⁴

- 1 Susan Baidawi & Rosemary Sheehan, ‘Crossover’ children in the youth justice and child protection systems, 1 (1st ed. 2019).
- 2 Barbara T. Kelley & Paul A. Haskins, *Dual System Youth: At the Intersection of Child Maltreatment and Delinquency*, 283 Nat'l Inst. of Just. J., 1 (2021).
- 3 Carolyn A. Modrowski et al., *Youth Dually-Involved in the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems: Varying Definitions and Their Associations with Trauma Exposure, Posttraumatic Stress, & Offending*, 150 Child. & Youth Servs. Rev. (2023).
- 4 Darren Maguire et al., *A Systematic Review of the Impact of Placement Instability on Emotional and Behavioural Outcomes Among Children in Foster Care*, 17 J. Child & Adolescent Trauma 641 (2024); Brianne H Kothari et al., *A Longitudinal Analysis of School Discipline Events Among Youth in Foster Care*, 93 Child. & Youth Servs. Rev. 117 (2018); Sarah Vidal et al., *Multisystem-Involved Youth: A Developmental Framework and Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice*, 4 Adolescent Resch. Rev. 15 (2018).

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FROM PROTECTION TO PREVENTION — CONTINUED

Effective child welfare lawyering requires recognizing crossover prevention as a core professional responsibility, operating at two critical stages. First, attorneys have an obligation to work to prevent removal, intervening early to challenge unnecessary placements, advocate for family-based supports, and resist system responses that conflate poverty, disability, or behavioral health needs with neglect. Second, when removal occurs, attorneys have an obligation to engage in post-removal intervention, actively mitigating the conditions and practices within foster care that increase the likelihood of juvenile legal system involvement.

CROSSOVER PREVENTION AS A CORE LEGAL OBLIGATION

The obligation to prevent crossover arises directly from the professional responsibilities that govern legal representation. Attorneys representing youth are not limited to reacting to agency filings; they are tasked with protecting their clients' legal interests in proceedings that profoundly alter the trajectory of childhood. When research consistently indicates that certain placements, disciplinary responses, and service gaps heighten the likelihood of juvenile court involvement, those risks become legally relevant harms.⁵ Adequate representation requires anticipating and addressing the consequences of state intervention.

I. PREVENTING UNNECESSARY REMOVAL

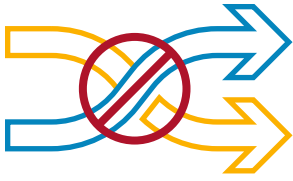
For many youth, removal from the home is neither desired nor necessary to ensure safety. A youth-centered approach requires attorneys representing youth to prioritize family-based supports that honor their clients' expressed wishes and well-being, rather than relying on removal as a protective measure. When youth voices are sidelined by those tasked with advocating and caring for them, frustrations can manifest in ways that are labeled delinquent conduct, exacerbating the likelihood of juvenile legal system involvement.

Understanding why removal so often causes harm requires examining the conditions that bring families into court in the first place. Conditions agencies frequently cite in neglect findings, such as parental substance use, mental health needs, housing instability, unmet healthcare needs, and lack of access to parenting supports, are often indicators of a lack of resources rather than neglect.

Preventing unnecessary removal requires attorneys to be knowledgeable about the services available in their jurisdictions and prepared to advocate for their timely application. This may include understanding how state Medicaid programs can fund mental health treatment, substance use services, and general healthcare, as well as how housing assistance and family preservation programs can stabilize home environments. Where youth have identified disabilities, attorneys should also invoke IDEA and ADA protections to prevent schools from criminalizing behavioral manifestations.

⁵ *Id.*

Conditions agencies frequently cite in neglect findings, such as parental substance use, mental health needs, housing instability, unmet healthcare needs, and lack of access to parenting supports, are often indicators of a lack of resources rather than neglect.



FROM PROTECTION TO PREVENTION — CONTINUED

Advocating for a variety of needs may require collaboration with legal aid attorneys specializing in healthcare, education, housing, and public benefits. Interdisciplinary partnerships allow child welfare attorneys to address underlying needs and create a holistic network of support for system-involved youth.

Equipped with knowledge of available services and strengthened by interdisciplinary partnerships, attorneys must then use those tools to actively contest neglect allegations rooted in poverty rather than actual harm or imminent risk. This includes requiring agencies to satisfy their statutory obligation to make reasonable efforts to prevent removal by providing family supports.⁶ Where agencies rely on generalized concerns to justify removal, attorneys should insist on individualized assessments and documented efforts to mitigate risk without family separation. By reframing neglect allegations in this way, attorneys can disrupt further involvement in the child welfare system due to economic hardship rather than child safety concerns.

Where a child may already be at a greater risk or further risk of juvenile legal system involvement, effective crossover prevention may require intervention before a delinquency petition begins. Child welfare attorneys can engage probation officers, prosecutors, and placement providers early to advocate for diversion, restorative responses, or behavioral services rather than formal charges. Notably, youth and families should have a voice in these conversations. Family participation honors their autonomy and dignity and ensures that proposed interventions are grounded in the family's needs. Early conversations allow attorneys to frame behavioral concerns as child welfare matters requiring support, rather than public safety matters requiring confinement.

II. PREVENTING JUVENILE LEGAL SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT AFTER REMOVAL

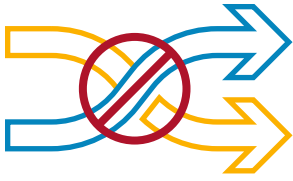
Preventing removal remains a critical obligation, but when removal occurs despite those efforts, attorneys must pivot to minimizing the risks that placement itself creates. Where kinship care or foster placements are available, advocacy should focus on equipping caregivers with the supports necessary to sustain placements safely. Research consistently shows that placement with relatives is associated with reduced juvenile legal system involvement, in part because kinship caregivers provide continuity of relationships, cultural connection, and greater tolerance for developmentally normative adolescent behavior than institutional settings.⁷ Advocacy should therefore focus on equipping caregivers with the supports necessary to sustain placements safely, recognizing that the protective benefits of kinship and foster care depend on whether caregivers receive the resources necessary to manage trauma-related behaviors without resorting to placement disruption or juvenile legal system involvement.⁸ Many voluntary relinquishments and involuntary removals stem from family

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⁶ U.S. Dep't of Health & Hum. Servs., Admin. for Child. & Fams., Children's Bureau, Child Welfare Info. Gateway, Reasonable Efforts to Preserve or Reunify Families and Achieve Permanency for Children (2020).

⁷ Annie E. Casey Found., Stepping Up for Kids: What Government and Communities Should Do to Support Kinship Families (2012).

⁸ *Id.*



Without proactive educational advocacy, school discipline becomes a direct pathway from foster care to juvenile court.

FROM PROTECTION TO PREVENTION — CONTINUED

conflict tied to unmet behavioral health needs.⁹ Attorneys should support families and youth in completing permanency plans by actively collaborating with service providers, ensuring that treatment and supports are accessible, appropriate, and responsive to the child and family's needs.

When family-based placement is not available or cannot be sustained, youth are at significantly heightened risk of juvenile legal system involvement through congregate care settings. Congregate care settings may treat behaviors that would typically be addressed within a family home—such as verbal conflict, minor property damage, running away, or refusal to follow staff directives—as rule violations or threats to safety, escalating into formal discipline or court involvement, despite being developmentally normative for adolescents.¹⁰ Such conduct can also be a reflection of fear, grief, or dysregulation rather than criminal intent. However, zero-tolerance policies and staffing models that rely on external control rather than relational de-escalation can transform trauma responses into delinquency allegations, pushing youth deeper into the juvenile legal system. Even after removal, children still require consistent, nurturing parenting. Ensuring that youth receive developmentally appropriate care in out-of-home placements is therefore a critical component of effective legal advocacy.¹¹

A parallel pipeline operates within school environments, where foster youth encounter heightened surveillance and disciplinary escalation. Youth in foster care experience disproportionate rates of school discipline, and the presence of school resource officers often escalates minor classroom disruptions into arrests or citations.¹² Court referrals often reframe behavior linked to trauma, disability, or placement instability as disorderly conduct or assault.¹³ Without proactive educational advocacy, school discipline becomes a direct pathway from foster care to juvenile court.

Congregate care settings and school environments represent the two significant institutional drivers of crossover for youth who have already been removed from their homes. Post-removal advocacy must rely on similar tools used for removal prevention to address placement instability, resist unnecessary congregate care, and ensure that the spaces youth occupy every day do not become the next step toward criminalization.

III. REORIENTING CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE

These recurring patterns reveal that crossover is not incidental, but structurally embedded, requiring a fundamental reorientation of child welfare advocacy. At its core, effective prevention work by child welfare attorneys and advocates requires a deliberate shift from surveillance to support. This includes separating poverty from neglect,

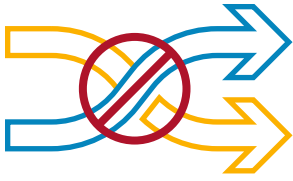
9 Off. of the Assistant Sec'y for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Dep't of Health and Hum. Services, *Prevalence and characteristics of children entering foster care to receive behavioral health or disability services: An analysis of custody relinquishment using administrative data* (2025).

10 Caitlin Cavanagh, *Healthy Adolescent Development and the Juvenile Justice System: Challenges and Solutions*, 16 Child Dev. Persp. 141 (2022).

11 M. Dozier et al., *Consensus Statement on Developmentally Appropriate Policy and Practice for Adolescents in Foster Care*, 178 Child. & Youth Servs. Rev. (2025).

12 John Prindle et al., *Arrests Among Adolescents with a History of Foster Care Placements in Group Home Settings*, 161 Child Abuse & Neglect (2025).

13 Crosby A. Modrowski et al. *Youth dually-involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems: Varying definitions and their associations with trauma exposure, posttraumatic stress, & offending*, 150 Child. & Youth Servs. Rev. 1 (2023).



Child welfare attorneys are uniquely positioned at the intersection of protection and punishment, where early legal decisions can insulate children from further harm.

FROM PROTECTION TO PREVENTION — CONTINUED

centering family autonomy and dignity, and redirecting resources away from removal and toward stability.

While training and continuing legal education play an important role, prevention also depends on ongoing knowledge-sharing among practitioners and sustained collaboration across disciplines. By engaging in both removal prevention and also robust post-removal advocacy, child welfare attorneys can meaningfully reduce the conditions that place children on a path toward criminalization.

Ethical rules require zealous advocacy, obligating attorneys to identify and mitigate foreseeable harms arising from state intervention, including the well-documented risk that child welfare involvement increases juvenile legal system contact.¹⁴ When attorneys fail to challenge placements or practices that predictably expose youth to criminalization, they acquiesce to violations of legal protective measures rather than fulfilling their role as legal advocates for youth interests.

Child welfare attorneys are uniquely positioned at the intersection of protection and punishment, where early legal decisions can insulate children from further harm. Recognizing crossover prevention as a core component of child welfare representation reframes the attorney's role from passive participant to active safeguard against foreseeable harm. By engaging in removal prevention, intervening after placement, and favoring family-centered support, attorneys can disrupt the pipeline from foster care to confinement. When children receive support in stable family settings with access to mental health care, educational support, and supportive parenting, attorneys can interrupt the trajectory toward criminalization. ■

¹⁴ Model Rules of Pro. Conduct r. 1.3 cmt. (Am. Bar Ass'n 1983).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



BRI CRAWFORD, JD, MPP, is the 2025 Equal Justice Works Text-to-Give Fellow at the Youth Law Center in Nashville, Tennessee. Her fellowship project addresses the unmet legal needs of racially marginalized children and youth with disabilities in Tennessee who are involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Bri is a graduate of Howard University School of Law and holds a Master of Public Policy in Education Policy from Vanderbilt University. During law school, she served as a policy consultant with the Juvenile Court of Memphis and Shelby County and completed internships with the Battered Women's Justice Project, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender's Juvenile Unit, and the National Center for Youth Law. She also represented parents in her law school's child welfare clinic. Prior to law school, Bri worked as an education consultant, supporting schools, districts, and education-focused organizations in designing equitable policies and learning environments that expanded students' opportunities to thrive. Bri brings both professional expertise and lived experience to her advocacy, grounding her work in empathy, respect, and a deep commitment to justice for youth and families



LEARNING FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE

WHEN YOUTH VOICES RISE AND SYSTEMS RESIST: THE VITRIOL OF PERFORMATIVE LIVED EXPERIENCE INCLUSION

By Ivory Bennett, M.Ed.

There is a myth that child welfare centers children and youth. The reality is that there is an intense and intentional disconnect between what is written in policy and procedure and what happens in practice. Cashmore (2011) notes, “Children’s participation is not simply about being heard, but about having their views taken seriously in decision-making.” Systems claim to center children while prioritizing arbitrary timelines, haphazard compliance practices, and professional hierarchies above the lived experience testimonies of the youth subjected to it — a stark contrast to the warnings of scholars over the last several decades that simply listening to children is not equitable in comparison to actually sharing power with them (Shier, 2001; Cashmore, 2011).

Legally, youth’s disclosures are documented — rarely is this information grounds for meaningful investigation or proactive measures (Shier, 2001). Performative youth voice inclusion — particularly in court, case planning, and permanency hearings — is one example of many where practitioners unintentionally protect and engage in the harmful oppression inevitably engrained in the United States family court systems. Important to note, under Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, youth’s views must be

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



IVORY BENNETT is a dedicated leader, educator, and advocate with over 17 years of experience driving positive change in education equity and child welfare. With a multifaceted background in curriculum development, coaching, and community engagement, Ivory is committed to advancing the well-being of vulnerable populations and promoting trauma-informed pedagogy. As the Program Manager at Youth Voices Rising in Los Angeles, Ivory develops and executes comprehensive training programs in basic journalism skills for lived experts, empowering them to create impactful content focused on child welfare issues. With a Master’s in Education Administration from Concordia University and dual accreditation in English from Texas A&M University–Commerce, Ivory brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to her work. Her dedication to creating safe and supportive environments for vulnerable populations exemplifies her commitment to social impact and positive change. Ivory Bennett’s tireless advocacy, leadership, and expertise make her a transformative force in education equity and child welfare, inspiring others to join the movement for a more just and equitable society.

You can contact Ivory via email at ivory@fosteringmediaconnections.org.

LEARNING FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE — CONTINUED



It is only when children and youth inconveniently buck against injustices that are seemingly unimportant to the powers that be — misuse of clothing allotments, undignified subjugations, dismissal of cultural practices, and blatant abuse and neglect, just to name a few — that their stories gain traction, to be used against them!

given “due weight” — still, research reveals a persistent gap between obligatory listening and intentional inclusion (Cashmore, 2011; United Nations, 1989).

Unfortunately, identity shapes credibility. And in an ecosystem such as the child welfare landscape, many youth have marginalized identities that are disproportionately represented. Identity, something that is far too often predetermined and projected onto not only youth, but their families, cultures, and communities, is an essential component to their “listen-ability.” Roberts (2002) wrote, “The child welfare system is not a benign force in the lives of Black families;” a stark reminder that not all identities garner the same attentiveness, seriousness, or value.

Black families are often victims to a child welfare system that perpetuates more harm than restoration. Research has long shown that child welfare systems disproportionately surveil Black children (Roberts, 2002), who are often perceived as more adult and less deserving of protection (Morris, 2016), and who may present trauma-affected narratives that professionals misinterpret as inconsistency rather than injury (De Bellis et al., 2013).

I, once a young, black girl with a more mature body and an adultified and parentified awareness of myself and the world, living in an incredibly racist city and culture, often experienced feeling dismissed by individuals who were meant to serve and protect me. Morris (2016) documents how adultification bias leads Black youth — particularly girls — to be viewed as “more culpable and less deserving of protection.” Too often, my experiences only mattered when my story could be plastered as trauma-porn that guilted wealthy patrons into donating more money or resources into whatever entity felt entitled to exploit my lived experiences for their profit.

Zora Neale Hurston once proclaimed, “If you are silent about your pain, they’ll kill you and say you enjoyed it.” It is only when children and youth inconveniently buck against injustices that are seemingly unimportant to the powers that be — misuse of clothing allotments, undignified subjugations, dismissal of cultural practices, and blatant abuse and neglect, just to name a few — that their stories gain traction, to be used against them!

And it is important to note that these stories are typically only heard when being shouted with aggression or coupled with undesired behaviors, because the system often dismisses, ignores, or undervalues calm, rational communication. Moreover, credibility is further compromised when children are ignored; De Bellis et al. (2013) explains that trauma can disrupt memory encoding and retrieval, meaning inconsistencies in children’s accounts may reflect neurobiological stress rather than deception.

It is crucial to explicitly uplift a particular marginalized group the child welfare system often dismisses as unreliable narrators — lived experts with chronic illnesses. Due to the stressful nature of child welfare involvement, those with lived experiences tend to have higher ACE scores, thus higher instances of disease — “Adverse childhood experiences are a leading determinant of the health and well-being of the nation (Burke Harris et al., 2018).”

In other words, systems-involved children and youth are not adequately protected while in the child welfare system and must also deal with those ramifications throughout the entirety of their lives in the forms of health disparities. When identity shapes credibility, the intersections of race, trauma, disability, and professional bias interfere with equitable legal assessments and proceedings that last well beyond childhood.

LEARNING FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE — CONTINUED



Far too often, harm disclosures are meticulously documented but insufficiently interrupted. As someone who lived the experiences of foster homes, kinship homes, and even one shelter across the span of 17 years and about a dozen placements, I know what it means for the record to be accurate while the response remains inadequate. I know what Audre Lorde meant when she wrote, *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*.

System responses do not always escalate in meaningful ways that reduce harm, according to research on child protection decision-making, even when the risks are clearly identified (Font & Berger, 2015). In practice, this can create a discouraging gap between legal acknowledgement and legal accountability — a case note may accurately reflect what a child communicated; it does not ensure that anyone acted with urgency regarding that shared information.

Institutional reviews of maltreatment disclosures similarly find that systems frequently struggle to translate knowledge into protection, particularly in complex or high-volume environments (Whittaker et al., 2017). Nowhere is this more painfully visible than in fatality review findings, where children are repeatedly described as “known to the system” prior to serious injury or death. These patterns reveal a structural truth: information alone does not save children — timely, decisive intervention does. When case files hold the truth but outcomes remain unchanged, the issue is not documentation capacity but accountability discipline.

My daily work through Youth Voices Rising and InnerViews has reinforced what the research increasingly affirms: lived experience is not anecdotal; it is diagnostic. Scholars of co-production note that integrating lived expertise into system design improves both responsiveness and also legitimacy because it surfaces risks professionals may overlook (Jones et al., 2020). In child welfare, lived experts often function as an early warning system, identifying patterns of harm long before they appear in aggregate data.

Beyond early detection, lived experience operates as an interpretive lens that helps legal and policy actors correctly read what is already in front of them. Beresford (2016) argues that user involvement produces a distinct form of knowledge capable of challenging institutional blind spots. When paired with trauma-informed advocacy approaches that emphasize partnership and power-sharing (Saulnier & Swigonski, 2015), lived expertise becomes a moral accountability mechanism — not just a storytelling exercise. The question, then, is no longer whether to include lived experts, but whether systems are prepared to change because of what lived experts consistently reveal.

Here are some practical steps for attorneys, judges, and advocates to take when shifting from performative listening to meaningful inclusion of youth voice:

- Slow down when harm is disclosed (National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges [NCJFCJ], 2017; SAMHSA, 2014):
 - Have resources for your client readily available
 - Have a plan for yourself to allow for healthy processing, offloading, and recovery
- Approach inconsistency as a trauma indicator, not as a moral deception (SAMHSA, 2014)
- Build and protect feedback loops with lived experts that extend beyond courtroom testimony (NCJFCJ, 2017; SAMHSA, 2014)
- Ask: What would accountability require here for restorative justice — beyond procedure? (Piquero et al., 2017)

The question, then, is no longer whether to include lived experts, but whether systems are prepared to change because of what lived experts consistently reveal.

LEARNING FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE — CONTINUED



Beliefs, values, and morals can and must translate as legal actions. Centering youth voices — honoring the brave stories of their lived experiences — must be an unavoidable and structural foundation of any child welfare-related practices. Child welfare attorneys, judges, and advocates must move beyond performative lived experience inclusion towards centering real, true accountability. Youth voice cannot exist merely as a symbolic performance, but as a sacred, integral, and protected facet of the institution that is the child welfare system. Belief must be centered as an ethical and legal responsibility, not just as an anecdote. Just imagine the possibilities for change if children's words were treated as evidence, not inconvenience! ■

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CEO'S MESSAGE



KIM DVORCHAK, JD
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
COUNSEL FOR CHILDREN

Kim.Dvorchak@
NACCchildlaw.org

CELEBRATING PROGRESS IN PRACTICE AND POLICY

Across the country, the movement to strengthen legal representation for children and parents has entered a new phase: we are no longer talking about whether legal representation matters, we're talking about how it should be implemented and funded. At a time when political polarization, global uncertainty, and strained public resources can leave even the most committed professionals feeling weary, it is important we acknowledge and uplift the progress we have achieved.

The growing consensus around children's and parents' legal representation offers a source of clarity and purpose. What was once a reform discussed primarily among advocates is increasingly supported by research, court standards, and bipartisan policymakers. Support from across these varied disciplines has reinforced what many practitioners have long understood — when children and parents have skilled, well-trained attorneys, the legal system functions better for everyone involved.

In January, the Participatory Action Research Collective released an [independent study evaluating the impact of the Child Welfare Law Specialist \(CWLS\) certification](#). NACC founded this program twenty years ago to test the hypothesis that specialized certification would strengthen child welfare legal practice. The findings confirm this to be true: CWLS-certified attorneys demonstrate deeper knowledge of governing law, stronger advocacy and procedural competence, and greater capacity for holistic approaches. As jurisdictions across the country seek to professionalize children's representation systems, this evaluation confirms that investing in specialized training and professional standards improves the quality of representation available to children and families.

In February, NACC shared a new policy analysis examining the [federal fiscal impact of expanding access to counsel for children in foster care](#). The report estimates over 57,000 children in foster care across 13 states still appear in court without legal representation. Looking at the short- and long-term costs, the analysis demonstrates that expanding access to counsel for kids would not only advance justice—it could also generate substantial public savings (\$67-145 million under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act alone, plus additional federal and state savings from other streams). Ensuring legal representation for children is both a moral imperative and sound public policy.

These developments come as the [Counsel for Kids campaign](#) enters its fifth year of advocacy. Across the country, state leaders are introducing legislation, defending existing reforms, and exploring new approaches to ensuring that children in foster care have meaningful access to counsel. As described in the [Counsel for Kids Spring Newsletter](#), the campaign continues to equip advocates with research, policy tools, and technical assistance that translate momentum into lasting reform.

Professional dialogue around these issues continues to evolve as well. In March, NACC convened a [Professionalism and Ethics Symposium](#) that brought together practitioners and scholars to explore emerging ethical questions in legal representation. The

CEO'S MESSAGE — CONTINUED



discussion examined the role of peer advocates, recent developments related to artificial intelligence, and the ABA Model Rule 1.14. We are not just fighting for counsel for all parties in child welfare, we are fighting for high-quality counsel who are well trained and zealously adhere to the ethical code in our profession.

Taken together, these developments reflect a growing alignment between research, professional practice, and policy reform. The field increasingly recognizes that effective legal representation requires not only statutory authority, but also specialized training, ethical clarity, and sustained advocacy.

NACC remains committed to advancing this work. The progress we see today is thanks to our broad community of advocates—attorneys, judges, scholars, youth leaders, policymakers, and supporters—who share a belief that children and parents deserve access to justice in the matters profoundly affecting their lives.

For those who wish to support these efforts, contributions to the [Children's Justice Fund](#) help sustain NACC's research, training, and advocacy initiatives nationwide. We also invite committed supporters to join the growing community of [Sapphire Members](#), whose leadership strengthens the national movement for high-quality legal representation for children.

Thank you for the work you do every day to ensure access to justice for children and families.

We are NACC. Together we are Promoting Excellence, Building Community, Advancing Justice

Kim Dvorchak

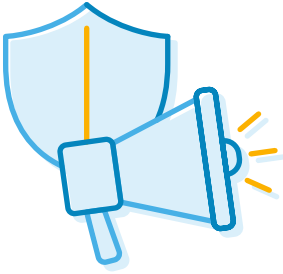
Chief Executive Officer

National Association of Counsel for Children. ■

Children's
Justice
Fund

There's a lot of uncertainty these days, but what we know for sure is that we need to protect children's rights. NACC has been helping do that for nearly 50 years. Please support this vital work!





DEFENDING RIGHTS, ADVOCATING FOR RESOURCES

By Anjanae Goins

“What’s needed now is the political courage and sustained commitment to align resources with rhetoric, to back values with investment, to choose prevention over reaction.” Those words, written in an open letter to the New Orleans City Council by the Youth Justice Advocates Coalition, including the Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights (LCCR), captured the urgency of fending off proposed budget cuts that would have eliminated critical youth programs in our city.

The proposed cuts targeted initiatives designed to provide mentorship, workforce development, and opportunity for young people in under-resourced communities. Our letter was one part of what proved to be a highly effective mobilizing effort: the proposals were withdrawn before reaching a hearing.

While we successfully diverted a potential disaster, the experience revealed a disheartening reality.

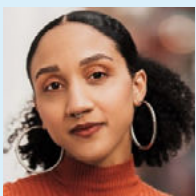
Across the country, youth-serving organizations face shrinking budgets, funding freezes, and cancellations. The programs most often on the chopping block tend to be the very ones that strengthen communities over the long term, while punitive systems that feel more immediate or visible remain intact. In our case, youth services faced cuts, including reductions affecting prevention initiatives and juvenile court programming, while law enforcement funding would receive an increase.

This dynamic reflects a broader misunderstanding about community safety. Reactive punishment alone does not rehabilitate people or repair harmful patterns. Being arrested or serving time in a detention facility does not address the root causes that led a young person into the system. In Louisiana, where one in four children lives in poverty, limited access to consistent city support leaves many young people with fewer constructive options. That gap does not disappear when a detention sentence ends.

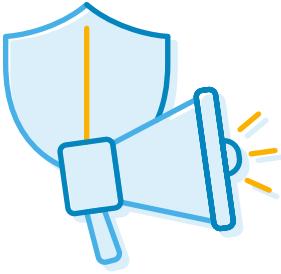
So, what helps close it?

Programs that provide workforce development, restorative programming, mental health support, and mentorship. Programs that help children recognize their value, build skills, and imagine futures beyond their past mistakes. Yet legislators often treat these supports as secondary when fiscal pressures rise, rather than recognizing them as essential to long-term safety and stability.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



ANJANAЕ GOINS is the Communications Manager at the Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights and a former educator. She works at the intersection of policy advocacy, narrative change, and youth justice.



DEFENDING RIGHTS, ADVOCATING FOR RESOURCES — CONTINUED

Our coalition's concerted effort made this contradiction impossible to ignore. We moved quickly and cohesively ahead of the budget hearing. We organized community partners, submitted a formal letter outlining funding alternatives, and recruited trusted voices to testify. We presented research. We shared lived experience. We showed up consistently and across multiple avenues.

We made clear that developmental science, policy research, and community experience all point in the same direction: investment in youth services reduces long-term system involvement. Holistic support strengthens overall community safety. Perhaps most importantly, we demonstrated that constituents would not accept disinvestment in young people without accountability from their leaders.

If we expect children to thrive, our budgets must reflect what actually helps them grow. Sustained investment in youth programming makes accountability child-centered and builds safer, more stable communities nationwide.

Organizations facing similar funding threats may find several lessons from our recent advocacy effort useful.

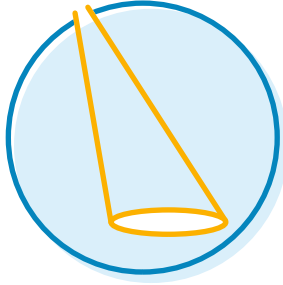
1. **Pair concerns with clear alternatives.** Our coalition did more than describe the harms of proposed cuts. We outlined specific reallocations and funding adjustments for consideration. Decision-makers are more likely to engage when advocacy includes actionable, viable solutions.
2. **Prepare community members to speak with clarity and confidence.** We developed structured talking points for partners preparing to testify, reinforcing consistent themes about investment, prevention, and youth development. When advocates speak clearly and consistently, public testimony becomes more powerful and accessible.
3. **Center the voices of those closest to the impact.** Letters and data matter. Testimony from service providers, families, and directly impacted individuals adds urgency and credibility. When multiple communities speak in alignment, it becomes harder to dismiss youth programs as abstract or expendable.
4. **Connect prevention to public safety and cost.** Budget discussions often focus on immediate savings. Effective advocacy broadens the frame. Cutting prevention services may reduce short-term expenses, but it can increase long-term costs through higher system involvement, recidivism, and community destabilization.

Where public dollars are invested shapes the systems that surround young people and influence the broader social environment. When states reduce funding for prevention and holistic support, the consequences don't disappear. They shift onto families, schools, courts, and communities that are already stretched thin.

For practitioners and advocates, budget debates are part of the work of defending young people. When organizations join forces to mobilize quickly with strategy, clarity, and conviction, they increase the likelihood that decision-makers will listen.

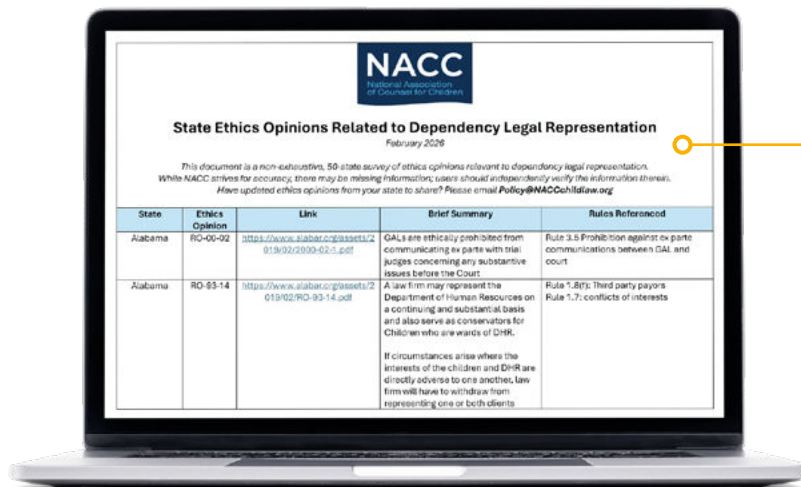
If we expect children to thrive, our budgets must reflect what actually helps them grow. Sustained investment in youth programming makes accountability child-centered and builds safer, more stable communities nationwide. ■

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT



50-STATE SURVEY OF DEPENDENCY ETHICS OPINIONS AND CASE LAW

In March, NACC hosted a 6-session virtual symposium on professionalism and ethics in child welfare law. In conjunction with this event, we created a new resource for practitioners — a non-exhaustive chart of ethics opinions and case law from around the country relevant to dependency legal representation. This 50-state survey provides links to opinions and case law and brief summaries of the issues discussed. While NACC strives for accuracy, there may be missing information, and readers should independently verify opinions and law before citing.



CLICK TO CHECK OUT THE NEW RESOURCE PDF ON OUR WEBSITE!

HAVE UPDATED ETHICS OPINIONS FROM YOUR STATE TO SHARE? PLEASE EMAIL POLICY@NACCCHILD LAW.ORG.



PROFESSIONALISM & ETHICS SYMPOSIUM

Online Virtual Training
March 4–6, 2026

DID YOU MISS NACC'S PROFESSIONALISM & ETHICS SYMPOSIUM IN MARCH?

Stay tuned! NACC will be offering access to individual sessions for on-demand viewing later this year at a reasonable cost. Get ready to choose from these excellent presentations:

- Sustaining Ethical Child Welfare Advocacy: Boundaries and Attorney Well-Being
- Ethical Child Representation: Duties, Considerations, Conundrums
- Professionalism, Ethics, and Peer Support Specialists in Child Welfare Cases
- Professionalism & Ethics in the Virtual Child Welfare Courtroom
- The Human in the Loop: How AI Might Make You a Better Advocate
- Playing By the Rules Representing Families ■



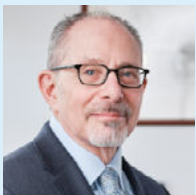
A DISCUSSION OF NYS RULE OF THE CHIEF JUDGE §7.2 PROTECTING DUE PROCESS & ENSURING THE RIGHT TO EFFECTIVE ASSISTANCE OF COUNSEL

By Glenn Metsch-Ampel, JD

In New York State, § 7.2 of the Rules of the Chief Judge (22 NYCRR 7.2, hereafter “Rule 7.2”) contains several deceptively succinct provisions. Taken together, they provide clear guidance for implementing the Attorney for the Child’s professional and ethical obligations in jurisdictions that require — or seek to establish — a directed advocacy model.

Rule 7.2 strikes a clear, common-sense balance between honoring a young person’s agency and protecting children who may lack the capacity or judgment to direct their representation. It does so by requiring that the Attorney for the Child (“AFC”) be guided by the wishes of their client unless one of two narrow exceptions applies. Even when the attorney is “convinced” that an exception applies, they have the discretion — but are not required — to substitute their judgment for that of the client. (These exceptions

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



GLENN METSCH-AMPEL is the Executive Director of Lawyers For Children. He has served in various leadership roles at LFC since 1992. Mr. Metsch-Ampel is the 2013 recipient of the Howard A. Levine Award for Excellence in Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare (New York State Bar Association) and the 2012 Kathryn A. McDonald Award for Excellence in Service to the Family Court (Association of the Bar of the City of New York). He is an appointee of the state-wide Permanent Commission on Justice for Families, and the Family Court Advisory Committee, Appellate Division, First Department. He is also the former Chair of the NYC Bar Association Family Court & Family Law Committee, a former member of its Council on Children, and a current member of the Children & the Law Committee. Mr. Metsch-Ampel was recently nominated to the Bar Association’s Board of Directors. Among other publications, he is co-author of two reports issued by The Association of the Bar of the City of New York—The Family Court Judicial Appointment and Assignment Process (2020) and The Impact of COVID-19 on the New York City Family Court: Recommendations on Improving Access to Justice for All Litigants (2022).

Prior to joining Lawyers For Children, Mr. Metsch-Ampel was Executive Director of Housing Conservation Coordinators (a not-for-profit housing advocacy organization) and the former Managing Director of Amnesty International USA’s Concerts For Human Rights Foundation. He is also a former Adjunct Professor of Legal Writing and Analysis at New York Law School.

He is admitted to the Bars of the States of New York and New Jersey, and admitted to practice in the US District Court for the Eastern District of New York.



NYS RULE OF THE CHIEF JUDGE — CONTINUED

do not apply in youth justice/delinquency cases, where directed advocacy is required without exception.)

At the outset, Rule 7.2 makes unequivocally clear that “the attorney for the child is subject to the ethical requirements applicable to all lawyers, including ... constraints on: ex parte communication; disclosure of client confidences and attorney work product; conflicts of interest; and becoming a witness in the litigation.” [22 NYCRR 7.2(b)]. This distinguishes the AFC from a guardian ad litem or CASA volunteer. In fulfilling that role, the AFC “must consult with and advise the child to the extent of and in a manner consistent with the child’s capacities and have a thorough knowledge of the child’s circumstances.” [22 NYCRR 7.2(d)(1)].

Accordingly, an AFC does not violate Rule 7.2 by declining to substitute judgment, even when they could have done so. The violation occurs only when judgment is substituted without a proper basis.

The rule then squarely addresses the directed advocacy obligation – even when the child’s position conflicts with the attorney’s own view:

If the child is capable of knowing, voluntary and considered judgment, the attorney for the child should be directed by the wishes of the child, even if the attorney for the child believes that what the child wants is not in the child’s best interests.
[22 NYCRR 7.2(d)(2)]

These obligations are consistent with the New York Rules of Professional Conduct, which require attorneys to “abide by a client’s decisions concerning the objectives of representation and ... consult with the client as to the means by which they are to be pursued.” [Rules 1.2(a) & 1.4(a)(2), 22 NYCRR 1200.0].

Where things get more interesting is in the rule’s two exceptions. The first applies “[w]hen the attorney is convinced that the child lacks the **capacity** to make a knowing, voluntary and considered judgment...” [22 NYCRR 7.2(d)(3); emphasis added]. While this may sometimes be straightforward, it is often complex, given the wide variation in children’s development. More importantly, this standard is frequently confused when the AFC feels the child is not *exercising* good judgment by taking a position that is not in their best interest. But §7.2(d)(2) is explicit: the AFC must follow the child’s wishes even when the attorney believes the choice is unwise. The question is not whether the child is *exercising* good judgment, but whether the child has the *capacity* to take a knowing, voluntary, and considered position.

The second exception applies when the child’s position would place them at “substantial risk of imminent, serious harm.” [22 NYCRR 7.2(d)(3)]. Each element of this standard is significant:

- there must be **risk of harm**;
- the risk must be **substantial**; and
- the harm must be both **imminent** and **serious**.



NYS RULE OF THE CHIEF JUDGE — CONTINUED

This is a high bar. It is not enough that there be some risk, or even a clear risk of harm. The risk must be substantial, and the harm both imminent and serious.

The rule further requires that, before substituting judgment, the AFC must be “convinced” that one or both exceptions apply and, even then, is merely “justified” — not required — to advocate a position contrary to the child’s wishes. [22 NYCRR 7.2(d)(3)]. Accordingly, an AFC does not violate Rule 7.2 by *declining* to substitute judgment, even when they could have done so. The violation occurs only when judgment is substituted without a proper basis.

Finally, when the AFC does substitute judgment, they must inform the court of the child’s position if the child wishes them to do so. [22 NYCRR 7.2(d)(3)]. This implicates the §7.2(d)(1) duty to consult with the client — here, to discuss the decision to substitute judgment and determine whether the child wants their wishes disclosed.

Of course, the greatest challenge lies in applying the rule in practice. Future discussion could explore its operation in sibling cases with conflicting positions, in matters involving allegations of undue influence, and in the AFC’s duty to advocate for meaningful client participation in their court proceedings. At its core, however, Rule 7.2 safeguards the right of children, adolescents, and young adults to effective assistance of counsel and protects their due process rights — even when they may be least able to recognize or assert those rights themselves. ■

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FORMER NACCLR MEMBER KRISTEN NICOLE POWELL PUBLISHES HER MEMOIR



Kristen Nicole Powell



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THE PAIN WE CARRY
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The Pain We Carry is a raw and unflinching memoir of survival, abandonment, state violence, and the long road home to oneself. Kristen Nicole Powell takes readers into the heart of her childhood — through addiction, domestic violence, foster care, juvenile justice, incarceration, and the aching hunger to be loved. From running away at twelve to facing 25-to-life as a teen, she writes with unfiltered honesty about trauma, shame, generational wounds, and the cost of resilience.

But this is also a story of reclamation — of a girl who refused to stay silent, a young mother who chose life through the darkest nights, and a woman who now stands as an advocate, leader, and healer for youth impacted by systems. *The Pain We Carry* is more than a memoir. It is testimony. It is survival. It is a hand reaching back for every person who has ever felt unseen, unsafe, or unworthy, reminding them that healing is possible, and that their voice matters.

Kristen Nicole Powell served on NACC's National Advisory Council for Children's Legal Representation from 2022 to 2025. Kristen is a passionate and creative community leader who cofounded [The Lost & Found Institute](#) (LFI) in 2023. LFI's mission is:

*"Through healing and honoring our humanity we are
eliminating the oppression of our people."*

The Lost & Found Institute works with youth and young adults who have been impacted by systems of care and trauma to help them navigate transformative organizing, liberation, and healing.

Kristen has a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and sociology from Wichita State University and has worked in various roles that involve survivor-informed, survivor-led services, holistic healing, journalism, research, and social justice. She worked as the Community Engagement Bureau Manager at The Wichita Beacon, a nonprofit newsroom that engages community representatives in critical conversations that inform their product. Kristen has received multiple awards and recognition for her dedication and inspiration, such as the Light the Way Youth Award and the Soroptimist International Live Your Dream Award. ■



POLICY NEWS & AMICUS UPDATES

FEDERAL UPDATES

NACC recently joined partners to endorse the following:

Foster Youth Bill of Rights in Minnesota: This letter urges the Minnesota Committee to pass the Foster Youth Bill of Rights to help ensure children in Minnesota's foster care system are treated with dignity, fairness, and respect.

John Lewis Every Child Deserves a Family Act: If passed, the Act would prohibit federal-funded child welfare services providers from discriminating against children, families, and individuals based on religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, sex, and marital status. Additionally, the Act ensures that youth in foster care receive identity-affirming and culturally competent care.

A Joint Letter commenting on a Department of Homeland Security Public Charge Rule: The letter focused on the potential impacts to children if changes are made to the Department of Homeland Security's Public Charge rule.

Sign-On Letter to the National Design Studio: This letter expresses support for the Executive Order, Fostering the Future for American Children and Families and offers youth-centered principles and insights for consideration.

Protecting the U.S. Department of Education: This letter expresses concern regarding the Trump administration's decision to illegally dismantle the Department of Education.

Full Service Community Schools: NACC joined a sign-on letter encouraging Congressional and Appropriations Leadership to fund the Full-Service Community Schools Program at \$135 million in the Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations bill.

Foster Youth Postsecondary Education Access and Success Act

Sensitive Locations Protections in Department of Homeland Security bill

The Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act

Health and Human Services proposed rule on **Gender Dysphoria & Section 504**

Amend the **Ending Coercion of Children and Harm Online (ECCHO) Act**

FY2027 Funding Request for **Federal Programs Supporting Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness**

Executive Order feedback memo: **Maximizing Chafee and ETV Spending by States**

Executive Order feedback memo: **Improving Data Collection to Better Inform Older Youth Policy and Services**

Appropriations letter to **Support Connecting Foster Youth and Incarcerated Parents**

NACC ALSO SUBMITTED FORMAL COMMENT ON THE FOLLOWING:

CMS-2451-P: "Prohibition on Federal Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program Funding for Sex-Rejecting Procedures Furnished to Children"

CMS-3481-P: "Hospital Condition of Participation: Prohibiting Sex Rejecting Procedures for Children"



**ALLISON GREEN,
JD, CWS**
CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER

Allison.Green
@NACCchildlaw.org



**NATALECE WASHINGTON,
JD, CWS**
POLICY COUNSEL

Natalece.Washington
@NACCchildlaw.org



POLICY NEWS & AMICUS UPDATES — CONTINUED

FYI

The federal Administration for Children and Families recently rescinded over 35,000 pages of sub-regulatory guidance. All active guidance is located [in this portal](#). Several frequently-cited Information Memoranda, such as those on [Youth Voice](#), [Title IV-E Funding](#), [Civil Legal Advocacy](#) and [Permanency/Wellbeing](#), remain active.

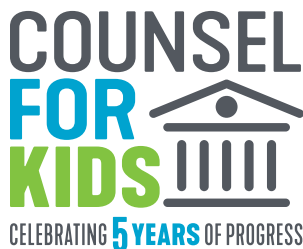
STATE UPDATE

NACC wrote to Mississippi policymakers in support of specific provisions of [SB2728](#), the Mississippi Chancery Youth Court Act of 2026.

AMICUS UPDATE

The Colorado Supreme Court [declined to issue an opinion](#) in the [Interest of BJS](#), a case in which NACC joined as amicus.

[Lawyers for Children et. al. v. New York OCFS](#): NACC joined partners in an amicus brief challenging a “host homes” regulation that exceeded its authority and included insufficient due process protections.



COUNSEL FOR KIDS UPDATES

COUNSEL FOR KIDS CELEBRATES 5 YEARS

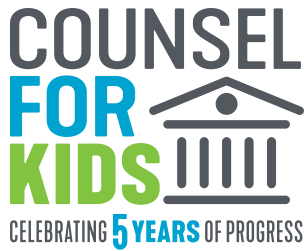
The Counsel for Kids (C4K) Campaign celebrates 5 years of impact this year. Around the country, state advocates are energized by the momentum of legislative victories in the fight to expand youth access to counsel in child protection court proceedings.

Since its inception, the Campaign has:

- ✓ Helped introduce 39 bills
- ✓ Enacted 13 new state statutes or court rules
- ✓ Testified at 26 legislative hearings
- ✓ Submitted written testimony for 52 state legislative hearings
- ✓ Helped establish or expand the right to counsel in 5 states (AK, MT, ND, NH, WA)
- ✓ Helped improve the quality of children’s legal representation in 9 states (AZ, CA, CO, GA, IL, MO, MS MT, NM)

AMICUS REQUEST

The NACC Amicus Curiae Program promotes the legal interests of children through the filing of amicus curiae (friend of the court) briefs in state and federal appellate courts. We submit our own briefs and participate as co-amici in cases of particular importance to the development of law for children. To submit a request for NACC to participate as amicus curiae in a case you are working on, please download and complete [NACC’s Amicus Curiae Request Form](#).



POLICY NEWS & AMICUS UPDATES — CONTINUED

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES EXPANDING YOUTH ACCESS TO LEGAL COUNSEL

This legislative session, states took meaningful steps towards access to justice for children and youth.

Hawai'i's C4K fight is youth led. Championed by [HI HOPES Initiative](#) youth leaders, [House Bill 1565](#) / [Senate Bill 2678](#) would establish and appropriate funds for a working group to improve family court processes, including access to legal representation for youth in the child welfare system. The House passed its bill and transmitted it to the Senate March 6. The Senate Committee on Judiciary will consider the bill on March 17. The Senate Committee on Judiciary passed the companion bill on February 12 and it now awaits hearing by the House Ways and Means Committee. See [NACC's written testimony](#) in support of the proposals.

Illinois [House Bill 4966](#) would guarantee the right to client-directed counsel for youth eight and older who are placed out-of-state. This proposal draws attention to the attorney's role holding the state accountable for its continuing responsibilities to children in out-of-state placements to ensure they are not subjected to harm, discrimination, or denial of care that would be lawful and medically appropriate under Illinois law. The bill was referred to the House Rules committee on February 6.

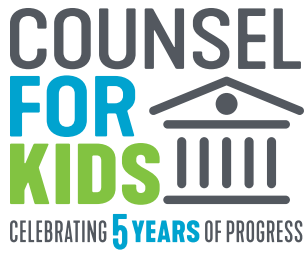
On January 1, **South Carolina** launched its children's representation project, led by former NACC State Coordinator and newly appointed State Child Advocate Margaret Bodeman. The study will explore the impact of legal representation on outcomes for youth 13 and older and their siblings in dependency hearings in Berkeley, Sumter, and Clarendon counties. A successful proviso appropriations request the legislature made in 2025 funds this [Supreme Court-sanctioned](#) project. It awards a non-recurring \$251,520 annually for two years to the Department of Children's Advocacy.

Utah [House Bill 372](#), as initially drafted, would guarantee expressed interests legal representation to any child eight or older. The bill was introduced for first reading by the House Rules Committee on January 26 and later assigned to House Judiciary for Second reading on February 12. (Subsequent amendments removed the language to change the model of representation for youth over eight.) This proposal inspired community awareness, stakeholder discussions, and intense debate that will support readiness for reform.

DEFENDING YOUTH RIGHTS

States also fought to protect youth access to counsel, party status, and procedural rights this session.

Arizona [Senate Bill 1234](#) would reverse the 2021 system reform that mandates courts to appoint a client-directed attorneys to all children in dependency matters. The proposal would require a guardian ad litem and make any appointments of client-directed counsel discretionary. The Senate Committee on Judiciary and Elections and Senate Rules considered and passed the bill. NACC joined numerous C4K advocates in submitting [written opposition testimony](#). On March 10 the bill was amended to continue client-directed legal representation of children. It awaits floor review and transmission to the House.



POLICY NEWS & AMICUS UPDATES — CONTINUED

Colorado House Bill 26-1227 clarifies that children and youth are parties who have standing in their own cases and the related right to have their GAL or attorney fully represent those interests. The bill also includes a provision that gives youth a right to legal process before the Department dismisses the case over their objection. After public hearing, the House Health and Human Services committee passed the bill on March 4 and awaits consideration of the House Committee on Appropriations. NACC submitted [this letter of support](#) to committee members.

An **Oregon** attorney shortage crisis could impact legal representation for children. Oregon Public Defense Commission's proposed budget to the Ways and Means committee would cut funding for children's legal representation in dependency matters. NACC issued [a letter](#) imploring OPDC leadership and legislative committee members to halt this plan and identify other cost saving measures that do not put the legal rights of children and youth in jeopardy. As the legislative session winds down in Oregon, it seems unlikely that the budget proposal will succeed.

NEW RESOURCES

The Counsel for Kids Campaign is pleased to share several new additions to our [online toolkit](#) to support C4K policy advocacy.

- [Counsel for Kids Fiscal Assessment](#): This new report finds that 57,374 foster children in 13 states are without legal representation. The report additionally finds that, using conservative assumptions, a federal counsel for kids mandate would generate an "estimated federal savings of between \$67 million and \$145 million per year." [Read the full report.](#)
- [Kids Can Be Clients: Understanding Development in Middle Childhood](#)
- [Kids Can Be Clients — Table](#)
- [Kids Can Be Clients — Practical Tips](#)
- [15 Ways Counsel for Kids Advance Children's Health Rights](#)
- [5th Anniversary Impact Maps](#) ■



NACC RACE EQUITY HUB

The child welfare system often perpetuates racism, bias, poverty, and the trauma of family separation against children and families of color. NACC encourages advocates and practitioners to resist these injustices by demonstrating cultural humility, pursuing antiracist practices, confronting personal privilege and bias, utilizing a race equity lens when making decisions, and promoting diversity and inclusion. NACC's Race Equity hub is regularly updated with resources to support anti-racist practice.



MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

THANK YOU TO OUR PLATINUM LIFETIME AND SAPPHIRE MEMBERS!



EDENNE GROSS

MEMBERSHIP AND
SALES ASSOCIATE

Edenne.Gross@NACCchildlaw.org

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NACC's Counsel for Kids campaign, a national effort dedicated to ensuring that children in the nation's foster care systems have access

to attorneys of their own to ensure that their voices are heard and respected.



MEMBERSHIP MATTERS — CONTINUED

THANK YOU TO OUR GOLD AND SILVER MEMBERS!

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MEMBERSHIP MATTERS — CONTINUED

THANK YOU TO OUR ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS!

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Alaska Office of Public Advocacy ALASKA	Foster Care Advocacy Center TEXAS	Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services MISSISSIPPI
Alliance for Children's Rights CALIFORNIA	Franklin Law Group MARYLAND	National Center for Youth Law CALIFORNIA
Arizona Office of the Attorney General ARIZONA	Gwinnett County Department of Child Advocacy and Juvenile Services GEORGIA	Nebraska Children's Justice Attorney Education Program NEBRASKA
Berks County Pennsylvania Office of the GAL PENNSYLVANIA	Howard University School of Law WASHINGTON DC	New Mexico Children, Youth, and Families Department Children's Attorneys NEW MEXICO
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CASA of Portage County OHIO	Indiana Department of Child Services INDIANA	Office of Civil Legal Aid Children's Representation Program WASHINGTON
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Ginger.Burton@
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Fulton County Office
 of the Child Attorney
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COMING SOON! — REVISED STANDARDS FOR CWLS CERTIFICATION

NACC will soon implement a revised version of the Standards for CWLS Certification, the main document that lays out rules and requirements for CWLS application, recertification, and periodic reporting. The last update was over ten years ago, so we are excited for this refresh!

The revised Standards incorporate recommendations from an external equity audit of the program as well as general clean-up and alignment with policies and practices already in place. The revisions do not add any additional requirements for applicants or CWLS; instead, they streamline processes, clarify policies, and reduce barriers.

CWLS and current applicants will receive an email with more details about these upcoming changes, and NACC will post the new documents to the website soon. Please bear with us as we update our online certification platform and, as always, feel free to reach out to Certification@NACCchildlaw.org with any questions. ■

QUESTIONS?

Email us at
Certification@NACCchildlaw.org.



ONLINE
#NACC2026



PORTLAND, OREGON

AUG 12-14, 2026

Pre-Conference Aug 11

Hilton Portland Downtown

Lodging available at the Hilton, and at The Duniway, A Hilton Hotel. Book here to receive our discounted conference rate of \$189/night.

BOOK YOUR ROOMS NOW! [↗](#)



TRAVEL PORTLAND

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

PNW GETAWAY [↗](#)



AND DON'T FORGET THE ONLINE CONFERENCE

OCT 14-16, 2026

From the comfort of your home or office

REGISTER NOW ▶

FOR THE 49TH NATIONAL CHILD WELFARE LAW CONFERENCES!

Solutions That Sustain: Cultivating Community, Advancing Practice

PORTLAND ADD-ON EVENTS [↗](#)

NACC will offer several pre-conference sessions on August 11, 2026. Visit our [website](#) for more information and register for these add-on events:

Foundations of Child Welfare Law and Practice

Foundations 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.

Trial Skills for Child Welfare Attorneys

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 and Practice/Red Book Training Course or CWLS Certification

Children's Law Office Project Convening

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.

SPONSOR, EXHIBIT, ADVERTISE [↗](#)

Sponsorship, Advertising, and Exhibiting are excellent ways to promote your organization, products, and services to a wide range of multi-disciplinary 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.



TRAINING & MEMBER WEBINARS



**SHANNON FELDER,
JD, CWLS**

TRAINING DIRECTOR

Shannon.Felder@NACCchildlaw.org



**JOSEPHINE
VANDERHORST,
JD, CWLS**

SENIOR STAFF ATTORNEY

Josephine.Vanderhorst@NACCchildlaw.org

FOUNDATIONS OF CHILD WELFARE LAW & PRACTICE

NACC'S SIGNATURE RED BOOK TRAINING, NOW REIMAGINED AND OFFERED IN THREE DIFFERENT FORMATS

Designed for practitioners who represent children, parents, or the child welfare agency, this dynamic training is grounded in the fourth edition of *Child Welfare Law and Practice* (the Red Book) — the national standard in child welfare law. Whether you're new to the field or deepening your expertise, the Foundations course equips you with the essential legal knowledge and advocacy skills to provide high-quality legal representation. Explore the legal framework, stages of a case, common substantive issues, and core attorney roles. The training also serves as key preparation for those pursuing Child Welfare Law Specialist (CWLS) certification.

Choose the format that works best for you:



ASYNCHRONOUS ONLINE TRAINING

- At your convenience, on your own schedule
- Self-paced over a 6-month access period
- Work through each module by viewing instructional content and completing interactive learning activities, quizzes, knowledge checks, and reflection questions
- Ideal for those who learn best on their own through reading and reflection

REGISTER NOW! ▶



LIVE ONLINE TRAINING

- Offered annually each spring
- Eight weekly 90-minute sessions delivered live on Zoom
- Access to the recording is available after each session through the end of the year
- Absorb the content over multiple sessions, interact with the expert instructor in real time through Q&A in Zoom, and rewatch the recordings as needed
- Designed for those who learn best from a live instructor in a seminar format, with a set schedule and recommended chapters to read each week

REGISTER NOW! ▶

Mondays, April 13–June 8
4:00–5:30pm ET



IN-PERSON TRAINING

- Offered annually at NACC's National Child Welfare Law Conference (or at any time through a contract with your office or jurisdiction)
- Intensive, one-day, classroom-style training
- For those who learn best in a traditional in-person setting

REGISTER NOW! ▶

Tuesday, August 11
9:00am–4:30pm PT

TRAINING & MEMBER WEBINARS — CONTINUED



ALREADY COMPLETED THE FOUNDATIONS TRAINING? DEEPEN YOUR PRACTICE WITH TRIAL SKILLS FOR CHILD WELFARE ATTORNEYS

REGISTER NOW ▶

Tuesday, August 11, 2026 • 9:00AM–4:30PM PT

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/Red Book Training Course or CWLS Certification



UPCOMING WEBINAR

FOSTERING SIBLING CONNECTIONS: USING COURTROOM TOOLS TO PROTECT SIBLING BONDS IN DEPENDENCY CASES

REGISTER NOW ▶

Tuesday, April 28, 2026 • 1:00–2:30PM ET

PRESENTERS:

IVORY BENNETT, M.ED. – PROGRAM MANAGER, FOSTERING MEDIA CONNECTIONS

LILY COLBY, JD – FOUNDER, FOSTERING SIBLING CONNECTIONS

ERICA HICKEY, BA, LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT – NATIONAL NETWORK FOR FOSTERING SIBLING CONNECTIONS

Sibling separation in foster care continues to be a traumatic and avoidable outcome for too many youth. This interactive workshop will guide participants through the laws, research, and ethical duties that support sibling placement and contact. It will feature a courtroom simulation in which attendees work to act out dependency hearings focused on sibling rights. Participants will learn how to draft motions, advocate effectively in court, and ensure compliance with applicable legal standards for sibling connections. The session draws from research compiled by the ABA, and the National Network for Fostering Sibling Connections. Sample motions for dependency attorneys and bench card tools for judicial officers will be shared. This is a highly engaging session designed for those ready to make an impact and excited for tools to do so more effectively. ■

INTERESTED IN PRESENTING AN NACC MEMBER WEBINAR?

[Click to learn more about the submission and selection process.](#)



TRAINING & MEMBER WEBINARS — CONTINUED

PAST WEBINARS ARE AVAILABLE TO NACC MEMBERS. [CLICK HERE](#) TO ACCESS ALL WEBINARS AND CLE DOCUMENTS.

TOPICS AND PRESENTERS	PRESENTED	CLE ACCREDITATION
CWLS Certification at 20: Proof, Impact, Next PRESENTERS: Allison Green, JD, CWLS • Stef Sloan, PhD • Daniel Trujillo	Mar 2026 90 mins	CA 1.5 General CO 1.8 General
The Legacy of Control: The Racist Roots of The Family Policing System PRESENTERS: Angela Olivia Burton, JD • Shemia Dillard • Hina Naveed, JD • Shanta Trivedi, JD MODERATOR: Alejandra Gomez	Feb 2026 90 mins	CA 1.5 Bias CO 1.8 EDI
Well-Being in Child Advocacy: Supporting the People Who Do the Work PRESENTERS: Josephine Vanderhorst, JD, CWLS • Dr. Jasmine Warren	Jan 2026 90 mins	CA 1.5 Wellness CO 1.8 General
Kids Can Be Clients: Honoring Children’s Capacity and Right to be Heard PRESENTERS: Angela Cook, JD • Lisa Kelly, JD • Hon. Kathleen Kroll • Adiaha Spinks-Franklin, MD, MPH, FAAP	Dec 2025 90 mins	CA 1.5 General CO 1.8 General
Civil Rights in Child Welfare Law: Advocacy and Action PRESENTERS: Aubrey Edwards-Luce, JD • Hina Naveed, JD • Stephanie Persson, JD	Nov 2025 90 mins	CA 1.5 General CO 1.8 General
Lived Experience Guide to Fixing Foster Care: Recommendations from Youth, Caregivers, and Workers PRESENTER: Serita Cox, MBA	Sep 2025 90 mins	CA 1.5 General CO 1.8 General
The Role of the Client-Directed Children’s Attorney PRESENTERS: Allison Green, JD, CWLS • Jahlia Hernandez • Christopher Imperoli, JD Natalece Washington, JD, CWLS	May 2025 90 mins	CA 1.5 General CO 1.8 General
Leveraging Technology to Improve Client Engagement & Legal Representation in Child Welfare Cases PRESENTERS: Gwendolyn Clegg, JD; Ryan O'Donnell	April 2025 90 mins	CA 1.5 General CO 1.8 General
Salus Populi Part 2 — Social Determinants of Health and Legal Issues Affecting Children and Families [Free] PRESENTERS: Hon. Jay Blitzman (ret.) • Wendy Parmet, JD	April 2025 90 mins	CA 1.5 General CO 1.8 General
Salus Populi Part 1 — Social Determinants of Health and Legal Issues Affecting Children and Families [Free] PRESENTERS: Alisa Lincoln, MPH, PhD • Beth Molnar, ScD, SM	April 2025 90 mins	CA 1.5 General CO 1.8 General
Safety First: Planning for Immigrant Children, Parents, and Caregivers in Uncertain Times PRESENTERS: Rachel Konrad, JD • Randi Mandelbaum, JD, LLM	Mar 2025 120 mins	CA 2 General CO 2.4 General
Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth through the Federal Designated Placements Rule PRESENTERS: Currey Cook, JD • Luna Floyd, JD • Danny King, JD	Jan 2025 90 min	CA 1.5 General CO 1.8 General
Your Case, Your Rights [Free] PRESENTERS: Gina Cabiddu, MSW • Parker, MSW	Jan 2025 90 mins	CA 1.5 General CO 1.8 General
Congregate Care, Collective Trauma PRESENTERS: Chelsea Maldonado • Kayla Muzquiz • Amanda Simmons, JD • Annette Smith, JD	Dec 2024 90 mins	CA: 1.5 General CO: 1.8 General
Resilience through Compassion: Navigating Setbacks with Deep Listening and Humility PRESENTERS: Vivek Sankaran, JD, CWLS • Kathleen Creamer, JD • Matt Anderson	Nov 2024 90 mins	CA: 1.5 General CO: 1.8 General
Court Reform Efforts for Child Welfare-Involved Families: The Case Management Model PRESENTERS: Christina Bazak, JD, CWLS • Rosario Reyes, MSW Candidate	Oct 2024 90 mins	CA: 1.5 General CO: 1.8 General
Counsel for Kids: Victories, Trends, and Challenges PRESENTERS: Rob Geen, MA • Natalece Washington, JD, CWLS	Jul 2024 90 mins	CA: 1.5 General CO: 1.8 General
Humility as an Act of Compassion PRESENTERS: Sheri Freemont, JD • Vivek Sankaran, JD, CWLS • Shrounda Selivanoff, BAS	Jun 2024 90 mins	CA: 1.5 Wellness CO: 1.8 General



Join Us in Welcoming the Newest Members of the NACC Board of Directors!



JANUARY CONTRERAS, JD

Executive Director, Children's Action Alliance
PHOENIX, AZ

January has been an attorney for nearly 25 years and has spent a great deal of her career in policy development. In 2013, she founded ALWAYS, a legal aid center that serves children and young adults up to age 24. ALWAYS provides immigration, domestic violence, family law, criminal history repair, and victim representation services to young people affected by abuse, trafficking, or the foster care system. She led ALWAYS for eight years while also representing clients. While she passed the leadership role on to a new person in 2022, ALWAYS continues to thrive and grow. January also served as the Assistant Secretary for the Administration for Children and Families overseeing federal policy and funding for the child welfare system, Head Start, the Office of Refugee Resettlement, and more. Currently, she leads a statewide children's policy advocacy organization in her home state, Arizona.



JUSTIN D. GROSZ, JD

Co-Founder, Justice for Kids
BASED IN FLORIDA

Justin is a co-founder of Justice for Kids®, which is a boutique law practice focused exclusively on representing children who have been abused, neglected, or catastrophically harmed in child welfare systems nationwide. Justin is a veteran trial lawyer of more than 30 years. He has had more than 230 jury trials to verdict over his career and devotes his practice to fighting for the less fortunate who have been victimized at the hands of others. Justin handles cases, from investigation through trial, against child welfare agencies and other child care systems (schools, day care centers, etc.) seeking to hold them accountable for their failure to protect children when those failures result in significant harm to a child, through sexual abuse, physical abuse, maltreatment, neglect, or abandonment.

Justin began his career as an Assistant State Attorney at the Broward County State Attorney's Office in Fort Lauderdale where he spent over 11 years as a prosecutor, serving in various capacities, including as a misdemeanor and felony trial lawyer, a supervisor of fellow prosecutors, and having spent the last several years of his time in the office investigating, and trying cases involving crimes committed by violent



WELCOME NEWEST MEMBERS OF THE NACC BOD — CONTINUED

career criminals. While in private practice, after leaving the State Attorney's Office, Justin was appointed to serve as a special prosecutor to handle the prosecution of civil commitment proceedings against sexual predators. In private practice, Justin handled civil rights and catastrophic personal injury cases. Eventually, Justin opened his own practice before co-founding Justice for Kids®.

Justin is licensed to practice law in Florida, New York, Washington DC, and Oregon and has been admitted on a pro hac vice basis in several other states, including South Dakota, Montana, North Carolina and Louisiana.



CLARK PETERS, PHD, JD

Associate Professor, University of Missouri School of Social Work
BASED IN MISSOURI

Dr. Peters Clark Peters, PhD, MSW, JD, is an associate professor at the University of Missouri School of Social Work, focusing his research on adolescents in state care. He is a Policy Fellow at the Institute of Public Policy and holds a courtesy appointment at the University of Missouri School of Law. A graduate of Cornell Law School, Dr. Peters was a staff attorney and Skadden Fellow at the Youth Law Center in San Francisco before joining Chapin Hall Center to conduct research in child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Upon receiving his MSW and PhD from the University of Chicago, he joined the University of Missouri faculty, where he founded an undergraduate program in Criminal and Justice Studies and led the faculty senate for two years. He also co-founded a community-based NGO to seed college saving accounts for children entering primary school. His scholarship appears in social work and law reviews, and he regularly presents nationally and internationally.}

Welcome, January, Justin, and Clark! ■

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NACC STAFF

Kim Dvorchak, JD
Chief Executive Officer
Kim.Dvorchak@NACCchildlaw.org

Ginger Burton
Certification Manager
Ginger.Burton@NACCchildlaw.org

Shannon Felder, JD, CWLS
Training Director
Shannon.Felder@NACCchildlaw.org

Allison Green, JD, CWLS
Chief Legal Officer
Allison.Green@NACCchildlaw.org

Edenne Gross
Membership and Sales Associate
Edenne.Gross@NACCchildlaw.org

Evan Molinari
Communications Manager
Evan.Molinari@NACCchildlaw.org

Olivia Riggs
National Law School Student Organizer
Olivia.Riggs@NACCchildlaw.org

Breanna Smith, MSW
Policy and Communications Associate
Breanna.Smith@NACCchildlaw.org

Daniel Trujillo
Sales and Technology Director
Daniel.Trujillo@NACCchildlaw.org

Josephine Vanderhorst, MFP, JD, CWLS
Senior Staff Attorney
Josephine.Vanderhorst@NACCchildlaw.org

Natalece Washington, JD, CWLS
Policy Counsel
Natalece.Washington@NACCchildlaw.org

Sara Willis, MA
Senior Business and Conference Manager
Sara.Willis@NACCchildlaw.org

NACC DEPARTMENTS

Certification@NACCchildlaw.org
Comms@NACCchildlaw.org
Conference@NACCchildlaw.org
Membership@NACCchildlaw.org
Policy@NACCchildlaw.org
Publications@NACCchildlaw.org
Student@NACCchildlaw.org
Training@NACCchildlaw.org
[Youth@NACCchildlaw.org](mailto>Youth@NACCchildlaw.org)

THE GUARDIAN IS AN NACC PUBLICATION

JOSEPHINE VANDERHORST, EDITOR
National Association
of Counsel for Children
899 N Logan Street · Suite 208
Denver, CO 80203
303-864-5320

TOGETHER WE ARE NACC

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.

PROMOTING EXCELLENCE # BUILDING COMMUNITY # ADVANCING JUSTICE

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