



CEO'S MESSAGE

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.



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

Kim.Dvorchak@NACCchildlaw.org



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 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!

