



Kids Matter

Child Protection and Advocacy Law Section December 2015



The Significant Impact of Childhood
Toxic Stress

From the Chair

By Nicki Noel Vaughan



Welcome to the Fall, 2015, issue of Kids Matter. As always, we owe a great debt to our editor, Tonya Boga, for bringing the membership another interesting and informative newsletter including, in this edition, an article by the Hon. Peggy Walker, Juvenile Court Judge in Douglas County and a

former teacher, about the significant impact of childhood toxic stress on children's ability to learn. Also, the Department of Juvenile Justice's "Step-down Program" of transitioning eligible youthful offenders from Youth Development Centers to residential treatment facilities is explained. Additional articles discuss reproductive healthcare benefits and the 2015 National Juvenile Defender Summit held in Salt Lake City this fall.

Again, we welcome volunteers to serve on the Editorial Board or to submit an article for publication.

MEMBERSHIP:

The Section currently has 423 members. Thanks to all of you for your continued support. Your dues have gone to provide and support valuable training and activities this year. REMEMBER, dues are half-price in January for the remainder of the Bar year, so let's all try to get some new members to join the section so that they can take advantage of the benefits of section membership.

ACTIVITIES OF THE QUARTER:

In case anyone has not taken advantage of having the 2015 non-annotated version of the Juvenile Code, which is the perfect size to carry around easily, they are still available through LexisNexis, along with the annotated version.

As has become customary, the Section contributed funds to the Georgia Association of Counsel for Children for scholarships to its annual conference, as well as awarding a scholarship for a juvenile defender to attend the National Juvenile Defender Summit.

We also continued to work with the State Bar Law-Related Education Office on our "Before You Plea/Collateral Consequences" project. Our deep appreciation goes out to the Georgia Family Connections Program and its director, Elizabeth Turner, secretary of the Child Protection and Advocacy Section, for assisting us in distributing the posters to the 8th grade civics classrooms that did not receive them through the Department of Education. We have a good number of posters left if section members would like to distribute them to local teen centers or clubs to disseminate the information.

The Section Executive Committee presented two bills that were approved by the State Bar Advisory Committee on Legislation that, if approved by the Board of Governors in January, will be part of the State Bar's Legislative Agenda. One bill amends OCGA § 15-11-103 to strengthen the waiver of representation from parents in Dependency cases; the other is intended to clarify OCGA § 15-11-35 regarding some of the issues surrounding Juvenile Court Orders that are appealed. The Legislation Committee understands that the Child Welfare Reform Council will work on mental health access and services for children, foster care recruitment and support, and work force development for the upcoming legislative session.

The Section again co-sponsored, with the Juvenile Law Committee of the Young Lawyers Division, a Holiday Gift Drive to benefit foster care children. It was held at Manuel's Tavern on Dec. 18. Hors d'oeuvres, a cash bar, and good cheer were shared with friends and colleagues.

CLE:

Please see page 6 in the newsletter for the itinerary for our Child Protection and Advocacy Section Annual CLE which will be held Jan. 28, 2016, at the State Bar Conference Center. Cost for the CLE Program is \$155, discounted to \$125 for section members. The cost includes 6 hours of CLE, including one hour of Ethics and one hour of Professionalism. The Section will offer a limited number of scholarships to Section members. For scholarship information, please contact Rande Waldman at rwaldm2@emory.edu.

We will also hold our Section Annual Meeting during the lunch hour (11:45 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.). If you want to come to the Annual Meeting without attending the CLE Program AND would like to have lunch, please let me know so that we can be sure to have enough food to be available at cost.

We want and need your support. State Bar Sections exist to serve their members. Let us know what you need and what you would like to see the section provide. Thank you all for your continued interest and support.

Best wishes for a Happy Holiday season, and I hope to see everyone at the CLE and Section Annual Meeting!

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The Significant Impact of Childhood Toxic Stress

By Hon. Peggy Walker

On Sept. 3, 2015, I had the honor of giving a lighting speech at the Get Georgia Reading Community Action Summit at Georgia Tech. Through this speech, I explained the relationship between children's health and toxic stress in setting the stage for educational challenges and entry into the juvenile justice system. This is the message I shared.

I am Peggy Harris Walker, the daughter of a City of Atlanta school teacher and the granddaughter of a coal miner from McDowell County, Welch, West Virginia, the poorest county in this nation. My mother loved learning and instilled a deep love of learning in me. I began my career as a social studies teacher in Clayton County, Georgia. I was surprised to find many students who did not want to be in school and did not love learning. I was curious about why they had such struggles so I began to engage them to learn about them. They were bright and funny but easily frustrated. They overreacted to situations. They did not have the ability to express themselves effectively.

I left education, but my love for children carried over into my law career where I volunteered to work in Juvenile Court and eventually became the Judge. I was drawn to the delinquency cases where I saw those same children, the ones who acted out, who hated school, who struggled to learn. *I realized I was going to have to start at an earlier age to have an impact on education.* I moved to the dependency cases where I learned the foundation for learning begins prior to birth because we *parent as we were parented.* How our parents care for us, how they meet our needs, and how they view education matters and determines our capacity and motivation to learn. This was made clear to me in the courtroom. I had a teenaged girl in foster care that gave birth to a baby. I asked her to bring the baby to the bench for me to hold her baby. The baby was just beginning to make sounds so I held her so she could see her mother and asked this teen Mom to talk to her baby. She looked at me, but did not respond. I asked her again. She did not respond. I asked her, "What is the problem?" She responded that she did not know how. I was stunned. I literally sat down holding her baby and talking to the baby to show her how. By the time I finished we were both crying. I was so sad to realize that her mother had not nurtured her so she did not know how to nurture her baby. She cried because she loved her baby and wanted to be a good mother, the one she never had. This teen mother's toxic stress arose from living with an alcoholic mother in poverty.

In dependency cases, I see children who are struggling to survive toxic stress arising from an environment that is so unsafe that the child experiences the flight, fight or freeze response with cortisol production flooding the brain and changing the brain and the body. These children are at risk for chronic health problems of asthma, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. They are physically smaller. Their brain is smaller. They do not develop vocabulary, but respond with behavior which becomes their words. Toxic stress arises from poverty, substance abuse, mental illness, family violence, abuse and neglect. *What matters most to these children is having a safe, appropriate adult who can and will meet their needs*

on a consistent basis. Safe, appropriate caretakers allow children to safely explore their environment and learn so that children have the capacity to self-regulate.

I hear cases where children cannot self-regulate. I was asked to detain a child from kindergarten. Of course, I refused. I asked the school resource officer to bring the child, school staff and the parent to court to discuss what had happened. The child was out of control in the classroom. He climbed on tables and kicked other children in the face. I asked the Mother to help me understand the child's behavior. She responded that she had no idea why this was happening. I knew that was not the truth. I exercised jurisdiction over the case and learned that this child was repeatedly exposed to domestic violence. Once we understood the root of the behavior, we began to work to create a safe environment and provide structure so he could learn to self-regulate. Then he was able to make friends, participate in class and learn like his classmates.

We have a choice. We can raise America by educating our children with the skills they need to succeed in life or we can raze America by putting children out of school because of their behaviors. This pipeline to prison of education failure arising from behavior has to stop.

What do we do to raise America? Every child under the age of three who has a substantiated case of abuse and neglect is referred for Part C services under IDEA as a requirement of CAPTA (Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act). We are just beginning to



look at behavior as language and learn that we cannot just focus on changing behavior without understanding the origins of the *behavior*. Removing children from day care or the classroom because they cannot self-regulate denies them the opportunity to learn and their best option for escaping toxic stress through the educational achievement. When we punish the child for behavior arising from impaired parenting, we are limiting that child's potential. Every child deserves the best opportunity for an education that we can provide. We have to break the cycles of violence, substance abuse, mental illness, racism and poverty. We will never break these cycles as long as we continue to focus on changing the behavior of the child without addressing the family who also needs services to make the changes necessary for a safe, stable, consistent environment for the child.

In Georgia, Part C services are in Public Health through Children's First and Babies Can't Wait. We do not utilize these services effectively. Children transition from Public Health to early special education at the county level through the local Board of Education. Often these services are provided in conjunction with Early Head Start and Head Start, but they are underutilized by the children who are most in need of services. Part C services and early special education services engage the caretaker to assist in helping the child achieve milestones and skills to get ready for school.

We must recognize that chronic toxic stress plants the seeds for mental illness and substance abuse. We have the opportunity to plant the seeds for mental health by developing a system of care for our families. We do not have a mental health system and services adequate for our children. Most providers decline to serve children under seven. Waiting for therapy until 7 is too late as the brain is wired by the experiences of those early years. We have innovative practices in child and parent psychotherapy, play therapy and parent child interaction therapy that must begin as soon as possible to remediate the damage from toxic stress. Those services are not readily available in all communities. Those trained to provide those services cannot serve all of the children in need of support.

Georgia is a national leader in early education in providing pre-k to all of our children. As child advocates, policy makers, economists, budget decision makers and leaders of our communities, state and nation, are we going to raise Georgia and America in a quest for excellence or raze America by denying children the education they must have to succeed? I urge you, implore you, and beg you to love, nurture, protect, defend and educate all of our children.

Georgia Juvenile Code 2014 Edition



The Juvenile Code stand-alone publication has been released and can be ordered using the link below.

<http://tinyurl.com/kbaxz92>

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AGENDA

The registration fee for all seminars held at the State Bar of Georgia has been reduced by ICLE in recognition of the Bar's service to Georgia attorneys.

Presiding: **Nicki Noel Vaughan**, Program Chair; Chair, Child Protection & Advocacy Section, State Bar of Georgia; Chief Assistant Public Defender, Northeastern Judicial Circuit, Gainesville

8:00 **REGISTRATION AND CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST** (All attendees must check in upon arrival. A jacket or sweater is recommended.)

8:30 **WELCOME AND PROGRAM OVERVIEW**
Nicki Noel Vaughan

8:45 **MEDICAL BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN: WHAT'S NEW?**
Vicky O. Kimbrell, Family Law Specialist, Georgia Legal Services Program, Atlanta

9:45 **IMMIGRATION: HELPING JUVENILE CLIENTS STABILIZE IMMIGRATION STATUS**
Dawn M. Seibert, Former Staff Attorney, Immigrant Defense Project; Assistant Public Defender, Northeastern Judicial Circuit, Gainesville
Jessica M. Daman, Managing Director of Immigration Services, Latin American Association, Atlanta

10:45 **BREAK**

11:00 **MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES FOR ADOLESCENT YOUTH**
Sarah Y. Vinson, M.D., Triple Board Certified Child & Adolescent, Adult & Forensic Psychiatrist; Founder, Lorio Psych Group, Atlanta

11:45 **LUNCHEON** (Included in registration fee)

12:15 **EARLY RELEASE FROM RESTRICTIVE CUSTODY**
S. Cindy Wang, General Counsel, Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, Decatur

1:15 **ETHICS**
Paula J. Frederick, General Counsel, Office of the General Counsel, State Bar of Georgia, Atlanta
Randee J. Waldman, Clinical Professor of Law & Director, Barton Juvenile Defender Clinic, Emory University School of Law, Atlanta

2:15 **BREAK**

2:30 **PROFESSIONALISM**
Hon. Peggy H. Walker, Chief Judge, Douglas County Juvenile Court, Douglasville

3:30 **ADJOURN**

CANCELLATION POLICY

Cancellations reaching ICLE by 5:00 p.m. the day before the seminar date will receive a registration fee refund less a \$15.00 administrative fee. Otherwise, the registrant will be considered a "no show" and will not receive a registration fee refund. Program materials will be shipped after the program to every "no show." Designated substitutes may take the place of registrants unable to attend.



SEMINAR REGISTRATION POLICY

Early registrations must be received 48 hours before the seminar. ICLE will accept on-site registrations as space allows. However, potential attendees should call ICLE the day before the seminar to verify that space is available. All attendees must check in upon arrival and are requested to wear name tags at all times during the seminar. ICLE makes every effort to have enough program materials at the seminar for all attendees. When demand is high, program materials must be shipped to some attendees.

DJJ “Step-down” program

Transitioning eligible youthful offenders from Youth Development Campuses into non-DJJ operated residential treatment facilities

By Cindy Wang, General Counsel & Joe Vignati, Deputy Commissioner of Community Services

The Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) has more than 52,000 youths in its custody and supervision. On an average day, the Division of Community Services serves:

- 7,393 youth (78 percent) in the community, at home, and under supervision
- 421 youth (4 percent) in RYDC
- 847 youth (9 percent) in YDC
- 523 youth (6 percent) in community non-secure residential placements
- 289 youth (3 percent) in adult jails.

As part of the juvenile justice reforms measures resulting from the enactment of HB 242 (2013 GA Laws), DJJ is able to transfer eligible youth from a secure facility to a non-secure facility during the time of the youth’s restrictive custody. However, only certain classifications of youth are eligible.

HB 242 created two distinct classes of designated felonies, class A and class B, depending on the seriousness of the offense and the youth’s prior history.

OCGA §15-11-2 provides, in relevant portions:

(12) “Class A designated felony act” means a delinquent act committed by a child 13 years of age or older which, if committed by an adult, would be one or more of the following crimes:

- (A) Aggravated assault in violation of paragraph (1), (3), or (4) of subsection (b) or subsection (d), (e), (f), (j), or (m) of Code Section 16-5-21 or assault with a deadly weapon or with any object, device, or instrument which, when used offensively against a person, actually does result in serious bodily injury;
- (B) Aggravated battery;
- (C) Armed robbery not involving a firearm;
- (D) Arson in the first degree;
- (E) Attempted murder;
- (F) Escape in violation of Code Section 16-10-52, if such child has previously been adjudicated to have committed a class A designated felony act or class B designated felony act;
- (G) Hijacking a motor vehicle;
- (G.1) Home invasion in the first degree;
- (H) Kidnapping;
- (I) Participating in criminal gang activity, as defined in subparagraphs (A) through (G) and (J) of paragraph (1) of Code Section 16-15-3, in violation of Code Section 16-15-4;
- (J) Trafficking of substances in violation of Code Section 16-13-31 or 16-13-31.1;

- (K) Any other act which, if committed by an adult, would be a felony in violation of Chapter 5 or 6 of Title 16, if such child has three times previously been adjudicated for delinquent acts all of which, if committed by an adult, would have been felonies in violation of any chapter of Title 16, provided that the prior adjudications of delinquency shall not have arisen out of the same transaction or occurrence or series of events related in time and location; or
- (L) Any other act which, if committed by an adult, would be a felony, if such child has three times previously been adjudicated for delinquent acts all of which, if committed by an adult, would have been felonies in violation of any chapter of Title 16 and one of which, if committed by an adult, would have been a felony in violation of Chapter 5 or 6 of Title 16, provided that the prior adjudications of delinquency shall not have arisen out of the same transaction or occurrence or series of events related in time and location.

(13) “Class B designated felony act” means a delinquent act committed by a child 13 years of age or older which, if committed by an adult, would be one or more of the following crimes:

- (A) Aggravated assault in violation of subsection (g), (h), or (k) of Code Section 16-5-21 or assault with a deadly weapon or with any object, device, or instrument which, when used offensively against a person, would be likely to result in serious bodily injury but which did not result in serious bodily injury;
- (B) Arson in the second degree;
- (C) Attempted kidnapping;
- (D) Battery in violation of Code Section 16-5-23.1, if the victim is a teacher or other school personnel;
- (E) Racketeering in violation of Code Section 16-14-4;
- (F) Robbery;
- (F.1) Home invasion in the second degree;
- (G) Participating in criminal gang activity, as defined in subparagraph (H) of paragraph (1) of Code Section 16-15-3, in violation of Code Section 16-15-4;
- (H) Smash and grab burglary;
- (I) Possessing, manufacturing, transporting, distributing, possessing with the intent to distribute, or offering to distribute a destructive device in violation of Code Section 16-7-82;
- (J) Distributing certain materials to persons under the age of 21 in violation of Code Section 16-7-84;
- (K) Any subsequent violation of Code Sections 16-8-2 through

16-8-5 or 16-8-5.2 through 16-8-9, if the property which was the subject of the theft was a motor vehicle and such child has had one or more separate, prior adjudications of delinquency based upon a violation of Code Sections 16-8-2 through 16-8-5 or 16-8-5.2 through 16-8-9, provided that the prior adjudications of delinquency shall not have arisen out of the same transaction or occurrence or series of events related in time and location;

- (L) Any subsequent violation of Code Section 16-7-85 or 16-7-87, if such child has had one or more separate, prior adjudications of delinquency based upon a violation of Code Section 16-7-85 or 16-7-87, provided that the prior adjudications of delinquency shall not have arisen out of the same transaction or occurrence or series of events related in time and location;
- (M) Any subsequent violation of subsection (b) of Code Section 16-11-132, if such child has had one or more separate, prior adjudications of delinquency based upon a violation of subsection (b) of Code Section 16-11-132, provided that the prior adjudications of delinquency shall not have arisen out of the same transaction or occurrence or series of events related in time and location;
- (N) (i) An act which constitutes a violation of Code Section 16-11-127.1 involving a:(I) Firearm, as defined in Code Section 16-11-131;
- (II) Dangerous weapon or machine gun, as defined in Code Section 16-11-121; or
- (III) Weapon, as defined in Code Section 16-11-127.1, together with an assault; or(ii) An act which constitutes a second or subsequent adjudication of delinquency based on a violation of Code Section 16-11-127.1; or
- (O) Any other act which, if committed by an adult, would be a felony in violation of any chapter of Title 16 other than Chapter 5 or 6 of Title 16, if such child has three times

previously been adjudicated for delinquent acts, all of which, if committed by an adult, would have been felonies in violation of any chapter of Title 16 other than Chapter 5 or 6 of Title 16, provided that the prior adjudications of delinquency shall not have arisen out of the same transaction or occurrence or series of events related in time and location.

OCGA §15-11-602 provides, in relevant portions:

- (d) An order for a child adjudicated for a class B designated felony act placing such child in restrictive custody shall provide that:
Such child shall be placed in DJJ custody for an initial period of up to 36 months; provided, however, that not more than 18 months of such custodial period shall be spent in restrictive custody.
- (2) Except as provided in subsection (e) of this Code section, if such child is classified as moderate risk or high risk, he or she shall be confined for a period set by the order in a secure residential facility for half of the period of restrictive custody and the other half of the period of restrictive custody may, at the discretion of DJJ, be spent in a non-secure residential facility.

DJJ has already begun identifying a list of eligible “step-down” youth and have successfully transitioned youths to non-secure residential placement. The process for reviewing a youth’s step-down eligibility is outlined below.

The DJJ Transition Team (Transition Team) will review a youth’s case between 120 & 90 days prior to youth’s “step-down” eligibility date to determine eligibility for non-secure residential placement.

At the “step-down” review, if a youth meets all requirements, the Transition Team will recommend the youth for non-secure residential placement and forward the request through DJJ. If the Transition Team does not recommend the youth for “step-down,” then the team will discuss with the youth the reasons for the decision and make specific recommendations to the youth as to how to address those deficiencies.



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Once the youth corrects the deficiencies, the Transition Team will reactivate the review process. Currently we have approximately 70 youth who meet their statutory requirement of having completed 50 percent of their restrictive custody time.

We have an additional 51 youth who will meet their statutory requirement of having completed 50 percent of their restrictive custody time through the end of this calendar year.

DJJ staff is currently reviewing Treatment Team notes and estimates, conservatively, that we have approximately 40-50 youth who could be successfully transitioned into a non-secure residential placement if such bed-space were available. After sharing previous slides with Together Georgia providers, we reviewed a listing of 130 possible "step-down" youth (with personally identifying characteristics redacted) and shared the following:

- 99 percent are male
- 60 percent are 16+
- Offense history
- Educational level
- County of residence
- Projected "step-down" dates.

DJJ has implemented a pilot program with vendors interested in providing "step-down" services to our eligible youth. The pilot program will guarantee a number of "step-down" slots for interested providers in order to assist with making the program fiscally viable (possibly 10-20 per site, depending on provider's capacity).

All time spent in a secure residential facility or non-secure residential facility shall be counted toward the confinement period set by the order.

Youth designated as class A felons are not eligible for step-down. However, for youth with class B felonies, they will be considered if they meet the following criteria. (DJJ Policy #18.8 covers the general procedures of the "step-down process".) Requirements (these are outlined in DJJ Policy 18.8- Attachment B):

- Youth has no guilty findings for Class C rule violations (e.g. aiding an escape, escape, riot, sexual contact/penetration);
- Youth has no guilty findings for Class B rule violations in past six months (e.g. contraband, safety violation, bullying, harassment, gang activity, physical altercation, inappropriate sexual behavior, lewd conduct, continued refusal to obey, threats);
- Substantial progress towards treatment and service plan objectives;
- Completion (or on task) of academic goals outlined in individualized program of study;
- Completion of Impact of Crime Class
 - Completion (or on task) of sex offender intervention, if applicable
 - Completion (or on task) of substance abuse treatment, if applicable
 - Restitution Plan developed with youth and case managers, if applicable.

Transitioning eligible youthful offenders from Youth Development Campuses into non-DJJ operated residential treatment facilities is a priority for DJJ and youth have been successfully transitioned. DJJ continues to actively work to transition other youth who meet the requirements for transition.

Section Executive Committee

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The opinions expressed within *Kids Matter* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the State Bar, the Child Protection and Advocacy Section, the Section's executive committee or the editor.

Georgia's Literacy Landscape:

Why Georgians who want our children and our economy to soar are focusing on third grade reading

By Elizabeth Bradley Turner, Georgia Family Connection Partnership

In 2009, only 32 percent of Georgia's fourth graders were proficient readers, despite [abundant research](#) on the importance of third grade literacy for children's educational and lifelong achievements. Third grade marks the critical time when children are expected to shift from learning to read, to reading to learn. Children who are not proficient readers by the end of third grade cannot make that transition, having serious implications for their academic, economic, and personal success.

Today, two-thirds of all Georgia's students are still not meeting this critical milestone, and only 23 percent of fourth graders from low-income families in Georgia can read proficiently. Growing concern among partners from diverse sectors in Georgia—including government, health, business, and juvenile justice—led them to begin viewing and tackling this issue for what it truly is: an epidemic in our state.

Championed by Gov. Nathan Deal and First Lady Sandra Deal, the Get Georgia Reading: Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is a population-focused collaboration of more than 100 public and private partners and a platform for action at both the state and community levels. Collectively, Campaign partners are working throughout Georgia to meet the shared expectation that all children in Georgia, starting from birth, are on a path to third-grade reading proficiency.

Third-Grade Reading: Not Just an Education Issue

The ability to read proficiently by the end of third grade is fundamental to mastering the skills and attaining the knowledge needed to succeed in school and the workforce. Nearly half of the printed fourth-grade curriculum in the United States is incomprehensible to children who cannot read at grade-level, and most children who fall behind are likely to never catch up to their peers, as the achievement gap widens over time.

Poor readers are four times more likely to drop out of school, putting those students at high risk for being unemployed, living in poverty, and being turned away from military service for failure to meet minimum requirements. Not meeting the third-grade literacy milestone also leads to a higher likelihood of a child receiving public assistance later in life and to being involved in the juvenile and adult justice systems.

Therefore, children who grow up without reading skills struggle to be productive adults and are costly to our state in terms of remediation and Georgia's ability to compete in a global economy. For example, according to the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education's most recent [The Economics of Education](#) report, if Georgia would have graduated approximately 30,000 more students in 2010—or, half of the students who ultimately dropped out—those graduates would have yielded for our state:

- \$242 million in increased earnings,
- \$191 million in increased spending,
- \$475 million in increased home sales, and
- \$350 million in increased gross state product.

Ultimately, we all share the effects of our children's reading abilities—and so we should share the responsibility of ensuring their success, too.

As the national [Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#) articulates: "Although schools must be accountable for helping all children achieve, providing effective teaching for all children in every classroom every day...schools cannot succeed alone. Engaged communities mobilized to remove barriers, expand opportunities, and assist parents in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities to serve as full partners in the success of their children are needed to assure student success."

Get Georgia Reading

Recognizing the importance of this issue to our state, Gov. Deal made third-grade reading his top education priority in 2010 and began supporting a range of efforts by public and private agencies aimed at addressing the issue. By early 2013, the Get Georgia Reading Campaign—Georgia's effort that ties into the national campaign—was mobilized and was being led by a steering committee of 26 high-level leaders from throughout the state. Work was underway to unite the public and private sectors, to better align existing efforts, and to focus collective energy toward a shared strategy.

The Campaign hosted an Innovation Forum in June 2013 to explore issues relating to grade-level reading and to share cutting edge research and effective practices. That fall, partners also participated in 15 learning journeys—specially designed site visits that enabled participants to wrestle with tough questions and to mine existing efforts for effective practices. At Georgia Tech's Center for Health and Humanitarian Logistics, for example, partners explored the issue of access to quality early learning programs, and they identified the factors of affordability, awareness, accessibility, availability, accommodation, and acceptability as contributing to the existing literacy gap in Georgia. These explorations culminated in an all-day session in November 2013, when more than 100 partners developed a clearly defined common agenda, designed to ensure all Georgia children become proficient readers by third grade by the year 2020.

Research tells us that language abilities and literacy development are driven by a complex combination of early-childhood experiences and factors. Children can't read because their bodies and brains lack proper nutrition, and many lack access to health care, quality early care and education, safe and healthy classroom environments, books, summer learning opportunities, and involved adults. Accordingly, the common agenda is comprised of four strategic pillars that aim to support the growth, development, and learning of children, starting at birth. And those four pillars have become Georgia's platform for action at both the state and local levels:

- **Language Nutrition:** Research shows language deficits are caused by a lack of language nutrition. In order to become proficient readers, children must first receive language-rich, adult-child interactions, which are as critical for brain development as healthy food is for physical growth.
- **Access:** For healthy growth and reading success, children and their families must have year-round access to educational and supportive services for healthy development and success in early childhood and early elementary education.

- *Positive Learning Climate:* Just as a positive workplace climate improves productivity, attendance, and retention, productive learning climates in schools, early-learning centers, and homes increase student success. Educators, families, and policymakers should understand and address the impact of climate on social-emotional development, school attendance, engagement, and ultimately student success.
- *Teacher Preparation and Effectiveness:* Educators at all levels—which includes parents as children’s first teachers—must focus on providing high-quality, evidence-informed instruction and effective learning experiences tailored to the needs of each child, regardless of the child’s background.

While numerous efforts are underway nationwide to increase student learning and success, Get Georgia Reading is unique in its focus on all aspects of language, literacy, development, and sustainability. Also unique to Georgia is the coordinated effort to bring this work to the community level, as well as the strong commitment of public and private partners, the diversity of those partners, and their level of sustained engagement.

Most recently, Get Georgia Reading brought the partners back together—including community leaders, educators, librarians, health and business professionals, juvenile court judges, elected officials, and the first lady of Georgia—for a Community Action Summit in August. At that event, members of this unprecedented alliance gained an even deeper understanding of the research and best and promising practices around early learning—grade-level reading, and then they designed a plan for applying the common agenda at the community level across Georgia. From that cross-sector input, a community toolkit is being developed that will assist communities throughout Georgia with their own efforts of ensuring their children meet the third-grade reading milestone.

Join the Journey to Get Georgia Reading

For more information about how to get involved with the Get Georgia Reading Campaign, visit getgeorgiareading.org.

To learn more about the best and promising practices around early childhood and grade-level reading, read the research compendium, [Building the Path to Reading Proficiency: Addressing Early Childhood in Georgia](#).

To read about existing community-level efforts addressing early childhood and grade-level reading across Georgia, visit gafcp.org/communicate/stories.

Committee Members Needed!

JOIN ONE TODAY

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Newsletter
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Training
Activities

P4HB Medicaid Provides Reproductive Healthcare for Women

By Callan Wells, Benefits Hotline Supervisor

The state of Georgia has a vastly underutilized type of Medicaid program that can help provide reproductive healthcare for women. P4HB* Medicaid will cover an annual family planning exam, contraception, treatment for sexually transmitted infections, and family planning services for women between the ages of 18-44 with incomes up to 200% of the federal poverty level or \$31,860 annually for a family of two (2015).

Although the ultimate aim of this program is to prevent low birth weight among Georgia’s babies, it does so by providing general reproductive healthcare for women of childbearing age. Women are not required to have children, or to plan to have children, to enroll in P4HB Medicaid.

According to the United Way, the most common cause of infant death is low birth weight. Additionally low birth weight babies are more likely to suffer from severe health programs, and care costs can be ten times that of a healthy weight baby. Georgia currently has one of the highest low birth weight rates in the country.

P4HB Medicaid works in two ways to prevent low birth weight. The program provides general reproductive health services for all fertile women between the ages of 18-44, even if they are not seeking to become pregnant. Women may use these services to keep from getting pregnant when they are not ready, to increase spacing between births, or to detect a health issue that may put them at risk should they become pregnant.

The program also provides broader services to women who have already given birth to a low birth weight baby. These services can include primary care, limited dental care, and substance abuse services.

While Georgia still has not expanded Medicaid to all adults with low-incomes so that women might have access to routine and extensive medical care, this Medicaid program would provide access to reproductive health services for a vast number of low to moderate income women who just aren’t aware of the program. For more information on this program and for help applying, women may contact Georgia Legal Services Program’s Benefits Hotline at 1-888-632-6332 or visit www.p4hb.org.

*Planning for Healthy Babies, <http://odis.dhs.ga.gov/Main/Default.aspx>, Section 2186

National Juvenile Defender Summit Recap

By Gayle B. Murray, Chief Assistant Public Defender

Bright and early Friday morning, I walked into the ballroom of the Salt Lake City Hilton. After a long day of travel on Thursday, it was finally time for the start of the 2015 National Juvenile Defender Summit. I had already reviewed the agenda and was very excited about the different topics, presenters, etc. I chose a seat at a table and said hello to the woman next to me. Then, I happened to look at the table and saw her phone. Her screen saver said this:

"I DIDN'T COME THIS FAR TO ONLY COME THIS FAR."

Wow. Those ten words made such an impression on me in so many ways. Logistically - I had a six hour airplane trip and had come nearly 1900 miles. Professionally - after 18 years in the adult public defender's office, I have been in the juvenile public defender's office for ten months. Personally - this small town Florida girl moved to the big city in 1993 and is now a wife, mother, and community member. BUT, I didn't come this far to ONLY come this far.

Additionally, this sentiment applies to the National Juvenile Defender Center too. So many strides and accomplishments have been made in their 19 years of existence. Juvenile defenders across the country have fought many battles and won many wars: detention assessment instruments, risk assessment instruments, alternative placements, JTIP training, ending the practice of indiscriminate shackling of youth in many states - the list could go on and on. But I know I can say that the juvenile defender community feels there is still more work to do, more mountains to climb, more unfair practices to challenge, more children to protect and save. WE didn't come this far to ONLY come this far.

And so with all these thoughts in mind, the conference began at 8:30 a.m. on Friday, Oct. 23, 2015. There were several breakout and plenary sessions. I will highlight for you the ones I found most interesting.

- *"Turn up the Volume: The Collective Fight for Police Accountability"* - Of course, given all that has happened in the last year in Ferguson, Baltimore, and nationwide, this is a hot topic. The presenters (Ji Seon Song, Jim St. Germain, and Andrea Ritchie) each had a unique perspective on how police accountability interacts with the juvenile justice system. Ritchie is the Senior Policy Counsel for "Streetwise and Safe," an organization focused on the policing of LGBTQ youth of color. Song is a public defender in California who works on special juvenile projects and is on the steering committee for the Bay Area Public Defenders for Racial Justice. St. Germain was once involved in the juvenile justice system. He overcame many obstacles to co-found Preparing Leaders of Tomorrow, a nonprofit mentoring organization for justice-involved and at-risk youth.

- *"Militarization of Schools"* - Again, anyone involved in the juvenile justice system is aware of the efforts against the school-to-prison pipeline. The presenters (Emily Chiang, Hector Linares, and Hannah Proff) highlighted real world experiences. From an eight-year-old child being handcuffed behind his back in Kentucky to an alarming rate of school suspensions for minority youth in New Orleans to a lawsuit in Alabama regarding the use of pepper spray in schools - the examples were plentiful and disturbing. The presenters gave practical guidance on how to use recent lawsuits, legal literature, Department of Justice statements of interest, and the upcoming Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention toolkit to formulate a method of challenging problems that we may encounter in our local school district.
- *"Easier Than You think: Collecting and Using Data to Affect Change for Clients"* - I have to admit - numbers make my head hurt! But I also know that numbers (data) are needed for any policy initiative. This breakout session was informative and very practical. The presenters spoke of how they used data collection to help drive their policy initiatives on court fees, shackling, and juvenile appeals.

Fortunately, there were also several sessions with practical implications for the juvenile defender. These included sessions on ethics, challenging racial disparities, litigating a bench trial, dealing with difficult judges, confession motions, utilizing a social worker in the defender team, dealing with youth who are immature or suffer from trauma and/or disabilities, strategies to roll back youth sex offender registration, challenging transfers to adult court, and combatting vicarious trauma/compassion fatigue. There were so many good and informative presentations, it was difficult to choose which ones to attend!

Finally, the summit marked the end of the tenure of Patricia "Patti" Puritz, the Founding Executive Director of the National Juvenile Defender Center. She is an amazing woman who has impacted the lives of so many children and the careers of so many juvenile defenders. Patti will definitely be missed, but her legacy certainly will live on through the juvenile defender community.

The 2016 Summit is tentatively scheduled to be held in Chicago, Illinois. The first summit was held there in 1996 so the plan is to return there for the twentieth edition. I hope to see you there!!

Gayle B. Murray can be contacted at the Law Office of the Public Defender – DeKalb County/Juvenile Division, Stone Mountain Judicial Circuit, Gregory A. Adams Juvenile Justice Center, 4309 Memorial Drive - 3rd Floor, Decatur, GA 30032.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE ARTICLES TO *KIDS MATTER* OR HAVE ANY IDEAS OR CONTENT SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE ISSUES, PLEASE CONTACT TONYA.BOGA@GMAIL.COM.

**STATE BAR OF GEORGIA
CHILD PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY SECTION
SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION**

The Child Protection and Advocacy Section of the State Bar of Georgia will offer three (3) scholarships in the amount of up to \$500 per scholarship each year. These funds may be used for either registration fees or travel expenses for an out-of-town conference or seminar.

The scholarships will be awarded to members of the Section who demonstrate both a need for financial assistance and a demonstration of the relevance of the content area of the conference or seminar to the work conducted by the attorney.

Commitment to Share Information:

Scholarship recipients agree that they will write an article for the Section newsletter, *Kids Matter*, regarding a topic covered at the conference or seminar.

Application Process:

Application Periods: There will be three application periods each year, with one scholarship awarded during each application period. The application periods are as follows:

January 1 – April 30 (scholarship awarded by May 31)

May 1 – August 31 (scholarship awarded by September 30)

September 1 – December 31 (scholarship awarded by January 31)

Application: The attached application form, including a statement of need and copy of the agenda, must be completed and returned to the scholarship committee by the appropriate application period close date. Applications should be returned to derricks@gabar.org.

**STATE BAR OF GEORGIA
CHILD PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY SECTION
SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION**

NAME: _____

AFFILIATION: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____ **FAX:** _____

E MAIL: _____

DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM YOU WISH TO ATTEND : (Please attach a copy of the program agenda, if available.)

Program Title: _____

Program Location: _____

Program Dates: _____

Program Costs: _____

STATEMENT OF NEED (Include any financial contributions provided by your organization, relevance of the seminar to your work, etc) (You may attach a separate letter, on your organization's letterhead, with your statement of need)

Send completed applications to derricks@gabar.org