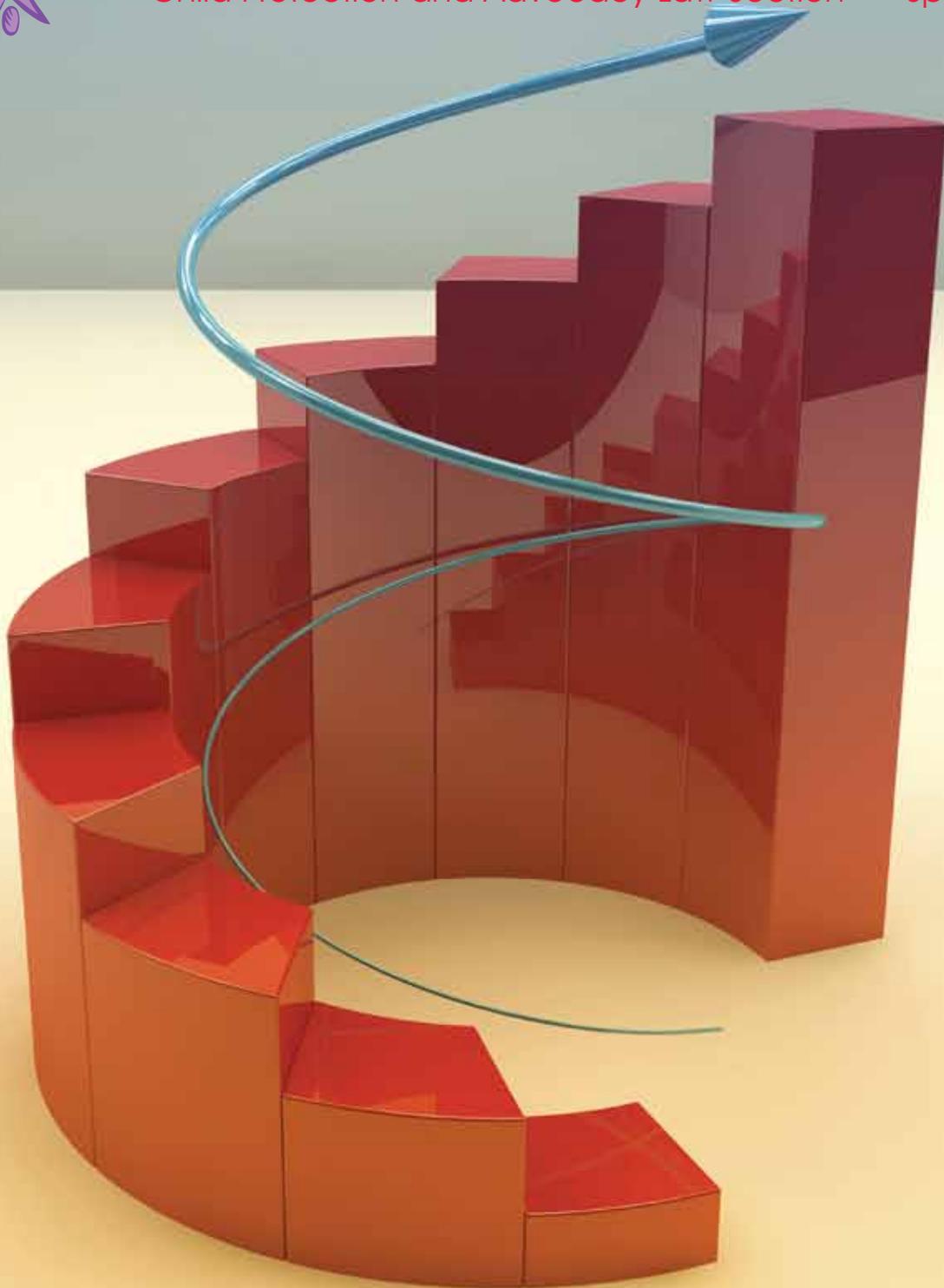




Kids Matter

Child Protection and Advocacy Law Section

Spring 2014



Reflecting on the Legislative Session

From the Chair

By Nicki Noel Vaughan



Welcome to the Spring, 2014 issue of Kids Matter. Congratulations to Hon. Peggy Walker, who has recently been inducted as the president of the National Council of Family and Juvenile Court Judges. We especially appreciate her taking the time to share an overview of the 2014 Georgia legislative session and her perspective about

changes going on in child welfare. We also appreciate Melissa Carter's contribution regarding the push to privatization and Dr. Sharon Hill's article about DFCS from the inside perspective. I hope you'll enjoy these articles, as well as the general information, and find it insightful and useful to your practice. Thanks, as always to our editor, Tonya Boga, who welcomes everyone to volunteer to serve on the Editorial Board or to submit an article for publication.

MEMBERSHIP:

The Section now has 352 members. Thank you all for your continued support.

ACTIVITIES OF THE QUARTER:

This quarter has been busy and has offered many opportunities for growth of the section.

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

The Section once again co-sponsored VOICES for Georgia's Children's 2014 Legislative Forum held at the Depot in February and attended by the Governor, legislators, and representatives of the child-serving community. The primary focus of our Section's legislative advocacy was the "Technical Corrections to the New Juvenile Code" bill which was passed and signed by the Governor. This bill clarified inconsistencies and language that needed to be modified in the 242-page overhaul of the Juvenile Code last year. Many of our members were interested in a bill that proposed to add additional State funding to assist both prosecutors and defenders in Juvenile Court who were given

increased responsibilities by the New Code. However, that bill was tabled in order to obtain a greater understanding of the actual cost.

CLE: "HOLD ON! LAWS IMPACTING CHILDREN ARE CHANGING FAST"

This Section-sponsored full-day CLE was originally cancelled because of snow but was later held in April. It was very well attended and received excellent feedback from attendees.

ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting was held during the lunch break at the CLE program. The By-Laws were amended to clarify the definition of a quorum and to split the original officer position of Secretary/Treasurer into two positions. Officers elected unanimously were: Nicki Vaughan, Chair, Karlise Grier, Vice-Chair, Mary McKinnon, Secretary, and Randee Waldman, Treasurer. The Amended By-Laws are available on the State Bar Web Page.

EXPEDITED JUVENILE COURT APPEALS

This committee continues to study the feasibility of various ways to expedite the appeals of Juvenile Court Orders. Anyone interested in assisting with this work should contact Karlise Grier or me for further information.

CO-SPONSORSHIP OF COMPLEX TRAUMA SUMMITS

The Section co-sponsored a series of four programs conducted by the Georgia Supreme Court Committee on Justice for Children around the state. The summits drew a good response from those attending and learning more about this timely issue.

WE WANT AND NEED YOUR HELP!

Thank you all for your continued interest and support of the section. We need your support and ideas about topics for upcoming newsletter articles, webinars and CLE offerings.

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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.

Reflecting on the Legislative Session

By Hon. Peggy Walker

The 2013 legislative session focused on criminal justice reform.

The juvenile justice portion of criminal justice reform changed practice, policy, procedures and time lines for abuse and neglect cases setting the stage for the 2014 session. While there was much talk and effort to move Georgia toward privatization of child welfare, the end result was for Gov. Deal to constitute a council to study and make recommendations for the 2015 session. Legislating around high profile cases is not good policy. Bringing together stakeholders for honest, open dialog to form sound recommendations is a better approach to formulate good policy and legislation for child welfare reform.

The big budget for FY2015 that came from the session includes enhancements to the Department of Human Services in a number of areas. Sixteen new positions were created for the Child Protective Services Intake Communication Center. The state has moved to centralized intake which involves one phone number and a standard process for intake in an effort to provide consistency around the State. The system has struggled with long wait times and complaints from law enforcement and others that the centralized process is not responsive. This is an effort to address those concerns.

The legislature allotted \$7.4 million for 175 additional child protective services workers. While there is no question that more cps workers are needed to lower case loads and improve response time, the problems are deeper than just staffing. Investigators are entry level positions with new workers not having much life or career experience. Interview skills are lacking as are basic social work skills of engagement. The Division recognizes these weaknesses and is working to improve training particularly interviewing of children, but more must happen to effect real change.

We must recognize that staff turnover makes systems improvement a challenge. Furloughs, reduced benefits, and lagging pay scales drive talented workers from the field to better jobs with a career path and make recruitment of the best and brightest extraordinarily difficult. Over the course of twenty-five years, a teacher's salary increases significantly while a social worker loses ground with increases in cost of living. Many local Department of Family and Children Services offices experience a 100 percent turnover within 12 - 18 months making this work more difficult because it really is based upon relationships. Building relationships with clients, with supervisors, with law enforcement, with court staff, with educators, with providers and with other community stakeholders is vital to this work and does not happen with such high rate of turnover.

The FY 2015 budget includes a \$100 increase annual for foster care clothing allowance. While the increase is much needed, the allowance does not reflect what it costs to cloth any child over the course of a year. Fortunately, we have wonderful foster families, the

Foster Care Foundation, family and friends who help provide for our children. The highest priority need in the northwest Georgia region is more foster homes. Our need greatly exceeds our supply. As budgets have been cut, so has resource development to the point that children are not being placed within reasonable geographic proximity to their homes. This makes visitation difficult if not impossible and hampers efforts to reunify families. There must be a focus on recruitment, training and retention of foster parents including an emphasis on providing homes for teens.

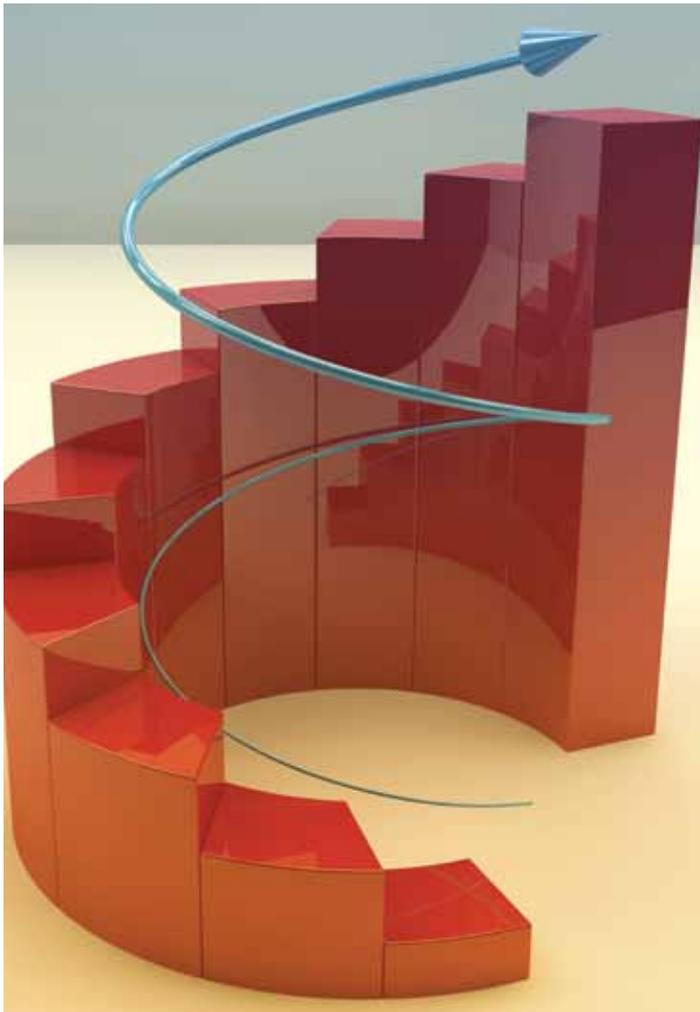
After many years without increased funding, the Department of Human Services received a \$300,000 enhancement for Court Appointed Special Advocates to represent the best interests of the child. The legislature provides \$2 million to fund this corps of volunteer advocates. Georgia CASA and local affiliates received and raise additional funding of \$6 - 7 million to support local programs on an annual basis. The goal of 100 percent representation by CASA for every foster child in Georgia had yet to be achieved, but performance and representation across the State continues to improve.

In addition to the budget enhancements for Department of Human Services, a number of bills passed and are awaiting the Governor's signature. Discussion during the legislative session centered on the role of child fatality review, where to place it and how to make it an effective tool. HB 923 passed the House but stalled in the Senate Health and Human Services Committee. Its language was added to SB 365 which did pass both houses and awaits the signature of the Governor. Child Fatality Review will move from the Office of the Child Advocate to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation. Public Health will have an enhanced role in reviews. Statutes are amended to facilitate sharing of information. We must as a State put more effort into learning from child deaths, making recommendations for prevention, and implementing those recommendations in policy, practice and the budget. The silos for investigation, prevention, policy and budget have diminished the effectiveness of this tool in the past and must be broken down for an integrated, effective approach to understanding and addressing child fatalities to improve child safety.

Other bills focused on a number of issues. SB 358 allows law enforcement to respond to a missing person report filed by a caretaker, governmental unit responsible for the legal custody of a child. This legislation is important because our children are vulnerable to human trafficking and are at risk of engaging in survival sex when they run from placement. The faster law enforcement knows of them and can look for them, the more likely they are to be found.

HB 770 adds home invasion of an occupied home with a weapon as a designated felony. This bill recognizes the danger posed by armed perpetrators invading the sanctity of the home and enhances penalties for such conduct.

The FY 2015 budget includes a \$100 increase annual for foster care clothing allowance. While the increase is much needed, the allowance does not reflect what it costs to cloth any child over the course of a year.



HB 898 enacts the Interstate Compact on Juveniles and returns Georgia to reciprocal relationships with 49 other states when children under delinquent supervision move to another state or move to Georgia from another state. Georgia did not participate for a number of years which caused some serious challenges to the juvenile courts and concerns for safety in our communities.

HB 911 adds strangulation to the list of offenses that constitute aggravated assault. Georgia continues its efforts to make victims of domestic violence safe. This language strengthens the statutory scheme and recognizes the seriousness of strangulation as an indicator of lethality in domestic violence cases. The legislature and Governor are commended for their continuing support of victims of domestic violence.

HB 915 allows for security freezes for children under 16 years of age. Identity theft plagues our children as well as adults. Checking on children's credit reports is now a standard practice in court so that our children do not have the burden of trying to establish a credit history as adults when someone has already used their identity.

HB 251 prohibits the sale of alternative nicotine or vapor products containing nicotine to minors. This bill stops sale of electronic cigarettes to minors.

HB 772 requires drug testing for applicants for Temporary Assistance To Needy Families and food stamps when there is reasonable suspicion of illegal drug use. Dependent children are exempt. The challenge of this bill is funding for drug screens. Local Departments of Family and Children Services do not have adequate funding to screen for drugs in dependency cases now. Unless funds are allocated for testing, this bill will not be able to accomplish its purpose, cutting off the use of state funding where there is potential of misuse for illegal drug use.

There are numerous other bills and budget changes from the 2014 legislative session that affect children and families. As revenue collections for the State continue to improve, we must focus the 2015 session on more than safety and permanency for children. We must address well-being for our children to be able to have healthy and productive lives.

HB 804 allows the court to order a child under 17 years of age testify by closed circuit television outside the presence of the person accused if the court finds the child is likely to suffer serious psychological or emotional distress if required to testify in the presence of the accused. This bill recognizes that the legal system does contribute to further trauma with children who are often unable and unwilling to speak in the presence of the person accused of harming them or others.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO
CONTRIBUTE ARTICLES
TO NEWSLETTER OR HAVE
ANY IDEAS OR CONTENT
SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE
ISSUES, PLEASE CONTACT
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Share Ideas!
Join a Section Online.

Log in to your account at www.gabar.org and select "Join a Section" or simply check the box on your dues notice and add the payment to your remittance

The Push to Privatize - Opinion Editorial

By Melissa Carter

For child advocates, the biggest debate during the 2014 session of the Georgia General Assembly centered on a proposal for rapid system-wide privatization of all child welfare services. Despite predictions by some lawmakers, political pundits and advocates that the legislature would not be active on children's issues during this compressed session, SB 350 stirred up a frenzy of activity until the final hours. Ultimately, the original proposal and all related measures failed to pass, but the conversation about privatization has only just begun.

Notably, there is no single, uniform definition of "privatization." The term generally refers to the extent to which the public child welfare agency contracts with private agencies to deliver services. These arrangements differ in terms of the extent to which the public agency transfers responsibility for day-to-day case management to the private provider, which particular aspects of practice are outsourced, and who maintains critical decision-making authority as the case progresses. Senate Bill 350 represented one, relatively unique, model of privatization, which reflects how business is done in only two states.

Senate Bill 350

Specifically, SB 350 proposed that Georgia follow Florida's lead and adopt that state's Community-Based Care model, which requires child welfare services to be competitively bid to local lead agencies. As defined in the bill, "child welfare services" included: adoption, family preservation, independent living, emergency shelter, residential group care, foster care, therapeutic foster care, intensive residential treatment foster care supervision, case management, post-placement supervision, permanent foster care, and family reunification.

The bill contemplated at least 15 lead agencies (one per DHS service region) and established qualifications for any provider seeking a lead agency contract. Among those standards, lead agencies would be required to provide the full array of child welfare services, 35 percent of which any lead agency could provide directly and the remainder through subcontracts with other agencies. Lead agencies must have the ability to ensure continuity of care for a child the entire time the child is in foster care, be accountable for certain outcome and performance measures, be capable of serving all children who are referred to the agency, ensure adequate staff training and cooperate with DFCS to ensure compliance for federal funding purposes. Payment terms included a monthly administrative rate and a case rate calculated on previous service utilization divided by the total appropriated funds allocated for child welfare services during the same timeframe. DFCS would remain responsible for intake and investigation of child abuse reports, as well as for the quality of all child welfare services and programs, and for monitoring the performance of lead agencies.

The State of Privatization

Utilizing private organizations is not a new approach to the provision of child welfare services. Historically, the private sector served vulnerable families and children by providing institutional placements and foster homes long before child protection became a primary role of government. As one popularly known example, think back to the orphan trains that operated between 1853 and 1929. Spearheaded by two charitable institutions – the Children's Aid Society (founded by

Charles Loring Brace) and the Catholic New York Foundling Hospital – this movement resulted in the relocation of approximately 250,000 orphaned, abandoned and homeless children from urban areas of the east to foster homes located in the rural areas of the Midwest.

All states continue to rely on the private sector to meet the needs of children and families. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, privatization of child welfare services expanded, primarily as a result of rising caseloads, declining state investment in social welfare, limitations in staffing flexibility in public agencies and spending restrictions at state and local levels. Now, many states have one or more initiatives that are structured as managed care or public-private partnerships that range from statewide reforms to more limited initiatives that target particular strategies or a particular geographic region.

Federal regulations governing funding from Titles IV-E and IV-B, the two largest sources of child welfare system funding, grant states discretion as to how responsibilities to private providers will be assigned. To date, Kansas and Florida are the only states that have adopted system-wide privatization through a lead agency model. Illinois and New York are noted for their large-scale efforts to transfer authority for case management to private providers, as have some local jurisdictions within other states. Arizona, South Dakota, Wyoming, Missouri, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, and Tennessee have implemented smaller-scale privatization initiatives. With limited exception, all states retain the child investigation and protection functions.

Prompted by chronic concerns about the number of children entering state custody and poor performance on the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), Nebraska attempted a staged adoption of a fully privatized model similar to Florida's beginning in 2009. First, service coordination was contracted to lead agencies, followed by the transfer of case management responsibilities in 2010. Shortly thereafter, the state's lead agencies began to fail and/or proactively withdraw from their contracts. In 2011, a legislative proposition calling for an investigation of the reform was passed, and the audit that followed confirmed that performance was worsening. Subsequently, the Governor of Nebraska instructed agency officials to postpone entering into any more lead-agency contracts, and the state enacted legislation to end the initiative.



As is illustrated by the pattern among states, little to no empirical evidence exists to support the conclusion that privatization is either more or less effective than a public agency service delivery model. Although some states, including Florida, have improved their child welfare system outcomes through a privatization strategy, others have not, and no state is a model for all performance measures. Child welfare systems are complex and uniquely dynamic, and state differences matter.

Georgia's Partially Privatized System

Georgia's child welfare system is highly dependent on its array of private service providers. The state's current system includes many of the features of a "privatized" child welfare system, including heavy reliance on private agency providers to provide care and placement for children and foster care and an array of community-based service providers to provide supports to families. That extensive private provider network includes agencies and professionals that hold contracts to perform child and family assessments; deliver parenting, counseling, and other family preservation and reunification services; provide transportation to children and families; and supply care and placement at a range of levels.

Currently, Georgia contracts with 164 child caring institutions (CCI's) and 64 child placing agencies (CPA's) for foster care; approximately half of the children in the state's foster care system reside in these private agency placements. In state fiscal year 2014, the cost to provide that care and placement capacity is projected to total over \$136 million. These providers are managed through performance-based contracts, another characteristic feature of a "privatized" system.

In addition, DFCS will expend over \$32 million to purchase services to support children to remain with their families in the community. These services include front-end / family preservation services, child and family assessments, wraparound services, and crisis intervention, family support, reunification and adoption support services. The agency's largest privatization initiative launched on March

3, 2014 when the state moved to a single managed care organization to oversee the healthcare of about 27,000 children in Georgia's foster care, adoption assistance, and juvenile justice programs.

Many considerations have fueled the recurring interest in further privatization of Georgia's foster care system, including concerns for achieving greater cost efficiencies, incentivizing community engagement, and expanding services. Interest increases, as well, at times of real or perceived system crisis. Privatization is popular for other reasons too, as it speaks to interests in reducing the overall size and role of government and embracing the efficiencies of a corporate model. However, these interests are not proxies for the ultimate consideration, which is what is the best policy for Georgia's abused and neglected children.

Looking Ahead

From a research and data perspective, the indicators of a "healthy" child welfare system are well established: a low foster care population and assurances that children are safe in the community. Georgia's child welfare system is among a handful of states leading the country in the safe reduction of the foster care population. The number of children in foster care has been reduced by nearly half since a peak in 2004, and critically, Georgia enjoys one of the lowest rates of re-maltreatment. Compared to Florida, Georgia's abused and neglected children are twice as safe, and Georgia also meets or exceeds national standards in other crucial outcome areas like reunification and adoption. These markers do not mean that system improvement is not needed. They do, however, strongly caution against reactionary reform that fails to appreciate the nuances of Georgia's system and that does not lead to better outcomes for children and families. Opportunities for the kind of systematic and purposeful study that is needed exist in the work of Governor Deal's Child Welfare Reform Council and the pilot project he has authorized through DFCS. Without this kind of careful study, the push to privatize offers nothing more than a different business model that does nothing to address systemic deficiencies.

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An Interview with Dr. Sharon L. Hill

By [Tonya Boga](#)

This interview is being conducted by Boga, Esq., Editor of *Kids Matter*.

Boga: Thank you so much Dr. Hill for agreeing to this interview with *Kids Matter*. We appreciate your service to Georgia's children.

Hill: You are so welcome. Thank you for the opportunity.

Boga: We will begin with a bit of background information to help our readers get to know you a bit better. You are known as Dr. Sharon Hill.

Hill: Yes, Ph.D. My Ph.D. is in Urban and Public Administration.

Boga: You've been in your current position as State Director of the Division of Family and Children Services since August 2013, please share with our readers when and how you came to Georgia DFCS?

Hill: I have been with DFCS for 9 years now. I came in as a Risk Assessment manager working on assessing the risk and safety of children. I then worked mostly as Director of Federal Regulations and Data. My background is in research and data. In this capacity I was responsible for overseeing our Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System, which is our electronic case management system we refer to as SHINES. Also responsible for conducting data analysis and disseminating data and reports on a regular basis. I was also responsible for our quality assurance programs for both child welfare and Office of Financial Independence (Food Stamps, TANF, Medicaid, and Child Care). We reviewed a random sample of cases each month to ensure all work followed policies and best practices. Before Georgia DFCS I was Assistant Professor at University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in the Political Science and Public Administration Department.

Boga: Why did you initially want to work with DFCS?

Hill: I wanted to highlight my passion for working with children and adults in crisis whether battling substance abuse or Domestic Violence types of issues. I was a case manager and supervisor in child welfare very early in my career. I feel it is one of the noblest professions. I feel providing for safety and protection of children and strengthening families is my life's purpose. It is what I was created to do.

Boga: What is it that drives you while at DFCS?

Hill: A desire to get my staff and people that I work with back to a sense of caring about the plight of others especially those who are less fortunate and experiencing difficult times. While I am confronted with some of the worst examples of inhumanity toward children, there are many more success stories, such as children being reunified with parents or relatives. Children in their late teens being adopted, individuals being able to remain sober and drug free after many years of dependency. These things give me a great amount of hope. Last year we had about 35 youth in foster care to graduate from colleges and universities. The possibilities of who our children can become in spite of dire circumstances drives me each day.

Boga: Since taking the position as State Director of DFCS, what accomplishment are you most proud of as we talk today?

Hill: Working to instill principles and values in staff that lead the work that we do. Really focusing on getting people to understand the value system. We are not just doing this work for compliance purposes or to follow any policy or law but we are doing this to protect children and strengthen families.

I am proud that we are able to build stronger external partnerships whether that's law enforcement or school systems. We have been able to open up greater dialogue and that helps our children because we are all in this work together.

Boga: Are there any current DFCS projects that you want to share with our readers? Yes. We are encouraging more youths to remain in foster care until 21. Effective July 1, we are moving to an "opt out" policy. Right now at 18, a youth has to sign themselves back into care. Beginning July 1st we will make the assumption that youth will remain in care unless they opt out. At 18, a case manager goes to youth asking if they want to stay in foster care that will no longer occur. No good parent really expects at 18 that their child can fully take care of themselves. So, why should we expect that from our youth? We are going to focus on ensuring that older youth are safe, healthy, educated, employable and connected. We expect that every youth will have a plan for that. HB242 requires that those youth over 18 and still in care have their plan reviewed.

Boga: What's available to a child once they turn 18 and remain in care?

Hill: Assistance with housing, education, training programs, and, I think the biggest thing is having a case management for their lives in the Independent Living Program. They have someone who can really help them navigate school and make sure that they remain in school. We have a Teen Works program. We have educational services. We pay for tutors. They will receive services that they received pre-18. If they were in a foster home, we would continue to pay for that. If they were in a congregate living home, we would continue to pay for it.

Boga: Are there any additional resources for this new initiative?

Hill: We are going to need additional resources. I am going to be working with other community services that are geared toward providing services to older youth.

I am also working with Annie E. Casey with a foster care to 21 program. We are looking at how to draw down additional federal funding for this program. We have been doing focus groups with older youth in care to talk about the needs and services that they would like to have when they remain in care. Right now only about 400 are in care in the 18-21 group. That's a very low number given the number of youth that have aged out over the years.

One of the biggest barriers for youth not wanting to remain is that they want more graduated independence. We are looking

at policies that we have that make youth feel as if they are still a child.

For example, we have restrictions around them driving. Foster care parents can insure them if they want to but we as a state do not purchase policies for our youth. We are looking at what we can do with that. We realize that we will need more transitional living programs where youth can live in their own apartment but we can maybe have staff onsite. These would primarily be for youth who are working and we would probably subsidize their rent in some way and allow them to contribute in some way.

Boga: We have previously worked together on and you have written in this publication about the CPS Intake Communication Center. How's the much publicized call center going?

Hill: As of April 30, it's fully implemented. The CPS Intake Communication Center is fully implemented. All counties are on the system. We have hired more staff and continue to hire more staff. Our goal is to decrease hold time. Since we began implementing it in last September to now we have almost doubled the intakes that we received prior to the centralized system. "If you build it, they will call," I have been known to say. Prior to implementation of statewide call center, we averaged about 6,000 intakes per month, now it is about 7,300 per month. I believe that the intake center is a factor in the increase. The high profile child deaths is likely a factor in the increase too. Other states have also reported an increase after similar systems were implemented. I think that we are able to do a better job of reaching and receiving concerns as a result of this system. We are assessing it each day and adding staff as needed. We want to decrease the wait times for reporters while at the same time maintaining the integrity of the process and ensuring we obtain sufficient information from them to determine safety of children.

Boga: Staff. DFCS is reportedly getting some new staff?

Hill: Yes, we are hiring 175 new staff members for FY2015. We have already hired half of them. We will have the other half on board by July 1. This will help to decrease our caseloads.

Boga: You have been working on some additional training to staff for awhile now, how's that going?

Hill: Beginning March 1, our staff that do investigation and staff support are going through intensive three day training on interviewing children to assess their safety. There were situations in which I felt our staff appeared to be relying on children to be able to "save themselves." In that they wanted children to be able to articulate that they were being abused. I wanted all staff to be able to assess non-verbal cues from a child as well as go deeper than what the child was actually telling them. The training is being provided and it is helpful to them.

At the beginning of April, staff started training through GPSTC- a three day training that will help them to assess and interview adults. How do you assess what's being said as well as what's not being said by an adult? They are learning about reading behavioral cues in order to determine an adult's level of protective capacity. Both of these trainings are in full gear right now and will be continuing throughout the year.

Boga: There's been a lot of frustration expressed from parents and parent attorneys with the ICPC process, what's the current status of ICPC in Georgia?

Hill: I have developed a quality assurance program for the ICPC unit to take a look at how it's functioning and what we need to do to improve it. Georgia has established border agreements with all of our border states. We are also working to establish an agreement with North Carolina. The intent of these border agreements is to expedite things with our neighboring states as ICPC has historically taken too long to get children placed with out of state relatives.

Boga: What involvement do you have with the Governor's Child Welfare Council?

Hill: On May 1, DFCS had its first meeting with the Governor's Child Welfare Council. The goal is for them to work closely with DFCS to review our practices and to ensure that we are doing the best possible to ensure the safety and well-being of children. I am looking forward to working closely with them as I do believe that Georgia can and will lead the nation in exceptional outcomes for children and families.

Boga: Privatization, what can you tell us about what's happening in that area?

Hill: We are working on a privatized referral placement project in Region 3 (Rome, Floyd County area) and Region 5 (Athens, Clark County area). We will be issuing a RFP later this summer for a lead agency to contract with DFCS to locate placements for children in foster care and to provide oversight for those placements. Our goal is to really have an agency in place by early Fall. In those two regions DFCS would not be recruiting its own foster homes and our staff would not be attempting to locate placements for children. As you know, this can be time consuming for staff. This will free up staff to really focus on permanency for the child particularly working with parents to help them with reunification. By having private agencies monitoring the needs in foster homes, it frees up caseworkers to work with getting permanency for children. Our hope is that it will expedite positive permanency for children.

We will have statewide and local stakeholder meetings with foster parents, private providers, judges and others to get feedback on what this should look like. We are doing this with other child welfare advocates and professionals to build a program that will have the most opportunity of succeeding.

Boga: Will these meetings be open to the public?

Hill: Yes, if any of your members are interested they can contact me. Our first meeting is May 16th. They can contact the Georgia Department of Human Services Office of Legislative Affairs and Communications to find out more information. The website is <http://dhs.georgia.gov/>. In the Divisions and Offices you will see the Office of Legislative Affairs and Communications.

Boga: Thank you so much for sharing with our membership the current state of affairs at DFCS.

Hill: Thank you for providing this opportunity for me to share and keep the public informed of what is going on at Georgia Division of Family and Children Services.