



Kids Matter

Child Protection and Advocacy Law Section

Fall 2024

From the Chair

By Laurie M. Thomas Williams



Welcome to the Fall 2024 issue of KIDS MATTER!

Happy Fall! This is truly my favorite time of year—the leaves transform into a beautiful new landscape, the weather cools down,

and it's the perfect season for enjoying a hot chocolate with extra whipped cream. As I write this letter to our members, it happens to be Mental Health Day, and I'm mindful of the challenges many in our state are facing, from the aftermath of recent storms to the unrelenting pace of our profession and daily life.

In light of these challenges, I'd like to invite you to join me in a moment of reflection, appreciating the things we do have and the meaningful work we do to support Georgia's families and children. I know you all give so much of yourselves, and it's easy to overlook the impact that work and life can have on your well-being. Please remember to prioritize self-care when needed even if it's something as simple as enjoying that hot chocolate with extra whipped cream and a sprinkle of nutmeg. If you ever need additional support, don't forget to [Use Your 6](#). State Bar offers six free therapy sessions.

Read on to discover the exciting initiatives we have planned and the accomplishments we've achieved so far this year. I want to extend a special thank you to the Newsletter Committee and our Editor, Amber Walden, for their hard work in putting together this edition.

Membership

As of September 17, 2024, our section has grown to 534 members. We are continuing our call to "BRING A FRIEND" to CPAS. Some child welfare advocates in Georgia are not yet members, so please ask your colleagues if they have joined. If not, encourage them to sign up and remind them of the great benefits that come with membership. Our goal is to reach 600 members in the next fiscal year.

Membership requirements: Pay \$20 annual fees. Be a member of the State Bar of Georgia in good standing.

Membership benefits: Section sponsored or reduced cost CLEs, scholarships to CLEs, fellowship with other practitioners, access to this wonderful newsletter, access to joint section CLE's and information that is child protection and advocacy related, as well as supporting community programs like Dropout Prevention, Youth and Law Summits, Roadmap to Law School, and community supports.

Who can join? Anyone interested in child protection and advocacy law or working in related fields. This includes juvenile prosecutors, public defenders, parent attorneys, guardians ad litem, judges, legal counsel for state agencies handling child welfare matters, child advocates, solo practitioners, and others involved in related legal areas.

Join today and "BRING A FRIEND"!

Activities and Updates:

- Our annual section meeting and CLE will take place on January 22, 2025. This year, we're excited to be meeting in person! Last year, over 86 people attended, and we hope to surpass that number this time. Look out for more details

on programming and meeting information via email. At the meeting, we will provide an update on our section's recent activities and upcoming plans. We will also vote on section-wide issues, including proposed bylaw changes and the election of officers for the Executive Committee for the 2025-2026 bar year. Additionally, we will present the Willie Lovett Award to this year's recipient.

- Congratulations to Anissa R. Patton, the 2023-2024 recipient of the Willie Lovett Award! She will be honored at the annual meeting. Please join us to celebrate Attorney Patton's well-deserved recognition.

District Socials & Events:

Savannah/District 1: Georgia Healthy Housing Coalition – Fall Convening, October 17 @ 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM. Following the convening, a reception with refreshments & viewing of Georgia Appleseed's 2024 “[See Me: Pieces of Life from Youth In Care](#)” art exhibit. See our feature piece on this special program in this newsletter. The event is free, but [registration](#) is required.

Stay tuned for additional district events and socials.

New Members of the Executive Committee:

The section's bylaws call for representation from various types of legal practices and geographic diversity across the state. We currently have openings for:

- District representative for the Augusta area (Judicial District 10)
- Special Assistant Attorney General (SAAG) representative
- CPAS is always open to exploring whether other child welfare agencies or organizations should be represented on our Executive Committee as a representative from your child welfare agency or organization that is not yet represented on the Executive Committee.

If you or someone you know is interested in serving, please contact me at lmthomaslaw@gmail.com.

CPAS Community Sponsored or Supported Events:

Our section continues to support the “Roadmap to Law School” initiative led by Executive Committee

Member Ira Foster, Esq. This program introduces college students to lawyers and provides guidance on the path to becoming a lawyer. Recently, we voted to support a law student by covering LSAT fees. The most recent event was held at Savannah State University in September 2024.

Opportunities to Serve:

- Bring A Friend
- Write an Article
- Serve on a Subcommittee

Thank you for your dedication to child protection and advocacy.

Laurie M. Thomas Williams, Esq.

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**If you are interested in
publishing an article,
please reach out to
Amber D. Walden, Editor
info@floteservices.com**

2024 - 2025 Executive Committee Judicial District Representatives

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Hon. Stephanie Burton sburton@eighthdistrict.org	8	Ocmulgee, Dublin, Middle, Oconee, Cordele
Michelle Vereen Michelle.Vereen@gwinnettcounty.com	9	Appalachian, Enotah, Mountain, Northeastern, Gwinnett, Bell- Forsyth, Blue Ridge
Vacant	10	Toombs, Augusta

Accessing Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Policy

Child Welfare: The public can access all Department of Human Services' policies, (including the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS)), by navigating to: <https://odis.dhs.ga.gov/General>.

Once you have accessed this web page, click on "MAN3000 – Child Welfare," and a PDF document can be downloaded, which includes hyperlinks to up-to-date DFCS policies.

Another very helpful tip: If you are interested in receiving updates on DHS' policies and manuals, on the ODIS website, click on the bottom for the Division or Office you are interested in, look to the button right and click the "Subscribe" button.

Juvenile Justice: The public can access the Department of Juvenile Justice's (DJJ) policies by navigating to: <http://public.powerdms.com/GADJJ/tree>.

If an attorney needs additional policies or related attachments, they may also reach out to any Executive Committee Member, or Cindy Wang, General Counsel for DJJ's Office of Legal Services, at cindy.wang@djj.state.ga.us.

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Navigating Education Services for Youth in Foster Care

By Nicole W. Hull, Esq., CEO & Education Attorney, The Hull Firm LLC



Youth in foster care often experience significant trauma, and while efforts are made to address their emotional and psychological needs, the critical link between literacy and resilience is sometimes overlooked. Dr. Steve Dykstra emphasizes this connection:

“Research shows that the single most powerful predictor of [children’s] ability to overcome trauma and survive their circumstances is the ability to read. If they can read, they have a chance to find success.” By providing youth in foster care with the support they need to develop their reading skills, we can greatly enhance their ability to heal and succeed.

Understanding EPAC Services for Youth in Foster Care Educational Programming, Assessment, and Consultation (EPAC) services offer vital educational support to youth in the custody of Georgia’s Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS). EPAC is particularly beneficial for youth in general education as it focuses on remediation and addressing academic challenges in core subjects like math and reading.

EPAC services begin with comprehensive educational assessments conducted by certified teachers or EPAC staff. These assessments provide an in-depth evaluation of the youth’s proficiency in math and reading, identifying specific areas where additional support is needed. For youth in general education, these assessments are crucial in pinpointing gaps that can be addressed through targeted remediation.

Following the assessment, EPAC’s Education Support Monitors (ESMs) collaborate with DFCS case managers to develop personalized Education Action Plans based on the assessment findings. These plans are designed to provide the necessary interventions to support the academic progress of youth who may be struggling in their current educational settings.

To further assist youth in general education, EPAC

offers tutorial services delivered by certified teachers skilled in remediation techniques. These tutorials aim to help youth build foundational skills in areas where they may be lagging, thereby enhancing their overall academic performance and engagement.

Special Education Services for Youth with Disabilities
 For youth with disabilities, or those believed to have disabilities, special education evaluations are an essential step in securing the appropriate supports they need. This evaluation process involves comprehensive assessments to determine the youth’s specific needs. Once completed, the school team will decide whether the youth qualifies for accommodations such as extended time on tests and assignments or preferential seating through a 504 Plan. If more specialized instruction is required, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) may be developed to provide additional supports tailored to the youth’s unique needs.

Special education services can include a broad spectrum of supports, such as occupational therapy, speech therapy, physical therapy, nursing care, and behavior support with goal setting. These services may also extend to training for foster parents, equipping them with

the knowledge and skills to better support the youth’s educational and developmental needs. Importantly, these evaluations and services are provided at no cost to DFCS and are not billed to the youth’s insurance, ensuring that all eligible youth receive the support they need.

These special education services can work alongside EPAC’s focus on remediation, creating a comprehensive approach to supporting the educational success of youth in foster care. By integrating both EPAC and special education resources, we can establish a robust support system that addresses the diverse needs of these youth, helping them build resilience and achieve academic success.

Every youth in foster care deserves the opportunity to thrive, and through dedicated educational support and advocacy, we can make a significant impact on their lives.

Section Executive Committee	Officers		Members-at-Large	
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Private Dependency Actions: A Pathway to Swift and Stable Permanency for Children

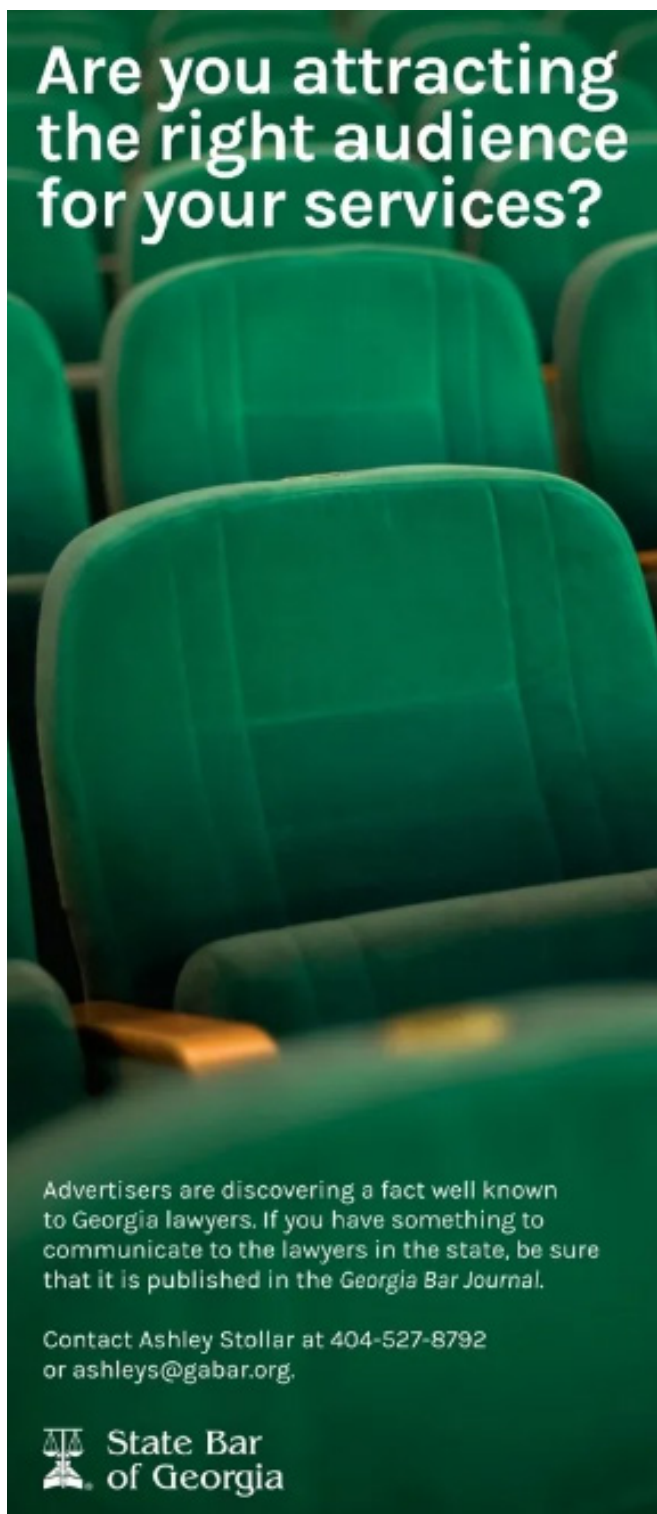
By Stacey Pinkney

There are advantages to permitting private individuals to file dependency actions. In my jurisdiction, private individuals are allowed to file dependency complaints and/or petitions on behalf of a child, alleging that the child has been abused, neglected, or abandoned. Also, the Juvenile Code speaks to allowing individuals to file private dependency actions. O.C.G.A. 15-11-150 states, “Any person who has actual knowledge of the abuse, neglect, or abandonment of a child, or is informed of the abuse, neglect, or abandonment, may make a petition alleging dependency.” By permitting private dependency actions there are benefits—particularly for the children we serve. One advantage of private dependency actions is that they reduce the chances of the child being traumatized. Children in private dependency actions are normally not removed from their current placement. In cases involving the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), a child is more likely to be removed from their current placement while an investigation is pending. A child’s removal from their placement may disrupt their schooling, their bond with the caregiver, and all of the things that the child is familiar with in their environment, consequently causing trauma to the child.

Private dependency actions have the advantage of leading to permanency for a child more quickly while at the same time not disrupting the child’s sense of stability. In cases handled by DFCS, it takes an average of two years for a child to achieve permanency. In private dependency cases, a child usually achieves permanency within an average of three months. This is often because the child is already living with a relative or fictive kin who is seeking legal custody to provide the child with basic needs, medical coverage, stable housing, and school enrollment.

Unlike DFCS cases, where time is spent searching for a suitable relative or kinship placement, private dependency actions avoid this delay. During this process, a child in DFCS cases may be moved several times due to reasons beyond the control of DFCS and the child leading to instability. The Juvenile Code allows

private individuals to initiate dependency proceedings, which offers convenience for the children we serve. It’s important to consider this option because not all dependent children need to be in DFCS custody. As child welfare practitioners, we should consider using our resources to ensure that our dependent children experience less trauma, find permanent placement sooner, and have stability. Private filings provide these benefits.



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Advertisers are discovering a fact well known to Georgia lawyers. If you have something to communicate to the lawyers in the state, be sure that it is published in the Georgia Bar Journal.

Contact Ashley Stollar at 404-527-8792
or ashleys@gabar.org.

 **State Bar
of Georgia**

Court Improvement Program, Committee on Justice for Children

Judicial Council of Georgia / Administrative Office of the Courts is currently working in partnership with Mindworks Georgia to bring trainings to the child welfare legal community.

Click here for Mindworks Georgia's Training and Events Calendar:

<https://mindworksga.org/training-and-events-calendar/>

Build Your Skills in Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Youth and Families

- Are you interested in learning more about
 - Systems thinking and adaptive leadership
 - Conversational capacity
 - Long-term impact of adverse childhood experiences
 - Infant and early childhood developmental and behavioral health
 - Risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems
 - Secondary traumatic stress
 - Suicide and violence prevention

Scan the QR code to take this quick survey. We want to hear which trainings are most relevant to you.



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Mindworks Georgia is a public-private collaborative that connects the dots of Georgia's behavioral health system of care to improve access and outcomes for youth (ages 0 to 26).

Mindworks and its partners enact this vision by promoting evidence-based policies for prevention, intervention, and treatment that are innovative, person-centered, well-coordinated, and easy to navigate for children, young adults, and families.

A Sample of Mindworks Projects include:

Georgia THRIVE

Infant and Toddler Court Programs help to boost coordination in the child welfare and court systems to provide trauma-responsive and culturally competent services to young children and their families.

Georgia Strong Families Program

A Healthy Start program that aims to improve child and family outcomes by implementing strategies within the community-based public health maternal and early childhood system.

Local Interagency Planning Teams

Bring together child-serving organizations and resources to serve the children and families living in the area. LIPTs aim to improve and coordinate services for children living with severe behavioral health needs or addictive diseases.

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Art and Advocacy: Empowering Georgia's Youth in Foster Care Through the 'See Me' Project

By R. Michael Waller, Executive Director, Georgia Appleseed

Children and youth in Georgia's foster care system move often, sometimes hundreds of miles from family. Frequent moves spark behavior challenges at home and school as kids cope. A damaging cycle emerges. Behavior challenges result in school discipline, often suspension or expulsion. In turn, suspensions exacerbate behavior and create new instability. Working foster parents cannot leave their jobs to care for homebound kids—and DFCS must find a new home. With each new home and school, the cycle repeats.

Georgia Appleseed breaks that cycle. In the last year, Georgia Appleseed provided legal services to 200+ children in care, in 69 counties. Case managers refer students to our School Justice Initiative when schools threaten long-term school suspension. We work with



schools to reduce suspensions (122 school days on average per student), and marshal education and behavioral supports to disrupt the cycle.

Georgia Appleseed's "See Me" project provides youth in foster care with financial commissions for their artwork and storytelling. Through their art, these youth provide powerful insights about their experiences. The exhibition has moved business leaders, government officials, educators, attorneys, and many others across the state to advocate for youth in foster care, volunteer for Georgia Appleseed, and support our policy proposals. And the youth's stories inspire and inform Georgia Appleseed's priorities and policy proposals.

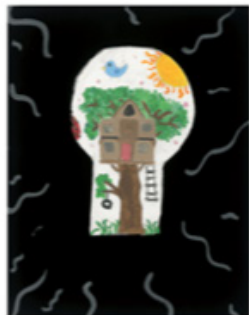
Visit www.gaappleseed.org/resource/see-me/ to learn more and find out where you can see the exhibit!

Paintings commissioned by Georgia Appleseed from youth in foster care are moving art pieces that tell their real stories. The artists describe their artwork with great emotion and insight.



The Duck Pond, Erica Harrod
"The world is just a pond, and we're all ducks. And our actions just leave ripples in the pond."

[Read More](#)



The Lock of Life, Anonymous
"I had all of my walls up so I couldn't get hurt, and inside of the lock was bright and creative."

[Read More](#)



Resemblance, Nilo Martinez
"Each line for the stitches, it shows how many people been in my life there and improve it."

[Read More](#)



Oh the Places I Go, Anonymous
"I'm always questioning what's gonna happen, and that there's places I go everyday in my mind."

[Read More](#)

[LISTEN TO AUDIO](#)



Healing My Heart, Anonymous
"Foster care gave me a ladder, just helped me. My heart was broken, but I'm slowly fixing it with the bandages."



Drowning, Anonymous
"That's me. Right there. I'm basically drowning. And this lady -- she's not doing a thing."



Growing, Kira Greer
"I thought I was struggling to find myself. It wasn't me trying to find myself, it was me trying to grow."



The Jellyfish, Anonymous
"Jellyfish are kinda cute ... soft and squishy. But then other times, it can sting you."

Tapping into Underutilized Resources for Children and Parents with Disabilities: An Informative Interview with Joe Sarra

By Karimah Boston, JD, CWLS, Staff Attorney | Atlanta Judicial Circuit, Georgia Public Defender Council



Mr. Joe Sarra, MSW, works with the Georgia Advocacy Office (GAO). GAO is a private, not-for-profit organization designated by the Governor's office as a part of Georgia's statewide protection and advocacy

system to protect and advocate for the human and legal rights of persons with disabilities and mandated by certain acts of Congress to implement their regulations (i.e. The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000, 42 U.S.C. s. 15041 et. seq, the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) Act 42 U.S.C. s. 1080 et seq. and the Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights (PAIR) program of the Rehabilitation Act 29 U.S.C. s. 794e).

GAO investigates, monitors, provides training, makes referrals and pursues legal, administrative and other remedies on behalf of persons with disabilities. To that end, in January 2024, GAO filed a lawsuit charging Georgia officials with violating federal law for their well-documented, longstanding failure to provide mandated home and community-based mental health services to thousands of children who experience repeated, prolonged, unnecessary institutionalization. After the United States Department of Justice investigated the Georgia Network for Educational and Therapeutic Supports (GNETS) program, the DOJ found that GNETS violated Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by unnecessarily segregating students with disabilities from their peers which resulted in GNETS students having limited access to opportunities in comparison to those provided to other students throughout the state, creating inequality and disparity in outcomes. In 2017, GAO filed a class action lawsuit alleging Georgia discriminated against thousands of public school students with disabilities by providing them with a separate and unequal education via the state's GNETS program.

Joe, what is your role at the Georgia Advocacy Office?

I serve as an Advocate for children and youth with behavioral health and/or developmental disabilities. In my work, I investigate individual cases of abuse, neglect, rights violations and suspicious deaths. Investigations can include determining barriers to services for youth under age 21 and enrolled in Medicaid who are not receiving medically necessary services as prescribed by the youth clinician.

What community resources are already available to Georgia parents?

Medicaid-enrolled youth with disabilities have a right to medically necessary services as prescribed by the treating clinician even when the service prescribed is not part of the state's Medicaid plan, unless the service is considered experimental or investigative. Youth with disabilities must have access to medically necessary home- and community-based services to address behavioral and/or developmental support needs.

For example: Youth diagnosed with autism should have access to Georgia's Adaptive Behavioral Services (ABA) services to address behavioral concerns in the home and community. Additionally, the Georgia Pediatric Program's (GAPP) provides in-home supports to families with medically fragile children under the age or 21 years. These Medicaid funded programs thereby reduce the risk of child admissions to facilities and prevents out-of-home placements. Youth with behavioral health disabilities must have access to a full array of home and community-based services to prevent institutionalization and out-of-home placement. In addition to individual and group therapy services, Georgia currently only provides Intensive Family Intervention (IFI), and Intensive Customized Care Coordination (IC3).

What can GAO do to help or support Georgia parents and children?

Much of my work is focused on helping parents understand how to access services for their children. This includes parents understanding the state departments and their roles/

responsibilities as it all relates to providing in-home and community-based services to youth with disabilities. In addition, I assist families in understanding the Medicaid Act's Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) language, so parents/caregivers understand their child's right to medically necessary services while their child is enrolled in Medicaid. Once parents understand the basics of EPSDT, my focus then shifts to helping families to secure Letters of Medical Necessity by the youth's clinician which note the service(s) being prescribed as well as the number of hours of the service(s) to be provided to the youth in order to correct or ameliorate the youth's conditions.

What should Child Attorneys Child advocate for on behalf of their child client's wishes, and what should Child Guardians ad Litem follow-up on when representing the best interests of the child?

It is important that the courts and all of the attorneys involved in the cases understand the roles and responsibilities of each of the state departments as related to youth with disabilities and their rights under federal law. The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) oversees the provisions of behavioral health services for youth. The Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH) as the state's Medicaid authority, and Amerigroup (as one of DCH's contracting organizations for youth in foster care and post adoption services), maintains the responsibility of ensuring Medicaid enrolled youth under the age of 21 years are receiving medically necessary services as prescribed by the youth's clinician "to correct or ameliorate" the youth's condition. Failure to provide medically necessary services to children and youth with disabilities results in impediments to growth and development. Prolonged institutionalization in facilities results in youth experiencing further delays in global development and often results in the child regressing.

Child attorneys are welcome to contact me for technical assistance around issues related to behavioral health and developmental disabilities.

Recap of CAPTA Citizen Review Panels

By Jill Roth, J.D., CWLS



Earlier this year, I was selected to serve a three-year term as a volunteer on the Georgia's Metro District CAPTA Citizen Review Panel. In this article, I will share with you what I have recently learned about CRPs and the important role they serve.

Citizen Review Panels (CRPs) emerged from the 1996 reauthorization of the Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA), specifically Section 106(c). These panels are tasked with evaluating state and local child protection systems and providing recommendations for their improvement. CRPs evaluate the extent to which state and local agencies are effectively discharging their child protection responsibilities under Georgia's CAPTA Plan, child protection standards under federal and state law, and any other criteria the CRP considers important to ensuring the protection of children. As described in CAPTA, CRPs should be comprised of volunteer members, broadly representative of the communities in which they are established, including members who have expertise in the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect, and may include adult former victims of child abuse or neglect. Members often include children's attorneys, child advocates, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers, private citizens, parents, social workers, teachers, mental health providers, and researchers.¹

Across the country, CRPs vary significantly in terms of support, membership appointment, and the composition of their annual reports. Funding for CRPs ranges from none to substantial, sourced from CAPTA and other funds. Members may be elected or appointed by state child welfare systems or legislative bodies.² To receive

¹ National Citizen Review Panels Advisory Board Tip Sheet #1, CAPTA Citizen Review Panels: The Basics.

² Id.

CAPTA funding, most states, as recipients of CAPTA grants, must establish at least three CRPs. There are over 350 CRPs across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Some states exceed this minimum, while others, due to smaller populations, may have only one.³ Some states initiated new panels to meet the CAPTA mandate, while others adapted existing ones, such as Children’s Justice Act Task Forces, state Child Fatality Review Boards, or community-based Foster Care Review Panels to meet the mandate.⁴

CRPs review policies, procedures, and practices of child protection agencies. They also examine specific cases to assess if these agencies are effectively fulfilling their responsibilities according to the CAPTA state plan and child protection standards. They focus on areas such as coordination with foster and adoption programs and reviewing child fatalities and near fatalities. CRPs must submit an annual report detailing their work and recommendations for improvements, to which the state child welfare agency must respond within six months.⁵

CRPs have made significant strides in promoting positive child welfare outcomes. They have tackled issues such as mandatory reporting, father engagement in child welfare, child fatality review, and child welfare agency employee retention. Some panels also participate in federal Child and Family Services Reviews and state Quality Assurance Reviews.⁶

Georgia’s Citizen Review Panels

The Georgia Department of Human Services’ Division of Family & Children Services (DFCS or Division) administers CRP funding allocations and coordinates the three CRPs on behalf of the State, provides the CRPs with information necessary to carry out their functions, and responds to the CRP annual report, including addressing whether or how the State will be incorporating the CRP’s recommendations.



Left to Right - David Meyers (UGA), Deena Davis (Douglas County Family Treatment Court Peer Specialist), Estelline Beamon (DFCS CAPTA Contracts Specialist), Jershaun Roberts (DFCS – GARYSE Chafee Supervisor), Jill Roth (Attorney), Kristi Gilley (CASA).

Prior to September 2023, three of Georgia’s panels complied with CAPTA requirements. Two of the panels served a dual role—the Children’s Justice Act Task Force (CJATF) and the Child Fatality Review Panel (CFRP). Prior Panels have focused on making recommendations related to how to conduct diversion programs in accordance with national standards and practices, and making recommendations related to safety planning. They also performed a survey of DFCS staff related to turnover and workplace concerns to identify issues with retention. Salary was identified as a major concern and was addressed legislatively following the panels’ recommendations. The panels further addressed the mandated reporter training, system of care plans, improving the quality of legal representation and child welfare workforce development and retention concerns.

The third panel was the Child Protective Services Advisory Committee. Previous CRPs have made recommendations related to caseworker attrition and diversion in child protection cases, among other things. The reconstruction will allow the CJATF and CFRP to focus solely on their federally mandated responsibilities and will allow the district panels the ability to select their focus areas.

Beginning in September 2023, Georgia began to transition to a new district-based framework. There will be CRPs representing Georgia’s North, Metro, and South districts, along with a fourth panel—Georgia Peers Advocating for Change (CPAC)—the Division’s youth advisory board, comprised of young adults with lived experience in the child welfare system, which will provide support for the other panels. As part of the transition process, the Division selected Estelline Beamon to serve as CAPTA Contract Specialist, a role that includes coordinating quarterly CRP meetings, planning the annual CRP retreat, serving as a liaison and communicator amongst and between the panels and between the panels and DFCS, and assisting the panels with researching information, stakeholder engagement, etc. Ms. Beamon is currently drafting a policies and procedures manual, which will be shared with the

³ Id.

⁴ Id.

⁵ Id.

⁶ Id.

panels for input, recommendation, and feedback.

The University of Georgia's J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development was recruited to assist with the transition of the panels. To keep the application and selection process for CRP volunteers independent of DFCS, the Fanning Institute coordinated the application and selection process for volunteers. The Fanning Institute will continue to assist with the transition through September 2024.

In June 2024, I attended the orientation on Georgia's CAPTA Citizen Review Panels, which was held for new CRP volunteers. On August 17, 2024, all of Georgia's CRPs will convene for an Annual CAPTA Panel Retreat, where mission statements and focus areas will be developed for the various panels.

More information regarding Georgia's CAPTA Citizen Review Panels, Georgia's CRP Annual Reports to DFCS, federal reviews and plans, and other useful data can be found on these websites:

GA DFCS CAPTA website: <https://dfcs.georgia.gov/services/georgia-capta>

HHS CAPTA legislation: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/capta.pdf>

GA DFCS Federal Reviews and Plans: <https://dfcs.georgia.gov/data/federal-reviews-and-plans>

- Includes Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) and Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR)

GA DHS Data Website: <https://dfcs.georgia.gov/data>

- Includes data for child welfare and for the Office of Family Independence

Children's Bureau AFCARS website: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/adoption-fostercare>

To contact any GA CRP, email: gacrp@dhs.ga.gov; a contact link is also available on the GA DFCS CAPTA website.

Reflections from the 2024 National Citizen Review Panel Conference



National Citizens Review Panel Conference - San Diego May 2024

In May, I was able to attend and participate in the 2024 National Citizen Review Panel Conference: Empowering Communities to Lead Change, which took place in beautiful, sunny San Diego, California. I was joined by fellow recently selected CAPTA volunteers Kristi Gilley (South District) and Deena Davis (Metro), as well as CAPTA Coordinator Estelline Beamon, and David Meyers and Jason Bedgood of the Fanning Institute.

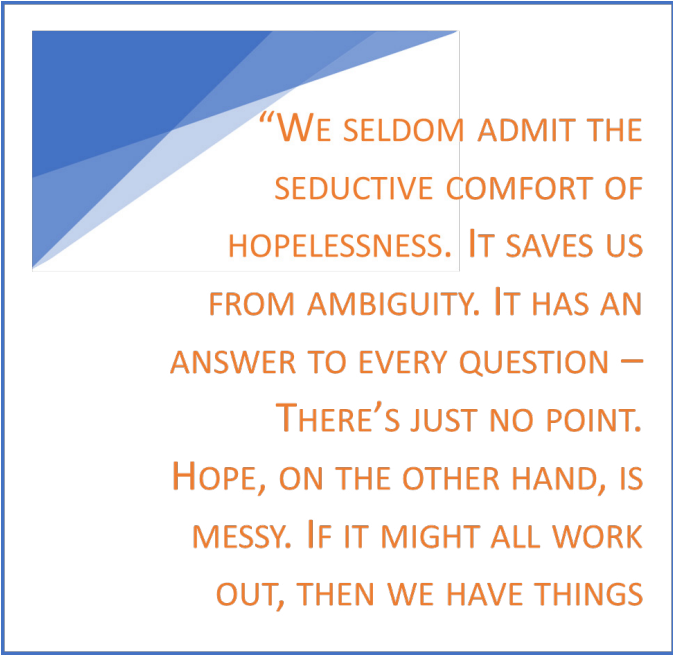
The conference featured speakers such as Rebecca Jones Gaston, MSW, Commissioner of the Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF); Dr. Robert Sege, Co-Director, Community and Stakeholder Engagement at Tufts CTSI; and Deb Farrell, Chair of the National CRP Advisory Board.

HOPE and Positive Childhood Experiences

Dr. Sege discussed HOPE ("Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences") a framework that has transformed care in various settings across the country. He emphasized that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) do not determine one's fate, quoting psychiatrist Carl Bell: "Risk factors are not predictive factors because of protective factors." Healing is possible through nurturing and support, and the brain's adaptability allows for intervention throughout a person's life.⁷

Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) are crucial for healthy development and can mitigate the effects of ACEs. Research shows that positive childhood experiences (PCEs) drive healthy development and lessen the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). PCEs allow children to form strong relationships and meaningful connections, cultivate positive self-image and self-worth, experience a sense of belonging, and build skills to cope with stress in

⁷ Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Fact Not Fate, last updated June 15, 2023, located at: <https://collectivehealthtrust.org/adverse-childhood-experiences-aces-fact-not-fate/>.



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healthy ways.⁸ PCEs can be nurtured, developed, and expanded and can mitigate the effects of adverse childhood experiences.⁹

Key PCEs include relationships with adults and peers, safe and stable environments, social and civil engagement, and social/emotional growth.¹⁰ By focusing on a child’s and family’s strengths, providers can better support children’s mental and physical health outcomes.

More information on the HOPE Framework can be found here: <https://positiveexperience.org/>.

Evident Change and Structured Decision Making

Phil Dector, Director of Child Welfare at Evident Change (formerly the National Council on Crime & Delinquency and the Children’s Research Center), highlighted the importance of structured decision-making tools in child welfare determinations to counteract biases.¹¹ Most child welfare removals are due to neglect, making unbiased decision-making critical. Structured decision-making assists mandated reporters and child welfare professionals with shifting

⁸ [https://positiveexperience.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/HOPE-Two-
Pager-2023.pdf](https://positiveexperience.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/HOPE-Two-Pager-2023.pdf).

⁹ Robert Sege, MD, PhD, et al, Prevalence of Positive Childhood Experiences Among Adults – Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Four States, 2015-2021, US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Vol. 73, No. 17, May 2, 2024

¹⁰ Dina Burnstein, Chloe Yang, Kay Johnson, Jeff Linkenbach, Robert Sege, Transforming Practice with HOPE (Health Outcomes from Positive Experiences), Maternal and Child Health Journal (2021), available at <https://positiveexperience.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Transforming-practice-with-HOPE.pdf>.

¹¹ <https://evidentchange.org/about-evident-change/>.

from fast, intuitive thinking to slow, deliberative thinking, improving child safety assessments.¹²

If you would like to try a Structured Decision Making tool in a hypothetical or real-life reporting situation, the California Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services has launched an online Child Protection Reporting Guide (CPRG) which is intended to assist reporters who are concerned about possible abuse or neglect of a child with determining whether to report their concerns to a child protection agency or law enforcement agency. The tool can be accessed at: <https://cprg.app.evidentchange.net/humboldt/> (ensure to indicate “I would like to practice using the CPRG; I do not have a current concern about a child” when prompted).

The CPRG is intended to complement rather than replace critical thinking and does not prohibit a reporter from any course of action the reporter believes is appropriate. The guide incorporates design principles that helps the reporter focus on the most critical pieces of information at hand, in order to make the best decisions possible, which will reflect the consensus of multiple child protection agencies and community partners concerning which situations are best served through a formal child welfare response versus those that are best served through alternative interventions.

When a report is recommended, Humboldt’s CPRG directs users to Child Welfare Services. The CPRG is intended to assist reporters as they gain familiarity with the mandated reporting threshold, help ensure that children and families requiring child protection response are promptly reported, provide alternative options for reporters to assist children and families who would be better served outside the statutory child protection system, and help child protection agencies increase direct family contact for reports requiring response by eliminating time spent on reports that could be diverted for more appropriate service(s).

Family Resource Centers

Dr. Elizabeth G. Vermilyea, from the Child Parent Institute discussed Family Resource Centers,

¹² U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children’s Bureau, The AFCARS Report, p. 3, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/afcars-report-30.pdf> (during FY2022, 62% of removals were tied to neglect; 33% to drug abuse (parent); 13% caretaker inability to cope; 13% physical abuse; 11% housing; 8% child behavior problem; 6% parent incarceration; 6% alcohol abuse (parent); 5% abandonment; 4% sexual abuse; 2% drug abuse (child); 2% child disability; 1% parent death; 1% relinquishment; 0% alcohol abuse (child).

established a Family Resource Center in the Cotati-Rohnert Park Unified School District in California. Many states offer Family Resource Centers (FRCs) as part of their Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) funded programs. FRCs are generally community- or school-based drop-in centers located in a variety of settings including schools, libraries, community centers, housing complexes, and faith-based buildings. They offer a safe, strength-based setting for family-oriented on-site programs, resources, activities, and classes to strengthen families in their communities. They are intended to be warm and welcoming places where family members can access formal and informal supports to promote their health and well-being, not only in times of need but as a regular part of day-to-day life. FRCs provide multiple services and resources to diverse families and children, increase protective factors, and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. Services are typically provided through collaborative efforts with public and private community-based organizations. FRCs may offer services such as: parent education and skill classes; parent-to-parent support groups; child development activities; home visiting; advocacy and community leadership; after school and academic enrichment; literacy supports; physical, mental health and wellness information; respite and crisis care services; assistance with concrete supports such as housing, food, clothing; other programs, activities, and services; and referrals.

More information on Family Resource Centers can be found at the following links:

<https://www.nationalfamilysupportnetwork.org/family-support-programs>
<https://friendsnrc.org/prevention/family-resource-and-support-center/>
<https://www.casey.org/family-resource-centers/>
<https://strategiesca.org/vehiclesforchange/>
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/search/?q=family%20resource%20centers>
<https://calparents.org/what-we-do/rohnert-park-family-resource-center/>

I left the National CRP Conference inspired to focus on HOPE, to encourage a shift from deficit to strength-based thinking, and to assist with efforts to strengthen the network of child and family community-serving agencies to ensure that services can reach children and families in their homes, schools, and communities.



Resources:

Final Report: Georgia Child and Family Services Review (2024)

This document presents the findings of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the state of Georgia. The CFSRs enable the Children's Bureau to: (1) ensure conformity with certain federal child welfare requirements; (2) determine what is happening to children and families as they are engaged in child welfare services; and (3) assist states in enhancing their capacity to help children and families achieve positive outcomes. Federal law and regulations authorize the Children's Bureau, within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, to administer the review of child and family services programs under titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. The CFSRs are structured to help states identify strengths and areas needing improvement in their child welfare practices and programs as well as institute systemic changes that will improve child and family outcomes.



If impacted by Hurricane Helene, please seek out State Bar Resources:<https://www.gabar.org/hurricane-helene-information-and-resources>

Announcements:

Nomination Season for the 9th Annual Judge Willie Lovett Award starts at the beginning of 2025!

Nominations open on January 1, 2025, and will be accepted through March 1, 2025. The Lovett Award honors Juvenile Court Judge Willie Lovett's child welfare legacy of grace, humility, empathy, kindness, honesty, optimism, resilience, compassion, as well as Judge Lovett's dedication to public service, and his lasting impact on so many lives. Each year CPAS' Lovett Award Selection Committee reviews nominations from its general body, and the Committee selects one judge and one attorney who embodies the many qualities for which Judge Lovett was known. The nominator must show that the recipient of the Lovett Award has a strong commitment to advancing child welfare and juvenile justice, with a demonstrated history of dedication to advocacy for the protections of family and children, children and parents' rights. The recipient must exemplify excellence and professionalism as a judge or as an attorney. A nominator is welcome to submit a nomination for his/herself or for more than one nomination. The award recipient will receive a one-of-a-kind, engraved glass statue.

Judge Nominee Eligibility: 1) Member in good standing of the State Bar of Georgia; 2) Member of the Child Protection and Advocacy Section (CPAS) of the State Bar of Georgia; 3) Has exhibited history of dedication to advocacy and/or protection of children and/or parents' defense, children and/or parents' rights, or child welfare protection; 4) Has practiced for at least the last five consecutive years in child welfare; 5) Exemplifies excellence and professionalism as a judge; 6) Active in child welfare related State/American Bar activities or professional associations; and 7) Active in non-law related community service organizations.

Judge Nominee Ineligibility: A member of the Lovett Award Selection Committee, or staff of the State Bar of Georgia, or staff of the Administrative Office of the Courts.

To find the Judge Willie Lovett Award Nomination Form, please visit the CPAS website at the link below: [Child Protection and Advocacy Section](#)

Congratulations to Darlene Lynch!

Georgia Appleseed has hired Darlene Lynch (dlynch@gaappleseed.org) as the new Legal and Policy Director. She previously worked for the Center for Victims of Torture. She is an amazing lawyer with a long history of remarkable advocacy for children on the international, state, and local scale. Everyone at Georgia Appleseed is very excited about Ms. Lynch's leadership!

Save the Date for the 2025 Child Protection and Advocacy Section Annual Meeting & CLE

When: January 22, 2025, from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Where: State Bar of Georgia

What: Mark your calendars now to join the CPAS annual meeting and CLE! Annually, this program brings together practitioners to gain valuable knowledge on updates in delinquency and dependency law. This year's program will offer attendees a closer look at protecting dependency cases for appeal along with a panel presentation focused on the implementation of best practices in juvenile law. *Following this year's CLE, the Young Lawyers Division will host a social event for those in attendance.*

Registration information will be distributed by the Georgia Bar in late November 2024, and can be found on the CPAS website near the beginning of 2025 ([Child Protection and Advocacy Section](#))

Child Protection and Advocacy Section Scholarships

The Child Protection and Advocacy Section of the State Bar of Georgia will offer three scholarships in the amount of up to \$750 per scholarship each year. These funds may be used for either registration fees or travel expenses for an out-of-town conference or seminar related to child welfare or family law. The scholarships will be awarded to current members of CPAS who demonstrate both a need for financial assistance and the relevance of the content area of the conference or seminar to the work conducted by the attorney. Please click the following link to access the Scholarship Application: [Child Protection and Advocacy Section](#)

SECTION BYLAWS UPDATE: The State Bar has asked us to update our bylaws to be more in line with the model bylaws. The comparison document, accessible by using the link or QR code, is our attempt to align our bylaws to the model bylaws. The document to the left in red is the original bylaws and the document on the right in green is the updated version of the bylaws we are seeking to pass. You are able to leave comments on the documents, if you feel strongly about a change, so that we may consider the same. The comment period for the membership will be open until December 15, 2024. We will vote on the proposed changes at our annual meeting.

Please scan the QR code to view the comparison document relating to the changes in the Child Protection and Advocacy Section's Bylaws or visiting: [CPAS bylaws.](#)



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