



Kids Matter

Child Protection and Advocacy Law Section

Spring 2026

From the Chair

Greetings Child and Protection
Advocacy Section (CPAS)
Members,

I hope you've stopped to feel the sunshine on your face and to notice the blooming flowers and trees and all the other joyous occasions as spring turns to summer—celebrations of miracles, mothers, awards days, performances, graduations, and so many birthdays!

Arriving after the dog days of winter, spring is not loud about its work. It arrives quietly – pressing daffodils through frozen ground, insisting on growth where everything appears dead, reminding us that growth is often uneven and may seem impossible before it becomes visible, and that sometimes the seeds we plant lie dormant, awaiting the right conditions to bloom.

“I couldn't help it, yes, I let it get in
The helpless optimism of spring
Worn out and tired and my heart
near retired
And the world bent double from
weeping
And yet, the birds began to sing. . .”
-Florence Welch

In our work, we encounter young people during some of the most difficult and turbulent chapters of their lives. Adolescence has a way of bringing pain, trauma, instability, and unmet needs to the surface with particular force. The behaviors that follow can be alarming, frustrating, and heartbreaking. But they are not permanent.

Many of us who now sit in positions of leadership, advocacy, or service were once struggling young people ourselves. Some of us carried wounds that surfaced as rebellion, poor decision-making, and self-destructive behaviors before healing and stability eventually took root.

Both research and lived experience remind us that most delinquent and unruly behavior declines significantly as young people mature into adulthood, especially when they encounter support, accountability, safety, and someone who believes they are capable of becoming more than their worst moments. Often seeds planted do not grow right away, but take time to root, awaiting the perfect set of conditions in which to push through. We cannot

force someone to hear a message they are not ready to receive, but we must never underestimate the power of planting a seed.

Spring is a fitting season to remember the extraordinary human capacity for change. You plant seeds every single day with every action you take. You have influence and are making a dent in the universe in a very real way. Thank you for the work you do each day on behalf of children, families, and communities, and for continuing to hold space for both accountability and hope.



- Jill E. Roth, JD, CWLS

*Chair, State Bar of Georgia Child
Protection & Advocacy Section*

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BAR BENEFITS

Conference Center

DID YOU KNOW?

The Bar Center conference rooms can be reserved at no charge for law-related meetings. Similar amenities are available at the Savannah and Tifton offices.

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State Bar
of Georgia

Beginning Lawyers Program Membership Drive



On February 24, 2026, Child Protection & Advocacy Section Chair Jill Roth teamed up with Executive Committee members Ira Foster and Michael Waller to host a table at the State Bar of Georgia's Beginning Lawyers Program. CPAS also provided financial support for the program. Attendance offered the opportunity for CPAS Executive Committee members to meet with new lawyers and introduce them to the benefits of CPAS Section membership. The event also provided an opportunity to meet and network with leaders from other State Bar Sections.

An advertisement for the Georgia Bar Journal. It features a background image of green chairs in a courtroom setting. The text reads: "Are you attracting the right audience for your services?" followed by "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." and "Contact Ashley Stollar at 404-527-8792 or ashleys@gabar.org." The State Bar of Georgia logo is at the bottom.

19th Annual Youth and the Law Summit "Knowledge is Power, Self-Knowledge is the Superpower"



On April 18, 2026, the 19th Annual Youth and the Law Summit took place at the State Bar of Georgia. The Summit is hosted by Fulton County Juvenile Court Chief Judge Renata Turner and co-chaired by Darrick McDuffie, Partner at Constangy, Brooks, Smith & Prophete, LLP, and Dr. J.L. Wyatt-Keyton, Executive Director of Career Services and Professional Development at Atlanta's John Marshall Law School. The event is sponsored by youthSpark, Wholistic Stress Control Institute, the Gate City Bar Association, the @Promise Center, Constangy, Brooks, Smith & Prophete, John Marshall Law School, SOJ 411, and the State Bar of Georgia's Child Protection & Advocacy Section.

During the Summit, youth and their parents or guardians had an opportunity to learn about their rights, learn about and connect with community resources, and participate in inspiring discussions

with presenters, including Dr. Shadonna Davis, Pastor Lorenzo King, CPAS Past-Chair Laurie Thomas Williams, School Social Worker Sade Wise, Dr. J.L. Wyatt-Keyton, Assistant District Attorney Lashawnda Woods-Roberts, Lisa Thomas, Gary Davis, Sr., and Mary Goldschmidt. The Summit acts as a bridge to youth, providing them with access to services and tools they can use to pursue bright futures.

CPAS Executive Committee Members and Community Leaders Unite to Strengthen Families



On April 20, 2026, CPAS Executive Committee members Quintin Lewis and Danielle Simpson Alford, along with attorney Max Schardt, proudly participated in a powerful and solutions-driven panel discussion on violence prevention, accountability, and community partnership at the *Atlanta Parental Accountability Take Over – Part 2*, supported by Atlanta District 12 Councilman Antonio Lewis.

The event took place at POWER (Pathways of Wealth & Economic Resources) Atlanta's location in the Pittsburgh area, southwest of downtown Atlanta, and was a joint

venture hosted by Mothers Against Gang Violence [MAGV](#) and [WII Care](#) Atlanta.

The panel discussion centered on protecting youth and strengthening families, emphasizing the importance of connecting families with local service providers before a child becomes court-involved while also ensuring immediate support as families navigate urgent challenges.

The panelists offered thoughtful analysis drawn from prior cases and highlighted how early intervention, informed advocacy, and strong family engagement can significantly impact long-term outcomes. They also explored how the law functions not only as a mechanism for accountability but also as a framework designed to protect children and preserve community safety.

Advice shared with attendees included taking proactive steps, leaning on community support systems, and never giving up on children and their needs. Panelists acknowledged that it can be a difficult time for families trying to figure things out but reinforced that help and resources are available.

A central theme throughout the discussion was balancing parental accountability with parental support. Meaningful change requires equipping parents with access to resources, clear communication channels, and strong community connections. Families must be active partners in their children's development, but they must also be supported and informed.

The conversation reinforced a powerful truth: when policymakers, legal advocates, community organizations, and families work

together proactively, we create safer neighborhoods and stronger futures for our youth.



- **Danielle Simpson Alford, Esq.**
*Secretary, State Bar of Georgia Child
Protection & Advocacy Section*

Georgia General Assembly 2026 Legislative Session Update



"Official State Tree of Georgia"

The Georgia General Assembly officially adjourned on April 3, 2026 (*Sine Die*), marking the end of the two-year session and finalizing key legislation for the year. Any bills that did not receive final approval by the end of the day on *Sine Die* are considered dead for the session and must be reintroduced next session. May 12, 2026 was the final day for Governor Kemp to sign, veto, or do nothing thus allowing passed legislation to become law.

A notable bill that did not pass was HB 1061, previously called the "Raise the Age Act" and later renamed the "Mandi Ballinger Act" after the late committee chair. The

bill began with provisions raising the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to include seventeen (17) year-olds and included an implementation committee. Mid-session, substantive provisions were removed, leaving only the implementation sections intact. The bill passed the House and was favorably reported out of the Senate committee, but it was not voted on by the Senate. Therefore, the bill is now dead.

In addition to the bills listed in the chart below, the General Assembly passed SR 622, which creates a Joint Study Committee on Evaluating Escalating Costs in Georgia's Foster Care System. The committee will have twenty (20) members: a SAAG appointed by the governor; six (6) members appointed by the President of the Senate; six (6) members appointed by the Speaker of the House; the Commissioners of the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), and the Department of Community Health (DCH); the Presidents of the Councils of Superior Court and Juvenile Court Judges; and the Executive Director of Together Georgia. The committee is required to issue a report prior to its abolishment date of December 1, 2026.

To keep up-to-date on legislative developments, consider following these child and family policy organizations:

Voices for Georgia's Children is an organization that works to improve policies and systems that impact child wellbeing by advancing laws, policies, and actions that improve children's lives. They conduct research, release reports and fact sheets, convene coalitions, hold events, and publish frequent newsletters to

keep interested parties up to date on the latest child-related policy and legislative initiatives. You can sign up to receive legislative and policy updates at [Voices for Georgia's Children](#).

You can also sign up to receive legislative updates from **Emory University School of Law's Barton Child Law and Policy Center** at [Barton Center](#). The Barton Center tracks bills of interest, flags key hearings and votes, and translates complex proposals into clear, practical takeaways. Their goal is to equip advocates, practitioners, and community partners with timely, reliable information to support informed, strategic, and effective advocacy for children, youth, and families across Georgia.

Other organizations that focus on children and family policy that can help you stay up-to-date with Georgia legislative updates include: [GEEARS](#); [Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition](#); and the [GA Budget and Policy Institute](#).

- Jill E. Roth, JD, CWLS
Chair, State Bar of Georgia Child Protection & Advocacy Section

2026 Georgia General Assembly Legislative Summary

Bill	Summary	Effective Date
HB 256	Amends OCGA 15-11-19 to state that a party, including the Department in any case in which the court allowed its participation, has a right to the full and complete record of any proceeding in Juvenile Court and parties do not have to obtain a court order to receive the record. Amends OCGA 49-5-41 to replace “Foster Parents Bill of Rights” with “Foster Placements Bill of Rights.” Adds OCGA 49-5-41(h) to allow foster placements reasonable access to nonidentifying information of children in foster care. Establishes approved “volunteer advocates” under OCA. Amends OCGA 49-5-281 to include relative caregivers and fictive kin under the definition of “foster placement” in the Foster Placements Bill of Rights.	Upon the signature of the Governor: 5/11/2026

HB 350	Amends OCGA 19-10A-1 to rename the “Safe Place for Newborns Act of 2002” to “Eliza Jane Warner Act.”	July 1, 2026	HB 979	Allows for state government jurisdiction over juvenile matters occurring on federally owned lands and military installations.	July 1, 2026
	Amends OCGA 19-10A-4 to expand the Act to 45 days instead of 30.		HB 1009	Bans cell phones in high schools. In 2025, a bill passed banning cell phones for K-8 public schools effective July 1, 2026.	July 1, 2027
	Amends OCGA 19-10A-5 to allow placement of “newborn safety devices.”				
HB 943	Enacts OCGA 49-5-26 to require DFCS to develop and implement a five-year pilot program to provide screenings and clinical evaluations for autism spectrum disorder for children in foster care, and to provide training to staff. Prioritizes children diagnosed with ADHD or reactive attachment disorder (RAD) or who have been prescribed psychotropic medications. Requires written report from DFCS no later than July 1, 2031.	Upon the signature of the Governor: 5/11/2026	HB 1192	Revises OCGA 49-2-10 and 49-4-144 to require that any funds appropriated or allocated to DHS and DCH by the General Assembly or federal funds be maintained in a separate account and may only be expended for the designated purpose. Also requires that the commissioners conduct an annual review on department practices and procedures, contracts and agreements, and accounting practices to identify cost savings and opportunities for operational efficiency and to report findings to the legislature.	Vetoed by Governor
HB 945	Amends OCGA 7-1-4 and 7-1-239.11 <i>et seq.</i> to allow a financial institution to take actions and place a hold on accounts of a person they suspect is the victim of financial exploitation.	July 1, 2026	HB 1215	Adds superior court judges to the Gwinnett, Middle Georgia, Northeastern, and Clayton judicial circuits.	January 1, 2027

HB 1247	Added 15-1-24. When interpreting the state's Constitution, statutes, or published rules, a court shall not defer to a state agency's determination or interpretation of such authorities, whether such determination or interpretation is written or unwritten. Section shall not be construed to alter any standards of judicial review expressly established by statute.	Governor signed May 12, 2026, with Signing Statement indicating that he signed with the "expectation and understanding that the constitutional requirements for the passage of legislation, which includes legislative overrides of agency rules and regulations, will be followed, notwithstanding any language in this bill that could be interpreted to the contrary."
HB 1283	Enacts OCGA 19-13-70 to establish Family Justice Centers for victims of family violence, sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse, and human trafficking.	July 1, 2026
HB 1409	Revises OCGA 19-7-5, the Mandatory Reporter Statute. The bill adds firefighters and animal service workers to the list of mandatory reporters and permits reports to be made via a secure web-based platform. Requires DFCS to develop a training curriculum.	Vetoed by Governor
SB 383	Amends OCGA 19-15-3 regarding child fatality review committees to revise several items, including adding members, providing for required attendance, and clarifying the scope of review.	July 1, 2026
SB 428	Enacts OCGA 40-4-142.6 to allow the Department of Community Health to submit a waiver request to the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to authorize the qualification of Medicaid reimbursement for home and community-based services for individuals over the age of 21 who are in need of mental health services, but do not require institutional care.	December 31, 2026

SB 431	Enacts OCGA 20-1-9 to add definitions relating to education. Amends OCGA 20-2-670 to require schools to enroll children in foster care within three (3) school days following receipt of a completed enrollment registration form and provides a procedure for enforcement by the GaDOE chief privacy officer and RESA student affairs office to require compliance. RESA student affairs officers are required to prepare quarterly reports concerning disputes or contacts, which are to be summarized in an annual report prepared by the DOE for designated legislative recipients.	July 1, 2026
SB 535	Recreates community service boards (CSBs) and establishes that CSB executive directors will be appointed by the Commissioner of DBHDD.	July 1, 2026
SB 587	Amends OCGA 16-5-70 (relating to cruelty to children) to allow Superior Courts to issue orders to locate the parent or guardian of a child for purposes of welfare and safety.	July 1, 2026



Legislative Summary Chart
provided by: **Dana H. Carroll**,
CPAS Executive Committee Member

MAYA
First year attorney

RUBY
Practicing law for 30+ years

Find your people.

Georgia Lawyers Helping Lawyers (LHL) is a confidential peer-to-peer program that provides colleagues who are suffering from stress, depression, addiction or other personal issues in their lives, with a fellow Bar member to be there, listen and help.

If you are looking for a peer or are interested in being a peer volunteer, visit www.GeorgiaLHL.org for more information.

GEORGIA
LAWYERS
HELPING
LAWYERS

Case Law Update

Jan. 1, 2026 - May 1, 2026

Delinquency

ITIO M.I., A25A1748 (March 6, 2026) (unpublished opinion). MI and his co-perpetrator attacked an off-duty corrections officer at Sam's Club and tried to remove his firearm. He was able to fend them off and they ran. While he was chasing them, one of them dropped a wallet.

The surveillance video did not show the attack, but did show the youths approaching the area where it happened and then fleeing the area with a wallet being dropped. MI was identified from the video.

MI alleged the evidence was insufficient to sustain adjudication because it was circumstantial and "there was not sufficient evidence presented to exclude every other reasonable hypothesis other than guilt." The appellate panel pointed out that every hypothesis is not a "reasonable one," and that it is the trier of fact who makes that determination. The decision won't be disturbed on appeal "unless it is unsupportable as a matter of law." Here, the judge's conclusions were not "unsupportable as a matter of law" based upon the evidence presented.

Dependency & TPR

ITIO T.K., A25A1800 (March 11, 2026). The trial court found dependency where mother left children with paternal grandmother (PGM). The mother had DFCS history (2 prior cases), a history of meth abuse and instability, was living in her car, and her whereabouts

were unknown. PGM's husband had been accused of molesting a child 35 years earlier. The appellate court upheld the finding of dependency based on the mother's unrehabilitated substance abuse, neglect, and lack of supervision of the children. The court also found non-reunification was appropriate as it was the children's third time in foster care. Mother did not appeal the non-reunification decision, only arguing there was not clear and convincing evidence of dependency and need for removal.

ITIO AA, A26A0324 (April 24, 2026). Upholding the juvenile court order awarding permanent guardianship of AA to the paternal grandmother. Evidence is construed in favor of the judgment and court determines whether a rational trier of fact could have found clear and convincing evidence that reunification services should not be provided. COA neither weighs the evidence nor determines the credibility of witnesses and will defer to the juvenile court's factfinding and affirm unless the appellate standard is met.

In this case, the mother argued that the record did not include permanency plan documents or reflect that a permanency plan hearing was timely conducted. However, she did not raise the objection in juvenile court; thus, it was not preserved for appeal.

The COA rejected the mother's argument that failure to include a permanency plan in the guardianship proceeding deprived her of notice that the division was pursuing permanent guardianship. The COA noted that a guardianship proceeding is separate from a

dependency proceeding, with its own petition and case number. The mother did not request the dependency proceedings to be included in the record on appeal. Permanency plans are not required in permanent guardianship cases. The mother was served with the petition for permanent guardianship and the mother's attorney and mother clearly understood the division had filed a permanent guardianship petition.

Because records from the dependency case were not included, it was not clear whether any permanency plan report was filed in the dependency proceedings where permanency plans are statutorily required. OCGA § 15-11-231.

Evidence supported the trial court's conclusion that reasonable efforts to reunify AA with his mother would be detrimental to him, as required by OCGA § 15-11-240(a)(1). The child had lived with his paternal grandmother for his entire life, the parents returned the child to the paternal grandmother after just a few hours of visitation due to the child's inconsolable crying, the paternal grandmother was able to meet the child's elevated medical needs, the father consented to guardianship, the parents lacked stable housing and income and did not complete treatment as recommended by substance abuse evaluations, the mother was not in treatment or taking medication to address her mental health, the dependency remained unresolved, and the parents had not consistently visited with the child in more than six (6) months.

Nothing requires expert or professional therapist evidence to

support the finding that appointment of the permanent guardian is in the best interests of the child. The juvenile court's order found facts based on the testimony of the witnesses, made conclusions of law, and applied the applicable law to the facts consistent with OCGA § 15-11-240 to make the decision to grant the petition for the appointment of a permanent guardian for AA.

The trial court did not err by considering the factors articulated in *Clark v. Wade*, 273 Ga. 587, 544 S.E.2d 99 (2001), a case that involved a custody dispute between a noncustodial father and the maternal grandparents under OCGA § 19-7-1(b.1), rather than a guardianship proceeding brought by the division under OCGA § 15-11-240. The trial court's reliance was limited to the question of whether the division had met its burden of rebutting the presumption of parental custody. See *In the Interest of M. F.*, 298 Ga. 138, 144-145(2), 780 S.E.2d 291 (2015) (citing *Clark* and noting that presumption of parental custody applies in the context of a petition to modify guardianship under OCGA § 15-11-244). The court also applied the factors set out in OCGA § 15-11-240, the statute that grants juvenile courts authority to appoint permanent guardians for dependent children.

The mother argued that the juvenile court applied the wrong standard in denying the oral motion for the return of custody. The COA held the mother's challenge to the denial of her oral motion for return of custody was moot. The order of permanent guardianship entered by the juvenile court superseded the continuance order that included the denial of the motion for return

of custody, effectively mooted the issue the mother raised regarding the validity of the denial of her motion. The COA rejected the argument that the denial of mother's request for continuance was in error – the trial court denied the motion early in hearing but issued the continuance later in proceeding – the mother failed to articulate how the delay in ordering continuance harmed her.

ITIO AA, A26A0173, A26A0174 (April 23, 2026). The record and facts supported the finding by the juvenile court that the mother and father were involved in the abuse and mishandling of their seven-week-old child and thus that reunification of parents with the child and his sibling was not warranted where the child had a dozen bone fractures caused within the first seven weeks of his life, he was housed with only his parents and maternal grandmother, an expert in child abuse pediatrics opined that the injuries were the result of child abuse caused by an adult, and the juvenile court could draw an adverse inference from the parents' invocation of their Fifth Amendment privilege against self-incrimination, which resulted in a failure to provide an explanation for child's bone fractures that would negate the expert's opinion.

During a nonreunification hearing, the juvenile court could draw adverse inferences from the parents' invocation of their privilege against self-incrimination under the Fifth Amendment. “[I]nferences can be drawn from [the parents'] invocation of [their] privilege against self-incrimination ..., and such inferences *may constitute admissions unfavorable to [them]*.”

The juvenile court's oral expression

of concern about the parents' incarceration at the nonreunification hearing involving the minor children, one of whom had twelve (12) bone fractures, was not binding; rather, the juvenile court's written order, which properly premised nonreunification on its finding that the parents subjected the child to chronic abuse, not on the parents' incarceration, was binding.

“Chronic abuse” may be understood to mean, among other things, a constant, habitual, or always present nonaccidental physical injury. “Chronic” not only refers to something that occurs “for a long time,” it also refers to conditions that are “always present,” “constant,” and “inveterate.” AA was subjected to twelve bone fractures from *at least* three instances of abusive handling in just his first seven weeks of life. Over this seven-week period, the abuse was both debilitating and *constant*, and, given the alarming frequency of abuse in this short period, the COA found no error in the juvenile court's determination that AA was subjected to the type of “chronic abuse” contemplated by OCGA § 15-11-2(5)(C).

The juvenile court was authorized to consider the parents' abuse of the seven-week-old child as evidence that they would not be able to properly care for the child's sibling for purposes of supporting nonreunification proceedings involving both children; the statutory definition of aggravated circumstances includes when a parent subjects a child or the child's sibling to abuse.

Adoption

ITIO JAD, A25A1700 (January 30, 2026) (unreported). A couple appealed from the trial court's denial of their petition to adopt. The standard of review for denial of adoption is "plain abuse."

The child was placed with DFCS at six (6) months old. The parents consented to permanent guardianship with appellants. After approximately three (3) years with the permanent guardians, the child's mother petitioned for visitation and was awarded two hours per week. She married and had another child of whom she retained custody. The permanent guardians filed for adoption and TPR based on abandonment. The GAL reported that custody should remain with the appellants but gave no opinion on the TPR issue.

In the order denying the petition for adoption, the trial court "contrasted" the period of time when the mother was struggling to where she was at the time of trial, which showed she had stable housing, no legal issues, had provided financially for the child, and had meaningful contact with the child without any issues. The order pointed out that appellants had ignored the mother's efforts to be more involved in the child's life.

Appellants had the burden to show TPR was "warranted." They relied solely on abandonment under OCGA 19-8-10(a) and 15-11-310(a) (4) as grounds for TPR. The COA panel quoted the *KGV* case from 2024: "To constitute abandonment, the conduct must actually show an intent to abandon in light of the rest of the record."

Evidence of some of the facts set forth in the abandonment code section does not "require" a finding of abandonment but are facts that may support abandonment, i.e. "may be evidenced." Upon achieving sobriety, the mother made efforts to have contact with and support the child. Therefore, the COA affirmed the trial court's finding that the appellants failed to prove abandonment.

Appellate Review of School Tribunal

M.B. v. Henry Co. Bd. of Ed., A25A2004 (March 9, 2026). MB appealed the decision of the school tribunal to the State Board of Education and the superior court, alleging that the tribunal hearing did not meet the ten (10) day requirement set out in OCGA 20-2-754. The COA noted that appellate review is governed by the "any evidence" standard of review.

Records showed that MB raised the timeliness issue in his letter brief during the tribunal process, but the local school board did not address it. The COA found that MB properly raised the issue before the local board in the letter brief and that the local board was required to consider the issue. Because review of the local board's decision by an appellate body is governed by the "any evidence" standard of review, and the local board did not make a factual finding on the issue of timeliness, the COA concluded that both the superior court and the State Board overstepped their authority by ruling on the timeliness issue without considering the evidence.

K.B. v. Cobb County School District, A25A1870 (March 11, 2026). KB appealed a superior court order reversing a decision of the State Board of Education and reinstating a decision of the Cobb County School Board that suspended him for nearly two years for off-campus conduct violating the Local Board's code of conduct.

The SRO and assistant principal went to a local barber shop to confront KB about missing school. They used the SRO's marked squad car to block KB's car into its parking space. KB refused to cooperate or follow the SRO's command to exit his vehicle. KB then attempted to leave and in doing so his car "brushed up against" the assistant principal. KB was suspended for two years due to "off-campus conduct." He was also charged with aggravated assault; however, the aggravated assault charge was later dismissed by the district attorney who asserted that the charge could not be proven.

KB appealed the Cobb County School Board's decision to the State Board of Education arguing that the Local Board exceeded its authority by suspending KB due to off-campus conduct. The State Board reversed the Local Board's decision.

Then the Cobb County School District, not the Local Board, appealed the State Board decision to the Cobb County Superior Court. The superior court had a hearing and reversed the State Board's decision, thus reinstating the decision of the Local Board.

The COA accepted KB's application for discretionary appeal. The

superior court, in its decision reversing the State Board, failed to address KB's argument that the Local Board's rule pertaining to off-campus offenses which provided that "Off-campus misconduct for which a student shall be disciplined *includes, but is not limited to*, any off-campus conduct that: Could result in the student being criminally charged with a felony and is prohibited by the Georgia or United States criminal codes or would be *punishable as a felony if committed by an adult*; AND [m]akes the student's continued presence at school a potential danger to persons or property at the school or disrupts the educational process" exceeded the statutory authority granted to the Local Board because its language allowed schools to discipline students for off-campus conduct *beyond* that allowed by OCGA 20-2-751.5(c). The State Board agreed with the argument and determined that provision exceeded the scope of jurisdiction provided to the Local Board under Georgia law, and therefore was void.

The COA noted that the superior court failed to address this legal issue in reversing the decision of the State Board. Therefore, the COA vacated the superior court's order reversing the decision of the State Board and remanded for the superior court to address whether the language in the Local Board rule exceeded the Local Board's authority under OCGA 20-2-751.5(c); and, if so, whether that violation renders the rule void in its entirety or as applied to KB.

- Jill E. Roth, JD, CWLS
Chair, State Bar of Georgia Child Protection & Advocacy Section

Georgia Uniform Juvenile Court Rules Updates

The Uniform Rules for the Juvenile Courts of Georgia govern procedures for delinquency, child in need of services (CHINS), and dependency cases statewide, ensuring consistent practice among juvenile courts. Effective December 4, 2025, the following amendments became effective:

- UCJR 24 - related to juvenile court clerk training requirements.
- Appendix A – Juvenile Docket Sheet Instructions – added special proceedings 16 (petition for revocation of permanent guardianship); 17 (petition for revocation of temporary guardianship); and 18 (petition for emancipation under 15-11-721).

- Jill E. Roth, JD, CWLS
Chair, State Bar of Georgia Child Protection & Advocacy Section

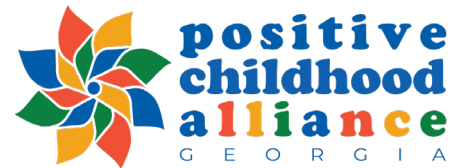
Seeking Newsletter Co-Editor

Greetings – The CPAS Newsletter Committee is seeking a passionate, collaborative CPAS member to serve as co-editor of the newsletter. This is a meaningful opportunity to spotlight our members' work, share timely updates on child protection and advocacy, and build a stronger, more connected community. If you enjoy writing, editing, or shaping content and care deeply about child protection and advocacy, I'd love to work with you. Whether you are a seasoned attorney or a law student eager to get involved, your voice and perspective are welcome

and appreciated on the Newsletter Committee. Please reach out if interested in serving as co-editor or if you have any questions about serving on the Newsletter Committee.

If you are interested in publishing an article, please reach out to:
Jill Roth, KidsMatter Editor
Jill.Roth@cobbcounty.gov

Positive Childhood Alliance (PCA) Georgia



Since 1981, Positive Childhood Alliance (PCA) Georgia has been the state leader working to protect the health and safety of children in our communities. As the state chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America, PCA Georgia provides statewide direction to build safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments to prevent child abuse and neglect. PCA Georgia is committed to strengthening all families and embracing the dignity and diversity of every child, youth, and family.

While reporting suspected child abuse is critical to protecting children, PCA Georgia believes that by:

- Raising awareness,
- Connecting families to critical supports, and
- Helping to embed family-friendly policies and practices in our communities and systems,

WE CAN PREVENT CHILD ABUSE from ever occurring. That starts with a mindset shift—from a culture that looks for problems to report to one that **offers help, trust, and connection**.

Together, we can build a strong prevention ecosystem—one that responds early, meets families where they are, and leads with compassion and practical support. One such support is [Find Help Georgia](#), which connects families to zip code specific concrete supports through a comprehensive directory of local resources.

For more information on resources, trainings, and supports for families and children across Georgia, join the PCA Georgia newsletter [here](#).

Content submitted by: **Jamie Jones, PMP, CSM, Learning and Development Coordinator**, Positive Childhood Alliance Georgia

Announcements and Upcoming Events

Georgia Appleseed's FAIR Project: Free Legal Support for Families Navigating School Challenges

Georgia Appleseed's FAIR (Fairness, Advocacy, and Individualized Representation) Project provides free legal support to families across all 159 Georgia counties facing school discipline cases, enrollment barriers, and special education or disability-related challenges. Children who qualify for free or reduced-price school meals are eligible for direct

legal representation or one-on-one advocacy coaching. Their trained advocates and volunteer attorneys help families understand their rights, prepare for hearings, and navigate complex school systems.

Even families who don't qualify for direct representation or coaching can access Georgia Appleseed's extensive online resources, including printable guides on topics such as school discipline and special education, on-demand advocacy training, and [Seedmore](#), an AI-powered school rights coach that answers questions 24/7.

To refer a family or learn more, visit gaappleseed.org or complete their [referral form](#). Questions? Contact fair@gaappleseed.org.

89th Annual National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Conference



When: July 19-22, 2026

Where: Nashville, TN

What: The 89th Annual National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Conference offers attorneys working in child welfare an invaluable opportunity to deepen their practitioner's engagement in child welfare by bringing together

judges, attorneys, and system stakeholders from across the country to collaborate on cutting-edge innovations, share practical strategies, and build stronger, more family-centered court systems. The 89th Annual Conference will offer over 60 topic-specific educational sessions and is a must-attend event for anyone committed to elevating their practice and improving outcomes for children and families nationwide. Registration is currently open. If you are a CWLS, you are automatically an organizational member and eligible to register for the conference at the reduced member rate. For more information and to register, please visit [the NCJFCJ 89th Annual Conference in Nashville, TN](#).

Child Protection and Advocacy Section Scholarships



The Child Protection and Advocacy Section of the State Bar of Georgia will offer (3) scholarships in the amount of up to \$750 per State Bar 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 CPAS members who demonstrate both a need for financial assistance and the relevance of the conference or seminar content area to the attorney's work. Please click the following link to access the Scholarship Application: [CPAS Scholarship Application](#).

Accessing Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Policies

Child Welfare: The public can access all Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) policies by navigating to PAMMS (formerly ODIS): [DFCS Policies](#).

Once you have accessed this web page, click on “Division of Family and Children Services” on the left-hand side. On the next page, click “Child Welfare Services” on the left-hand side. This will take you to the landing page for the Child Welfare Policy Manual.

Juvenile Justice: The public can access the Department of Juvenile Justice’s (DJJ) policies by navigating to: [DJJ Policies](#). If an attorney needs additional policies or related attachments, they may reach out to CPAS Executive Committee Member-at-Large/General Counsel for DJJ Cindy Wang at cindy.wang@dj.j.state.ga.us.

Child Protection and Welfare-Related Reports

Prevent Child Abuse America Report, for Childhood: A Framework for Positive Childhoods: [PCA Report 2025](#) highlights how Georgia is using the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) [Essentials for Childhood](#) framework to build safer, stronger environments for children and families. Led by partners including the Georgia Department of Public Health, Division of Children and Family Services, and Positive Childhood Alliance Georgia, the state has aligned policies, data, and prevention strategies to reduce child abuse and neglect.

The 2025-2029 Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) and the 2024 Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR) are available for review. They can be found at [DFCS Federal Reviews and Plans](#). This site includes information on Georgia's child welfare plans, annual reports,

federal reviews, state assessments, related resources.

[2025 Voices for Georgia's Children: Whole Child Primer 4th Ed.](#)

Thorough report including a variety of data, demographic information, and recommendations related to Georgia children and families.

[Georgia's Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time \(BOOST\) Grants Program - Year 3 Evaluation Report, April 2025](#)

The Get Georgia Reading Attendance Resource Toolkit has launched. More information can be found on the [Get Georgia Reading Attendance Toolkit Webpage](#).



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Welcome New Child Protection & Advocacy Section Executive Committee Members

Please join me in welcoming Dana Carroll, Deputy General Counsel of the Georgia Department of Human Services; Nicole Trego, Senior Staff Attorney to Judge Roxanne Formey of Chatham County Juvenile Court; Wendellyn Wright, Attorney, Chatham County Child Advocate Office; and Ari Mathe, The Law Office of Ari Mathe to the Child Protection & Advocacy Section Executive Committee!

Section Executive Committee	Members-at-Large		
	Officers		
	Jill Roth, Chair jill.roth@cobbcounty.gov	Tonya Boga tonyab.esq@gmail.com	Beth Morris bmorris@hhhlawyers.com
	Anissa Patton, Vice Chair anissa.patton@fultoncountyga.gov	Hon. Stephanie Burton sburton@eighthdistrict.org	Stacey Suber-Drake sdrake@doe.k12.ga.us
	Danielle Simpson, Secretary danielle@gateenlaw.com	Dana Carroll dana.carroll@dhs.ga.gov	Nicole Lynn Trego nicole@trego.law
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	Laurie Thomas Williams, Immediate Past Chair lmthomaslaw@gmail.com	Leslie Gresham greshamlawgroup@gmail.com	Michelle Vereen michelle.vereen@gwinnettcounty.com
		Chris Hempfling Hempfling.3@gmail.com	R. Michael Waller mwaller@gaappleseed.org
		Afiya Hinkson afiya@thehinksonfirm.com	Cindy Wang cindy.wang@djj.state.ga.us
		Quintin Lewis quintin.lewis@fultoncountyga.gov	Wendellyn Wright wenwright@chathamcounty.org
		Ari Ellerbe Mathe mathe.ari@gmail.com	

2025-2026 Judicial District Representatives

Nicole Lynn Trego nsherman@chathamcounty.org	1	Eastern, Ogeechee, Atlantic, Brunswick, Waycross
Michael Waller mwaller@gaappleseed.org	2	Pataula, Dougherty, South Georgia, Tifton, Southern, Alapaha
Vacant	3	Chattahoochee, Macon, Houston, Southwestern
Laurie Thomas Williams lmthomas@gmail.com	4	Stone Mountain, Rockdale

Afiya Hinkson afiya@thehinksonfirm.com	5	Atlanta (Fulton)
Anissa Patton anissa.patton@fultoncountyga.gov	6	Coweta, Griffin, Towaliga, Flint, Clayton
Jill Roth jill.roth@cobbcounty.gov	7	Douglas, Cobb, Paulding, Tallapoosa, Rome, Cherokee, Lookout Mtn, Conasauga
Hon. Stephanie Burton sburton@eighthdistrict.org	8	Ocmulgee, Dublin, Middle, Oconee, Cordele
Michelle Vereen Michelle.Vereen@gwinnettcountry.com	9	Appalachian, Enotah, Mountain, Northeastern, Gwinnett, Bell- Forsyth, Blue Ridge
Vacant	10	Toombs, Augusta

If you are a CPAS member living in a vacant judicial district and are interested in serving as a district representative, please reach out to Jill Roth at jill.roth@cobbcounty.gov.