



# Kids Matter

Child Protection and Advocacy Law Section

Summer 2024

## From the Chair

*By Laurie M. Thomas Williams*



Welcome to the Summer 2024 issue of KIDS MATTER. Since our last newsletter was issued earlier this year, we have continued to work hard to put on events and bring value to our membership.

Thank you to the Kids

Matter Newsletter Committee and to the new Editor, Amber D. Walden, Esq. for this Summer 2024 issue of the newsletter, and we will provide a formal introduction in our Spring 2024 newsletter.

### Membership:

Since our last issue we have 517 members, which is down from our last report of 540 members. Please remember to select the "Child Protection and Advocacy Section" when renewing your state bar dues. We are continuing our call to "BRING A FRIEND" to CPAS. Simply ask those practicing around you if they have joined, and if not, please remind them to do so and of the great benefits of being a member. Our goal is to have 600 members this next fiscal year.

Membership requirements: \$20 annual fees; 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 back-to-school and Christmas presents drives.

Who can be a member of CPAS? Anyone with an interest in child protection and advocacy law or who is practicing or working in a child protection and advocacy related field. That means you ... juvenile prosecutors, public defenders, parent attorneys, child advocates, guardians ad litem, judges, legal counsel for state agencies that handle child welfare connected issues, solo practitioners, and others working in child protection and advocacy related legal areas.

So, join today and bring a friend!

### Activities and Updates:

On April 13, 2024, we sponsored and jointly organized a parent session on "Protecting Youth and Children Online" with the Privacy and Technology Section at Fulton County's Youth and the Law Summit. It was very well attended and everyone in the room walked away with knowledge of how to protect themselves and by extension their children as well. We are looking to working with the Privacy and Technology Section again on creating additional content geared at protecting our youth online. As we plan these sessions, we will share information with our membership for participation.

### Judge Willie J. Lovett Award:

We had a great selection of applicants for the Lovett Award this year to choose from and had a hard time selecting the winners for the award. The Judge award recipient, Chief Judge Renata D. Turner, received the award at the State Bar Annual Meeting on June 6, 2024. See the newsletter for more information. The practitioner award recipient will receive their award at our section annual meeting in January 2025. Congratulations to those awarded this prestigious award as it is well deserved.

Reminder, we select a Judge and a practitioner to receive the award each year. So please be on the lookout for calls for nomination submissions for the award around the beginning of each year.

#### **District Socials:**

Judicial District 1 held an event on May 7, 2024. Be on the lookout for other district events and socials.

#### **New Members to the Executive Committee:**

In February 2024, we welcomed Michelle Vereen, Director, Child Advocacy and Juvenile Services in Gwinnett County. We will provide a formal introduction in our next newsletter.

In April 2024, we welcomed Quintin J. Lewis, Esq. an Assistant District Attorney, Juvenile Division in the Fulton County District Attorney's Office to the Executive Committee.

So happy to have these wonderful advocates join our Executive Committee. We are looking for a district representative in the Augusta area, Judicial District 10. If you have a desire to serve, please reach out to me at [lmthomaslaw@gmail.com](mailto:lmthomaslaw@gmail.com).

#### **CPAS Community Sponsored or Supported Events:**

The Section has in the past, and has recently, supported Executive Committee member and General Counsel for Georgia Legal Services Program, Ira Foster's "Roadmap to Law School" initiative, with the purpose of connecting college students to lawyers in the community and introducing them with the process of becoming a lawyer. The last workshop was held at Clark Atlanta University and was supported by our Section.

CPAS also supported and shared facilitation of the "School Dropout Prevention" workshops in Augusta and Valdosta, Georgia. The workshops were organized by Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., Eta Lambda Chapter, the Alpha Georgia Education Foundation, Inc., and the Georgia Legal Services Program.

#### **Upcoming Events:**

January 2025: Annual Meeting and CLE

#### **Opportunities to Serve:**

Executive Committee or subcommittee: If you are interested in serving on the Executive Committee (EC)

or a subcommittee (Legislative, CLE, Budget, Judge Lovett Award, and/or Newsletter) please reach out to me. We are always looking for people willing to serve and to have representation from people working in an array of child protection and advocacy roles and with agencies not currently represented on our Executive Committee.

Newsletter: We are always open to submissions of articles as direct content for Kids Matter or which might be cross-published in our newsletter and the State Bar of Georgia magazine.

Thank you for the work you do!

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**If you are interested in  
publishing an article,  
please reach out to  
Amber D. Walden, Editor  
[info@floteservices.com](mailto:info@floteservices.com)**

## 2024 - 2025 Executive Committee Judicial District Representatives

JP Berlon <a href="mailto:jpberlon@gmail.com">jpberlon@gmail.com</a>	1	Eastern, Ogeechee, Atlantic, Brunswick, Waycross
Michael Waller <a href="mailto:mwaller@gappleseed.org">mwaller@gappleseed.org</a>	2	Pataula, Doughtery, South Georgia, Tifton, Southern, Alapaha
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Laurie Thomas <a href="mailto:lmthomas@gmail.com">lmthomas@gmail.com</a>	4	Stone Mountain, Rockdale
Afiya Hinkson <a href="mailto:afiya@thehinksonfirm.com">afiya@thehinksonfirm.com</a>	5	Atlanta (Fulton)
Anissa Patton <a href="mailto:anissa.patton@fultoncountyga.gov">anissa.patton@fultoncountyga.gov</a>	6	Coweta, Griffin, Towaliga, Flint, Clayton
Hon. Kareem West <a href="mailto:kareemwest@cobbcounty.org">kareemwest@cobbcounty.org</a>	7	Douglas, Cobb, Paulding, Tallapoosa, Rome, Cherokee, Lookout Mtn, Conasauga
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Michelle Vereen <a href="mailto:Michelle.Vereen@gwinnettcounty.com">Michelle.Vereen@gwinnettcounty.com</a>	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](mailto:cindy.wang@djj.state.ga.us).

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## Tribute to a Trailblazer, Nicki N. Vaughan, Esq.

By Laurie M. Thomas Williams, Esq.,  
Chair, Child Protection and Advocacy Section



During this last bar year, the Child Protection and Advocacy Section (CPAS) has experienced several changes. Some have been positive—such as the inclusion of new members on our Executive Committee; while others have carried a touch of bittersweetness—notably the retirement of one of our co-founders, Nicki N. Vaughan, Esq. For those acquainted with Nicki, her tireless commitment as a servant leader was evident. She would consistently show up for causes close to her heart and passionately support them. With this tribute to Nicki N. Vaughan, Esq., our aim is to convey our gratitude and appreciation for her steadfast service, not just to CPAS but to the entire State of Georgia.

Nicki pursued her legal education at Georgia State University, earning her law degree in 1994. During her academic years, she actively contributed to the Georgia State University Law Review, producing thought provoking articles such as *The Georgia Child Hearsay Statute* and *the Sixth Amendment: Is There a Confrontation?* This early engagement with legal discourse foreshadowed her future dedication to advocacy and her subsequent career as a public defender in later years. Nicki commenced her career in child protective case services, emerging as a dedicated advocate for at-risk children and youth through juvenile and family court advocacy. In this capacity, she gained profound insight into the circumstances of children and their ties to the courts in Georgia. In 1981, as a member of the Junior League of Atlanta, she played a pivotal role in co-founding what we now recognize as CHRIS 180<sup>1</sup>, originally established as the state’s first organization to provide specialized group homes for children and youth with behavioral/emotional challenges.

<sup>1</sup> Formerly CHARLEE (Children Have All Rights-Legal, Educational, Emotional).

As her commitment to services for neglected, abused, and in-need children deepened, Nicki took a leading role in co-founding Georgia's inaugural Court Appointed Special Advocate Program, widely known as CASA, around 1989. She was inspired to bring CASA to Georgia after attending a national conference and learning about the program. The first pilot program in Georgia was launched in her hometown of Gainesville. In order to make this happen, she mobilized local juvenile court judges, the State Bar, Junior League of Atlanta, National CASA Association, and the Gainesville community to ensure the success of the pilot program from its inception.

CASA became a transformative force for Nicki, motivating her to pursue a legal education. Throughout her legal career, she remained an unwavering supporter of the CASA organization, holding a life membership on their board. When interviewed about her work with CASA, Nicki expressed, "I cannot say I'd be prouder of anything. I can't imagine not having it now."

A significant portion of Nicki's legal career was spent as a public defender in the Northeastern Circuit—primarily in Hall and Dawson Counties. Her last position before retirement was as a Chief Assistant Public Defender in Hall County. During her tenure there, she vigorously advocated for access to justice, not only within her region but also statewide, particularly focusing on ensuring fair treatment for children within the juvenile justice system. Retired public defender and longtime colleague and friend of Nicki, Linda Pace, said of her "no matter the time of day when we would speak, she always had this unwavering determination and tireless resolve to secure justice for children. Nicki was committed to ensuring that the legal system recognized the unique needs of adolescents and did not subject them to overly harsh treatment given their immature brain development." Pace admires Nicki's boundless energy and describes her as "a true warrior in her work."



*(Photo courtesy of the State Bar of Georgia. The organizers of "Fulfilling Promises" (left to right) Sara Totonchi, Nicki Vaughan, Lauren Sudeall Lucas and Claudia Saari)*

Around 2007, Nicki commenced her tenure on the State Bar of Georgia Board of Governors, which is the principal policymaking body of the State Bar, comprising 160 members representing each of Georgia's judicial circuits. For 16 years, she served as representative for Northeastern Judicial Circuit, Post 2. Throughout her legal career, Nicki held various roles within the State Bar, including positions on the Executive Committee, Access to Justice Committee, State Bar of Georgia Foundation, Inc., Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism, Children and the Courts Committee, and the Indigent Defense Committee, where she held the position of chair and Judicial Council of Georgia Standing Committees, and notably as an Advisory Member for Access to Justice (A2J). Her consistent advocacy at the State Bar aimed to enhance access to justice by raising awareness of its limitations across the state, emphasizing the importance of access to justice in every Continuing Legal Education (CLE) program, and advocating for increased state and federal funding for legal access programs.

Nicki remained acutely aware of the regions within the state that were devoid of legal representation, spurring her relentless advocacy for sustained access to justice across all corners of Georgia. Former State Bar of Georgia President, Dawn Jones, Esq., who has worked extensively with Nicki over the years on the Executive Committee of the State Bar, recalled of her that she was a petite woman who exuded a quiet demeanor, yet her passion and dedication to advocacy were unmistakable, leaving a lasting impression on those around her. Always wearing a smile or sharing laughter, whether at the pool or during lunch, she never ceased being an advocate. Highly respected and exceptionally knowledgeable, she consistently brought value to any room she entered,

using every opportunity to champion those who lacked representation. Her departure from the CPAS Executive Committee was a significant loss, and her absence will be deeply felt. Her absence leaves a void that remains to be filled.



*(State Bar of Georgia's 2019-20 Executive Committee: (back row, left to right) YLD Immediate Past President Rizza O'Connor, YLD President Will Davis, Secretary Sally Akins, Member Amy Howell, Photo courtesy of State Bar of Georgia; Member David Lipscomb, Member Ivy Cadle, Member Tony DelCampo, Member Javoyne Hicks; (front row, left to right) Member Nicki Vaughan, President-Elect Dawn Jones, Treasurer Elizabeth Fite, President Darrell Sutton; Immediate Past President Hon. Ken Hodges, YLD President-Elect Bert Hummel)*

In 2012, Nicki, in collaboration with Tonya Boga, Hon. Sharon Hill, and Linda Pace, identified the critical need for a specialized children's section within family law practice and recognized the necessity of offering support to juvenile practitioners throughout the state. This realization led to the establishment of the Child Protection Advocacy Section (CPAS) of the State Bar of Georgia. As the founding chair, Nicki infused the section with her boundless energy and enthusiasm, working closely with bar leadership and the Justice for Children Committee to overcome initial skepticism about the necessity of the section, as noted by Karlise Grier. True to Nicki's proactive approach, she mobilized her colleagues to raise awareness about the section, resulting in significant growth in CPAS membership, which reached 200 members by the end of 2012.

The inaugural Executive Committee was composed of Nicki Vaughan as Chair, Karlise Grier as Vice-Chair, and Diane Woods as Secretary/Treasurer. Nicki, transitioning into the role of the first Vice-Chair, played a pivotal role in shaping the organizational framework and identifying key individuals crucial for the organization's sustained success. Other early members of the Executive Committee included attorneys Leslie Gresham, Randee Waldman, Linda Pace, Thomas L. Williams, Trish McCann, Pat Buonodono, Crystal

Conway, Robert "Ted" Edward Hall, Vicky Kimbrell, Beth Feingold Morris, Richard A. Horder, Lois D. Shingler, Stephanie Steel, Jan A. Wheeler, and Jonathan Zimring.

During its inaugural year, CPAS achieved significant milestones, including the development of a day-long CLE program in collaboration with the Institute of Continuing Legal Education (ICLE), which garnered considerable attendance and positive feedback. The section also co-sponsored various programs and actively engaged with the Georgia Legislature. Additionally, CPAS launched its newsletter, titled "Kids Matter", and enhanced the content of its website at [www.gabar.org](http://www.gabar.org) to provide valuable information for practitioners specializing in this area of law. Nicki emphasized the collaborative efforts involved, stating, "I told them this was a joint effort. It takes lots of people to do good work."

Under Nicki's guidance, the section's focus remained steadfast on promoting excellence through education for both members and the public, enhancing access to justice, and fostering collaboration with numerous agencies, organizations, and partners to offer valuable resources and information to practitioners. She advocated for the expansion of the CPAS Executive Committee to include members from various child-related agencies and organizations beyond child welfare and juvenile justice practitioners, aiming to broaden the section's inclusivity and broaden its representation to all attorneys who advocate for Georgia's children. Her efforts also led to the establishment of judicial district representatives on the Executive Committee and representation in every judicial circuit, significantly extending CPAS's reach across the State of Georgia.

Nicki Vaughan accepts the Award of Achievement on behalf of the Child Protection and Advocacy Law Section, presented by 2012-13 President Robin Frazer Clark.



*(Photo courtesy of State Bar of Georgia)*

Under Nicki's leadership, the section has received numerous awards and recognitions, a testament to Nicki's effective leadership and commitment to excellence. Those awards include the State Bar of Georgia's Section Award of Achievement in 2013 and 2014 and 2019 in addition to being honored as the State Bar of Georgia Section of the Year in 2015. In 2019, she was awarded a Good Apple Award from the Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice to honor her lifelong dedication and service to improving the lives of children and her admirable leadership as chair of the Child Protection and Advocacy Section of the State Bar. The section was also recognized for its "leadership in all aspects of juvenile court advocacy and dedication to the well-being of children in our state."



*(Photos courtesy of State Bar of Georgia Nicki Vaughan of the Gainesville-Northeastern Bar Association, left, accepts the Award of Merit from State Bar President Kenneth L. Shigley)*

So let us come together to honor the legacy of Nicki N. Vaughan, a true trailblazer, leader, and relentless advocate. **servant**

May her life's dedication inspire us to reflect on how we can serve as voices for the voiceless and champions for the underrepresented, and how we can contribute to positive change in our communities, legal profession, and the lives of children and families across our state. As Nicki famously said, "it takes lots of people to do good work," so let us take action today to make a difference. Wishing you a well-deserved retirement, Nicki. Rest assured your impactful work will continue to inspire generations to come.



*(Photo courtesy of State Bar of Georgia. From left to right: Child Protection & Advocacy Section Executive Committee Members Ira Foster, Leslie Gresham and Laurie Thomas; Helen Hines; Section Chair Nicki Vaughan; State Bar General Counsel and Georgia Appleseed Board Member Paula Frederick; Section Treasurer Randee Waldman; 2018-19 State Bar President Ken Hodges; and 2018-19 State Bar Secretary Dawn Jones)*

On July 17, 2019, her life's work was recognized on the U.S. House floor by Ninth District House Representative Hon. Doug Collins of Georgia, who expressed gratitude for her unwavering commitment to our justice system. He emphasized her role in bettering the lives of younger generations and extended thanks on behalf of the Ninth District. Additionally, Nicki has received several accolades for her service, including the Governor's Volunteer Award and the Justice Robert Benham Award for Community Service. As president of the Gainesville-Northeastern Bar Association, Nicki led the association to receive the Award of Merit.

# Child Protection and Advocacy Section's Annual Meeting

By Chris Hempfling, Esq., CPAS CLE Committee Chair

On January 25, 2024, the Child Protection and Advocacy Section hosted their annual meeting and CLE. The event was held in Atlanta and the Georgia Bar Association. A focus on this event for the nearly 100 attendees was the three-hour CLE.

Diana Rugh Johnson, the Director of the Georgia Court Improvement Program led off the CLE. Director Johnson provided attendees with a review of influential case law updates. Throughout the presentation, Director Johnson provided an in-depth analysis of how the court's various holdings impact juvenile court dependency practices. Attendees gained critical information to influence their practice from adjudication hearings to terminations of parental rights.

Sarah Babcock, the Deputy Director of the Georgia Truancy Intervention Project was the second presenter at this year's CLE. Deputy Director Babcock presented on professionalism in delinquency and dependency representations. Throughout Ms. Babcock's

presentation she focused on identifying challenges in representing low-income clients, making the connection between principals of legal education and effective representation, and provided three concrete strategies for effective representation.

This year's CLE concluded with a panel presentation focused on educational rights and responsibilities. Panelists included Craig Goodmark - Goodmark Law Firm, Nichole Hull - Managing Partner at The Hull Firm LLC, and Michael Waller - Executive Director of the Georgia Appleseed Center for Law and Justice. Each panelist provided a summary of critical educational law considerations and how attendees can advocate for educational stability and well-being.

This year's CLE was a success because of the participation of our presenters. On behalf of the CPAS CLE planning committee, I want to express my appreciation for their participation. In addition, a special thanks to Lane Sosebee and Mary Jo Sullivan for their partnership. The CPAS CLE is held every year in conjunction with its annual meeting and we look forward to seeing you at next year's program.

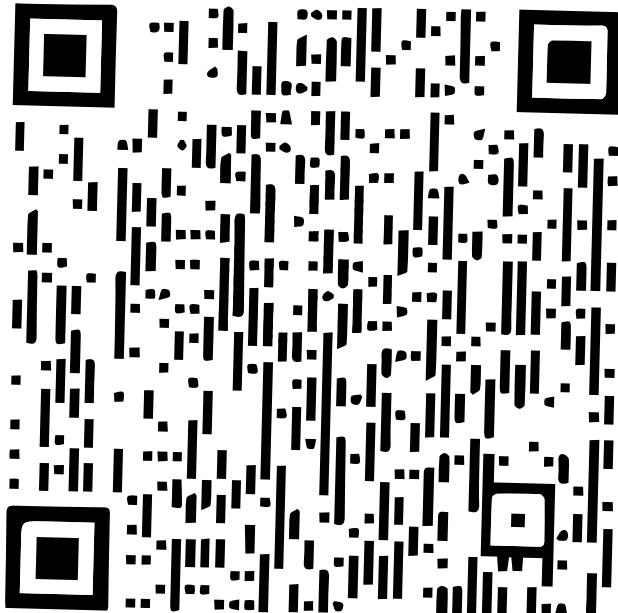
Please scan the following QR code to view all of resources provided from this year's CPAS CLE.

## Child Protection & Advocacy Law Section

Annual Meeting and CLE

January 25, 2025

Scan the QR code below to access meeting materials.



# Case Law Updates

By Amber D. Walden, Esq.,  
Editor, CPAS Kids Matter Newsletter

Editor's Note: Attribution for Ms. Walden's Case Law Updates contribution was inadvertently omitted from the Winter 2024 Edition of Kids Matter.



**ITIO K.M., et al.,  
A23A1311, 897 S.E.2d  
521 (January 23, 2024)**  
*A tragic past is not  
inevitable current  
dependency.*

The COA reiterated its rulings in numerous case precedent: "... 'parental unfitness' is essential to supporting an

'adjudication of dependency.' (*In re V.G.*). So, in making its determination as to dependency, a juvenile court 'may consider evidence of past conduct, but the record must contain evidence of present dependency, not merely past or potential future dependency.' (*In re A.M.B.*; *In re T.Y.*). And as with dependency determinations, '[p]roof of parental unfitness must...be by clear and convincing evidence.' (*In re V.G.* and *In re H.B.*). Importantly, this constitutionally mandated standard of review 'safeguards the high value society places on the integrity of the family unit' (*In re K.R.*)—i.e., the private realm of family life (*Prince v. Massachusetts and Dept. of Humas Services v. Duncan*)—and 'helps eliminate the risk that a factfinder might base his determination on a few isolated instances of unusual conduct or idiosyncratic behavior.'"

In ITIO K.M., prior to the case on appeal, one of the mother's children (J.M. ) was burned when an iron fell on her foot, and the mother immediately took that child to the hospital. None of the children were removed, and the matter was closed. Subsequently, there was a report that J.M. (who later died from another incident) had "a grapefruit-sized bruise on his abdomen." The mother took J.M. to the hospital immediately, explained that the bruise was caused when then one-year-old K.M. fell while walking near J.M. A pediatrician evaluated J.M.'s injury, and "[a]ccording to the DFCS investigator, there was no evidence the bruise was the result of 'foul play,' and she agreed that 'accidents happen with children every day.'"

The Division became involved with the family again in August 2022, after the mother's then two-year-old child (J.M.) was found dead in her home. The mother stated that she left the baby in his "bouncer" chair, as usual, and he fell asleep. The mother fell asleep while watching a movie and found the baby unresponsive the next morning, whereupon she called the police and performed CPR efforts, which failed to revive J.M. The Division filed its petition for dependency and removal of all six children, based on J.M.'s death and the two prior incidents requiring DFCS involvement. During the adjudication hearing, the responding officer testified that J.M.'s body was sent to the GBI for an autopsy, and revealing no physical cause for the death (e.g. no skull fracture, no broken bones, no bleeding in the brain, no retinal hemorrhage), the cause of death was deemed "undetermined;" thus, the police did not arrest either mother or boyfriend in connection with death and did not have concerns about the safety of the other children in the home, or the "single 'small little square bagg[y]' of marijuana" they found in the home.

During the adjudication hearing, the mother testified to smoking marijuana and testing positive for its use, and COA noted in its ruling that "[w]hile [Mother] tested positive for marijuana on August 22, 2022, she was not tested again before the November 15, 2022 hearing." The Division's investigator testified that the mother's home was "very clean," there was adequate food with "[n]ecessities in the fridge and pantries," the children had adequate bedding and clothes, and that the investigator did not believe the Mother or her boyfriend were "hiding anything or not being forthcoming with the information [she] requested from them." The investigator further testified that the mother had been compliant with the investigator since the beginning of the case, and that the mother's cooperation had been "great." The mother had also completed a parenting assessment and attended substance-abuse counseling, and the case manager only recommended that the mother needed counseling. In In re K.M., the mother appealed the Juvenile Court's finding of dependency of her six children at the adjudication hearing. The mother argued—and significantly, the State agreed—that "the trial court erred in finding that there was clear and convincing evidence the children were dependent due to the parents' marijuana use, alleged abuse, and neglect," and the COA reversed the Juvenile Court's ruling.

**To be Fit, or Not to be Fit? That is the question!**

DFCS had been involved with this family since 2015, due to the mother being found to have struck one of the children with a charger cord, for which she was arrested and charged with first-degree child cruelty, with a condition of her bond that she was to have no contact with that child. DFCS issued a safety plan, under which the mother retained custody of the children, but the children resided with a family member. Later, two of the other children reported that the mother also had struck them with the charger cord. In November 2021, DFCS filed a petition for dependency and requested a protective order, under which, again, the children would be allowed to remain in the care of relatives with the mother retaining custody, as long as the mother cooperated with the department, and completed a parental fitness evaluation. A hearing was conducted on December 16, 2021, and on January 19, 2022 (nunc pro tunc), the juvenile court entered an “Order of Adjudication and Protective Order” reflecting the terms that had been proposed by DFCS.

Around August 2022, DFCS filed a “Motion to Modify Protective Order Disposition” requesting custody of the children, because the relatives could no longer care for the children, and DFCS alleged that the mother had not complied with the terms of the “Order of Adjudication and Protective Order” by not cooperating with service providers, not consistently visiting with the children, testing positive for marijuana, and not submitting to further drug screens. On October 5, 2022, the juvenile court conducted a hearing on DFCS’ Motion, granted DFCS’ request for custody, and on January 3, 2023 (nunc pro tunc) entered a “Protective Order Review/Order Modifying Disposition,” finding the children dependent and granting temporary custody to DFCS.

*Parental unfitness by any other name is still parental unfitness:*

Mother appealed the “Protective Order Review/Order Modifying Disposition,” asserting that the order contained contradictory and ambiguous findings of fact and conclusions of law, that the order did not mention mother’s ability to parent, that the evidence did not meet the evidentiary standard that the mother could not safely parent her children, or that protective custody was necessary to prevent further abuse or neglect pending a hearing on the dependency petition. The COA found that it is not necessary for the juvenile court to specifically use the words “unfit” or “parental

unfitness” in its order for that analysis to be deemed sufficiently addressed, as long as there were “findings of fact demonstrating clear and convincing evidence that...the dependency resulted from unfitness on the part of the mother.” *In the Interest of M.C.*, 365 Ga. App. 398, 403 (1), 878 S.E.2d 625 (2022).

*Parental fitness evaluation:*

Mother also challenged the January 19, 2022 “Order of Adjudication and Protective Order” relating to the juvenile court’s requirement that the mother undergo a parental fitness evaluation and the court’s reliance on said parental fitness evaluation. Mother put forth in her arguments that a parental fitness evaluation is covered by O.C.G.A. § 15-11-101(e) as analogous to a physical, psychological, or psychiatric examination, and that the juvenile court violated O.C.G.A. § 15-11-101(e) when (1) it ordered the parental fitness evaluation when there was no probable cause to support ordering the evaluation, (2) no affidavit was filed seeking the evaluation, and (3) the juvenile court did not conduct a hearing on the issue. The COA did not offer a determination on whether or not O.C.G.A. § 15-11-101(e) applies to parental fitness evaluations, but it emphasized that the evaluation was completed before the juvenile court entered the order that the mother challenged on appeal, and further highlighted that the mother did not show how she was harmed in the specific order that she was challenging as it related the evaluation. The COA further emphasized [hinted] that the mother did not challenge the fact that the juvenile court’s order did require that the mother *comply with recommendations that included her seeking mental health services.*

Mother also argues that because the parental fitness evaluation was not court ordered at the time the mother completed it, it was confidential and protected by the psychotherapist-patient privilege, thus shielded from disclosure to DFCS and the juvenile court. The COA found that it would not offer a determination on whether or not the parental fitness evaluation was protected from disclosure, because the mother did not assert privilege as a ground for her objection during the hearing, so the COA cannot consider that argument for the first time on appeal. See *Thomas v. State*, 224 Ga. App. 816, 818-819 (6), 482 S.E.2d 472 (1997) (attorney-client privilege). See also *In re Purohit*, 213 Ga. App. 182, 183-184 (2) (a), 444 S.E.2d 133 (1994) (appellant could not invoke privilege against self-incrimination for the first time on appeal).

Lastly, the mother asserted that the Protective Order was self-executing and void because of the “follow all recommendations” provision, however the COA determined that this provision did not direct any automatic changes in the case that would occur without judicial scrutiny. The entirety of the “Protective Order Review/Order Modifying Disposition” was upheld by the COA.

**Davis v. Taylor, A23A1384, 898 S.E.2d 574 (Feb. 13, 2024)**

***Show me the body, show me the foot[note].***

The Gwinnett County Superior Court initially issued an interim parenting-time order, then an order granting the legitimization, and followed up with a separate order granting the father custody and child support, then attorney’s fees. Mother appealed, challenging the trial court’s rulings on the interim parenting plan, denial of mother’s motion to compel discovery, failure to enforce notice of production mother served on father, child support ruling, and award of attorney’s fees to father. COA highlights that mother only “criticized” the legitimization order in a footnote, asserting that the COA should reverse that ruling, however the mother did not include that assertion in her enumeration of errors, thus the COA could not review that issue for possible reversible error.

The COA found that appellee was the biological father of the child and came to the hospital when the child was born, he had been involved in the child’s life since her birth, the child regularly visited the father and his family, the child and the father had an ongoing relationship, and the father had paid the mother child support since the child was a baby. In September 2021, the mother allowed the child to live with the father, but then she told the father to return the child one month later and...he did not. In December 2021, the father filed a petition for legitimization in Fulton County Superior Court, seeking custody, parenting time, and child support. Soon thereafter, mother filed a writ of habeas corpus in Gwinnett County Superior Court and emergency motion for the child’s return. That court granted the writ finding, “until and unless a court of competent jurisdiction grants [another] order,” the father shall return the child to the mother.

The mother filed a response and motion to dismiss the father’s legitimization petition in Fulton County Superior Court, arguing that Gwinnett County Superior

Court’s habeas order barred the father’s legitimization petition, and Fulton County Superior Court should not legitimate the child because the father had abandoned his opportunity interest in developing a relationship with the child. Fulton County Superior Court denied the mother’s mother to dismiss in April 2022, denied mother’s request for increased child support in August 2022, and partially denied mother’s request to compel discovery from father in October 2022. In January 2023, the court granted the father parenting time so that the guardian ad litem could observe visits and make recommendations for custody and visitation. The trial court denied mother’s request for a certificate of immediate review of the interim parenting-time order. The mother filed several other motions, which were all denied by the trial court, and the trial court granted the father primary physical custody and awarded him child support and attorney’s fees.

On appeal, the mother asserts two trial court errors stemming from the earlier Gwinnett County habeas order. The mother first argued that the trial court was barred from adjudicating the issue of custody under principles of res judicata or collateral estoppel. The COA disagreed with the mother and found that Gwinnett County decided one very narrow question regarding custody: whether the mother had lost her right to custody of the child, not whether a different custodial arrangement would be in the child’s best interest. (See O.C.G.A. § 9-14-2; see also *Douglas v. Douglas*, 285 Ga. 548, 550 (2), 678 S.E.2d 004 (2009)). Since the question of the child’s best interest was not at issue in the habeas proceeding, the ruling in the Gwinnett habeas case did not bar the Fulton trial court from administering the best interest standard under O.C.G.A. § 19-7-22 (g) in the legitimization case and making a custody determination. See *Alberti v. Alberti*, 320 Ga. App. 724, 726-728, 741 S.E.2d 179 (2013) (a custody ruling in a habeas action does not bar a party from seeking custody in a separate action where allowed by statute). Second, the mother argued that the habeas order served as a determination of custody between the mother and the father within less than two years, and that the father should have satisfied the statutory requirements for a custody modification by showing “a change in any material conditions or circumstances of a party or the child.” O.C.G.A. § 19-9-3 (b). The COA disagreed with the mother, reiterated its above rationale relating to the habeas order, and went further to state “[b]ut even if the material-change-of-condition analysis

applies here, we cannot imagine any situation in which the legitimization of a child would not constitute a change in the material conditions or circumstances of either the child or the parents" when determining custody.

The mother also challenged the trial court's evidentiary basis for its custody ruling, and argued that the evidence did not support the award of primary physical custody to the father. The COA stated that the trial court has very broad discretion in determining a child's best interest. O.C.G.A. § 19-9-3 (a). *Taylor v. Taylor*, 293 Ga. 615, 616 (1), 748 S.E.2d 873 (2013). In this particular case, the COA highlighted that the GAL's report specifically noted that the mother's restriction of visitation and contact between the father and the child—in violation of the terms of trial court's interim parenting parenting-time order—interfered with the GAL's investigation. See *Sigafoose*, 345 Ga. App. at 788 (1), 815 S.E.2d 136 (evidence that the mother had taken specific actions to prevent interaction between the child and the father supported a finding that the mother had been unwilling to facilitate a relationship between the child and the father); *Lowry*, 340 Ga. App. at 386 (2), 797 S.E.2d 230 (a trial court could, in its best interest analysis, consider the mother's current behavior as a ground for finding that the mother "would likely continue disregarding the parenting plan to the child's detriment"); *Wilson v. Wilson*, 338 Ga. App. 891, 894, 792 S.E.2d 139 (2016) (trial court did not abuse discretion in awarding custody to a child's father where there was evidence of the mother's unwillingness or inability to facilitate the child's relationship with the father); *Bankston*, 332 Ga. App. at 33-34 (1), 771 S.E.2d 726 (same).

The mother next challenged the Fulton trial court's entry of the interim parenting-time order as error without the trial court first hearing or ruling on the father's legitimization given that the mother had countered that the father had abandoned his opportunity interest to legitimate the child. The COA noted that the code section which the mother's argument relied upon has changed, and that the current Code and case law allows for legitimization proceedings to include claims for visitation, parenting time, or custody, with determinations based on the child's best interest. The COA reminds the mother that the trial court ordered visitation between the father and the child (which the mother hindered) to assist with the GAL's investigation in assessing the child's best interests, and points out that case law establishes that trial courts can award

temporary physical custody of a child to a father at an initial hearing, and case law supports the trial courts' order of a parent to submit to a psychological evaluation during the process. See *Sigafoose*.

Thus, COA could find no error with the trial court because the mother did not show how she was harmed by the interim parenting-time order; further, the mother did not enumerate error of the actual legitimization order, and the final custody order superseded the interim parenting-time order that the mother challenged.

**ITIO L.H., A23A1454, 898 S.E.2d 605 (Feb. 15, 2024)**

*Foster Parents' Sour Grapes*

After terminating the parental rights of the child's biological parents, the juvenile court concluded that it was in the child's best interest to remove him from his foster parents (who had custody of the child's sibling), and instead placed him with his paternal aunt and her husband. The foster parents appealed this order, asserting that the evidence did not support the juvenile court's decision. The COA agreed with the foster parents that the evidence showed that they are sufficiently able to care for the child, but the evidence also supported the juvenile court's placement of the child with the aunt and uncle. Accordingly, the COA affirmed the trial court.

The juvenile court's ruling included evaluation of the placement of the child following termination of parental rights pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 15-11-321(a), and it concluded that, while both the foster parents and the aunt/uncle could provide a loving and stable home, and both couples wanted to adopt the child, it was in the child's best interest to be placed with his biological family—the aunt/uncle. The COA was not led down the garden path of sour grapes, so it did not take the foster parents' argument of insufficient evidence for face value. The COA surmised that the foster parents' true challenge was, in fact, to the manner in which the juvenile court evaluated the evidence, not to the sufficiency of the evidence. The COA evaluated the foster parents' challenge in the light of the juvenile court's authority to exercise discretion to give more "weight" to the child's "familial connections" versus the child's familiarity to foster parents' extended family, the time the child had spent with the foster parents, the fact that the child would be separated from his sibling, and against the GAL's recommendation that the child remain with the foster parents. The COA added in a footnote that "the juvenile court gave little weight to the

report of the guardian ad litem because her conclusions and recommendations were reached without the benefit of having observed [the child] with the [aunt/uncle].” The COA found that the juvenile court hit all of the marks and that its ruling was supported by sufficient evidence to support the child being placed with relatives instead of the foster parents.

**ITIO T.D. et al., A24A0371, 898 S.E.2d 821 (Feb. 21, 2024)**

***Don’t get creative—make objections and get a court reporter.***

Mother appeals the juvenile court’s order granting physical custody of the children to their father and ordering the mother to pay child support. Mother and father were married, and then divorced. Superior Court awarded joint legal custody of their three minor children to the mother and father, with the mother having primary physical custody. Later, one of the children was placed in the temporary custody of the father as a result of a delinquency case for that child. In 2022, the father petitioned the Superior Court to modify custody of all three children to him, asserting that the delinquency case constituted a material change in circumstances, so the Superior Court transferred the case to juvenile court. During the juvenile court hearing on this matter, there was no court reporter during any portion of the proceeding, however the proceeding was being recorded by the court. The juvenile court interviewed each child individually in the presence of counsel, but everyone waived the option to have these conversations recorded or transcribed. The juvenile court found that there had been physical abuse by the mother against the children, and the juvenile court relied on two of the children’s expressed wishes to live with their father in awarding the father primary physical custody of all three children with visitation to the mother, and ordering the mother to pay \$866 per month in child support, as well as 75% of the children’s medical expenses that are not covered by insurance.

The mother challenges (1) the sufficiency of the evidence, and (2) the juvenile court’s partial reliance on the children’s unrecorded interviews. The mother “cites authority holding that a superior court presiding over a child custody case may talk to children in chambers outside the presence of the parties and counsel if the parties do not object, but any statements not made on the record cannot be used to support the superior court’s ruling.” See *Blue v. Hemmans*, 327 Ga.App. 353, 360

(2) (759 S.E.2d 72) (2014). HOWEVER, THIS IS JUVENILE COURT. The COA makes clear that when a case is transferred from superior court to juvenile court, the matter shall proceed as if it originated in juvenile court—which means if there are Juvenile Code provisions that address an issue, then those provisions must be adhered to. “[J]uvenile courts have discretion to conduct unrecorded in-chambers interviews of child witnesses.” See *In the Interest of A.R.*, 248 Ga.App. 783, 784 (1) (546 S.E.2d 915) (2001). A party who acquiesces in this procedure in juvenile court waives a recording of the in-chambers interview, and the juvenile court may rely on testimony from the interview in issuing its ruling. See *Id.* at 784 (2) (rejecting the appellants’ challenge to the sufficiency of the evidence in a deprivation proceeding in which the juvenile court’s ruling was predicated on unrecorded testimony of the minor child).

Regarding child support, the COA did remand for the juvenile court to include the income the father earned from “side jobs.” The COA upheld the insurance expense ruling challenged by the mother, because (1) there was no showing of abuse of discretion, and (2) the father challenged with “skepticism” the mother’s testimony that one of the children’s medical needs required frequent appointments with specialists, and that another child needed counseling. The juvenile court rejected the mother’s summary of the evidence, including the children’s statements as “very creative,” and the COA found that since there is no recording of the children, perhaps the children shed some light on the medical issues that supported the father’s contention that the medical appointments were “unwarranted” as a basis for its rulings on the financial matters.

Finally, the mother challenged the suspension of her visits. At the hearing on the ex parte order to suspend visits and hearing on other motions, mother’s counsel asked for a continuance on the visitation issue. The juvenile court stated it would grant the continuance, but the mother’s visits would remain suspended and she would be enjoined from going to the school until the next hearing. Mother’s attorney said, “I understand,” without objecting to these conditions, thus the mother cannot raise this as an appellate issue.

***Crary v. Clautise, S24A0004 (March 5, 2024)***

***That ever-lurking “Grandparent Visitation” statute—an “abstract fog of uncertainty.”***

The trial court granted appellant mother’s petition to set aside and revoke a final consent order, which granted the maternal grandparents visitation rights to the mother’s child, under O.C.G.A. § 19-7-3. On appeal, mother did not challenge the trial court’s ruling in her favor as to the final visitation order, but she did challenge three other orders relating to that proceeding: (1) an order denying mother’s motion to declare the grandparent visitation statute (O.C.G.A. § 19-7-3) unconstitutional; (2) an order denying mother’s motion for contempt against grandparents; and (3) an order denying mother’s motion for attorney’s fees and expenses. The COA dismissed as moot the portion of mother’s appeal that challenged the constitutionality of the grandparent visitation statute, and the COA affirmed the trial court’s orders denying the mother’s contempt motion and motion for attorney’s fees and expenses.

The mother argued that the grandparent visitation statute was unconstitutional because it “fails to provide[,] and Georgia appellate decisions do not set forth[,] (1) who has the burden of proof when a parent seeks to revoke a grandparent visitation order, (2) whether proof by clear and convincing evidence that a child would be harmed absent visitation is required for a grandparent to obtain visitation or for the court to deny a petition to revoke visitation, (3) whether ‘good cause’ for revoking grandparent visitation is shown if there is an ‘absence of a finding of harm,’ and (4) whether courts are prevented from granting or required to revoke grandparent visitation where the child lives with both parents.” The mother further argued that the legal standards fail to adequately protect parents’ “fundamental liberty interests” in “the care, custody, and control of their children.” The trial court denied mother’s motion to declare O.C.G.A. § 19-7-3 as unconstitutional, but it did enter an order that “set aside and vacated” the Grandparent Visitation Order as containing “nonamendable defects which appear[ed] on the face of the record and the pleadings,” because the father had not been joined as a necessary party and because the court failed to make certain factual findings by clear and convincing evidence.

The COA declared mother’s assertion of the unconstitutionality of the grandparent visitation statute was rendered moot when the trial court set aside and

vacated that order. The mother argued on appeal that “she remains in a position of uncertainty with respect to her child and her parents,” “[a]ll parenting decisions and all personal decisions she makes henceforth will require consideration of the impact, if any, on that ever lurking, ever threatening grandparent visitation action authorized by O.C.G.A. § 19-7-3,” and the mother “lives in fear that she may be served with a summons and petition for grandparent visitation.” The COA found that “the relief sought by a plaintiff must have some immediate legal effect on the parties’ conduct, rather than simply burning off an abstract fog of uncertainty.” The COA made clear that the mother can always file constitutional challenges in the future if the grandparents file a new action under the grandparent visitation statute, and there is no reason to believe that a new action will evade review by the courts.

Lastly, the mother argues that the trial court’s denial of her motion for attorney’s fees was error due to the trial court’s failure to conduct a hearing and take evidence on said motion. The COA found no error, because “[a] hearing is required in order to enter an award of attorney fees...because an oral hearing gives the party opposing attorney fees an opportunity to confront and challenge testimony with regard to the need for, and value of, legal services.” *Evers v. Evers*, 277 Ga. 132, 132 (1) (587 S.E.2d 22) (2003) (emphasis supplied). Thus, given this COA ruling, we deduce that the party seeking attorney’s fees has no right to a hearing on that issue prior to the trial court’s ruling, and only the party from whom the attorney’s fees are being sought is entitled to a hearing if the trial court is considering awarding fees.

***ITIO H.D.G.H., A23A1659 (MARCH 12, 2024)***

***SIJS...Again...Juvenile Court Judges MUST make a ruling on best interest...***

Appellant child was a 14-year-old Honduran boy who migrated to the United States as an unaccompanied minor to be with his adult sister. The adult sister filed a private dependency petition seeking permanent guardianship of the child. The Gwinnett County Juvenile Court concluded in the dependency ruling that “reunification with the child’s putative father and mother was not viable due to abandonment and neglect...and danger to the child due to the rampant gang activity in the area,” and awarded his adult sister custody and guardianship. Conspicuously, however, the juvenile court stopped short of entering a finding

relating to a best interest determination of whether the child should be returned to Honduras. The juvenile court declared that “decisions concerning where a child may physically locate, under Georgia law, are left within the sole discretion of the child’s appointed custodian; not a juvenile court judge.” The juvenile court’s refusal to rule had a direct and grave impact on the child’s future path to lawful permanent legal residency in the United States.

The COA specifically highlighted that this is the third time in less than two years that this particular juvenile court has erred in refusing to make the required SIJ findings based on the same reasons as in this case. See *In the Interest of S.N.-M.*, Case No. A24A0409 (Feb. 16, 2024) (unpublished); *In the Interest of R.E.Z.B.*, 370 Ga.App. 236 (896 S.E.2d 236) (2023). The COA has previously held that Georgia juvenile courts are “charged with making the factual inquiry relevant to SIJ status” when a migrant child is found to be dependent in their court, and the COA again reassures the juvenile court that the juvenile court does not have the power to render an immigration determination—only the federal government can do that. The COA vacated the portion of the juvenile court’s order refusing to make the SIJ best interest factual determination based on its purported lack of jurisdiction, and remanded the case to the juvenile court with instruction for the juvenile court to reconsider the issue and make written findings regarding all of the required SIJ factors.

The COA also noted that the appeal was not rendered moot by the child turning 18 years old while the appeal was pending “because the juvenile court’s ruling creates adverse consequences relating to [the child]’s immigration status that will continue to affect him beyond [his] childhood.”

#### ***ITIO K.G.V., A23A1299 (March 13, 2024)***

***Permanent guardianship is NOT as good as adoption.*** The maternal grandmother, as permanent guardian of the child, appeals the Superior Court’s denial of her petition for TPR and adoption. Grandmother alleged abandonment by both parents and presented evidence that the parents had not visited with the child in three years, that the parents failed to form a meaningful bond with the child, that previous visitation was very inconsistent, that the parents had failed to pay child support, and that the parents failed to complete the court-ordered plans. The trial court stated in its order

that the parents had not abandoned the child, because the mother suffered from substance abuse issues and the father had a traumatic brain injury. The trial court also found that the child was secure and stable in the grandmother’s home, with no evidence of emotional distress, that it is possible that the child may mend her relationship with her parents in the future, and that permanent guardianship would be just as good as adoption for the child. The COA saw things differently, and found evidence to the contrary—the therapist testified that the child needed “security and stability” and the GAL noted that the child needed “closure”—thus all arrows pointed to adoption, not guardianship.

The COA determined that the Superior Court’s findings did not justify its determination that the parents had not abandoned the child or that permanent guardianship was in the best interest of the child, and the COA remanded the case for the superior court to make a different decision “in light of the statutory framework and relevant case law listed herein.”

#### ***Smith v. Arizona, 2024 WL 3074423 (Decided by the Supreme Court of the United States on June 21, 2024)***

***“Truth is everything...” and there is no substitute for the truth when dealing with drug screens.***

“Evidentiary rules...do not control the inquiry into whether a statement is admitted for its truth. That inquiry...marks the scope of a federal constitutional right. And federal constitutional rights are not typically defined—expanded or contracted—by reference to non-constitutional bodies of law like evidence rules. The confrontation right is no different. Where testimonial statements are involved, “the Framers [did not mean] to leave the Sixth Amendment’s protection to the vagaries of the rules of evidence.” *Crawford v. Washington*, 541 U. S. 36, 61 (2004).

In Smith, the “original analyst” of a drug screen had vanished, so the State tendered a “substitute analyst” during the trial. The State contends that the statements of original analyst relating to a drug screen were being tendered into evidence not for their truth, but to “show the basis” of the substitute expert’s independent opinion during his testimony at trial regarding the drug screen results. The defendant/appellant in Smith argues that the original analyst’s statements were conveyed—via the substitute expert’s testimony—to establish that what the original analyst said happened in the lab did, in

fact, happen (“truth of the matter asserted”). The issues before SCOTUS were: “whether the Confrontation Clause permits ‘testimony by a substitute expert conveying the testimonial statements of a nontestifying forensic analyst, on the grounds that (a) the testifying expert offers some independent opinion and the analyst’s statements are offered not for their truth but to explain the expert’s opinion, and (b) the defendant did not independently seek to subpoena the analyst.”

SCOTUS determines in *Smith*: “If an expert conveys an out-of-court statement in support of his opinion, and the statement supports that opinion only if true, then the statement has been offered for the truth of what it asserts. The truth of the basis testimony is what makes it useful to the State; that is what supplies the predicate for—and thus gives value to—the state expert’s opinion. And from the factfinder’s perspective, the jury cannot decide whether the expert’s opinion is credible without evaluating the truth of the factual assertions on which it is based. But that is what raises the Confrontation Clause problem. For the defendant has no opportunity to challenge the veracity of the out-of-court assertions that are doing much of the work.”

The Georgia Code and Georgia case law have established that drug screen results may be admissible, if the proper foundation has been laid. The dependency sections of the Georgia Juvenile Code were amended several years ago to allow the juvenile court to consider any evidence, including hearsay evidence, that the juvenile court finds to be relevant, reliable, and necessary to make determinations at almost all hearings except adjudications and termination of parental rights (and presumably except for motions hearings). In *Melendez-Diaz v. Massachusetts*, state prosecutors introduced “certificates of analysis” (essentially, affidavits) stating that lab tests had identified a substance seized from the defendant as cocaine. 557 U. S. 305, 308 (2009). But the State did not call as witnesses the analysts who had conducted the tests and signed the certificates. SCOTUS held that a “straightforward application” of *Crawford* showed a constitutional violation. 557 U. S., at 312. The certificates were testimonial because they had an “evidentiary purpose,” identical to the purpose served had the analysts given “live, in-court testimony.” Id., at 311. And the certificates were offered to prove the truth of what they asserted: that the seized powder was in fact cocaine. See *id.*, at 310–311. Thus, the defendant had a right to cross-examine the lab-analyst certifiers.

SCOTUS went on to discuss that the Confrontation Clause commanded not reliability of the evidence, but as giving the defendant/appellant a way to challenge the evidence through cross-examination to explore how drug testing plays a role in cases and how they involve forensic analysis. The rationale being that lab tests are “not uniquely immune from the risk of manipulation” or mistake (*id.*, at 318), and the consensus being that a defendant likely would use cross-examination to probe “what tests the analysts performed,” whether those tests “present[ed] a risk of error,” and whether the analysts had the right skill set to “interpret[ ] their results.” *Id.*, at 320.

In *Bullcoming v. New Mexico*, 564 U. S. 647, 651–652 (2011), an analyst tested the blood-alcohol level of someone charged with drunk driving, and prepared a “testimonial certification” reporting that the level was higher than legal. But by the time the driver’s trial began, that analyst had been placed on unpaid leave. The “surrogate testimony,” the Court explained, “could not convey what [the certifying analyst] knew or observed” about “the particular test and testing process he employed.” *Id.*, at 661. Nor could that “testimony expose any lapses or lies on the certifying analyst’s part,” or offer any insight into whether his leave-without-pay was the result of misconduct. *Id.*, at 662. Concluded the Court: “[W]hen the State elected to introduce [the] certification,” its author—and not any substitute—“became [the] witness [that the defendant] had the right to confront.”

Finally, SCOTUS did not go into great analysis of the USCOA’s opinion on the second issue raised by defendant/appellant, regarding the defendant/appellant subpoenaing of the original analyst, in which USCOA stated: “Had *Smith* sought to challenge [the original analyst]’s analysis, he could have called her to the stand and questioned her, but he chose not to do so.” However, SCOTUS pointed out that the State as appellee wisely did not try to defend that opinion on appeal, and SCOTUS noted: “As we held in *Melendez-Diaz*, a defendant’s ‘ability to subpoena’ an absent analyst ‘is no substitute for the right of confrontation.’ The Confrontation Clause ‘imposes a burden on the prosecution to present its witnesses, not on the defendant to bring those adverse witnesses into court.’” 557 U. S., at 324.

# Legislative and Budget Updates

By Amber D. Walden, Esq., J.P. Berlon, Esq., and Laurie M. Thomas, Esq.

## Technology

### **Fiscal Year 2024 (Amended)**

- Senate Bill 401 (Amends O.C.G.A. § 15-11-64(d), adds O.C.G.A. § 15-11-64.1, revised O.C.G.A. § 15-11-280(b): Requires juvenile courts to collect additional data relating to adherence to time frames for post-TPR reviews and report data on those time frames and on cases of dually-adjudicated children to the Administrative Office of the Courts for further analysis and reporting to the legislature annually. (\$650,000 granted to Juvenile Courts).

<https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/66342>

## Representation and Services

### **Fiscal Year 2024 (Amended)**

- \$99,780 to improve the legal representation of foster children (Office of Child Advocate (OCA)).
- \$1.5 Million to match federal funds for wraparound services for those encountering the child welfare system (OCA)

## **Fiscal Year 2025**

- House Bill 916—\$1 Million to the court appointed special advocates (CASAs) to expand statewide (DHS).
- House Bill 916—\$1 Million to the state’s Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) for increased forensic and mental health services (DHS).

## Workforce Recruitment and Retention

### **Fiscal Year 2025**

- \$7 Million to provide a \$3,000 salary enhancement for child support, child welfare, and elder abuse caseworkers (DHS).
- \$8.4 Million for a 3% provider increase for child caring institutions, child placing agencies, foster parents, and relative caregivers (DHS).
- \$218,000 for the Juvenile Court Judges’ salary supplement (Juvenile Court)
  - With the note regarding SB 401 (see above): “Beginning in FY 2023, a \$6,000 supplement has been paid to juvenile court judge who certified no backlog of cases existed in their courts. There is ambiguity surrounding whether the purpose of this allocation has been followed.

A new data system should answer questions concerning case backlogs. Therefore, this \$6,000 supplement shall cease on February 1, 2025, for any juvenile court judge who has not adopted a uniform case management system that at a minimum provides the period of time that a child has been in Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) custody pending permanency.”

## House Bill 376

(Amends O.C.G.A. § 15-11-216, amends O.C.G.A. § 15-11-218, amends O.C.G.A. § 15-11-232, amends O.C.G.A. § 15-11-233): The bill directs juvenile courts to make a determination as to whether a parent has made “substantial progress toward completion of the case plan” at the initial 75-day review, periodic review hearings, and the permanency plan hearing. Creates a 14-day deadline for DFCS to develop any case plan contemplating nonreunification following any review hearing, and requires the juvenile court to review and adopt the plan within 45 days following said hearing. Requires the juvenile court to conduct a hearing at least 30 days prior to the child’s fifteenth month in foster care to review DFCS’s determination that filing for TPR would not be in the best interests of the child. The juvenile court may appointment of an attorney guardian ad litem who may file a TPR petition.

## Senate Bill 454

(Amends O.C.G.A. § 19-6-15 related to child support): The child support tables have been reconfigured to increase the amounts of presumptive child support and implements a graduated mandatory low-income adjustment. The law adds a parenting time unit of measurement. The law adds “payer” to include a noncustodial parent child support obligation with a negative number to then turn to a positive child support number for the custodial parent. Split parenting will require separate worksheet for each custodial parent. The noncustodial parent can enter expenses incurred during court ordered parenting time on Child Support Schedule C as a “parenting time adjustment” versus as a “deviation.” The updated worksheet will automatically calculate for low-income adjustment. Benefits such as VA disability benefits are now added. For trainings, members should be on the lookout for Administrative Office of the Courts Child Support Commission.

## House Bill 499

(Amends O.C.G.A. § 19-6-9 related to child support): Starting for actions after July 1, 2024, new legislation in Georgia introduces a cause of action for supporting disabled adult children, potentially extending child support indefinitely. A legal action may be brought by a “nonparent custodian” or a “guardian appointed to receive support for the dependent adult child whose benefit the support is ordered” to establish support for a dependent adult child. Parents may now be required to financially support their dependent adult children (as defined in Code Section 19-6-15.1) and maintain life insurance for them. The bill amends existing laws on child support and alimony to include unmarried adults over the age of majority who cannot support themselves due to a pre-existing physical or mental disability. Courts will consider various factors—such as the adult child’s needs and income, parents’ financial resources, and eligibility for government benefits—when determining support. The bill also allows for the support to be placed in a special needs trust to preserve eligibility for means-based benefits.



a Law Student” perspective to the group, to give insight into “what law school is really like.” CPAS’s Chair, Laurie M. Thomas, Esq. and Michelle Arrington, Esq., gave descriptions of their respective fields of practice, and then all of the attorneys offered answers on other practice areas as well. (Pictured right: Damon Elmore, Executive Director of State Bar of Georgia; Ira Foster, General Counsel for Georgia Legal Services Program; Laurie M. Thomas Williams, Chair, CPAS)

Please visit the below link to view the workshop:  
[\[School Dropout to Prison Recording \(Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.\)\]](#)

## **The Roadmap to Law School: Meet the Lawyers Day**

*By Ira Foster, Esq.*



Another stop on Ira Foster, Esq.’s “Road Map to Law School” initiative was a “Meet the Lawyers Day” workshop, conducted on April 11, 2024, hosted by Clark Atlanta University, and sponsored by the State Bar of Georgia, Georgia

Association of Black Women Attorneys (“GABWA”), Gate City Bar Association, and Georgia Legal Services Program (“GLSP”). Damon Elmore, Esq., Executive Director, State Bar of Georgia gave a warm welcome to the group of 18 Clark Atlanta University students in attendance. The students were very engaging, and they asked lots of questions! During the two-hour session, Diana DeJesus, Esq., Assistant Director of Admissions and Student Experience, and University of Georgia School of Law alumna, gave the students advice and pointers on LSAT preparation and the law school admissions process. Mr. Jerome Miller, a 3L at Emory University School of Law, offered “A Day in the Life of

## **Georgia Legal Services Program: School Dropout to Prison Prevention Town Hall Summit Workshop**

*By Ira Foster, Esq.*



On May 18, 2024, Ira Foster, Esq., General Counsel for Georgia Legal Services Program (“GLSP”) Atlanta Central Office, organized and facilitated a “School Dropout to Prison Prevention Town Hall Summit Workshop” at Broadway Baptist Church, in Augusta, Georgia, hosted by Pastor Anthony M. Booker. Laverne Gaskins, Esq., Board Member of GLSP, was unable

to attend the session in person, however she provided an excellent introductory video to open the program. About 25 people attended in person, and approximately 40 people viewed the program virtually. The audience was engaged and asked a lot of questions. Brittany Pasley, Esq., Staff Attorney II with Augusta GLSP, and Chadé Franklin, Esq. Supervising Attorney, with Augusta GLSP, did a great job presenting on the topic of “Know Your Legal Education Rights,” and responding to questions. Mr. Foster spoke in more detail about “Stopping the School to Prison Pipeline.” Closing remarks were graciously provided by Mr. Michael A.



Simmons, President, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Alpha Chi Lambda Chapter.

Potential next steps on the horizon include:

- Alpha Phi Alpha partnering with the Augusta GLSP Office to work with Ms. Pasley and Mr. Franklin to conduct a workshop focused only on “Know Your Rights and Disciplinary Education Issues.”
- Developing a “Street Law Clinic/Academy” focused on addressing many of the issues that were discussed during this Town Hall session.
- Partnering with the Augusta GLSP Office, local law offices and agencies, and Alpha Phi Alpha to conduct outreach programs focused on increasing the rate youth staying in school and decreasing the rates of youth detention and incarceration.
- Pastor Booker expressed a commitment to holding future workshops at their new community outreach facility as well as in the Augusta low-economic community. Pastor Booker wishes to partner with the Augusta GLSP Office and Alpha Phi Alpha to specifically conduct another dropout prevention workshop at the community center when the facility opens, and the church youth and Youth Minister will be involved.

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**Brian P. Kemp**  
*Governor*

**Amy M. Jacobs**  
*Commissioner*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Media Contact: Reg Griffin  
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**DECAL Releases New Economic Impact Study of  
Early Care and Education in Georgia**

*Collaboration between University of Georgia and Georgia State University looks at  
Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic*

**ATLANTA, Ga., (March 28, 2024)** – The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) has released the results of our most recent Economic Impact Study, which evaluates the importance of the early care and education (ECE) industry to the state's economy. The Executive Summary of this report can be found [here](#).

This is the third Economic Impact Study we have commissioned, following the first in 2008 and the second in 2016. Like previous studies, this report is a collaboration between researchers at the Georgia State University Andrew Young School of Policy Studies and the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government. Reports from the previous studies can be found [here](#).

This report covers changes in Georgia's ECE industry between 2019 and 2020. The report provides an overview of the industry and details impacts from the pandemic.

**About DECAL**

The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families. It administers the nationally recognized Georgia's Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program and federal nutrition programs, and manages Quality Rated, Georgia's community-powered child care rating system. The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of child care, and works collaboratively with Georgia child care resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education. For more information, go to [www.decal.ga.gov](http://www.decal.ga.gov).

Information provided by Ira Sudman, Esq.

Links from press release above

The Executive Summer of the report can be found at:

[Initial Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Georgia's  
Early Care and Education Industry \[Feb. 2024\]](#)

A summary of the current report can be found at:  
[Economic Impact of the Child Care Industry](#)

## “Look Again” Campaign

Information provided by Ira Sudman, Esq.



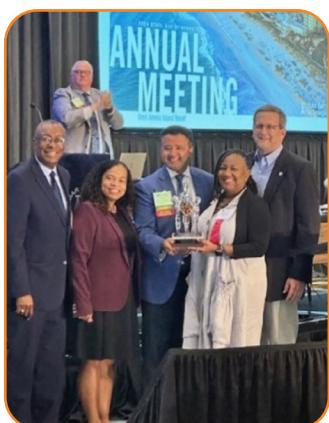
DECAL encourages families and caregivers of children to “Look again” when exiting their vehicles during these scorching summer months in Georgia. DECAL is committed to increasing awareness of the dangers of leaving children unattended in hot vehicles, and hopefully prevent heatstroke deaths of children year-round, but especially during the upcoming hot summer months. DECAL partners with the Governor and state agencies promote this initiative.

### [Look Again 2024 Kickoff Event](#) [CLICK LINK]

DECAL joined the Governor’s Office of Highway Safety (GOHS) and the National Highway Safety Traffic Administration (NHTSA) for a news conference as a public service announcement (Wednesday, May 1, 2024, at 11:00 AM at the DeKalb Fire Safety Administration Building, 1611 W. Exchange Place, in Tucker).

## 2024 State Bar of Georgia Annual Meeting

By Amber D. Walden, Esq.



From right to left: Ira Foster, Laurie Thomas Williams, State Bar Past President Tony Del Campo, Judge Renata D. Turner, Chief Justice Charles Bethel

Both awards were presented by the

This year the State Bar of Georgia’s annual meeting was held in beautiful Amelia Island, Florida, starting on June 6, 2024. Several awards were presented during the plenary session of the annual meeting. Of special note for CPAS was the Judge Willie J. Lovett Award, presented to Chief Judge Renata Turner, and the Chief Justice P. Harris Hines Child Advocacy Award presented to Amber D. Walden. Both awards were presented by the

esteemed Justice Charles J. Bethel, of the Supreme Court of Georgia. CPAS selected Chief Judge Turner of Fulton County Juvenile Court to receive the Lovett Award because her efforts in presiding over both dependency and delinquency cases exemplify the spirit of the Lovett Award. Chief Judge Turner exhibits passion and compassion for youth and families and has a steadfast commitment to seeking stability for families by listening to the voices of the children and parents who come before her in court, and by engaging the community for additional supports.

The Hines Awards were created in 2017 by the Georgia Supreme Court’s Committee on Justice for Children, in partnership with Georgia’s Office of the Child Advocate and CPAS. The Hines Award is given every year to a child welfare attorney who demonstrates a dedication to improving outcomes for children and families involved in the child welfare system.



From left to right: Justice Bethel and Amber D. Walden

Ms. Walden has been a zealous advocate for the constitutional rights of parents and children in dependency cases for over fifteen years. She practices in metro Atlanta and surrounding counties, and she conducts presentations at state and national child welfare conferences. She also organizes and facilitates trainings for Parent Attorneys and Child Attorneys/Guardians ad Litem that are tailored to provide information and resources for strategies and techniques for practical applications both in and out of court, in furtherance of quality legal representation for parents and children in our Juvenile Courts.

# Judge Renata D. Turner - 2024 Judge Willie J. Lovett Award Recipient

By Jill Roth, Esq.



The Honorable Renata D. Turner took me on as her judicial staff attorney in 2021, gifting me with the opportunity to work with her for several years and providing me the opportunity to witness firsthand her dedication to the families and children that came before her in various court proceedings

as well as the larger community. Her warm and kind-hearted demeanor make those who come before her feel valued and respected. I will be forever grateful for the time I spent under her guidance and mentorship. She consistently and constantly pours warmth, love, and compassion into everything she does. Judge Lovett's legacy lives on through her work.



In researching this article, I came across A Tribute to Professor Willie J. Lovett, Jr. (<https://www.johnmarshall.edu/tribute-professor-willie-j-lovett-jr/>), written by Judge Turner herself. Judge Turner worked with the late Judge Professor Willie J. Lovett at the City of Atlanta's Law Department, Atlanta's John Marshall Law School, and at the Fulton County Juvenile Court. She exemplifies so many of the qualities that she mentioned about him: grace, humility, empathy, kindness, honesty, optimism, resilience, compassion, public service. While I never had the opportunity to meet Judge Lovett, I have heard many stories about his commitment to the advancement of child welfare and juvenile justice and his passion for mentorship. Just like Judge Lovett, Judge Turner serves from a place of gratitude and seeks to engage, connect, and open doors for others. Through her professionalism and devotion to community, she teaches and mentors all she encounters. She is active in her community and a dedicated public servant. Just like Judge Lovett, she is known for her compassion and care for the children and families

appearing before her. Like Judge Lovett, she engages in a plethora of opportunities off the bench dedicated to improving the lives of children and families in the community. I believe his light shines on through her.

Judge Turner was raised in Atlanta, Georgia. After graduating from Daniel McLaughlin Therrell High School, she received a B.A. in psychology from the University of Georgia. She then worked for several years as a caseworker for the Fulton County Division of Family and Children Services before beginning law school at the University of Southern California.

Judge Turner has served many roles when it comes to working with children and families – DFCS caseworker, GAL, mediator. She started her legal career as a law clerk for then Superior Court Judge Frank M. Hull. After her clerkship, she worked for the City of Atlanta as an Assistant City Attorney, and later as Assistant Regional Counsel for the Social Security Administration. She joined the Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation in 2001 where she became Director of their Domestic Violence Project. In 2005, Judge Turner began teaching Domestic Violence and the Law at Georgia State University's College of Law. She went on to serve as Assistant Dean of Pro Bono and Experiential Learning and an Assistant Professor at Atlanta's John Marshall Law School. During this time, she also served as a part-time magistrate judge at Fulton County State Court. While at John Marshall, Judge Turner organized a Youth and the Law Summit and Re-Entry Forum for formerly incarcerated citizens.

In 2015, Judge Turner began serving as an associate judge with Fulton County Juvenile Court. She was appointed to presiding judge in 2017. Earlier this year, the Fulton County Juvenile Court announced the appointment of Judge Turner as chief presiding judge. As chief presiding judge, Judge Turner assumed administrative responsibility for the court, which has more than 140 employees.

As a Fulton County Juvenile Court Judge, Judge Turner continues to organize the annual Youth and the Law Summit. She serves as the lead judge for the School Pathways Project, a collaboration between the Fulton County Juvenile Court and Atlanta and Fulton County Public Schools, which enhances collaboration and communication between these youth-serving agencies. She was recently admitted as a Center for Justice Reform

Fellow for her work with school-justice partnerships. On the bench, Judge Turner presides over dependency, delinquency, guardianship, and other types of proceedings within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court. She assists with organizing Fulton County Juvenile Court's Adoption Day, during which she gets to preside over the adoption hearings for children who have had dependency cases before the juvenile court. She also serves as the presiding judge over CHOICES, the Fulton County Juvenile Court's drug court.

Through her leadership, Judge Turner shows that judicial leaders can be both assertive and kind. She manages a high caseload in a fast-paced environment while prioritizing the voices of youth and families, recognizing that the successes of the court's rehabilitative efforts are largely dependent on youth, family, and community engagement. Judge Turner's skillful approach on the bench resonates with youth and parents, as is evident through their recurring sentiments of gratitude for her inspiration and kindness and their willingness to make improvements in their own lives. She is likewise wonderful to her staff, who become family.

Off the bench, Judge Turner has served as vice chair for the Fulton County Child Attorney's Board and as a committee advisor for the Supreme Court of Georgia's Committee for Justice on Children. She is currently a member of the National Council of Family and Juvenile Court Judges, a member of the Georgia Commission on Dispute Resolution, and a board member of the Andrew and Walter Young YMCA.

Perhaps most importantly, she is a mother and a friend. Judge Turner's warm hugs, kind words, and optimism helped heal me when my mother lost her battle with alcoholism. She has always encouraged me, just like herself and everyone else, to just keep swimming. Judge Lovett's legacy lives on through Judge Turner's compassionate service.

## A TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR WILLIE J. LOVETT, JR.

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### Do Good Anyway- A Lesson from Professor Willie J. Lovett, Jr.

March 22, 1965 – January 30, 2017

By: Judge Renata D. Turner

Judge. Professor. Mentor. Leader. Friend. These are just a few of the titles proudly worn by our beloved Professor Willie Jake Lovett, Jr. I am most honored to have called him a friend first. We worked together during our nascent years as lawyers at the City of Atlanta's Law Department. Since that time our professional and personal paths crossed and merged eventually at Atlanta's John Marshall Law School and finally at the Fulton County Juvenile Court. I can still picture his smile and bow tie as he stood in my law school office doorway. He dropped by after an event and asked what he needed to do to become an adjunct. Once he began teaching, he fell in love with it. What he loved most was mentoring students- helping them to get their footing as young lawyers and opening as many doors for them as he could. We often spoke of the talent and dedication of AJMLS students and his desire to give back, recognizing the blessings that were given to him throughout his life.

Judge Lovett was raised by his grandmother in Savannah, Georgia. He graduated from Beach High School with the highest GPA of all the high school students in Chatham County. He graduated cum laude with Distinction from Yale University with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and earned his Juris Doctor from Harvard School of Law. He later earned his Master of Laws in Litigation from Emory Law School. He clerked for the Honorable Joseph W. Hatchett, former chief Judge of the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, served as an Assistant City Attorney for the City of Atlanta's Law Department, and worked as an associate at Moors, Manning & Martin, LLP, Ford & Harrison, LLP, and Troutman Sanders, LLP. For ten years, he served as the Deputy County Attorney for the Fulton of County Office of the County Attorney. He then served as the Director of the Fulton County Office of Child Attorney from 2009 to 2013. He was appointed as a Presiding Judge of the Fulton County Juvenile Court in the Atlanta Judicial Circuit in May 2013. He was affectionately known to the children in his court as the "bow tie Judge." On the bench, Judge Lovett was known for his compassion

and care for the children and families appearing before him. Off the bench, he was lauded for his dedication to improving juvenile justice. As examples, he was the lead judge for the Dually Involved Youth Initiative and served as a member for the Board of Directors for the National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC).

The list of Judge Lovett's accomplishments, honors, professional positions, and positions of service is long but now finite. The impact that he left behind to the legal community and those of us who knew and loved him, however, is infinite. Many of us question why his life ended so abruptly when he still had so much to give to a world desperate for his type of leadership. I like to believe that too much compassion and dedication to improving the world was concentrated in the man called Willie Lovett. Now it's dispersed to those of us also striving to serve and improve the world around us. When doing such noble and often thankless work seems too hard, Judge Professor Mentor Leader Friend Willie Jake Lovett, Jr. gave us the inspiration to keep moving forward through the words of his favorite poem that he often tearfully recited:

*ANYWAY*

*People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered;*

*Forgive them anyway.*

*If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives;*

*Be kind anyway.*

*If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies;*

*Succeed anyway.*

*If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you;*

*Be honest and frank anyway.*

*What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight;*

*Build anyway.*

*If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous;*

*Be happy anyway.*

*The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow;*

*Do well anyway.*

*Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough;*

*Give the world the best you've got anyway.*

*You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and your God;*

*It was never between you and them anyway.*

*Mother Teresa*

Rest in peace with your God my friend.

Judge Renata D. Turner



## ANNOUNCEMENTS & UPCOMING EVENTS

### National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC)

Top leaders in child welfare law are coming together again for the National Association of Counsel for Children's 47th National Child Welfare Law Conference. This year the conference will be in beautiful Salt Lake City, Utah! This is a critical time for community, information-sharing, and dialogue as NACC continues to enhance the practice of child welfare law and advance justice and equity.

Hashtag: #NACC2024

Link to: <https://naccchildlaw.org/conference/47th-national-child-welfare-law-conference/>

### The Summit, Georgia's Child Welfare Conference

The Georgia Office of the Child Advocate, Supreme Court of Georgia's Committee on Justice for Children, Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, and Georgia CASA are pleased to announce Georgia's sixth annual Summit, which will be held December 4 – 6, 2024, at the Hotel at Avalon in Alpharetta. The Summit is an extraordinary statewide, multidisciplinary conference offering learning and networking opportunities for all professionals who serve children and families involved with Georgia's child welfare system. The Summit provides Georgia's child welfare community an opportunity to learn how to improve representation and services to children, parents, and families involved with Georgia's child welfare system, and it will offer comprehensive training for attorneys, Judges, DFCS staff, policy makers, Court Appointed Special Advocates, foster parents, service providers, law enforcement, legal aid providers, delinquency and CHINS practitioners, educators, and school social workers, and policymakers.

If you have questions or would like to receive email updates about The Summit, please contact:

Contact AK Consulting Group  
Conference Meeting Planner  
(850) 523-4200  
[conference@akconsultinggroup.org](mailto:conference@akconsultinggroup.org)

### Gwinnett County Department of Child Advocacy and Juvenile Services

The Gwinnett County Department of Child Advocacy and Juvenile Services (CAJS) is proud to announce the historic selections of Ms. Christina Bridger, CWLS, and Mr. Donald Lee, CWLS, as Associate Judges in Gwinnett County Juvenile Court. This marks the first time that CAJS personnel have been elevated to the judicial bench. Ms. Bridger and Mr. Lee bring a wealth of experience and expertise in child welfare law to their new roles. Their extensive knowledge of the juvenile court system, combined with their dedication to advocating for the best interests of children, will be invaluable assets on the bench.

“We are thrilled to see Ms. Bridger and Mr. Lee selected as Associate Judges,” said Michelle Vereen, Director of CAJS. “Their tireless work and commitment to the children and families in our community make them highly qualified for these positions. Their selections also reflect the exceptional caliber of professionals working within CAJS.”

This announcement is particularly significant for Child Welfare Law Specialists (CWLS) across Georgia. It demonstrates the vital role CWLS professionals play in the child welfare system and the potential for career advancement within the field.

### About the Gwinnett County Department of Child Advocacy and Juvenile Services:

The Gwinnett County Department of Child Advocacy and Juvenile Services is dedicated to protecting children and ensuring their well-being. The department provides a range of services, including legal representation for children in court, volunteer oversight for children in foster care, and community supervision for youthful offenders.

Click the link below for more information about our office:

<https://www.gwinnettcounty.com/web/gwinnett/departments/childadvocacyandjuvenileservices>

# State Bar of Georgia Child Protection and Advocacy Law Section Scholarship Application

The Child Protection and Advocacy Law Section of the State Bar of Georgia will offer three (3) 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.

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

## Commitment to Share Information:

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

## Application Process:

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

- January 1 – April 30 (scholarship awarded by May 31)
- May 1 – August 31 (scholarship awarded by September 30)
- September 1 – December 31 (scholarship awarded by January 31)

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

State Bar of Georgia  
**Child Protection and Advocacy Law Section**  
**Scholarship Application**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of Program You Wish to Attend: (Please attach a copy of the program agenda, if available.)

Program Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Costs: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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