



Kids Matter

Child Protection and Advocacy Law Section

Winter 2026

From the Chair

By: Jill E. Roth, JD, CWLS

Chair, State Bar of Georgia Child Protection & Advocacy Section



I am thankful and honored that you all have elected me to serve as Chair of the Child Protection & Advocacy Section.

Our work brings us into daily contact with some of the most complex, emotionally demanding, and high-stakes issues in the legal system. We serve children and families at

moments of profound vulnerability, while navigating layered statutes, limited resources, and deeply human realities. In this environment, professionalism, humility, grace, sound judgment, and compassion are not optional. They are essential.

This Section is committed to elevating practice and strengthening the quality of legal representation across child protection and advocacy-related fields. Strong advocacy safeguards due process, promotes safety and permanency for children, and ensures that every voice is heard. Through education, collaboration, and shared experience, our members support one another in meeting these responsibilities.

Equally important is how we care for each other. This work is demanding. It requires dedication, perseverance, and continued learning. It is often frustrating and can be profoundly disheartening. As we confront difficult cases and complicated systems, we must extend compassion not only to the families we serve but also to ourselves and our colleagues. This is not always easy. Brene Brown wrote, “Compassion is not a virtue—it

is a commitment. It’s not something we have or don’t have—it’s something we choose to practice.”

The Kids Matter Newsletter provides practical guidance, legal updates, and perspectives from dedicated professionals working every day to improve outcomes for children and families. I hope it serves as both a resource and a reminder that none of us does this work alone.

Thank you for your dedication, integrity, and service to children and families. It is a privilege to work alongside all of you.

From the Immediate Past Chair

By: Laurie M. Thomas Williams, Esq.

Immediate Past Chair



As my time serving as Chair concludes and I continue supporting CPAS as Immediate Past Chair, I want to take a moment to thank the membership for the trust and confidence you placed in me during my time in leadership.

Serving as Chair of the Child Protection & Advocacy Section has been an honor. CPAS is composed of dedicated, thoughtful advocates who consistently advocate for children, families, and communities across Georgia. Leading this section through a period of growth, transition, and renewed focus has been both humbling and deeply rewarding.

During my term, CPAS experienced the highest membership levels in the section’s history, reflecting the strength, relevance, and engagement of our work. We continued to strengthen our CLE programming, expanded outreach and education efforts across the state, and increased opportunities for member participation and leadership.

I am also proud that, during this time, CPAS sponsored the Child Welfare Law Summit, contributing to high-quality, meaningful programming for practitioners across Georgia. In addition, we continued our sponsorship of the Southern Regional Youth Defender Center Summit, reaffirming CPAS’s commitment to supporting youth-centered advocacy and regional collaboration.

We also took important steps to align our governance practices with our updated bylaws, with a focus on transparency, accessibility, and full membership participation. These efforts were made possible by members who volunteered their time, shared their expertise, mentored others, and stepped forward to lead. None of this work happens in isolation, and I am deeply grateful for the collaborative spirit that defines CPAS.

As I conclude my Chair term, I do so with confidence in the section’s direction and appreciation for the leadership and members who will continue to advance the CPAS’s work. Leadership transitions are not an ending, but a continuation—an opportunity for new voices, fresh perspectives, and broader engagement to strengthen our mission.

Thank you again for your faith in me, for your engagement in this section, and for the important work you do every day. It has truly been a privilege to serve as your Chair, and I look forward to continuing to support CPAS in my role as Immediate Past Chair.

Inside This Issue

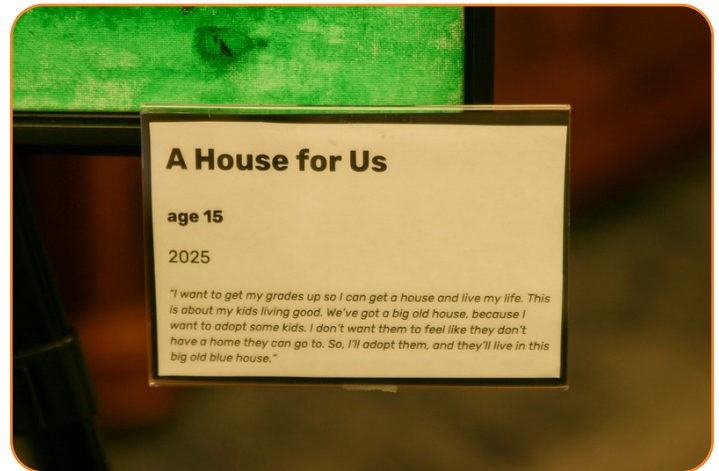
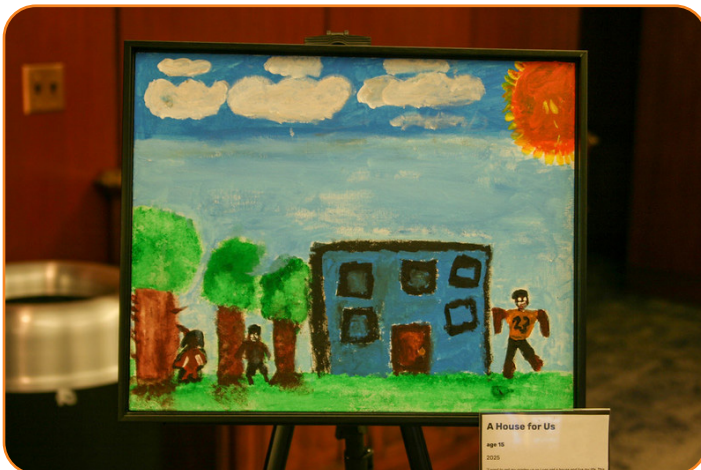
FROM THE CHAIR.....	1
FROM THE IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIR.....	1
CHILD PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY SECTION JANUARY 2026 ANNUAL MEETING & CLE.....	3
CPAS AT THE CHILD WELFARE SUMMIT.....	7
A SHARED CALL TO ACTION.....	8
2025 PUBLIC HUMAN SERVICES ATTORNEY’S CONFERENCE.....	8
RIDGE’S LAW.....	9
SEEKING NEWSLETTER CO-EDITOR.....	10
ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS.....	10
ACCESSING CHILD WELFARE AND JUVENILE JUSTICE POLICIES.....	12
SECTION EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.....	13
2025-2026 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE JUDICIAL DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVES.....	13

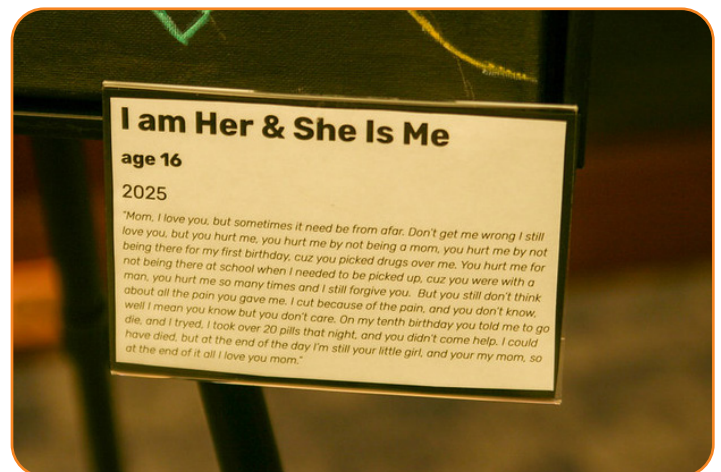
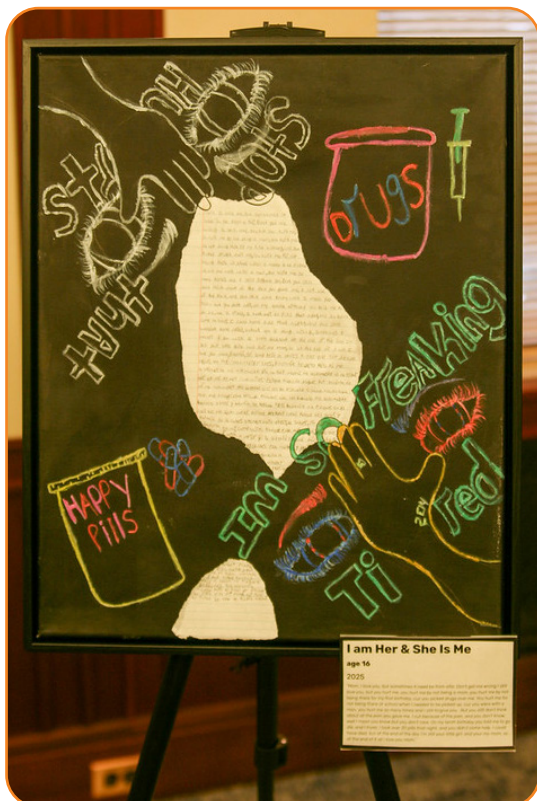
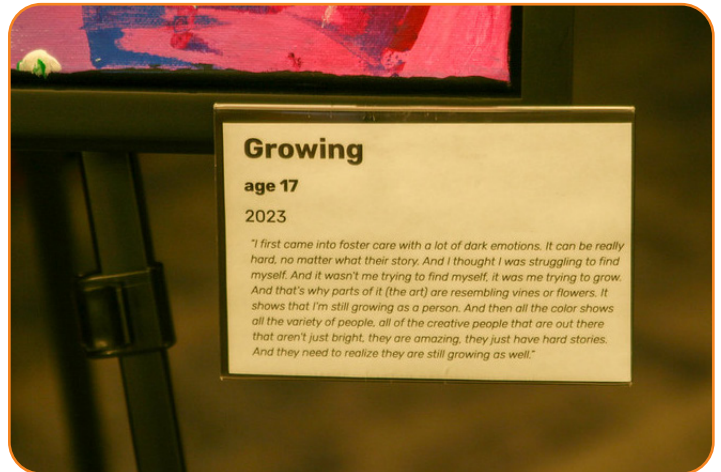
Child Protection and Advocacy Section January 2026 Annual Meeting and CLE

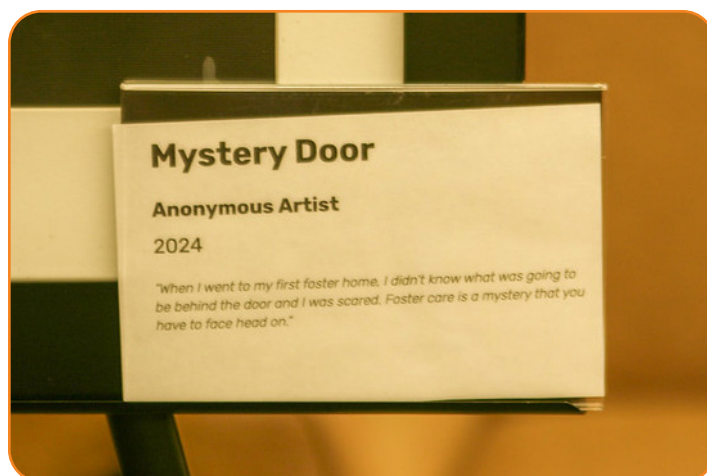
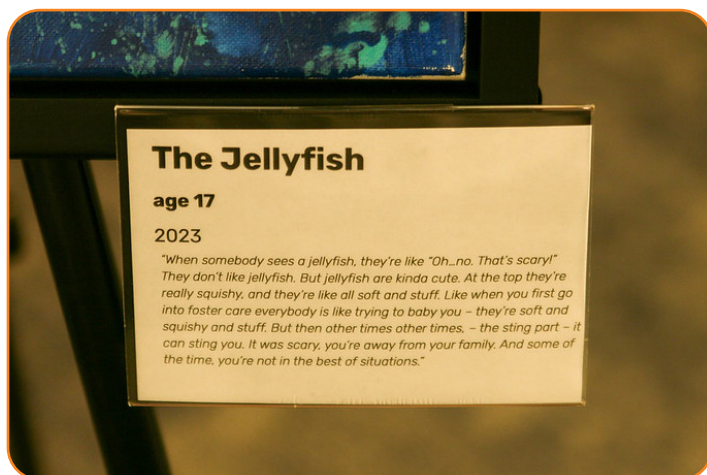
The Child Protection & Advocacy Law Section | CLE and Annual Meeting was held January 22, 2026, at the State Bar of Georgia. This year's program provided timely, practical insights for child welfare practitioners from [Randee Waldman, Director, Barton Juvenile Defender Clinic](#), and [Laurie Thomas Williams, Managing Partner, Reed Thomas Law Group](#), with a particular focus on how child welfare attorneys can appropriately and ethically utilize artificial intelligence tools in their practices. The program explored emerging issues and evolving practice standards, offering meaningful professional development for attorneys. The event also featured the [Georgia Appleseed Hear Me See Me Art exhibit](#).

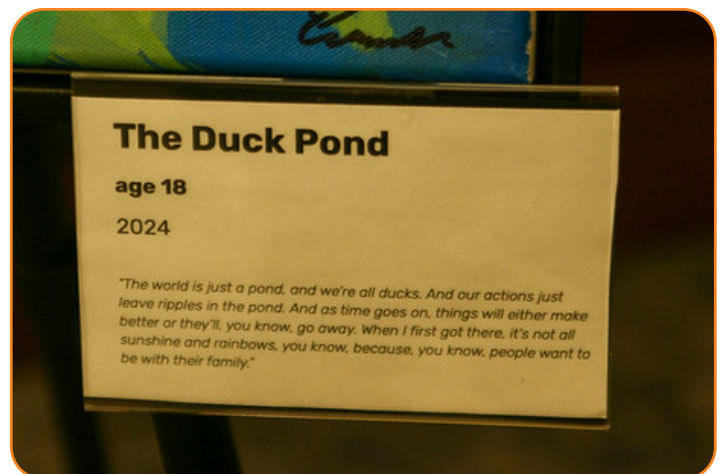
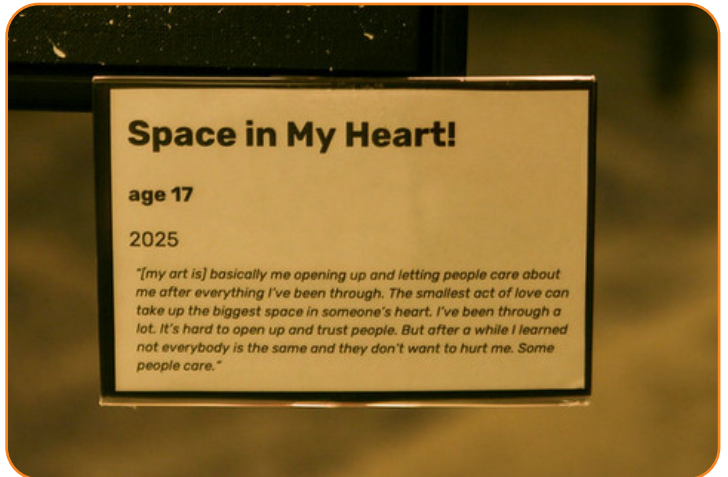


Randee Waldman









Clarifying Law, Coordinating Care, and Centering Children: CPAS at the Child Welfare Summit

By: Danielle Simpson, JD

Secretary, Child Protection & Advocacy Section



At this year's Child Welfare Summit, CPAS tackled some of the most pressing—and often misunderstood—challenges facing children navigating Georgia's child welfare and juvenile legal systems.

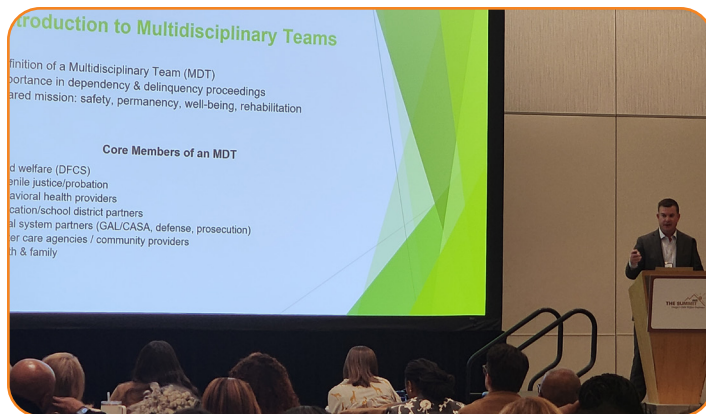
Across multiple sessions, presenters called for a shift away from fragmented responses and entrenched myths toward coordinated, child-centered, and legally sound practices that truly serve youth in crisis.



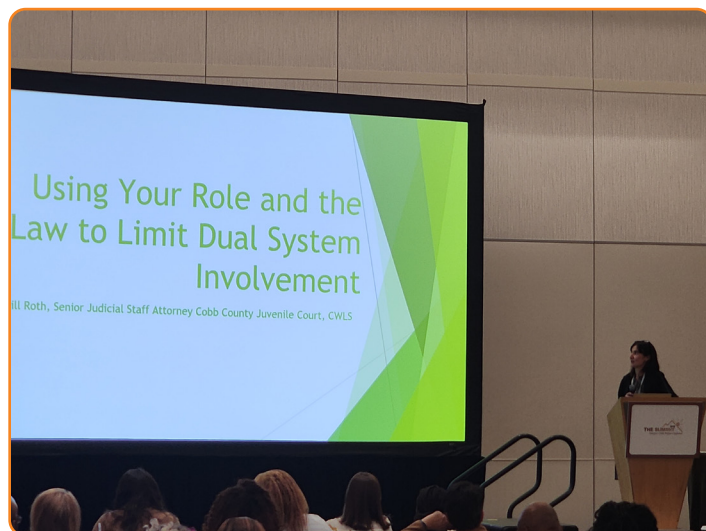
Too Much Medicine Can Make You Sick: Rethinking the Over-Servicing of Children in Crisis was presented by **Sydney Royes**, Director of Behavioral Health at HEALing Community Health, and **Danielle Simpson Alford**, Founder and Managing Attorney of Georgia Teen Legal Defense (GTLD).

This session examined how well-intentioned but excessive, uncoordinated, or duplicative services can overwhelm youth and families rather than stabilize them. Using Georgia-based case studies and real data, the presenters challenged the deeply ingrained belief that “more services” automatically equate to better outcomes. Beyond identifying the problem, the presentation pushed participants to reimagine

their roles across courts, schools, and communities, offering a practical framework for moving from chaos to coordination. The purpose of the session was not to reduce care, but to refine it—encouraging professionals to prioritize consistency, communication, and quality so that children experience support that is strategic, manageable, and truly healing, rather than confusing and retraumatizing.



The conversation shifted to the courtroom in ***Pulling Back the Curtain on Myths and Urban Legends in Juvenile Court Proceedings***, presented by **Amber Walden**, Attorney with the Family Law Office of Training and Education Services, LLC.



This session provided a focused legal deep dive into commonly misunderstood, misinterpreted, and misapplied statutes and practices that are often treated as unquestioned truths in juvenile court. More than a technical refresher, this presentation underscored the real-world consequences of legal myths on children and families, emphasizing that knowledge of and adherence to the law is foundational to fairness. The purpose was clear: when professionals rely on assumptions rather than the law, both parents' and children's legal and constitutional rights are compromised. By equipping

attendees with clarity and confidence, the session reinforced the importance of ethical advocacy and strengthened the integrity of juvenile court practice.

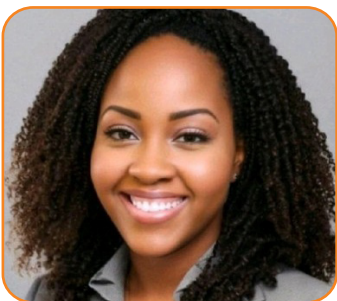
The Intersection Dilemma: Dependency, Delinquency, and the Children in Between was co-presented by CPAS members, **Chris Hempfling**, Vice President of Service Excellence and Stakeholder Relations at BrightSpring Health Services; **Jill Roth**, Senior Judicial Staff Attorney for Cobb County Juvenile Court; and **Danielle Simpson Alford**, Founder and Managing Attorney of Georgia Teen Legal Defense (GTLD).

This session explored the complex reality of youth who straddle both the dependency and delinquency systems and the compounded legal, social, and emotional harm that often results from system fragmentation. Through real-world examples and interactive dialogue, presenters examined how misunderstandings and misaligned services can unintentionally deepen trauma and delay permanency and stability. The presentation focused on the importance of compassionate treatment and trauma-informed, multidisciplinary approaches, enabling an examination of the entirety of a child's circumstances. The presentation provided practitioners with tools and resources to use creatively across their child-serving roles to improve outcomes for youth and families. The purpose of this session was to challenge professionals to move toward shared responsibility, reminding attendees that children do not experience their lives in silos and that positive outcomes for children and families can be achieved only through effective coordination, communication, and commitment by

A Shared Call to Action

By: Danielle Simpson, JD

Secretary, Child Protection & Advocacy Section



Together, these CPAS sessions delivered a unified message: outcomes for children and families improve when systems communicate, professionals collaborate, and decisions are made in adherence

with the law and an understanding of trauma. Whether addressing dual-system involvement, service overload, or courtroom myths, the workshops underscored the need to slow down, ask better questions, and intentionally center the child at every stage of the process.

As CPAS continues to support education and advocacy across child protection and advocacy legal professions, these conversations serve as a powerful reminder that meaningful service begins with clarity, coordination, and a commitment to seeing the whole child—not just the case.

2025 Public Human Services Attorney's Conference

By: Chris Hempfling, JD, MBA, CHC, CWLS

Executive Committee Member, Child Protection & Advocacy Section



The 2025 American Public Human Services Association's Public Human Services Attorneys' (PHSA) Conference brought together state human services agency attorneys who share a common purpose of making life better for children, families, and communities.

Throughout this year's conference, held in Reno, Nevada, a common theme emerged: the fundamentals of human services continue to focus on strengthening our communities to ensure the safety of children and the well-being of families. Whether discussing new technology, data systems, or policy updates, presenters emphasized the importance of compassion, dignity, and thoughtful engagement. Attendees explored ways to ease the burdens families face, strengthen local partnerships, and create more welcoming, supportive service systems.

I was honored to contribute to these conversations by presenting two sessions focused on federal child protective services policy. In the plenary, I shared an overview of national developments and how they are shaping the landscape for CPS agencies. Later, in a breakout session, we had a more in-depth conversation about the real-world challenges states encounter and the creative solutions they are developing to align practice with emerging federal expectations.

APHSA offers a wealth of resources for practitioners across a range of areas within the human services sector. Stay up to date on the organization's latest updates and information at <https://aphsa.org/>.

Ridge's Law

By: Darice M. Good, JD, CWLS



It starts the same way. Parents concerned about their sick baby take them to the children's hospital. After testing, the results show the baby may have fractured bones, bleeding, and swelling to the brain and retinal hemorrhages. In most cases, the baby

shows no outward signs of abuse. No bruises, scratches, marks, and/or swelling. Despite no outward signs of injuries, parents are accused of child abuse by a child abuse pediatrician. This was the experience of the Collins family.

In 2006, the American Academy of Pediatrics established a subspecialty of pediatrics called child abuse pediatrics. Child abuse pediatricians are trained in the diagnosis and treatment of children who are suspected victims of abuse. A child abuse pediatrician must be a pediatrician, complete a three-year fellowship in child abuse, and pass a certifying examination.

In August of 2023, when Ridge was eleven weeks old, he was life-flighted to the children's hospital because he went limp and unresponsive. His parents were terrified. Soon after admission and testing, a child abuse pediatrician accused Ridge's parents of abuse. Ridge had no outward signs of abuse, no bruising, scratches, marks, or swelling.

The child abuse pediatrician accused the Collins of Shaken Baby Syndrome. Shaken Baby Syndrome includes a triad of injuries: bleeding on the brain, swelling of the brain, and retinal hemorrhages. This diagnosis is widely questioned for its accuracy and credibility. Due to the controversy, the American Academy of Pediatrics changed the diagnosis to Abusive Head Trauma. Even with a new name, its accuracy and credibility are contested. The crux of the matter is whether a child can obtain these injuries by being shaken or must there be an impact.

Upon discharge from the hospital, the Division of Family and Children Services intervened in the family's lives. Ridge was removed from his parents and placed

with family friends and ultimately family. Ridge would remain out of the home for six months, with only supervised visitation with his parents.

And after six months, three days of a juvenile trial, three experts who testified for the Collins and thousands of dollars spent in their defense, the case was dismissed. The juvenile court found that the Division of Family and Children Services failed to prove child abuse by clear and convincing evidence. Finally, Ridge was allowed to go home with his parents.

But the nightmare was not over. The parents faced criminal charges of child abuse. Both were held in jail for several days before being released. Another eleven months passed. And after review, the Troup County District Attorney dismissed all criminal charges.

For seventeen months, the Collins family lived under the cloud of child abuse. The Collins family lived under suspicion of child abuse, initiated by a claim of abuse against them by a child pediatrician, despite there being no outward signs of abuse. What makes it worse is that when out of the physical custody of his parents and in the care of others, Ridge had three more brain bleeds, yet the child abuse pediatrician continued to claim that the Collins abused Ridge.

Ultimately, it was determined that Ridge had a medical condition where fluid was pooling in his brain, causing pressure to build up and cause a stroke. The fluid buildup was caused by a difficult birth, along with the rib fractures.

Due to the months of trauma experienced by the family, the Collinses wanted to make sure that other families were not harmed in the same way. With help from legislators, the Collins family proposed a second opinion bill, which allows families to seek a second opinion and examination of the child when accused of child abuse by medical personnel. The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services also created a protocol for parents to obtain a second opinion. The second opinion bill was passed by the legislature and named Ridge's Law – Section 15-11-131.1 of the Official Code of Georgia.

To learn more about the Collins and other families in Georgia who faced false allegations of abuse by a child abuse pediatrician, watch the series Help That Harms

by Rebecca Lindstrom at <https://www.11alive.com/helpthatharms>.

**Darice Good is a child abuse and neglect attorney in Georgia. She is a member of the Georgia Supreme Court's Justice for Children Committee, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act Panel, the Children's Justice Task Force, and a member of the Steering Committee for the National Parents Representation Project at the Children and Law Center of the ABA. Ms. Good is also a National Child Welfare Law Specialist. She co-authored the adjudication chapter of the National Parents Representation book.*

Seeking Newsletter Co-Editor

Greetings – The CPAS Newsletter Committee is looking for a passionate and collaborative CPAS member to serve as co-editor of the newsletter. This is a meaningful opportunity to spotlight our members' work, share timely updates on child protection and advocacy, and build a stronger, more connected community. If you enjoy writing, editing, or shaping content – and care deeply about child protection and advocacy – I'd love to work with you. Whether you are a seasoned attorney or a law student eager to get involved, your voice and perspective are welcome and appreciated. Please reach out if interested or if you have any questions about the role. Let's make something impactful – together!

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

Announcements and Upcoming Events

Georgia Appleseed FAIR Project Announcement

Georgia Appleseed's FAIR (Fairness, Advocacy, and Individualized Representation) Project provides free legal support to families across all 159 Georgia counties facing school discipline cases, enrollment barriers, and special education or disability-related challenges. Children who qualify for free or reduced-price school meals are eligible for direct legal representation or one-on-one advocacy coaching. Our trained advocates and volunteer attorneys help families understand their

rights, prepare for hearings, and navigate complex school systems.

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

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



The poster for the 19th Annual Youth and the Law Summit 2026 features a blue and orange color scheme. On the left, there is a graphic of a stack of books. On the right, there is a statue of Lady Justice holding scales. The text on the poster includes the title "19th Annual YOUTH AND THE LAW SUMMIT 2026", a quote "Knowledge is Power, Self-Knowledge is the Super Power", and the event details: "SAVE THE DATE", "DATE/TIME: APRIL 18, 2026, 8:30 AM – 2:00 PM", and "LOCATION: STATE BAR OF GEORGIA 3RD FLOOR CONFERENCE CENTER 104 MARIETTA STREET NW ATLANTA, GA 30303".

19th Annual Youth and the Law Summit

When: April 18, 2026, from 8:30 am to 2:00 pm

Where: State Bar of Georgia

What: Judge Renata Turner and the Fulton County Juvenile Court are hosting the 19th Annual Youth and the Law Summit. They typically host an audience of around 200 people, including youth, their parents, guests, and speakers who share a positive message to encourage youth in their future endeavors. The youth who attend are sometimes court-involved or participating in a program sponsored by Fulton County Juvenile Court or other agencies affiliated with the court. If you have any questions, please get in touch with Faye Payne at faye.payne@fultoncountygga.gov.



Southern Youth Defender Center Regional Summit

When: June 5-6, 2026

Where: Emory University

What: A conference focused on equipping youth defenders and justice policy advocates with the skills necessary to advocate for youth in delinquency cases and to provide community support for youth defenders. For more information, please reach out to CPAS Treasurer/Clinical Professor of Law/Director, Juvenile Defender Clinic at Emory University School of Law at rwaldm2@emory.edu.



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

When: July 19-22, 2026

Where: Nashville, TN

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



Child Protection and Advocacy Section Scholarships

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

Accessing Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Policies

Child Welfare: The public can access all Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) policies by navigating to PAMMS (formerly ODIS): [DFCS Policies](#). Other Department of Human Services' policies can be located at [PAMMS - Policy and Manual Management System](#).

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

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

Child Protection and Welfare-Related Reports

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

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

[2025 Voices for Georgia's Children: Whole Child Primer 4th Ed.](#) Thorough report including a variety of data, demographic information, and recommendations related to Georgia children and families.

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

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



Section Executive Committee

Officers

Jill Roth, Chair
jill.roth@cobbcounty.gov

Anissa Patton, Vice Chair
anissa.patton@fultoncountyga.gov

Danielle Simpson, Secretary
danielle@gateenlaw.com

Randee Waldman, Treasurer
rwaldm2@emory.edu

Laurie Thomas Williams, Immediate Past Chair
lmthomaslaw@gmail.com

Members-at-Large

Tonya Boga
tonyab.esq@gmail.com

Hon. Stephanie Burton
sburton@eighthdistrict.org

Ira Foster
lfoster.macon@glsp.org

Leslie Gresham
greshamlawgroup@gmail.com

Chris Hempfling
Hempfling.3@gmail.com

Afiya Hinkson
afiya@thehinksonfirm.com

Quintin Lewis
quintin.lewis@fultoncountyga.gov

Beth Morris
bmorris@hhhlawyers.com

Anissa Patton
anissa.patton@fultoncountyga.gov

Danielle Simpson
dsimpson@truancyproject.org

Stacey Suber-Drake
sdrake@doe.k12.ga.us

Elizabeth Bradley Turner
elizabeth@gafcp.org

Michelle Vereen
michelle.vereen@gwinnettcounty.com

R. Michael Waller
mwaller@gaappleseed.org

Cindy Wang
cindy.wang@djj.state.ga.us

2025 - 2026 Executive Committee Judicial District Representatives

Vacant	1	Eastern, Ogeechee, Atlantic, Brunswick, Waycross
<u>Michael Waller</u>	2	Pataula, Dougherty, South Georgia, Tifton, Southern, Alapaha
Vacant	3	Chattahoochee, Macon, Houston, Southwestern
<u>Laurie Thomas Williams</u>	4	Stone Mountain, Rockdale
<u>Afiya Hinkson</u>	5	Atlanta (Fulton)

<u>Anissa Patton</u>	6	Coweta, Griffin, Towaliga, Flint, Clayton
<u>Jill Roth</u>	7	Douglas, Cobb, Paulding, Tallapoosa, Rome, Cherokee, Lookout Mtn, Conasauga
<u>Hon. Stephanie Burton</u>	8	Ocmulgee, Dublin, Middle, Oconee, Cordele
<u>Michelle Vereen</u>	9	Appalachian, Enotah, Mountain, Northeastern, Gwinnett, Bell-Forsyth, Blue Ridge
Vacant	10	Toombs, Augusta

If you are a CPAS member living in District 3 or 10 and interested in becoming a District representative, please reach out to [Jill Roth](#).