

The NACC envisions a justice system that protects the rights of children by ensuring their voices are heard through the assistance of well-trained, well-resourced, independent lawyers.

How Attorneys and Judges Help Strengthen Families

by Jerry Milner and David Kelly



Associate Commissioner
Milner

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to join a group of legal and judicial experts to participate in the Children's Bureau's first ever Court Improvement Program (CIP) Talks event. I hope many of you viewed it live or have taken a look at the recording. It was a real pleasure to get to

know the other presenters; each and every talk drove home the importance of the roles that judges and attorneys – for parents, children, and the child welfare agency – play in strengthening families. Although I entered my role in federal government with a deep appreciation of how important the legal and judicial community is to a well-functioning child welfare system, the CIP Talks experience and the messages delivered that day strengthen my conviction even more.

It is clear to me that outcomes for children and families simply will not improve without active

lawyering and truly informed judicial decision-making. Ensuring that the voices of parents and children are heard at all times, pre-, during and post-hearings and reviews has clear benefits for all involved. Those benefits include a more complete understanding of family strengths, needs, and resources; increased levels of engagement by parents, children and youth; and greater depth and breadth of useful information on which a judge may base her decision. To be clear, each of these benefits directly and positively affects the child welfare agency.

The work that attorneys do helps identify resources such as kinship or respite placements; it helps identify services and supports that parents actually need and may be more likely to benefit from; can help reduce the likelihood that removal is necessary; and reduce the time that a child spends in out-of-home placement. These were goals that I sought to achieve as a former child welfare agency director, as a consultant working to help states improve outcomes for children and families, and those for which I will do everything I can to support from

the federal level. This commitment is reflected in and supported by the President's proposed budget.

In hearing the messages delivered during the CIP Talks from Carlyn Hicks, Don Duquette, →

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David P. Kelly, JD, MA, is Special Assistant to Commissioner Milner and oversees the Children's Bureau work with courts and the legal community, including the State and Tribal Court Improvement Programs, and other efforts to build state and tribal court capacity and improve legal representation.

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Judge Michael Nash, Chief Judge Carrie Garrow, Melissa Carter and all others, there were unifying themes that leapt out to me. Chief among the themes was that we cannot forget the “human” in “human services” – we must be humane, and the



Special Assistant Kelly

It’s time for child welfare attorneys to recognize explicitly that we should be working toward the same outcome in the overwhelming majority of cases. We know that most children should remain in or return to their homes. The law requires that we make

reasonable efforts to prevent removal and research demonstrates the importance of keeping children with parents and relatives; basic justice demands it.

The Children’s Bureau is rolling out a vision to reshape child welfare in the Unites States to prevent child maltreatment and reduce the unnecessary removal of children from their homes. Child welfare data tell us that some children enter care for very short periods of time, sometimes a month or less. Data also tell us that many families are reunified after approximately a year of separation. In the former cases, attorneys and judges should be questioning whether removal is truly necessary, in the latter we should be asking why, specifically, a return home sooner is not possible.

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approaches we take and how we treat children and families matters. We must respect personal agency, we must respect the integrity of the parent-child relationship, and we must not forget that the parents and children we serve are likely facing some of the most difficult moments of their lives.

As attorneys, it’s critical that we recognize that what we do in the space before and between hearings is pivotal – engagement with our clients cannot be episodic and restricted to preparation for and participation in hearings. How we go about our work makes a difference. Let’s give our clients the same level of respect and attention a high-paying private client would receive from a prestigious law firm. Let’s ask our clients what they would like to achieve, what is important to them, what would be helpful, and how they’d like to get there. Let’s be proactive, and let’s agree to work with urgent civility. Strong advocacy need not be adversarial when we stay connected to our common charge.

Attorneys and judges can have a profound impact on preventing maltreatment and reducing unnecessary removals, and can do so with a simple change of approach. Every conversation we have out of court and every opportunity we have to speak on the record is a chance to keep a family together or reunite them sooner. Let’s recommit to asking if removal is truly necessary in the first place – and what we can do to ameliorate safety concerns; let’s recommit to making sure kinship placement is always the placement of first resort and aggres-

As a social worker these are principles that were woven into my education and professional training. I was struck by just how similar and powerful principle-driven legal representation can be, and I thank all who may read this for your commitment to the work.

sively pursuing kinship care; let’s commit to paying well-being the attention it deserves no matter what the circumstances or how inconvenient it may be to the professionals in the room.

The CIP Talks that were mentioned at the opening of this article are a reminder of just how common our commitments are and a call to action we can answer today. ■

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NACC Commences Strategic Planning

by Kim Dvorchak, JD, NACC Executive Director

As NACC commemorates its 40th anniversary as a nonprofit organization, our board and staff are actively planning NACC's future. With the generous support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, NACC commenced strategic planning in partnership with Community Wealth Partners, a consulting firm based in Washington, DC. NACC's last five-year Strategic Plan concluded in 2017. We are grateful for Casey's support and the expertise of Community Wealth Partners as we embark on this critically important and exciting endeavor.

NACC's Board of Directors formed a Strategic Planning Committee, chaired by Bob Schwartz, to lead the discussion of setting goals and setting a clear strategic direction for the organization. The process has been and will continue to be informed by member surveys, focus groups, staff, external interviews, and market research to better understand NACC's strengths, the unique value NACC offers to our members and to the field, and strategic opportunities over the next three to five years.

As the strategic planning process continues we look forward to engaging NACC members as well as the Child Welfare Law Specialist community. We thank those of you who participated in last summer's survey. We will seek your additional participation in the surveys to be distributed this spring. Your insights and ideas are invaluable as NACC assesses how we can best advance our mission and vision to strengthen legal advocacy for children and families.

NACC anticipates completing strategic planning this summer, and we look forward to sharing the results with you. In the meantime, if you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me at Kim.Dvorchak@NACCchildlaw.org. ■



Policy Update

- NACC recently signed on to an amicus brief in a case before the Washington Supreme Court, In re: the Dependency of S.K.-P, arguing that children have a presumptive right to counsel in all dependency proceedings. On March 20, 2018 the Washington Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the case. Those arguments are archived and available [here](#).
- The NACC policy department is working with the Annie E. Casey Foundation involving its "Every Kid Needs a Family" initiative. Last year, NACC partnered with the ABA to create an attorney advocacy tool to assist attorneys in understanding and making arguments to ensure that children are placed in family settings as opposed to congregate care. As the second part of this initiative, NACC is creating a pilot workgroup of 10-12 Child Welfare Law Specialist (CWLS) attorneys to use the toolkit in court hearings and to meet monthly via video or phone conference, to discuss the use of the toolkit. If you are interested in being a part of this pilot workgroup, please review the [toolkit](#) and send us a cover letter explaining your interest as well as your resume. Applications will be accepted through April 2018 and the workgroup will convene in late May or early June 2018. Materials should be addressed to Brooke.Silverthorn@naccchildlaw.org.
- NACC is also working on several proposals to engage in policy related initiatives in partnership with other organizations. If you are interested in collaborating with NACC on a policy initiative, or if you would like NACC to support your local efforts, please reach out to Brooke Silverthorn, Director of Legal and Policy Advocacy at Brooke.Silverthorn@naccchildlaw.org. NACC is interested in a range of issues related to child welfare and juvenile justice. To learn more about NACC's policy priorities, check out NACC's policy agenda. ■



The top leaders in child welfare, juvenile justice, and family law are coming to San Antonio!

Join the national community of multidisciplinary advocates working to make this country a better place for children, youth, and families at the 41st National Child Welfare, Juvenile Justice, and Family Law Conference, August 23-25, 2018, at the San Antonio Marriott Rivercenter.

NACC is Thrilled to Announce This Year's Keynote Speakers



Jerry Milner, D.S.W., is the Associate Commissioner at the Children's Bureau, and the Acting Commissioner for the Administration on Children, Youth and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and will be the opening keynote speaker.



Sixto Cancel, founder and CEO of Think of Us, will be the keynote speaker at NACC's Annual Luncheon.

Advance Conference Agenda

In addition to these incredible keynote speakers, [click here](#) to see the Advance Conference Agenda detailing the faculty and presentations at this year's conference. The full brochure will be released later this spring.

Room Block

The hotel room block at the San Antonio Marriott Rivercenter is open. [Book online here](#) or call (210) 223-1000.



Remember to SAVE THE DATE

TX SAN ANTONIO TX

41st NATIONAL CHILD WELFARE, JUVENILE & FAMILY LAW CONFERENCE



EARLY REGISTRATION ENDS SOON!

Register before April 30, 2018 and save \$100!

NACC's 41st national conference will be held **August 23-25, 2018** at [San Antonio Marriott Rivercenter](#). Additionally, a full-day pre-conference Red Book Training will be held on **August 22, 2018**. The full conference brochure will be available in April 2018. Our conference and pre-conference are typically approved for CLE in all jurisdictions.

MORE INFORMATION:

www.NACCchildlaw.org/Conference
Conference@NACCchildlaw.org

Click to [REGISTER NOW](#)

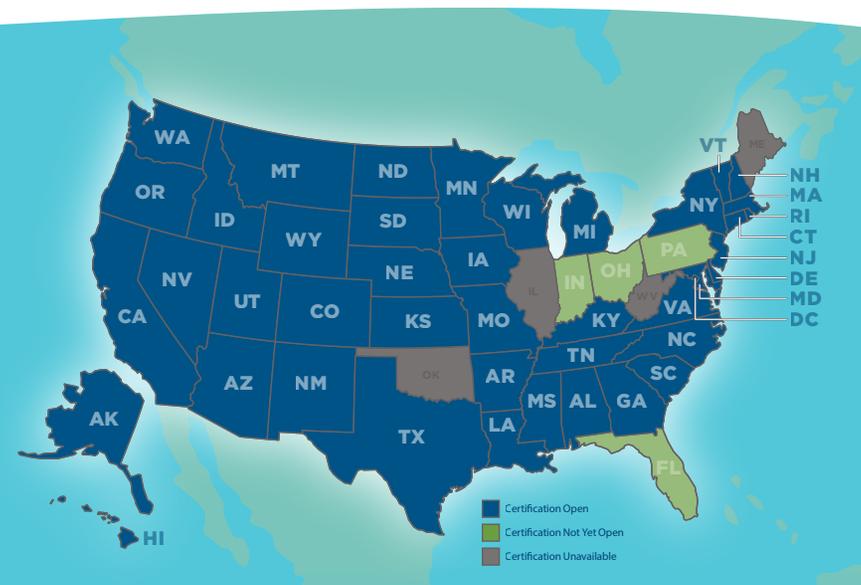
We are looking forward to yet another engaging and dynamic conference!



Child Welfare Law Specialist Certification



by Daniel Trujillo,
Certification Director



Congratulations to these new CWLS!

Carolyn Altman, JD, CWLS Altman Law Firm	Douglasville, GA
Tamalani Barnett, JD, CWLS RaisingHOPE, Inc.	Thousand Oaks, CA
Steven Bass, JD, CWLS San Bernardino County, Office of the County Counsel	San Bernardino, CA
Amanda Calogero, JD, CWLS Jefferson Parish District Attorney's Office	Harvey, LA
Anastasia Cowan, JD, CWLS Arnold and Smith, PLLC	Charlotte, NC
Carlyn Hicks, JD, CWLS Mission First Legal Aid Office	Jackson, MS
Leslie Jones, JD, CWLS Leslie L. Jones, Attorney at Law	Corrales, NM
Meghann Mills, JD, CWLS Utah Office of the Guardian ad Litem and CASA	Salt Lake City, UT
Alice Montestruc, JD, CWLS Mental Health Advocacy Service – Child Advocacy Program	Baton Rouge, LA
Frank Ruiz, JD, CWLS County of Kings, Office of the County Counsel	Hanford, CA
Joseph Seyler, JD, CWLS Mental Health Advocacy Service – Child Advocacy Program	Shreveport, LA

CWLS Application Fee Discount for NACC Members!

Attention, NACC members! If you've been thinking about becoming a certified Child Welfare Law Specialist, now is the time! NACC members who submit their CWLS application and fee during the month of April get an additional discount off the already-reduced application fee. Instead of the current \$350 application fee, NACC members can apply for only \$300! This application fee includes all exam costs as well as a copy of *Child Welfare Law and Practice, 3rd Edition* (the Red Book).

Please visit our website to [download the application](#) and then make your application payment online. Don't forget to use Discount Code **18CWLSMEMB** when checking out!

2018 CWLS Exam Season Now Open – Introducing Remote Proctoring!

The 2018 CWLS exam is now available. CWLS applicants who wish to take the exam in 2018 are able to self-schedule any time between now and mid-December. All exams can be taken from the comfort of your own home and will be remotely

proctored via webcam by our partner, Examity. NACC is sending additional information and specific instructions to current CWLS applicants by email.

General exam information and resources can be found [on our website](#).

CWLS Recertification and Early-Bird Rate

If you were originally certified as a CWLS in 2008 or 2013, then it's time to recertify! Recertification is necessary once every five years in order to maintain your specialist credential. The process is similar to the initial application, minus the exam and writing sample. CWLS who are due for recertification in 2018 will be notified via email.

Early birds who submit their recertification application and fee between April 1st and May 31st can get the early-bird rate of \$200 rather than the standard \$300 fee of submissions on or after June 1st. Please visit the [recertification page](#) on →



So long, Sara! We will miss you!



After ten years with NACC, our own Sara Whalen will soon be moving on to new adventures, having earned her master's degree in early childhood education. Sara has worn many hats at NACC over the past decade including membership director, conference

co-director, human resources expert, accounting liaison, training coordinator, graphic design guru, organizer extraordinaire, interior decorator, Snickers supplier, and horticulturist – all the office plants would be dead if it weren't for her. And that doesn't even cover everything – she's also a fabulous mom, a photographer, a roller derby queen, a practical joker, and a collector of traditional witches' brooms. You don't run across a Sara Whalen every day.

Sara has been with NACC through so many changes over the years. This particular change will be a sad one in many ways but joyful in others. We will miss Sara's work ethic and talents, but also her unique style, humor, patience, dedication, perseverance, and affirmative attitude. However, we know that she will bring these qualities to her new career and have a lasting, positive impact on the world of early childhood education, just as she has here at NACC. For that, we are happy.

Sara always leaves things better (and cleaner!) than when she found them, and NACC is lucky to have found Sara ten years ago.

We wish you the best of luck, Sara!

– *The NACC Team*

If you'd like to send her your well-wishes personally, email her soon at Sara.Whalen@NACCchildlaw.org.



Welcome Meryl!



Please join us in welcoming NACC's new Business & Operations Manager Meryl Ilove. Meryl brings decades of administrative experience in membership, community based programs, special events, and more! Meryl received her BA from Cornell University and her JD from the University of Pennsylvania Law School. She will be taking over the administrative side of Membership, supporting Conference, and managing NACC's office operations. You can reach Meryl at Meryl.Ilove@NACCchildlaw.org.

Child Welfare Law Specialist Certification, continued

our website to download recertification materials. The \$200 rate will be valid through May 31st and can be [paid online here](#).

Annual CWLS Disclosure of Conduct Report and Fee

Your 2018 annual CWLS Disclosure of Conduct report and \$120 fee can now be submitted online through NACC's quick-file process. Simply answer the three conduct questions and submit payment, and you'll be all set for

the year! If you were certified or recertified in 2018, or are currently in the process of recertification, you do not owe an annual report or fee for 2018.

Submit your report and fee by "[registering](#)" for the 2018 CWLS Annual Report "event" on NACC's website. Reminders will be sent periodically throughout the rest of the year until you've completed it, so the sooner you submit it, the fewer annoying messages you'll get!

CWLS Expertise Needed!

Learn about a CWLS-only opportunity to help NACC pilot an attorney toolkit for reducing reliance on non-family placements. Visit the [Policy Update](#) section of this issue.



Need Help? Forgot your username or password? It happens! Contact Membership@NACCchildlaw.org and we'll help you personally.



Membership Matters

by Sara Whalen, MA, NACC Membership Director



NACC's 40th Anniversary Celebration Continues!

NACC is offering all Bronze, Silver, and Gold members the opportunity to renew or extend your membership for one year at a 40% discount. Whether your membership expires this month or next year, we will add 12 months of membership when you renew during our 40 for 40 Celebration!

This is also a great time for members to elevate their membership level to Silver or Gold and receive the 3rd edition of [NACC's Child Welfare Law and Practice \(aka The Red Book\)](#)! Silver members receive a soft cover copy (regularly \$79 for members), and Gold members receive a hard cover copy (regularly \$119 for members).

Renew/extend/upgrade your membership now!

This spring, NACC is offering the **Silver Spring Special** at 50% off regular pricing. For \$100 you can receive a Silver Membership and a soft cover copy of the Red Book. Use code [SSS2018](#) during [online checkout](#) or download the [PDF form](#) and return via mail. For Bronze Memberships use code [NACC40](#).

Georgia Practitioners

NACC is pleased to announce a renewed partnership with the Georgia Association of Counsel for Children (GACC). For \$75 you can join both GACC and NACC. Use code [GACCBRONZE](#) at [checkout](#).

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NACC Mission

As a multidisciplinary membership organization, we work to strengthen legal advocacy for children and families by:

- Ensuring that children and families are provided with well resourced, high quality legal advocates when their rights are at stake
- Implementing best practices by providing certification, training, education, and technical assistance to promote specialized high quality legal advocacy
- Advancing systemic improvement in child-serving agencies, institutions and court systems
- Promoting a safe and nurturing childhood through legal and policy advocacy for the rights and interests of children and families

