

Remarks presented by David P. Kelly upon accepting NACC's Distinguished Achievement Award, August 27, 2019, at NACC's 42nd National Child Welfare Law Conference in Anaheim, CA

Thank you, Kim for the kind words and thank you to the board. This is an incredible honor and I am deeply humbled and appreciative.

I am uncomfortable with personal recognition so I will proceed to immediately make this not about me.

I have no discomfort with the podium---so as long as I'm here I'd like to share a few thoughts and offer an invitation.

In the short time I stand here, several children will be removed from their homes and families.

Data tell us the children will be from poor families and disproportionately families of color.

I am not confident that reasonable efforts or active efforts will be made to prevent those removals.

I am not confident that poverty will not be confused for neglect.

AND

I am not confident that implicit or even explicit biases will not play a role.

Unfortunately, I am very confident that the removals will cause trauma to those children, their parents and their families, and that trauma may last a lifetime.

Child Welfare exists in the space where poverty, public health and civil rights collide----it is time to recognize that explicitly.

We have a longstanding problem in our child welfare system and society at large of not valuing vulnerable populations, poor families and families of color.

If this makes anyone in the room uncomfortable, good.

Sit with it. It should make us all uncomfortable.

We see this play out in the outcomes we achieve year after year, plain as day.

The good news is we can change that and groups like NACC and each of us in our individual capacities can lead the charge.

There has **never** been a better time to get on the right side of justice in child welfare.

I have a direct message for those who are equivocal or agnostic on the importance of high-quality legal representation for children and parents.

I have a direct message for those who believe that it is acceptable for a child to have either an attorney or a lay volunteer to guide them through the most consequential legal decisions of their lives.

The message is also for those who believe that parents' rights are somehow in competition with the best interest of children as opposed to an assurance of it.

It's time to get on the right side of justice.

It's time to get on the right side of history.

We will soon look back at the child welfare system as we know it and be astounded by what we have done to children, families and communities.

We will be astounded that we were not more attentive to what families need to stay well and safely together.

We will be astounded that there was a time that all parents and all children did not have an absolute right to high quality legal representation----**AND**,

there will be no moral ambiguity about the errors of our ways.

My hope for everyone is that you leave here inspired, energized and more committed than ever to doing right by children and families.

I leave here feeling grateful and inspired by what you do and what we will make possible together.

Thank you.