

BETTER COURTS
FOR KIDS AND FAMILIES
THROUGH JUDICIAL LEADERSHIP



Children's
Commission

SUPREME COURT OF TEXAS PERMANENT JUDICIAL
COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

2009 ANNUAL REPORT
TO THE SUPREME COURT

SUPREME
COURT OF
TEXAS



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JUSTICE HARRIET O'NEILL
JUSTICE DALE WAINWRIGHT
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State Representative, District 35
Texas House of Representatives

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The Honorable Jeff Wentworth
State Senator, 25th District
Texas Senate



OUR MISSION:

STRENGTHEN
COURTS FOR
CHILDREN, YOUTH
AND FAMILIES IN THE
CHILD-PROTECTION
SYSTEM AND THEREBY
IMPROVE THE SAFETY,
PERMANENCY, AND
WELL-BEING OF
CHILDREN.



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CHILDREN'S COMMISSION TIMELINE

2004



PEW COMMISSION ON CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE RELEASES REPORT WITH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COURTS

- ▶ Adopt court performance measures to track and analyze caseloads and increase accountability for improved outcomes.
- ▶ Collaborate effectively with state agency to improve outcomes.
- ▶ Children and parents should have a strong, direct voice in court and effective legal representation.
- ▶ Highest state judicial leadership needed to organize courts, provide training, and promote more effective standards.

2005



FIRST NATIONAL JUDICIAL LEADERSHIP SUMMIT FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN HELD

- ▶ States send teams of high-level representatives of judiciary and child-welfare agency.
- ▶ Chief Justice Wallace Jefferson and Justice Harriet O'Neill attend.

2006



TASK FORCE CREATED TO STUDY NEED FOR STATEWIDE COMMISSION

- ▶ Team of experts holds strategic planning meetings and submits report to Supreme Court recommending Commission's creation and structure.
- ▶ Task Force recommends hiring an executive director to oversee the transition from the Task Force on Foster Care, created in 1993, to the Children's Commission.

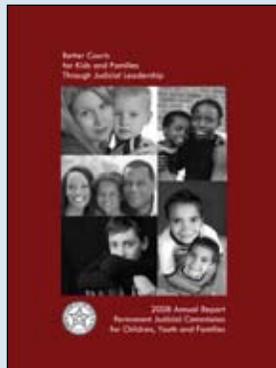
2007



SUPREME COURT OF TEXAS
CREATES CHILDREN'S
COMMISSION

- ▶ During a public hearing held by Supreme Court, overwhelming support for creation of Children's Commission is expressed.
- ▶ The Supreme Court of Texas signs the order creating the Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families.

2008



CHILDREN'S COMMISSION
BEGINS FIRST YEAR

- ▶ Administers \$2 million in federal court improvement program (CIP) grant funds.
- ▶ Establishes infrastructure, policies and procedures.
- ▶ Creates new opportunities for collaboration.
- ▶ Initiates new projects.

2009



CHILDREN'S COMMISSION IS
RECOGNIZED AS LEADER

- ▶ Increases collaboration opportunities.
- ▶ Significantly strengthens training for judges and attorneys.
- ▶ Serves as expert resource for legislature.
- ▶ Hosts National Judicial Leadership Summit on the Protection of Children.



Guests begin arriving at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum for the Summit's dinner event.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

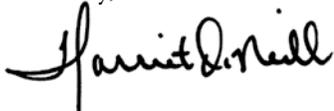
The 21st century has been described as the “age of collaboration.” For most, the concept of collaboration brings to mind technological advances in media sharing, social networking and twittering. In this sense, collaboration is little more than a means of communication. But true collaboration occurs when, as Wikipedia describes it, people or organizations work together in an intersection of common goals by sharing knowledge, learning, and building consensus. This is the type of collaboration the Children’s Commission has fostered since its creation two years ago. As you can see from this report, we have earned high returns on our collaborative investment.

Texas is the legal conservator of over 25,000 children on any given day. Over 500 judges have jurisdiction to hear child protection cases in 254 counties across a staggering diversity of institutional arrangements, legal cultures, and political climates. These judges hold approximately 90,000 child protection hearings each year. With Texas’ decentralized and often complex court structure, effective collaboration is critical to positive outcomes for children and families. By pooling knowledge across disciplines, tapping into synergies among stakeholders, and facilitating communication among the broad array of participants in the child protection system, the Commission has managed to leverage scarce resources to maximum effect. Over the course of 2009, numerous committee or workgroup meetings and conference calls were held with over 100 individual stakeholders attending — a total of 855 collaborative hours attributed to the Commission’s endeavors. From improving oversight of children caught up in both the Child Protective Services (CPS) and Texas Youth Commission (TYC) systems, to strategizing solutions for kids stuck in long-term foster care, from facilitating candid discussions between the judiciary and the child welfare agency in judicial education programs, to developing cutting-edge technology for case management, from creating an interactive bench book for child protection judges, to enhancing the quality of legal representation through attorney training, from implementing a Jurist in Residence monthly newsletter to child protection courts, to launching a comprehensive study of the attorney appointment system, it has been a productive year and effective collaboration has been the transformative element.

The key to any successful collaboration is leadership. The Supreme Court of Texas, as head of the judicial branch of government, is committed to leading the way by ensuring accountability, convening the necessary stakeholders to work toward innovative solutions, and raising awareness of child protection issues at state and local levels. The members of our Commission, and those who serve on our Collaborative Council and committees, are proven leaders in their fields who work hard to advance the Commission’s goals in their communities and across the state. And our dedicated staff, under the skilled direction of Tina Amberboy, is recognized nationwide as “the dream team” for effecting court improvement in child abuse and neglect cases.

As we assess our progress over the past two years, and look forward to the challenges ahead, let us never lose sight of the object of our efforts — safe, stable and permanent homes for children who have suffered abuse or neglect, because strong families pass on the tools for success to the next generation. It is my hope that every child who successfully transitions into responsible adulthood will carry this legacy, and pass it on.

Sincerely,



Justice Harriet O’Neill, *Chair*



“THE KEY
TO ANY
SUCCESSFUL
COLLABORATION IS
LEADERSHIP.”

SYSTEMS REFORM

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT



“...REFORM
STARTS AT THE
GRASSROOTS
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OWN.”

Looking back over the past two years, it is evident that the Texas child welfare system is transforming. Much of the reform spurred by Children’s Commission efforts starts at the grassroots level, where ideas take on a life of their own through discussion that leads to action. As one veteran attorney and respected critic of the child protection and legal system said, “the Commission has been a catalyst energizing diverse perspectives to effectuate change for kids.” To the surprise of some, it has not turned out to be an apologist for the system, but truly an avenue for hope and reform — bringing with it a sense that Texas can change outcomes for kids and parents.

A recent project begun to improve the legal representation of youth involved in the CPS and TYC systems bloomed from a discussion held some months ago at a commission meeting. One collaborative council member brought the plight of these youth — often lost between two huge systems — to the attention of the commission. Within weeks, a workgroup was formed to study the issue. Casey Family Programs, at the request of Carolyn Rodriguez, a commission member, conducted a national review of practices involving these youth. A legislative initiative ensued, resulting in changes to the Texas Family Code requiring greater judicial oversight of these youth. Finally, private foundation funding was secured to provide legal representation specifically for these youth, by attorneys who understand how to advocate in both the CPS and TYC systems.

Discussion of the unique challenges faced by youth exiting long-term foster care birthed a study currently underway and expected to yield policy recommendations by the summer of 2010. This study, spearheaded by Texas Appleseed, has brought together legal advocates, the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), members of the Texas judiciary, the Commission’s Collaborative Council, and others to look at what happens to youth who enter long-term foster care and to make recommendations to improve their outcomes. Scores of people tied to the child protection system — judges, lawyers, DFPS, CASA, foster youth, and parents — were interviewed, bringing a multi-dimensional look at the system.

Training opportunities are changing legal and judicial practices through free or low-cost quality education. In 2009, the Texas Center for the Judiciary (TCJ) invited top DFPS leaders to the CPS Judicial Conference for the first time, including Commissioner Anne Heiligenstein, Deputy Commissioner Joyce James, Assistant Commissioner for CPS Audrey Deckinga, and General Counsel Gerry Williams. The DFPS leaders were invited to present during one session, but made time to stay for the entire conference. TCJ received excellent evaluations from both the judiciary and the child welfare agency for its innovative idea of bringing the judiciary responsible for these cases and the child welfare executives together in a structured setting that allowed each to speak openly to the other about the problems they faced on the bench and in the field.

State-of-the-art case management software is here. It is starting out on a small scale in Texas’ rural counties, but the future holds much promise as the Commission works to develop strategies to make this incredible case management system available free of charge to any county, large or small, that wants it.

A web-based, interactive bench book for judges handling child protection cases will be unveiled in 2010 with access to statutes, case law, practice guidelines, and resource articles.

Two public defender offices were launched in May 2009, and may change the future of legal representation for children and parents statewide.



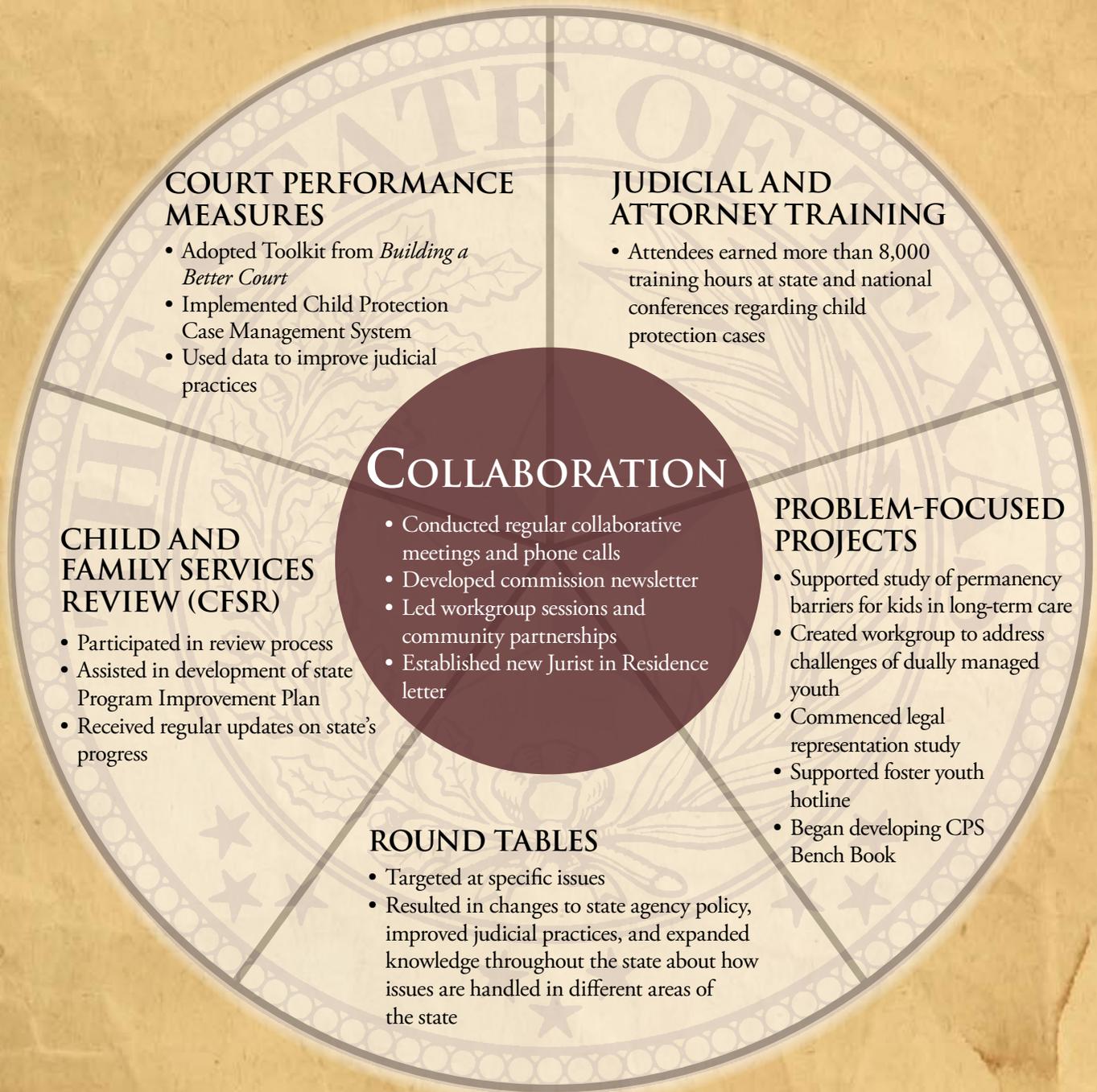
A Round Table on Mediation in CPS cases motivated one judge to return to his jurisdiction and reinstitute a mediation program, and the Commission has identified several promising practices regarding mediation that will be shared through yet another new communication tool called the Jurist in Residence (JIR) Letter. The JIR letter is a monthly communication sent from Judge John Specia (ret.), Jurist in Residence for the Office of Court Administration (OCA) to all child protection judges in the state. The letter is intended to provide current and compelling information judges need for hearing CPS dockets.

Free, online tools such as “The Abuse and Neglect Case: A Practitioners Guide,” were made available to every attorney who attended Commission-sponsored training, and to any other practitioner seeking to improve his or her practice, and Texas Lawyers for Children, an online resource center funded with CIP dollars, boasts over 1,400 judges and attorneys as registered users who access the website over 70,000 times per month. Because quality legal representation is so critical in termination of parental rights cases, the Commission launched a year-long study on the state of legal representation of parents and children in Texas CPS cases. A full report with recommendations will be published in 2010 with the hope of transforming and improving the appointment system.

Reform can be seen in other areas as well. In May 2010, the Commission will again partner with the Texas Center for the Judiciary and host an unprecedented judicial conference on implicit bias in judicial decision-making to help judges recognize judicial practices that may be leading to or contributing to the disproportionate representation of African-American families in Texas’ child protection system.

Sometimes, a phone call was all it took to bring together diverse interests and create a meeting of the minds. Other times, an issue was identified and a project launched to research, analyze, and make changes. Over time, new faces, voices, and disciplines have been added to the Commission’s membership, committees, collaborative council, and workgroups, expanding the scope and reach of the commission’s work to transform our judiciary, our child welfare system, and outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Tina Amberboy, *Executive Director*



“THE COLLABORATION ...
HAS MOVED STATEWIDE PRACTICE
FARTHER THAN IT HAS EVER BEEN.”

COLLABORATION

The Supreme Court order creating the Children’s Commission charged it with institutionalizing a collaborative model for systemic improvement that will continue beyond the tenure of any individual Commission member. The Court insisted on collaboration because in recent years it has become more than just some improbable ideal, thanks in part to the 2004 Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care report *Fostering the Future*, which found that collaboration is necessary to bring about true reform, and because of federal grant standards that require proof of collaboration as a condition of funding.

Collaboration is not an easy task considering the barriers to meaningful communication between child protection agencies and the judiciary outside the adversarial confines of a courtroom.

According to Senior District Judge John Specia, whose experience in child protection dates back to the 1970s, collaboration among the child protection system and the judiciary virtually did not exist until recently. Although jurisdictions often engaged in promising practices, it was rare that great ideas were disseminated to other jurisdictions for their implementation. “Everybody just did their own thing and went about it in their own way,” Judge Specia said.

The idea that life chances of children and their families might depend on the accidental emergence of a good plan without any collaboration is objectionable to all who care about the vulnerable children and families in Texas’ child protection system. While purposeful and well thought-out plans are often developed, it does not mean that Texas cannot improve collaboration to ensure that the families are better served.

Following the Supreme Court’s directive, Children’s Commission staff made collaboration a priority and developed strong lines of communication among CPS, the judiciary, and other stakeholders in May 2007, which now is paying off in concrete ways, according to Tina Amberboy, Commission Executive Director. “Frequent discussion between stakeholders promotes the kind of openness and trust that make problem solving easier,” Ms. Amberboy said. “And issue-specific committees accomplish more when they’re composed of key system players who are open, engaged and unafraid to tackle hard problems as a team.”

Historically, partnerships have developed at the local or regional level, but less so at the state level, according to Anne Heiligenstein, Commissioner of DFPS. “The Children’s Commission brings the statewide partnership needed and the shared understanding of individual strengths and limitations due to our different roles has been invaluable.”

“The collaboration is now so cohesive that state CPS leadership talks weekly on the phone with Commission representatives and key partners to work closely and regularly on all kinds of issues,” Commissioner Heiligenstein said. “It has moved statewide practice farther than it has ever been and that directly impacts child safety and permanency and child and family well-being.”

Because this new cooperative attitude has started and flourished at the highest levels, it has a better chance of outliving those who initiated it, according to Judge Specia. “When leaders model a behavior, their organizations will follow that lead, and eventually an attitude of cooperation will spread to the local level and become the accepted way to work.”

“There’s been nothing like it before,” Judge Specia said. “It’s exciting to see and to be a part of it, and to consider the potential impact this kind of partnering can make on our state child welfare system.”

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THAT LEAD.”

— JOHN SPECIA,
SENIOR DISTRICT JUDGE,
AND JURIST IN RESIDENCE,
OFFICE OF COURT
ADMINISTRATION

TRAINING

60

Number of training events sponsored with CIP funds.

2,475

Number of judges and attorneys trained by at least one project.

9,962

Number of training hours earned by attorney and judges who attended one or more projects.

Child abuse and neglect cases require the application of complicated federal and state statutes to complex and challenging family situations. Most child abuse and neglect cases involve some kind of substance abuse, mental health issue, inadequate life resources or skills, or poverty, and often a combination of more than one.

Good, relevant training has become even more valuable for the professionals who work with families, and is essential for improving outcomes of children and families in the child protection system. Promoting judicial leadership and improving the quality of legal representation are two of the Children's Commission strategies and about one-third of Texas' court improvement program (CIP) funds are dedicated to training efforts.

JUDICIAL TRAINING

Since 1973, the Texas Center for the Judiciary (TCJ) has offered high-quality continuing educational programs for judges and court support personnel. In 2009, with support from CIP funds, TCJ developed and hosted five training events and provided scholarships to two national conferences for 371 judicial officers or court personnel. The conferences included two Beyond the Bench Conferences, the CPS Judges Conference, the Associate Judges Conference, the National Conference of Juvenile Justice Judges, and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. Judges earned over 4,300 training hours at these conferences.

Program and participant evaluations and comments consistently reflected a high level of satisfaction (4.49 on a scale of 1 to 5), enhanced awareness, greater cross-disciplinary communication, and increased ability to make more informed decisions leading to better safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children and families.

TCJ's judicial training programs related to child protection cases increased access to cost-effective, specialized education for the judiciary and other stakeholders that satisfied continuing education requirements, increased attendees' awareness of pertinent issues, broadened the use of best practices, and promoted communication networks among judges and between judges and other stakeholders.

OCA also sponsored a two-day training for its Child Protection Court Judges at its Annual Child Protection Court Update held in October 2009, which trained 15 of these specialty court judges.

ATTORNEY TRAINING

Over the course of 2009, the Children's Commission sponsored 17 attorney trainings held by the National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC). There were 721 attendees at these trainings held throughout the state. To accompany the live training, commission staff coordinated the development and wrote a substantial portion of a comprehensive attorney manual that was provided free for all attendees of the NACC attorney trainings and was posted on the Commission website in December.



“VERY INTERESTING, AND GOOD
FOUNDATION FOR A FIELD THAT
WE TOO OFTEN IGNORE.”

— TEXARKANA ATTORNEY

Comments from attorneys who received free training:

“It covered a lot of important information. The material was very useful and will be a part of my review anytime I have questions about CPS procedure. The information for ad litem and CASA was helpful.” — *Amarillo attorney*

“It was extremely informative. I have been raving about it to the other attorneys in my county. It took the attorneys through the trial of a CPS case from the adversary hearings through the final hearings and beyond.” — *Beaumont attorney*

“The written material is superb and I have placed a copy on file with our law library for access to all the family [law] attorneys.” — *Houston attorney*

“Very interesting, and good foundation for a field that we too often ignore.”
— *Texarkana attorney*



“A NEW PRACTICE I PLAN TO IMPLEMENT IS ASKING THE JUDGES TO BRING THE CHILDREN TO COURT. ANOTHER IS TO SET UP MEDIATION EARLIER IN THE PROCESS.”

— GROESBECK ATTORNEY

Representation of parents in CPS cases also reached a new level of visibility in our state and at the Commission in 2009. To highlight that, several Texas attorneys appointed to represent parents in CPS cases were afforded scholarships to attend the American Bar Association Parents' Attorney Conference held in Washington, D.C., in May. Twenty-three attorneys from across Texas, representing urban, rural, border, and other areas, traveled to Washington, D.C., to hear from national speakers and network with peers and returned home with new skills and ideas.

"The conference exceeded my expectations. It was great to have the opportunity to discuss how the child welfare system works in other parts of the country and share practice advice for how to best represent parents whose children are in the system. I feel like I learned a lot both in terms of how to better handle the cases and ways the system/parent representation needs to improve. The scholarships make this possible by allowing more attorneys to attend who would otherwise be unable to do so given the cost."

— *Houston area attorney*

"A new practice I plan to implement is asking the judges to bring the children to court. Another is to set up mediation earlier in the process." — *Groesbeck attorney*

"But for the scholarship I would not have been able to attend. I am a small town solo practitioner but dealing with big city issues, drug addiction, criminal matters, mental health issues." — *Brenham attorney*

CIP Training Grant funds were also dedicated to the NACC to bring its annual Child Welfare Law Conference to Austin in October 2010. The NACC conference is in its 33rd year and is attended by hundreds of attorneys, judges, social workers, and other professionals from around the country. Texas is fortunate to host such a professional conference. CIP scholarships will be available to pay for registration fees for qualifying Texas attorneys.

Finally, with the Commission's support, Child Welfare Law Certification was recognized as a new legal specialty in Texas by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization in May 2009. Approximately 14 Texas attorneys will take the certification exam in Spring 2010.

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— BRENHAM ATTORNEY

TECHNOLOGY

“THE SYSTEM
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The sheer number of courts responsible for child protection cases, the manner in which these courts are funded, and Texas' large geographical size present real challenges in court improvement, especially in the area of technology. In its second year, the Commission took a major step to help courts acquire 21st-century technology. Texas OCA, with CIP funds and governance from the Commission's Technology Committee, developed a child protection case management system called CPCMS. OCA was guided in its technology efforts by national standards promoted by organizations such as the American Bar Association, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the National Center for State Courts, including a collaborative publication by those organizations — “Building A Better Court — Measuring and Improving Court Performance and Judicial Workload in Child Protection Courts,” based on the “Toolkit for Court Performance Measures in Child Protection Courts.”

This venture was guided by OCA's prior success in developing a functional requirements reference model that provided an authoritative set of requirements for the creation of CPCMS — a state-of-the-art specialty-court case management system that not only provides the useful information needed by judges handling child protection cases, but also gives courts the capability of tracking automatically, for the first time, many of the outcome measures that experts believe promote effective handling of cases.

Introduced in September to 17 child protection courts covering 131 counties across the state, the system allows judges to track different elements to measure safety, permanency, and well-being of children. For example, courts can use the data to identify issues such as whether children were safe while in foster care or whether their placements were stable. Being able to track how quickly a child moves toward permanency, whether that is through reunification with a parent, which is the priority, or through a permanent placement with a relative or other responsible adult, helps judges identify which judicial practices contribute best to timely permanency for children. It also enables judges to identify bottlenecks in the process so they can make changes where necessary.

One particularly innovative feature of CPCMS is a tool that allows judges to track medications prescribed to children on their docket. A CPCMS panel tracks prescribed medications for a child and follows the guidelines set by the Texas Department of State Health Services. Many dosage rules use the child's age, while others calculate the dosage based on the child's weight. The goal of the panel is to automatically alert the judge if the medication guidelines have been exceeded so a judge may request a review.

To further promote the adoption and utilization of the functional requirement reference model, the Children's Commission allocated grant funds to encourage vendors to implement the CPCMS model into their case management software products, and to encourage local jurisdictions to incorporate the CPCMS model into any case management systems they are planning to develop and implement for courts.

Other technology projects funded by CIP dollars in 2009 included the Judicial Web Page, which makes key data maintained by DFPS available to the judges who hear child protection cases. Additionally, OCA, with CIP funding, continues to engage in a partnership with the National Center for State Courts and a workgroup of state and national members to develop national data interchange standards. Their ultimate goal is to establish the proper framework so courts and the child protection agencies can exchange data directly, computer to computer.

CHILD

Enable Quick Link

Navigate: Cookie Bumstead - Child

[Relationships](#)

[Delete Person](#)

MEDICATIONS

Snapshot Date	Age Group	Weight	Review	Medication (Trade-Generic)	Category	Maximum Dosage	Dose (mg/day)	Warnings
02/01/2010	Child	45	<input type="checkbox"/>	Conoerta - Methylphenidate	ADHD	60.00	60.00	
				Abilify - Aripiprazole	Antipsychotic	15.00	15.00	
				Effexor - Venlafaxine	Antidepressant	60.75	60.00	

Note: Meds seem to be stabilizing behavior.

Snapshot Date	Age Group	Weight	Review	Medication (Trade-Generic)	Category	Maximum Dosage	Dose (mg/day)	Warnings
06/05/2009	Child	38	<input type="checkbox"/>	Conoerta - Methylphenidate	ADHD	60.00	60.00	
				Abilify - Aripiprazole	Antipsychotic	15.00	15.00	
				Effexor - Venlafaxine	Antidepressant	51.30	60.00	Overdose

Note: Ordered a review for a small overdose. Dr. has specifically approved and considers it necessary. 2 or more medications were added or removed.

Snapshot Date	Age Group	Weight	Review	Medication (Trade-Generic)	Category	Maximum Dosage	Dose (mg/day)	Warnings
01/23/2009	Child	32	<input type="checkbox"/>	Conoerta - Methylphenidate	ADHD	60.00	80.00	Overdose
				Abilify - Aripiprazole	Antipsychotic	15.00	15.00	Age is less than 4 years and prescribed antipsychotic(s)
				Desyrel - Trazodone	Antidepressant	300.00	200.00	Age is less than 4 years and prescribed antidepressant(s)

Note: Even though the child is young by DSHS guidelines, unusual case and Dr. believes the problems warrant the small risk.

[Save Medications](#) [Add Snapshot](#)

“BEING ABLE TO TRACK HOW QUICKLY A CHILD MOVES TOWARD PERMANENCY ... HELPS JUDGES IDENTIFY WHICH JUDICIAL PRACTICES CONTRIBUTE BEST TO TIMELY PERMANENCY FOR CHILDREN.”



SUMMIT III MANY THINGS CAN WAIT — A CHILD CANNOT

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Conference of Chief Justices

Conference of State Court
Administrators

National Center for State Courts

National Council of Juvenile
and Family Court Judges

Casey Family Programs

The Pew Charitable Trusts

American Public Human
Services Association

The Supreme Court of Texas

Texas courts and the Children's Commission proudly hosted the Third National Judicial Leadership Summit on the Protection of Children this past October 15-17, 2009, in Austin, which brought together state judges and child welfare leaders from around the country to devise ways to improve the child-protection system.

The theme of the Summit — “Many Things Can Wait — a Child Cannot” — aimed to build on the success of previous judicial summits and sustain the commitment of state leaders to view the child protection system through the eyes of a child. The conference theme was based on a poem called “His Name is Today,” by Nobel Prize-winning poet, Gabriella Mistral. It was chosen because it conveys a sense of urgency as well as the idea that a child's view of time is different from an adult's.

The Texas conference had the highest-ever summit attendance, with 48 states sending teams of state chief justices, child welfare directors, education directors and state court administrators.

In addition to attending workshops, state team members at each summit produced an improvement plan with concrete, measurable goals. After being inspired at the summit, each team committed to return home and implement the plan in their state. While education was the conference focus, other topics included engaging youth in and out of



court, the disproportionate representation of minority youth in foster care, and engaging relatives to care for youth.

The first summit held in Minneapolis in 2005 was a pioneering response to the 2004 report by the Pew Commission on Foster Care and a national call to action that pushed for a collaborative approach to decision making in child welfare cases. That first conference recognized the vital role courts play in child protection cases and urged judges to take a strong lead to improve court processes. It also stirred many participants to action, including Justice Harriet O’Neill, who began leading the effort for the creation of a Texas Children’s Commission almost immediately upon her return.

“For me, that first Summit was my ‘Aha’ moment, when it all came together for me,” Justice O’Neill said. “That’s when it hit me like a bolt of lightning — the impact child-protection courts have and the critical role CPS judges play.”

The Texas Summit concluded on a high note with dinner at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, where keynote speaker Margaret Spellings, former U.S. Secretary of Education, applauded those gathered for their dedication to vulnerable children. The Children’s Commission also unveiled its informational video and a well-known Austin country-swing band provided entertainment.



SUMMIT III — WHO'S WHO

1 Collaborative Council member Andrea Sparks, Director of Public Policy and Outreach for Texas CASA, Inc., with former foster youth and brother and sister, Mathew and Ashley Gallardo. Ms. Gallardo was in the Children's Commission video, which premiered at the Summit dinner.

2 Wallace B. Jefferson, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Texas, stands with Senior District Judge John Specia, who also serves as Jurist in Residence for the Office of Court Administration.

3 Bruce Robison (center) performs with his band.

4 California Summit Team.

5 Anne Heiligenstein, Commissioner, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.

6 Kristi Taylor, Summit Event Planner, Justice Harriet O'Neill, and Tina Amberboy, Children's Commission Executive Director.

7 Penny Cook, Collaborative Council member and Co-Founder of The Faith Connection, stands with her husband, David, beside the Heart Gallery display they provided for the dinner event. Summit III — Who's Who

8 Patricia Macias, Judge of the 388th District Court and Commission member. A view of the venue before the evening began — is not numbered

9 Stephanie Ledesma, Managing Attorney, Travis County Office of Parental Representation, and Collaborative Council member, Judge Karin Bonicoro, Child Protection Court of Central Texas and Commission member, and Karen Langsley, Guest.

10 Dinner keynote speaker Margaret Spellings, former U.S. Secretary of Education.

11 Carl Reynolds, Administrative Director of the Office of Court Administration takes the podium.

12 Justice Harriet O'Neill and Children's Commission member Dean Rucker, Judge of the 318th District Court in Midland, and Presiding Judge of the 7th Administrative Region.

13 Texas Summit Team.

14 Casey Family Programs staff: Chiemi Davis, Managing Director; Fran Gutterman, Senior Director, Strategic Consulting; and Carolyne Rodriguez, Director of Texas Strategic Consulting and Commission member.

15 Kristi Taylor, Judge John Specia, Sylvia Griego, staff of the Supreme Court of Texas, and Teri Moran, Children's Commission.

16 Dr. David Sanders, Executive Vice President, Systems Improvement, Casey Family Programs.

17 Tina Amberboy, Darlene Byrne, Judge of the 126th District Court and Vice-Chair of the Commission, Judge Karin Bonicoro, and Joyce James, DFPS Deputy Commissioner and Commission member.

18 Judge Scott F. McCown (ret), Executive Director, Center for Public Policy Priorities and Collaborative Council member, and Tina Amberboy.

19 Charles Childress, Judge Karin Bonicoro, Meg McGee, and Leslie Strauch, Clinical Professor, University of Texas School of Law, Children's Rights Clinic.

20 Trista Miller, Collaborative Council member and former foster youth, with guest.

21 Tomas Larralde, Chief of Staff to Texas Senator Carlos Uresti, and Sylvia Griego.

22 Judge John Specia and Oliver Bell, Chair, Texas Board of Criminal Justice.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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The Honorable Harriet O'Neill, Chair
The Honorable Darlene Byrne, Vice Chair
Judge Karin Bonicoro
Audrey Deckinga
The Honorable Camile G. DuBose
The Honorable Dean Rucker
The Honorable Robin Sage

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The Honorable Elma Salinas Ender
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The Honorable Doug Warne
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Barbara Elias-Perciful
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The Honorable F. Scott McCown, ret.
Andrea Sparks
The Honorable John Specia, ret.
Gerry Williams
Staff: Tina Amberboy
Tiffany Roper





COLLABORATIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS

Emy Lou Baldrige

Conni Barker

Roy Block

Susan Boone

Irene Clements

William B. Connolly

Penny Cook

Cathy Crabtree

Susan Hopkins Craven

De Shaun Ealoms

Barbara Elias-Perciful

Debra D. Emerson

Tomas Esparza, Jr.

Benigno J. Fernandez, M.D.

Mike Foster

Paul E. Furrh, Jr.

Eileen Garcia-Matthews

David Halpern

Leslie Hill

Alicia Key

Richard Lavallo

Stephanie Ledesma

Donald Lee

Tracy Levins

Rebecca Lightsey

Madeline McClure

Hon. F. Scott McCown, ret.

Trista Miller

Judy Powell

Chadwick Sapenter

Johana Scot

Vicki Spriggs

Gene Terry

Gloria Terry

Kenneth Thompson

Gina VanOsselaer

Arabia Vargas

Henrietta Wright

OTHER PROJECTS FUNDED BY CIP DOLLARS

TEXAS CASA

Texas CASA, whose mission is to advocate for abused and neglected children in the court system through the development, growth and support of local CASA programs, used CIP funds to conduct state-wide trainings for over 500 CASA program volunteers or staff members and to expand the coverage of its local programs to 203 of the state's 254 counties, including establishing a new program in Williamson County and expanding CASA of Walker County to serve San Jacinto County. This year saw an increase in the number of volunteers, due to a statewide volunteer recruitment campaign and new volunteer recruitment and public awareness materials and tools.

TEXAS FOSTER YOUTH JUSTICE PROJECT

Texas Foster Youth Justice Project provided legal resources via the internet, direct legal representation, training to legal aid staff attorneys, pro se legal resources, and a statewide hotline to improve outcomes for children and youth who are in the permanent managing conservatorship of DFPS but who are not represented by an attorney. During 2009, the project created a judicial checklist for youth aging out of foster care, distributed over 3,500 copies of *A Guide to Those Aging Out of Foster Care in Texas* to current and former foster youth, case managers, CASA staff and volunteers, attorneys and guardians ad litem, judges, and court staff.

CHILDSAFE

ChildSafe, in collaboration with the Bexar County Family Drug Court, provides a continuum of services to families identified as having sexual abuse issues. With the assistance of CIP funding in 2009, ChildSafe assessed 232 families, provided direct services to 36 children and 24 parents, participated in weekly meetings with drug court staff and attended weekly court hearings, providing testimony to the court as needed.

TARRANT COUNTY CHALLENGE

Tarrant County Challenge is a nonprofit agency that works to reduce substance abuse in Tarrant County. It partners with Tarrant County courts to serve people involved with CPS cases who have substance abuse problems. With financial assistance from CIP funding, Tarrant County Challenge increased the number of judicial reviews that parents have with the family drug court judge, and provided parents with incentives / rewards to reinforce participation in the program.



TRIBUTE



“CHILDREN
CAN’T WAIT —
I’LL NEVER
FORGET WHEN
I LEARNED
THIS MOST
IMPORTANT
LESSON.
WE MUST VIEW
THESE CASES
NOT THROUGH
THE MAZE
OF LAWS AND
PROCEDURES,
BUT THROUGH
THE EYES
OF A CHILD.”

— JUSTICE HARRIET O’NEILL

“Every day working for the commission seems more exciting than the one before, and being Executive Director of the Children’s Commission for the past two and a half years has been a dream job. But, I cannot look ahead to our next year without some sadness that the Children’s Commission will move forward without Justice O’Neill at the helm. From the very beginning, Justice O’Neill has been a role model, a mentor, an outstanding boss, and most importantly, a dear friend — not only to me, but to everyone on our staff.”

— *Tina Amberboy, Executive Director, Children’s Commission*

“Since 2007, Justice O’Neill placed an incredible amount of faith in everyone associated with the Children’s Commission to see her vision become reality. And while her accomplishments are too numerous to list, I suspect that when it’s all said and done, the creation of the Children’s Commission, the work it has already accomplished and its potential to help improve the judiciary’s handling of child abuse and neglect cases, could be her most notable achievement — her legacy. She has inspired those of us in the court system to examine what we are doing, to innovate, and to apply our time and talents toward improving the system for the children whose futures are directly impacted by our work. We — the whole State of Texas — are fortunate that she chose to take on such a daunting task. To our Children’s Commission Chair, our leader, and our friend — good luck, Justice O’Neill — and thank you!”

— *Dean Rucker, Presiding Judge, 7th Region, 318th District Court*

“Justice O’Neill has shown, through her forceful and compassionate leadership that judges can walk outside of their courtrooms, into the cities, counties, and neighborhoods, and positively impact the lives of those who are most vulnerable in our society. She has shown that a judge need not be confined to the important role of resolving disputes in our complex society, but can also advance real solutions for the problems that afflict our communities. Texas is a better state because of her work.”

— *Wallace B. Jefferson, Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Texas*

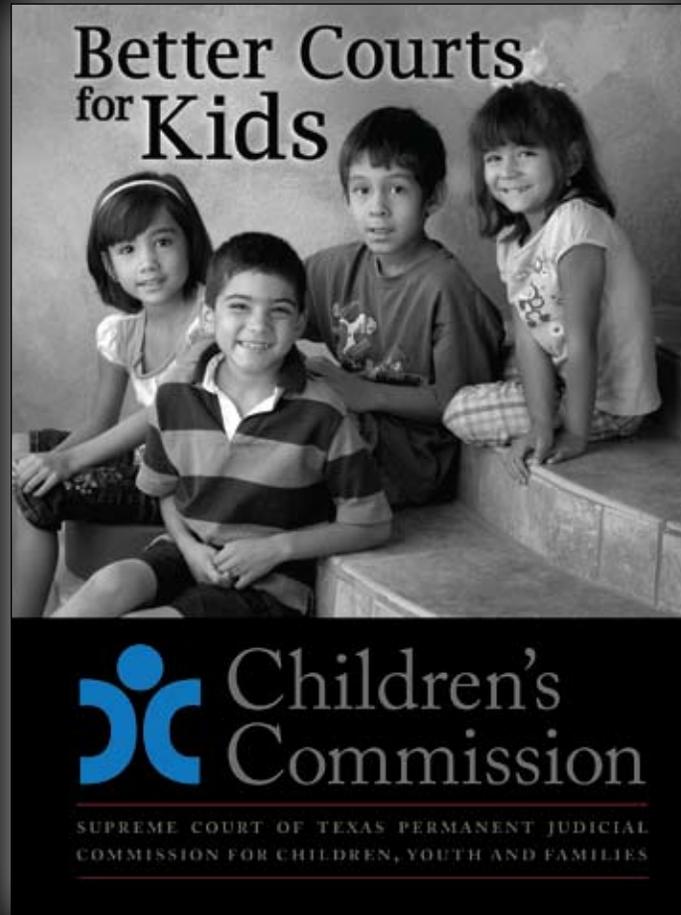
“Although we were all inspired by what we learned at the 2005 Minneapolis conference, it was Harriet — a distinguished Supreme Court Justice with no prior experience in child abuse and neglect cases — who came home and promptly turned that inspiration into action. She saw the need, accepted the challenge, and began working to create a Children’s Commission to improve the lives of children involved in the court system. It’s been an honor and a privilege to be a part of that journey and to witness Harriet’s leadership in action. The lives of countless children and families have and will be positively affected because she chose to turn her vision into a reality.”

— *John Specia, Senior District Judge, and Jurist in Residence, Office of Court Administration*

“I was privileged to join Justice O’Neill on her maiden voyage into the world of dependency cases at the Minneapolis Summit in 2005. She has been my hero and mentor since then, giving me energy and ideas, guidance and inspiration. Her work is improving the lives of children and her legacy will continue. As a bonus, she secured my involvement in her other world, the Access to Justice Commission and all the great work being accomplished for Texas in that arena.”

— *Carl Reynolds, Administrative Director, Office of Court Administration*

WITH MANY THANKS TO THE STATE BAR OF TEXAS FOUNDATION



The State Bar of Texas Foundation provided a grant to produce a video about the Children's Commission. If you would like a copy of the video, send an email to children@courts.state.tx.us

CONTACT

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