

# Their Day in Court:

Ensuring Adequate Representation for Children  
and Parents in Child Protective Services Cases



*The Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services, Connecticut Voices for Children, and Connecticut Senate President Pro Tempore Donald Williams invite you to attend a forum on legal representation of children, youth, and parents involved in Connecticut's child protective services system.*

November 20, 2006 — 11:30 A.M. to 1:30 P.M.  
Connecticut Legislative Building  
Hartford, Connecticut

## Welcome to “Their Day in Court”

In the 2005 Connecticut General Assembly Session, the legislature took an important first step in tackling the critical issue of how best to ensure that children and parents involved in child protection proceedings have adequate legal representation by establishing the Commission on Child Protection.

This Commission, headed by Chief Child Protection Attorney Carolyn Signorelli, is now charged with providing high-quality legal representation to children, youth, and parents involved in the most important of all cases, those in which the safety and well-being of children and the integrity of families lie in the balance. In these cases, Juvenile Court Judges expect to hear evidence and legal arguments that enable them to determine, among other things:

- if a child has been maltreated;
- whether or not the immediate safety of the child requires a temporary out-of-home placement;
- whether “reasonable efforts” have been made to prevent the removal of the child from his/her home;
- what services the custodial parents need to help facilitate the safe and expeditious return of the child home;
- the best permanency goal for a child when reunification with parents has been ruled out.

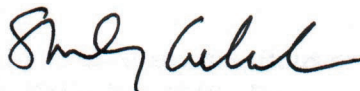
These complicated legal decisions are best made when all parties have the benefit of zealous and competent legal counsel as required by law and professional ethics. Yet, Connecticut’s system for appointment of counsel in these cases – historically characterized by low payment rates, high caseloads, little oversight, weak access to experts, and no certification or training requirements – does not yet assure that this standard of representation is readily available to all the traumatized parties involved in potentially life-altering child protection proceedings.

Today’s educational forum, entitled “Their Day in Court: Ensuring Adequate Legal Representation for Children and Parents in Child Protective Cases” seeks to provide its distinguished audience of youth and parents, legislators, members of the judiciary, legal advocates, child advocates, and child welfare stakeholders with information, data, and research about the consequences of inadequate legal representation in child protection proceedings, and the various options to improve our system in Connecticut.

Thank you for participating in today’s discussion of practice models and practice strategies that aim to better ensure that children and parents involved in child protection proceedings are afforded “their day in court” with quality legal representation.



Raymond L. Torres  
Executive Director  
Casey Family Services



Shelley Geballe, J.D., MPH  
President and Founder  
Connecticut Voices for Children

Honorable Donald Williams  
President Pro Tempore  
Connecticut State Senate

# Agenda and Cosponsors

## Agenda:

- 11:30 a.m. **Welcome:**  
Forum Facilitator:  
Sania Metzger, *Director of Policy, Casey Family Services*
- Connecticut Senator Andrew McDonald, *Cochair, Senate Judiciary Committee*  
Raymond L. Torres, *Executive Director, Casey Family Services*
- 11:40 a.m. **Child and Parent Perspectives:**  
Totally Real Person, *Parent*  
Cameron Iacovelli, *Former youth in care*
- 11:50 a.m. **Keynote Speakers:**  
Mark Hardin, *Director, Child Welfare, Center on Children & the Law, American Bar Association*  
Michele Cortese, *Deputy Director, Center for Family Representation*  
Attorney Robert Harris, *Chicago Public Guardian*
- 12:45 p.m. **Connecticut Perspectives and Reflections Plenary:**  
The Honorable William Lavery, *Chief Administrative Judge*  
Carolyn Signorelli, *Chief Child Protection Attorney*  
Senator Andrew McDonald  
Attorney Douglas Monahan  
Cameron Iacovelli, *Former youth in care*
- Moderated by attorney Shelley Geballe, president and founder, Connecticut Voices for Children*
- 1:10 p.m. **Questions and Discussions**
- 1:25 p.m. **Closing Summary**  
Shelley Geballe, *President and Founder, Connecticut Voices for Children*

## Cosponsors:

The Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services  
Connecticut Voices for Children  
Connecticut Senate President Pro Tempore Donald Williams  
Connecticut Commission on Child Protection  
Center for Children's Advocacy  
Connecticut Office of the Child Advocate  
Connecticut Bar Foundation James W. Cooper Fellows  
Connecticut Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

*Technical assistance for the event has been provided by the Connecticut Judicial Branch, State Court Improvement Program*

## Presenter Biographies

**Attorney Michele Cortese** is the deputy director and vice president at the Center for Family Representation (CFR) in New York City. She has held more than 100 trainings for a variety of agencies, including the U.S. Administration for Children's Services, Court Appointed Special Advocates, and Legal Services of New York. Prior to joining CFR, Cortese worked in the Juvenile Rights Division (JRD) of the Legal Aid Society of New York, the primary law guardian provider in all five boroughs of New York City. At JRD, she served as the director of professional development and the attorney-in-charge of the Manhattan trial office. Cortese has been a faculty member at the Practising Law Institute and the Child Welfare League of America, and has written for the American Bar Association's Center on Children and the Law. She received her undergraduate degree from Colgate University and her law degree from the Columbia University School of Law.

**Attorney Shelley Geballe** is president and cofounder of Connecticut Voices for Children. She also is a lecturer at the Yale Medical School (Department of Epidemiology and Public Health) and a clinical visiting lecturer in law at Yale Law School. Her work with Connecticut Voices for Children focuses on state and federal tax and budget policy, family economic security, child welfare and juvenile justice, children's health and mental health, and primary education. Prior to founding the organization, Geballe practiced civil rights law and was cocounsel in the *JUAN F. V. O'NEILL* case, the successful class action litigation against the Connecticut Department for Children and Families to reform its care of children in child protective services. She serves in numerous appointed positions, including on the advisory committee of the Connecticut Office of the Child Advocate and the Connecticut Commission on Child Protection. Geballe received her undergraduate degree from the University of Michigan, her law degree from Yale Law School, and her public health degree from Yale Medical School.

**Attorney Mark Hardin** is the director of the National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues at the American Bar Association (ABA) Center on Children and the Law in Washington, D.C. Prior to coming to the ABA in 1980, he worked with the Oregon Permanency Planning Project at Portland State University and the Family Law Center at Multnomah County Legal Aid in Portland, Oregon. Hardin conducts research, consults, and trains throughout the United States and internationally. He has been active in designing and conducting research on child welfare and the law, as well as drafting federal legislation, state statutes, state and local court rules, and court forms. He has written and cowritten many books, articles, and monographs on child welfare and the law. His efforts have earned him recognition from the National Association of Counsel for Children and the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services. Hardin received his undergraduate degree from the University of California at Berkeley and his law degree from the University of Oregon.

**Attorney Robert F. Harris** is the Cook County [Illinois] public guardian. Prior to that, he served as the chief deputy public guardian. In his present role, he oversees a staff of 285, including 130 lawyers. His office provides legal representation for 12,000 abused and neglected children, serves as guardians ad litem, offers legal assistance for 650 disabled adults, and represents children in divorce and custody proceedings. Harris served as a lobbyist in the Illinois State Legislature and in Washington D.C., in the interests of children and welfare reform. He has observed and reviewed national and international juvenile courts as part of an effort to develop ideas for improvement in Cook County. Harris received his undergraduate degree from the University of Illinois and his law degree from DePaul University College of Law.

## Presenter Biographies (continued)

**Cameron Iacovelli** participates in the Connecticut Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and works part-time at a Bridgeport law firm. He entered foster care when he was XX years old, XXX years ago. In XXXX, he graduated from XXXX High School in Bridgeport, and now attends Housatonic Community College where he is taking courses in XXXX. He first learned that a lawyer previously had been appointed to represent him in child protection proceedings when he turned age 18 and was told by his Connecticut Department of Children and Families worker that this attorney no longer would represent him; he had never met or spoken with this attorney. He now is eager to advocate for youth who are still in the foster care system to ensure that the attorneys representing their interests meet regularly with them and involve them in the important decisions affecting their lives.

**Honorable William J. Lavery** is the chief court administrator for the State of Connecticut, a post that he assumed after serving six years as the state's chief appellate judge. Prior to being appointed a judge, Lavery served one term as a state representative and two terms as an alderman for the City of Bridgeport. He has been active in the legal community, having risen to the post of president (1991-1992) for the Connecticut Judges Association, and has taken on various civic responsibilities including the presidency of the Bridgeport Mental Health Association. He received his undergraduate degree from Fairfield University and his law degree from Fordham Law School.

**Senator Andrew McDonald** currently is serving his second term in office representing the 27<sup>TH</sup> state senate district. He chairs the Judiciary Committee and is a member of the Education and Finance, Revenue, and Bonding committees. Prior to his election to the legislature, McDonald served as director of legal affairs and corporation counsel for the City of Stamford from 1999-2002, overseeing and managing all legal, human resource, and labor-related functions of the municipality. As a member of the senate, he has been an avid supporter of initiatives to protect the environment, expand affordable housing, and improve transportation.

**Attorney Sania Metzger** is director of policy for Casey Family Services. She serves as a member of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Policy and Communications Strategy Group, the Child Welfare Strategy Group, and the Casey-Center for the Study of Social Policy's Alliance for Racial Equity. She works to influence and track policies at the local, state, and federal levels, often collaborating with Casey's direct service divisions. She continues to provide pro bono legal services and has served as a small claims court arbitrator. She worked for the New York State Legislature for 11 years as legislative counsel to Assemblyman Roger Green, then chair of the Standing Committee on Children and Families. Metzger is on the Board of Directors for Prevent Child Abuse America and the Center for Family Representation.

**Attorney Douglas J. Monaghan** heads a one-attorney, general practice firm that has been in operation for 14 years. He has focused on juvenile law, in particular, neglect and abuse cases representing children, parents, grandparents, and foster parents. He spent many years in the Navy and is the recipient of the Navy Achievement and Navy Commendation Medals. Since his retirement from the U.S. Naval Reserves as a lieutenant commander, Monaghan has practiced law in Connecticut. He serves as secretary of the board of directors of the Juvenile Matters Trial Lawyers Association. Monaghan received his undergraduate degree in psychology from Lafayette College and his law degree from the Delaware Law School of Widener University.

## Presenter Biographies (continued)

**Attorney Carolyn Signorelli** is the chief child protection attorney for the State of Connecticut, appointed by the Commission on Child Protection. Her past professional experience includes 12 years as an assistant attorney general, nine of which were spent prosecuting child abuse and neglect matters on behalf of the Connecticut Department of Children and Families. During her tenure as an assistant attorney general she was an active participant on Bridgeport's Multi-Disciplinary Investigation Team, Waterbury's Child Abuse Investigation Team, and Danbury's Domestic Violence Task Force. She presently is a member of the Executive Board of the Children's Trust Fund, as well as the Connecticut Bar Association's Committee on Liaison with State Government and the Advisory Board on Families with Service Needs.

**Raymond L. Torres** is the executive director of Casey Family Services, the direct service agency of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. He is responsible for the oversight and administration of the agency's eight divisions, located throughout New England and in Baltimore, Maryland. He also serves as a member of the Annie E. Casey Foundation senior leadership team. Prior to his current position, he was the programs administrator for child welfare services within the Oklahoma State Department of Human Services. He held the post of deputy regional director for the New York State Division of Family and Children's Services. He has served as adjunct assistant professor at the University of Oklahoma School of Social Work, where he taught courses in child abuse prevention and child welfare issues.



## Cosponsors

**The Center for Children's Advocacy** is a nonprofit organization based at the University of Connecticut School of Law in Hartford, Connecticut. Its mission is to promote and protect the legal rights and interests of poor children who are dependent upon the judicial, child welfare, health and mental health, education, and juvenile justice systems for their care. The Center accomplishes its mission through systemic representation, individual representation, training for attorneys and child advocates, administrative advocacy, legislative advocacy, and consultation. It is committed to working in partnership with experts and policy analysts to develop appropriate solutions to meet the complex challenges of the interlocking systems serving children, youth, and families.

**The Connecticut Commission on Child Protection** was established in 2005 by the Connecticut General Assembly as an independent commission within the Division of Public Defender Services. The Commission aims to ensure that children and indigent parents who require legal representation in child protection and other family-related cases receive high quality, competent, and zealous representation. The Commission now is working to identify ways to reform current practice and to upgrade its training programs and support services to assure that child protection attorneys and guardians ad litem are knowledgeable and trained in the substantive and procedural law applicable to these cases, capable of skilled advocacy, and proficient in the subject areas that inform the issues their clients face.

**The Connecticut Bar Foundation James W. Cooper Fellows** program was established in 1994. The James W. Cooper Fellows aim to promote a better understanding of the legal profession and judicial system among the residents of Connecticut. The program also addresses matters concerning the legal profession and the administration of justice in Connecticut, including structure, organization, and challenges. Selection as a Fellow requires demonstrated superior legal ability and devotion to the welfare of the community, state, and nation, as well as to the advancement of the legal profession.

**The Connecticut Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative** is one of 10 sites in the nation that are a part of a national partnership of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Services, and Casey Family Programs. The Initiative seeks to help foster youth make a successful transition to adulthood. Connecticut Voices for Children, the Initiative's grantee, is a partner with FSW in Bridgeport and Our Piece of the Pie in Hartford, in creating opportunities for youth asset building (through debit accounts, financial literacy training, and matched savings accounts), linkages to employment opportunities, and youth leadership training. The Initiative's two Youth Leadership boards provide a platform for foster youth to advocate for policy change, including how they are being represented by court-appointed counsel.

**The Office of the Child Advocate** was established in 1995 in response to some very high profile deaths of children in state care and given responsibility for overseeing the protection and care of all of Connecticut's children and advocating for their well-being. The child advocate provides indispensable, independent oversight of state care and services for children and youth. To fulfill the responsibilities of the office, the child advocate has the authority to initiate and intervene in court cases on behalf of individual children and to obtain access to any records that are necessary to properly carry out her mandates. The Office of the Child Advocate also can communicate privately with a child in need of services and subpoena witnesses, records, and documents.

## Sponsored by:



CASEY FAMILY SERVICES, founded in 1976, is headquartered in New Haven, Connecticut, with operating divisions in Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. It is a fully licensed and accredited nonprofit child welfare agency providing foster care, as well as post-adoption, preservation, and reunification services for families. In addition, Casey Family Services has established a number of specialized and innovative community-based programs to help strengthen families and enable parents to provide the healthy, nurturing environments their children need to grow and thrive. Casey Family Services operates as the direct service agency of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private foundation dedicated to promoting public policies, human service reform, and innovative programs that meet the needs of disadvantaged children and families in the United States.



CONNECTICUT VOICES FOR CHILDREN is a research-based advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well being of Connecticut's children, youth, and their families by advocating for strategic public investments and wise public policies. Connecticut Voices for Children's current work is in the areas of education, health and mental health, child welfare, juvenile justice, family economic security, and state and federal tax and budget policy. The organization advances its mission through high-quality research and analysis, strategic communications, public education, and mentoring the next generation of advocates. Connecticut Voices for Children's interdisciplinary approach makes its work unique; the collaborative work of its staff, who have graduate training and experience in law, public health, health, political science, economics, and social work, enables the organization to have new insights on, and offer new solutions to, Connecticut's challenges.

SENATE PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE DONALD E. WILLIAMS JR. currently is serving his seventh term in office representing the 29TH state senate district. He serves as the chair of the Legislative Management Committee and is the vice-chair of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. He also has served as chair of the judiciary, environment, and children's committees. In 2003, he was appointed chief deputy president pro tempore and caucus chair of the senate Democratic caucus. His policy priorities have included child protection, improving the environment, and safeguarding the social safety net. He has authored legislation to clean up power plants and preserve the state's environment and, in the last session, was instrumental in the passage of model legislation to improve school nutrition and combat childhood obesity. Senator Williams also authored legislation that created the Office of the Child Advocate, the Office of the Victim Advocate, and the Office of the Health Care Advocate, and has sponsored a number of bills to prevent domestic violence. He received his undergraduate degree from Syracuse University and his law degree from Washington and Lee University School of Law.