

LSBA Children's Law Committee Meeting
February 19, 2025 at noon

Attendees

Caitlin Glass, Pelican Center
Cherrilynne Thomas - Department of Children and Family Services
Curtis Nelson, Louisiana District Attorneys Association
Emily Aucoin, Loyola Law Clinic - My Community Cares Staff Attorney
Guy R. Lain, Department of Children and Family Services
Judge Bernadette D'Souza, Orleans CDC
Judge Jennifer Womble, Jefferson Parish Juvenile Court
Kathleen Richey, State Child Ombudsman, Co-Chair
Kellie Johnson, Mental Health Advocacy Service, Co-Chair
Lauren Anderson, Attorney
Rachel Nastasi, ALSC
Richard Pittman, LSU Law Center
Sarah Stone, Loyola Center for Social Justice
Storm Ehlers, Louisiana Supreme Court
Tina Dennis Darensbourg, Louisiana Public Defender's Office - Juvenile Services

LSBA Staff

Rebecca Collins

MEETING MINUTES

- 1) Welcome & Introductions** Kellie Johnson welcomed the group and everyone introduced themselves.
- 2) Approval of Meeting Minutes from November 20, 2024.** The minutes were approved without objection.
- 3) Workgroup Updates**
 - a) **Trauma Informed Care** - Judge Womble discussed the work the group has been doing, saying they spent a lot of time having in-depth conversations about defining trauma and who the group is trying to reach. She said they were working on the basics of setting the plan and focus for the group. Kathleen Richey then provided more details, explaining that in their last meeting, the group tried to narrow down a specific definition of trauma-informed practice for lawyers. She said the plan is to identify the key qualities of a trauma-informed practice, develop resources to help lawyers achieve it, and look at training opportunities. Rebecca Collins had shared the definition the work group came up with in the chat, and Kathleen Richey endorsed it, saying the group had looked at definitions from many organizations. The committee agreed to adopt the definition without any objections. The definition by the group is: A trauma-informed practice puts the realities of the clients' trauma experiences at the forefront of the attorney-client relationship and at all stages of representation. A

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trauma-informed practice prioritizes safety, transparency, collaboration, and self-awareness in the attorney-client relationship, avoiding re-traumatization. Lawyers must adjust their approach to be informed by the individual client's trauma experience and integrate an understanding of trauma and its impact into their practice. It goes beyond traditional legal approaches by avoiding exacerbating the client's impaired sense of safety, difficulty with trust, and negative beliefs about themselves and their relationships with others. The act of being traumainformed requires ongoing learning, reflection and adaptation.

- b) Education** - Emily Aucoin explained that in the last meeting, the workgroup looked over a survey that Kathleen Richey had started to put together. The survey was aimed at gathering feedback from child attorneys and representatives within the juvenile system about their role in education advocacy for their clients and the scope of that work. Emily said the workgroup provided input on the survey, and she also took it to the youth justice students in her clinic to get their outside perspective and additional input. She noted that the survey has been sent over with that feedback. Emily stated that the next step for the education workgroup is to review the feedback received from the clinic students and put the final touches on the survey, as well as develop a plan for distributing it.
- c) Crossover Youth** - Curtis Nelson shared that the workgroup had a discussion presentation from Keedy Bradley on the court prep forms, which many on the call were already familiar with. The group then discussed what is happening at the detention hearings for crossover youth, and there was a lot of conversation about potentially developing a bench card or cheat sheet that attorneys and judges could use as a resource. Curtis expressed concern about not pushing families and children further into the system unnecessarily, and felt the bench card could be a helpful tool. He said the workgroup would continue working to develop something like that. Tina Dennis Darensbourg then added that the state public defender's office will be hosting a training summit the week of July 25th, and she is looking for volunteers to participate as teachers or lecturers. She said she wants to bring together various stakeholders for this training. Judge Womble offered that if the workgroup needs any forms that the courts use, such as disposition forms, they would be happy to share those resources.
- d) Diversity** – Rebecca Collins shared that Mark Harris with the diversity and disparities workgroup has met and is working with Patsy Wilkinson to create a series of trainings focused on diversity and disparities in the juvenile legal system, covering both the delinquency and child welfare sides. The plan is for the training to start from a broad diversity and disparity lens and then drill down into more granular information and best practices. Rebecca noted they are currently working to schedule a meeting with Patsy and the workgroup.

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4) Other Items

- a) **Reviewing Children's Law Pro Bono Award Nominations – Special Meeting March 12** – The Children's Law Committee will hold a special meeting to review the Children's Law Pro Bono nominations and make recommendations for the award.
- b) Lauren Anderson also raised an issue she is facing in a case in Sabine Parish. She is representing a child with special needs, and is having difficulty getting the child the necessary services from both DCFS and the school system. She asked the group for any advice or guidance on how to advocate for this child and family. Several members, including Kathleen Richey and Kellie Johnson, provided suggestions and offered to further discuss the case with Lauren offline.

5) Children's Law Legal Updates

- a) Lauren Anderson shared an update on a CPS case out of Texas that has been going back and forth between the local courts and the Fifth Circuit. She noted that the Fifth Circuit has a YouTube channel where you can listen to the audio of the arguments.
 - M. D. v. Abbott No. 24-40248
 - <https://www.ca5.uscourts.gov/opinions/pub/24/24-40248-CV1.pdf>
- b) Storm Ehlers then raised concerns about a lawsuit in Texas challenging Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which creates disability IEPs for kids. Storm said 17 states have joined this lawsuit, which is asking to get rid of Section 504. Storm provided two links in the chat - one with general information about the case, and the other with the actual complaint filed. Storm expressed that this lawsuit could have far-reaching consequences, and asked the group if anyone had more information they could share. Kathleen Richey responded that this issue was also discussed at a recent Women's Select Committee on Children and Families, where OJJ testified about the implementation of special education services for kids in their custody.
 - <https://dredf.org/protect-504/>
 - <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/images/press/HHS%20Rehabilitation%20Act%20Complaint%20Filestamped.pdf>
- c) Judge Bernadette D'Souza also provided an update, informing the group that there have been several USA attorneys that were on furlough or discharged, and the New Orleans Bar Association is offering free CLE to those attorneys.

6) Training and Education Opportunities

- a) CIP Café: The Work Of The Louisiana Child Ombudsman (see attached flyer)
 - March 20, 2025 12 pm - 1 pm
 - <https://teamdynamicsweb.com/event-5804997>

7) Future Meetings

- March 12, 2025 – Special Meeting to review Children's Law Pro Bono Nominations
- May 21, 2025

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8) Adjournment – The next committee meetings are on March 12 and May 21, 2025.