

**THE SUPREME COURT OF GEORGIA
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS
COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN**

2009 ANNUAL REPORT

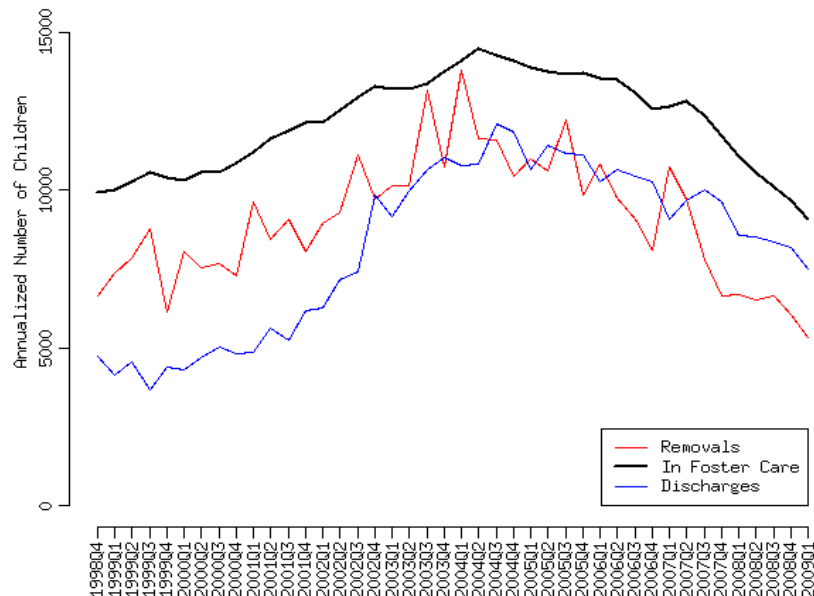
GEORGIA'S CHANGING CHILD WELFARE ENVIRONMENT

*The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present.
The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the
occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew.*

~ Abraham Lincoln.

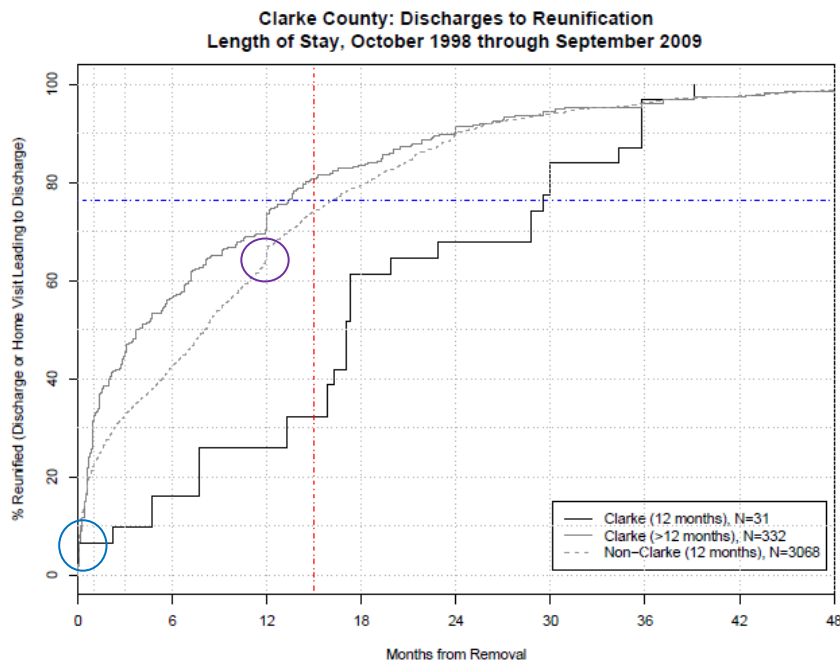
We are in a new child welfare environment. In the last five years, Georgia's foster care population has nearly been cut in half. As the chart below indicates, our foster care population peaked in 2004, with almost 15,000 children in care. On September 30, 2009, there were just over 8,000 children in care. Georgia is following the national trend of decreasing foster care populations.

Foster Care Dynamics: Statewide, GA



The 'number of children in care' is arguably the most basic child welfare data element, but there is nothing basic about understanding the myriad of variables contributing to the measure. The 'In Foster Care' variable above represents the number of children in care on the final day of each quarter in the given year. In other words, it is like freezing time on the last day of each quarter and counting the number of children in care. This *point in time* measure compares the day-to-day foster care population over several years and provides a mechanism for exploring how the population changes over time. The data are annualized to allow for quick comparison over various periods of time. Similar data for removals to and discharges from foster care are displayed in red and blue, respectively. In the years leading up to 2005, considerably more children were removed to foster care than were discharged. In 2005, however, that relationship inverted, and more children began exiting rather than entering foster care. This trend continues today.

The 'In Foster Care' measure is not only a function of entries and removals, but also a function of the length of time children spend in care. For children discharged from foster care during the 2009 federal fiscal year, the median length of stay was 13.4 months. Yet, this measure varies considerably when variables such as geographic location or 'discharge reason' are controlled for. In counties with more than 6,000 children in the population, median length of stay ranged from 2.7 months in Cobb County to 47.8 months in Bryan County. Considering only children discharged to reunification during the same period, the median length of stay was 8.1 months statewide, with a median of less than a month in Decatur County and almost 4 years in Worth County. Survival Analysis is helpful in exploring this dynamic. Survival Analysis involves modeling the time it takes for some event to occur. In the chart below for Clarke County, the event is reunification.¹



The solid, dark black line represents all reunifications in Clarke County during the 2009 federal fiscal year. The dotted black line represents all reunifications statewide during the 2009 federal fiscal year. Each curve starts in the bottom left hand corner – with no children reunified the moment they are removed from care.² The curves make their way to top of the chart – where 100% of children reunified with their families have returned home. The child welfare system is concerned with the rate at which the curve reaches the top of the chart. Following the lines from left to right, the faster

¹ For a chart of your jurisdiction, visit www.fosteringcourtimprovement.org/ga or contact J4C staff.

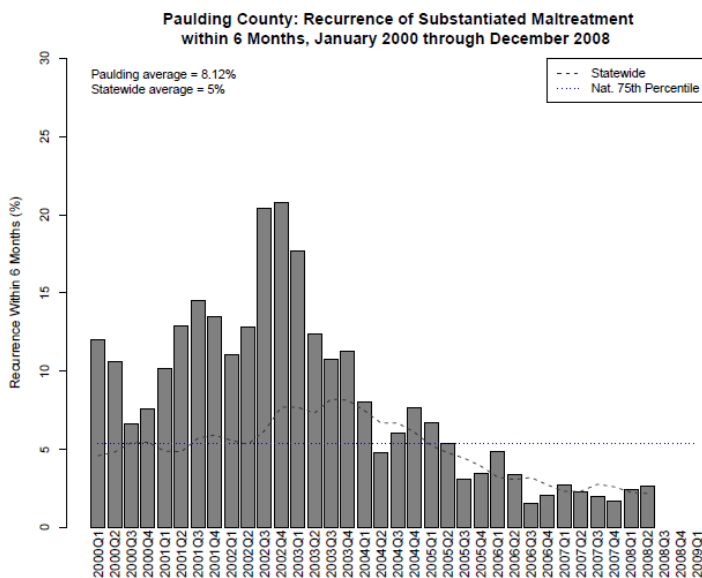
² It should be noted that some children are reunified within 72 hours of removal. Statewide, 9% of children reunified with their family spent less than 3 days in foster care. So, while no children are reunified the moment they are removed from care, 9% are reunified within 72 hours. These children are captured in the survival chart above, indicated by the blue circle. It is certainly worth asking if these children should have been removed from their home in the first place.

the curve moves up, the more quickly children have been reunified. Consider the red dotted line, representing 15 months. That red line traverses the solid black line at about 30 (from the perspective of the vertical axis on the left), indicating 30% of all reunifications in Clarke County in 2009 were finalized within 15 months. Comparing that to the dotted black line, we see that statewide, over 70% of reunifications were finalized within 15 months. This chart also reveals a considerable jump statewide around 12 months, indicated by the purple circle.

Children discharged to adoption typically spend more time in care than those discharged to reunification. Statewide, a child discharged to adoption during the 2009 federal fiscal year could have expected to have spent over two and a half years in care. In counties with more than 6,000 children per capita, the median time from removal to adoption varied from just over a year in Emanuel County to almost seven years in Meriwether County. Even more, the median months from TPR to final adoption in these jurisdictions was almost 6 months for Emanuel and almost 3 years in Meriwether.

While Georgia’s foster care population is changing, the core value of our profession remains constant. The bottom line in child welfare is to ensure that children are protected from abuse and neglect. Accordingly, we must consider whether we are *safely* reducing our foster care population.

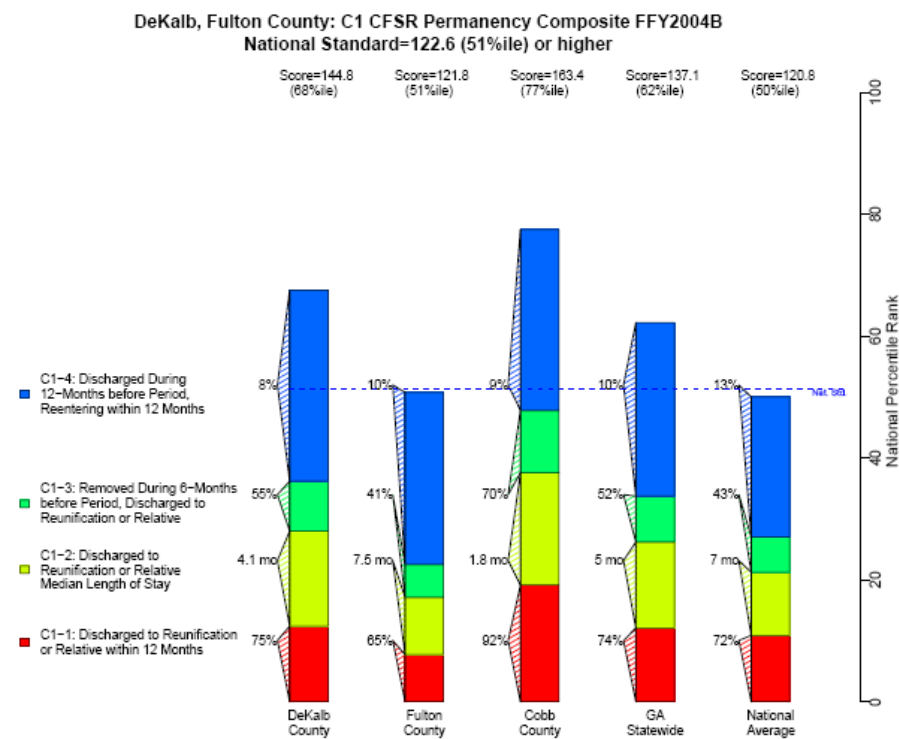
In 2004, 12,000 children were removed to foster care, and 9% of victims of child abuse and neglect were revictimized within six months of their initial victimization. Five years later, 5,683 children were removed to foster care, and the revictimization rate was reduced to 2.9% - a third of the 2004 rate. This statewide improvement is reflected locally, as the chart below demonstrates for Paulding County.³



³ For a chart of your jurisdiction, visit www.fosteringcourtimprovement.org/ga or contact J4C staff.

At the end of 2002, more than 1 out of every 5 victims of child abuse and neglect were revictimized within six months – that’s over 20% of victims experiencing a second incident of abuse or neglect within six months. Currently, the children in Paulding County have only a 1.5% chance of being revictimized within six months.

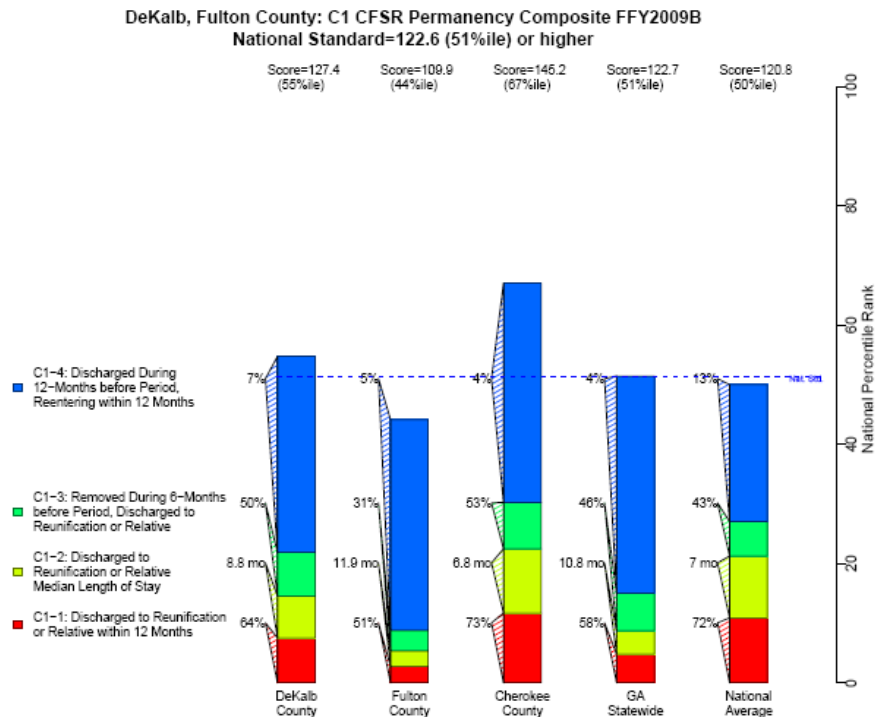
In determining whether our state is lowering our foster care population safely, we should also examine the practice of Diversion/Family Support. Introduced by DFCS in 2007, the philosophy and practices of Diversion/Family Support became integral components of a new child welfare policy. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to evaluate Diversion/Family Support under our current framework. Consider our statewide performance in 2004 on the federal government’s Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Permanency Composite 1 – ‘Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification’:



In 2004, 74% of children were reunified with their families within 12 months (represented by the red rectangle), and a child spent, on average, about 5 months in care before returning home (represented by the yellow rectangle). Yet, the blue rectangle shows that 10% of children entering care had been in foster care in the previous twelve months. As the blue dashed line indicates, our state easily exceeded the national target for this composite in 2004.

Now consider the same Permanency Composite calculated in 2009, two years after the introduction of Diversion/Family Support. During this reporting period, Georgia reunified only 58% of children within 12 months, with a median reunification time of 10.8 months. And of the children

entering care during that period, only 4% were in foster care during the previous twelve months. Using 2009 data, Georgia nearly misses the national target.



In 2004, 74% of children were timely reunified with a 10% reentry rate. In 2009, 58% of children were timely reunified with a 4% reentry rate. Under the current framework, the practices contributing to the 2004 Permanency Composite would be regarded as superior. However, under Diversion/Family Support practices, removals and reentries are down and reunification times are longer. While fewer children may be going home, under the current framework, when they do go home, they are more likely to stay there. Georgia’s permanency efforts are sticking.

The CFSR was designed by the federal government years ago, well before Diversion/Family Support was put in place in Georgia. It is no surprise, then, that practices based on Diversion/Family Support do not measure as well under a framework designed when child welfare practices were largely driven by out of home services. The CFSR has raised the performance bar for Georgia’s child welfare system. Under the CFSR, where we once were driven by anecdote, we are now guided by data. Yet the framework is ten years old, and inadequate to the stormy present. We need more robust measures to ensure Georgia’s children are protected from abuse and neglect.

SUMMARY

In the following report, the Committee on Justice for Children’s (J4C) programs and projects are summarized. They weave a theme – in Georgia’s changing child welfare environment, all of us must think anew and act anew. Inside the walls of juvenile courts, numerous decisions are made

every day that permanently affect the lives of Georgia’s children. Those decisions reflect on the most important measure of our society – “how we treat our children.”⁴

The new year will bring more change. In 2010, Georgians will elect their next Governor. In 2010, Melissa Carter will become the third Director of the Georgia Office of the Child Advocate. In 2010, Georgia will enact legislation to comply with the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act – the most expansive federal child welfare legislation in over ten years. In 2010, Judge Michael Key of the Troup County Juvenile Court will be sworn in as the President of the National Council of Family and Juvenile Court Judges. In 2010, JUSTGeorgia⁵ partners will introduce a bill to rewrite and reorganize Georgia’s juvenile code. The new year will also mark the ten-year anniversary of the death of Terrell Peterson. Terrell’s death is a constant reminder of the devastating consequences of system failure. Time Magazine reported on Terrell’s death in November of 2000, casting a spotlight on Georgia.

J4C programs and projects are designed to assist the courts and the stakeholders in their improvement efforts to better serve the children and families who appear before them. The J4C Committee and staff welcome feedback on how we can continue to serve the juvenile courts and improve the lives of children in foster care.



⁴ Proclamation No.5315, *National Child Abuse Prevention Month* (April 4, 1985).

⁵ For more information, visit www.justgeorgia.org.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Supreme Court of Georgia Committee on Justice for Children (J4C) (formerly known as the Child Placement Project) was created in 1995 to assess and improve court proceedings involving abused and neglected children in our courts. J4C is a part of the Federal Court Improvement Program, originally authorized as part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) of 1993. All 50 states currently participate in this program which provides funds to the highest court in the state to improve court process as it relates to the safety, well-being and permanence of children in foster care.

With direction from the J4C Committee, from our federal grant guidelines and in conversation with community partners, J4C identified nine goals for which we focused our efforts in 2009. They are: 1) Improving Legal Representation; 2) Developing, Reporting, & Using Data Measures for Courts; 3) Improving the Appellate Process; 4) Increasing Placement Stability; 5) Exploring the Court's Role in Family Preservation; 6) the Cold Case Project; 7) Improving the ICPC Process; 8) Improving Foster Parents' Notice and Right to be Heard; and 9) Increasing Title IV-E Reimbursement. Historically, J4C has focused

The mission of J4C is to improve the legal and court process of court-involved children in civil child abuse and neglect proceedings.

on the first five goals. Goals six through nine were added in 2009 due to a temporary surplus in federal funds. In April of 2010, J4C will return focus to the five, primary objectives. The four temporary projects are scheduled to complete along side the end of the 2010 federal fiscal year. J4C's efforts related to these 9 goals are detailed below.

1. IMPROVING LEGAL REPRESENTATION

A long-standing priority of J4C has been improving both the quantity and quality of legal representation for all parties in deprivation matters. In order to do so, we have taken a three-fold approach: 1) establish standards of practice; 2) ensure attorney access to high-quality training that aligns with the standards of practice; and 3) develop a method of providing quality assurance.

- **Standards of Practice.** With financial support and technical assistance from J4C, in 2007 the Georgia Public Defender Standards Council (GPDSC) drafted standard of practice for attorneys representing parents. In 2009, the J4C and GPDSC supported Georgia Parent Attorney Advocacy Committee (GPAAC) adopted the standards of practice. GPAAC holds monthly

meetings and offers comprehensive training programs throughout the year. With regard to child representation, there have been many obstacles to establishing uniform standards. This past March, J4C Committee member Judge Kevin Guidry, Piedmont Circuit Juvenile Court, hosted a session for judges and attorneys to address issues related to child representation and see if a consensus could be reached among stakeholders. Although consensus was reached, the Council of Juvenile Court Judges did not allow a vote to go further. During the latter half of the year, SB 292 was introduced and debated. The pending legislation defines the role for attorney's representing children. As to Agency representation, DFCS continues working with the Attorney General's (AG) office to establish standards for SAAGs, and J4C has provided input and support when requested. In 2009, J4C partnered with the Office of the Child Advocate for the Protection of Children (OCA) to explore the appointment process for SAAGs in Georgia; after meeting with the AG office to discuss the project, it was temporarily suspended. It was decided a representative from the AG's office would begin attending the monthly meeting between DFCS, J4C and OCA to discuss issues related to GA's PIP.

- **Training.** J4C hosts biannual child welfare attorney trainings at the State Bar and partners with other agencies to host trainings such as GPDSC's parent attorney trainings and Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation's Professional Series on Critical Issues Facing Special Needs and At-Risk Children. In 2009, J4C partnered with the Barton Child Law and Policy Clinic (Barton Clinic) to establish the Georgia Child Welfare Legal Academy (CWLA), a monthly

workshop hosted at Emory University School of Law. In 2009, eleven workshops were lead by various national and local child welfare experts covering the following topics: diligent search, Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) as a Permanency Plan, Fostering Connections, permanency hearings, family preservation, protecting children and liberty, permanence and rules of engagement, the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC), infant brain development, community involvement in juvenile court, Early and Preventive Screening and Diagnostic Testing (EPSDT) for children in care, and ethics in dependency cases. Videos of the presentations are archived and can be viewed online. Visit www.childwelfare.net for more information.

J4C also provides numerous scholarships for attorneys to attend national conferences. For example, J4C sponsored 38 Georgia attorneys to attend the ABA Child Welfare conference in Washington D.C. and 12 attorneys to attend the NACC conference in New York. In March of 2008, J4C hosted its first trial skills training and brought in experts from the National Institute for Trial Advocacy (NITA) to work with nearly 70 Georgia attorneys on child welfare specific trial skills. This past November, J4C sponsored 8 Georgia attorneys to attend a NITA 'Train the Trainer' workshop. In 2010, with the support of J4C, these attorneys will bring the skills and knowledge they acquired to attorneys here in Georgia. Finally, J4C partnered with the Georgia Association of Counsel for Children (GACC) to sponsor the first class of GA attorneys to apply for certification from NACC as a Child Welfare Law Specialist. Fourteen attorneys

applied, and by the end of 2009, ten were eligible to sit for the 2010 exam.

2. DEVELOPING, REPORTING, & USING DATA MEASURES FOR COURTS

J4C embraces the importance of outcome measurement to ensure the safety and well-being of our children. For several years now, J4C has partnered with Fostering Court Improvement (FCI) to provide more than 100 child welfare data measures to stakeholders. In partnership with DFCS and OCA, these measures – broken down by county, DFCS region, judicial circuit and judicial district – are publicly available at:

www.fosteringcourtimprovement.org/ga.

- **J4C Summits.** J4C first began working with Georgia juvenile court judges to convene summits in 2007. To date, 34 judicial summits have been held, reaching 26 judicial circuits and 83 counties. See Figure 2-A for a graphical representation of counties that have participated in a judicial summit, current through December of 2009. This past year, a total of 10 Justice for Children Summits were held, reaching 9 judicial circuits and 28 counties.

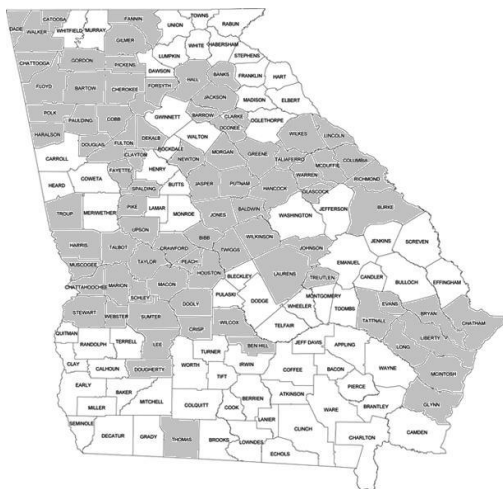


FIGURE 2-A.

When a county or circuit hosts a summit, a large portion of the day is devoted to an in-depth, explanation of the most relevant local data and a discussion of the data that look either promising or concerning to the local region. Stakeholders are later encouraged, during a strategic planning session, to use the data to create action plans to improve outcomes for youth in care.

- **Data Updates.** Each time FCI data is updated (every six months), individual letters are sent to past summit participants, highlighting changes in their data, especially as they relate to strategic planning goals or to areas indicating a need for attention.
- **Stakeholder Meetings.** J4C responds to county and circuit requests for assistance interpreting the data, including providing update presentations to stakeholder groups in different jurisdictions. For example, in September of 2009, J4C provided a local data update at Newton County’s Stakeholder meeting. Somewhat akin to a mini judicial summit, stakeholders came together for a data presentation, and later engage in an open, multi-disciplinary evaluation of current programs and existing practices based on the data. Juvenile court judges often call these meetings to bring together local stakeholders to discuss and train on localized issues. J4C sponsored over 100 such meetings in 2009.

3. IMPROVING THE APPELLATE PROCESS

During the 2007 legislative session, HB 369 was introduced to change the appellate process for TPR appeals from direct to discretionary. J4C provided research and data analysis to help inform the legislative process. J4C Committee Member Judge James Morris,

(ret.), spoke about the pivotal point of determining whether to legally sever a parent’s relationship with their child. Judge Morris emphasized the delicate balance of weighing a parents’ fundamental right to raise their child with a State’s exceedingly important right to protect its children. While he advocated meaningful consideration and sufficient judicial oversight of this pivotal point, he also recognized the importance of moving children to permanency quickly, and that life in foster care was most aptly classified as ‘temporary.’

The law went into effect on January 1, 2008, and was constitutionally upheld by the Supreme Court of Georgia. A unanimous court declared that the State has a “legitimate interest in not permitting children . . . to languish in temporary care, but instead, to leave this situation for permanent stable homes as expeditiously as possible.” *In re A.C.*, 2009 WL 3161493 *4 (Ga. Oct. 5, 2009). The discretionary appeals process, the court continued, “helps accomplish this goal by offering effective appellate review in an expedited manner, yet permitting a full appeal of the [TPR] if that is shown to be warranted.” *Id.*

For cases where a discretionary application is denied, the entire appellate matter is resolved in no more than 70 days. From January 1, 2008 through June 15 of 2009, there have been 136 appeals of TPR orders. Of those:

- 55 were Direct Appeals
 - 47 are finalized
 - 8 are still pending
- 81 were Discretionary Appeals
 - 18 were granted
 - 50 were denied
 - 10 were dismissed
 - 3 were transferred/withdrawn

Regarding the 47 direct appeals filed between January 1, 2008 and June 15, 2009, the median time from the docket date to final disposition was 73 days.⁶ In years prior to the implementation of HB 369, the median time from docket to disposition was as high as nine months.

Regarding the 81 discretionary applications during the same reporting period, of the 18 applications granted, the median time from docket to disposition was 19 days. For the 50 denied applications, the median time from docket to disposition was 24 days.

In October, J4C Lead Judge and Committee Advisor the Honorable James Morris stepped down after years of service to J4C.

Juvenile Court Judge Velma Tilley of Bartow County was thereafter appointed by the Supreme Court of Georgia to replace Judge Morris as the Lead Judge for the Improving TPR Appeals. Judge Tilley has identified two

“Cases involving [TPR] are about the lives of children, rather than contracts, insurance, business disputes, or water rights. The legal system views these cases as numbers on a docket. However, to a child, waiting for a resolution seems like forever – an eternity with no real family and no sense of belonging.”

*Justice Evelyn Stratton
Supreme Court of Ohio*

⁶ The average was 121 days.

key goals in moving forward with this project. One is reducing transcript delays, as identified in the National Center for State Courts' *Expediting Dependency Appeals: Strategies to Reduce Delay* by Ann Keith and Carol Flango. The second is to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the data provided by the Georgia Court of Appeals. We now have access to two years worth of data, and will evaluate the impact of the law on TPR timeframes as well as timeframes to permanency.

In addition to this work, J4C summarizes and publishes a monthly 'Appellate Law Update' on child welfare appeals in Georgia. The summaries are posted on our website, and members of the Georgia Association of Counsel for Children receive these updates via a listserve.

4. INCREASING PLACEMENT STABILITY

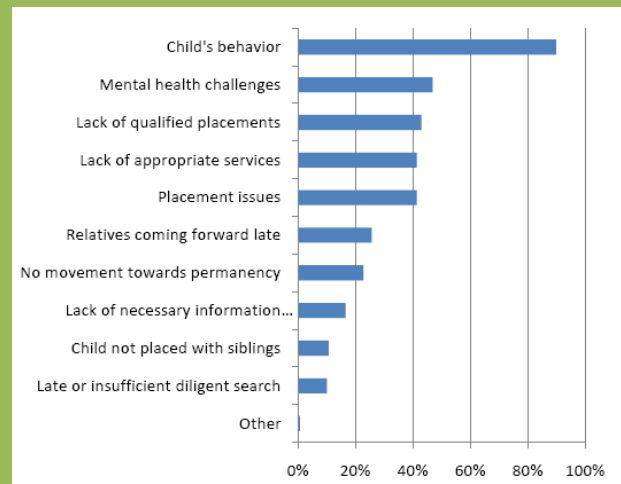
Frequent moves can have a negative impact on a child's educational, health and social development. Representative Loudermilk, of Georgia's 14th House District, sponsored HB 153 during the 2007 legislative session, requiring notice to all parties and the court of all impending placement changes of children in foster care. The purpose of HB 153 is to allow an opportunity for all parties to raise an objection to the move as well as to seek review of reasonable efforts to prevent unnecessary placement changes. J4C sponsored a group of judges and attorneys to author an implementation guide to educate stakeholders about the new law. Mary Hermann, as lead author, engaged DFCS leadership at all stages to ensure agency policy was incorporated into the implementation guide.

In early 2009, J4C recognized a continued decline in Georgia's compliance with federal

standards for placement stability. As a state, Georgia is currently failing on Permanency Composite 4, the placement stability composite.

In November of 2009, J4C surveyed juvenile court judges and practicing attorneys to collect information on the effectiveness of HB 153 and solicit ideas to improve placement stability for GA's children. 39 judges and 32 attorneys responded. In addition, J4C surveyed DFCS employees to collect their thoughts on the causes of placement instability, the effectiveness of HB153. Over 300 DFCS employees responded to the survey.

DFCS PLACEMENT STABILITY SURVEY



Responses to: "In your experience, what are the primary reasons for frequent changes in children's placements, or placement instability? (please check all that apply)"

Committee Member and Lead Judge Jackson Harris set two goals for moving forward, equipped with the survey results. First, J4C needs to shift resources to host cross-trainings to educate child welfare

stakeholders about the placement stability data measures and the implementation guide for HB 153. Also, Judge Harris recognized a need for multi-disciplinary collaboration to discuss and identify preventive strategies to reduce placement instability.

5. FAMILY PRESERVATION

The Family Preservation priority revolves around the core child welfare value that children do best in their own home, provided there home is one that is safe. For some time, J4C has been examining removal rates (i.e. the number of children removed from their homes per 10,000 children in the population) and encouraging closer examination of these numbers. At the time J4C began this work, removal rates across the state varied by a factor of more than 20. For the 2009 federal fiscal year, the median was 1.8 removals per 10,000 children, with a range of 0 removals to 9.7 per 10K.

In 2009, J4C devoted the winter bi-annual Court Improvement Initiative (“CII”) meeting, discussed below, to the topic of Family Preservation, with a specific focus on chronic families.

J4C continued to distribute *Family Preservation in Georgia: A Legal and Judicial Guide to Preventing Unnecessary Removal to State Custody*. Copies of the document are available at:

http://childwelfare.net/resources/Family_Preservation_In_Georgia.pdf.

Finally, Lead Judge Peggy Walker, Douglas Circuit Juvenile Court, received a federal grant to launch a specialized juvenile court focused solely on abused and neglected children, aged zero to three. Resources include intensive parenting classes, classes on safety and

bonding, and more frequent hearings to monitor parent progress.

6. THE COLD CASE PROJECT

The Cold Case Project was designed to improve permanency for GA’s most vulnerable youth – those languishing in care, with a particular emphasis on legal orphans. At the start of the project, over a quarter of GA’s foster care population had been in care longer than two years. J4C launched this one year project in April of 2009, in full partnership and support of DFCS and OCA. J4C hired eleven experienced child welfare attorneys to serve as Supreme Court of Georgia Fellows for the Cold Case Project. The attorneys represent a mix of agency (Special Assistant Attorney General), parent and child attorneys. The fellows reviewed over 200 cases to identify legal and actual barriers to permanency. J4C and the fellows meet weekly to discuss the cases they reviewed and brainstorm overcoming barriers to permanency. After the review, the fellows conduct a follow-up call with the local DFCS office to discuss the case.

The cases reviewed during the Cold Case Project were identified by applying a logistic regression model to AFCARS data to select children most likely to leave foster care without a permanent, safe connection to a caring adult. J4C contracted with Applied Research Services to serve as the project evaluator. J4C will publish a paper in April 2010 based on the results of the Cold Case Project.

Casey Family Programs has expressed interest in providing funding to continue the project within DFCS. Furthermore, the project was recognized and received an award from the Georgia Child Welfare Association (GCWA).

GCWA provides education and support for Georgia's children and families and the professionals who serve them.

7. IMPROVING ICPC

The purpose of the ICPC project is to ensure the safety and well being of children who are placed across state lines. GA law requires a handful of procedural safeguards to effectuate that goal, but these procedures often result in lengthy delays and limited accountability in the judiciary. In the words of one juvenile court judge, "ICPC cases seem to go into a black hole." In 2008, J4C Committee member Judge Britt Hammond, Toombs Circuit Juvenile Court, undertook the challenge of improving and simplifying the process, while still assuring children's safety.

Judge Hammond first surveyed juvenile court judges on the effectiveness of GA's current ICPC process. The survey identified several key areas of delay, including the time it takes to complete the home study in the receiving state, time to return the ICPC packet from the receiving state, and many others. Judge Hammond thereafter met with Georgia's ICPC administrator to identify DFCS' perspective on barriers to timely compliance.

Judge Hammond's findings were published in a final report, available on our website. His recommendations included electronically automating the process. Under the leadership of ICPC Administrator Stephen Pennypacker, Florida's child welfare agency did just that. Judge Hammond reached out to Mr. Pennypacker for advice on how to improve GA's process. Since then, they have presented together at the Georgia Child Welfare Legal Academy at Emory University, and at the 2009 annual CIP conference in Arlington, Virginia on how to automate the ICPC process. Last

December, Judge Hammond joined DFCS leadership on a trip to Florida to visit with Mr. Pennypacker and learn more about Florida's process. GA's DFCS committed to exploring the process and to automate requests between Florida and Georgia. As of the end of 2009, a Memorandum of Understanding was being finalized between GA and FL's child welfare agencies to electronically automate ICPC requests between the two states.

Judge Hammond continues to work on individual border agreements with neighboring states, including Tennessee and Alabama. Nonetheless, his goal is to achieve a nationwide, automated ICPC process.

8. FOSTER PARENTS NOTICE & RIGHT TO BE HEARD PROJECT

Improving the knowledge on the law regarding notice and opportunity to be heard for foster parents is part of an on-going, statewide training effort. GA's foster parent population is dynamic, with many moving in and out of the child welfare system. This year, J4C co-sponsored the Adoptive and Foster Parent Association of Georgia's ("AFPAG") annual conference and provided speakers to lead workshops. At the conference, Judge Hammond conducted a workshop entitled, "Right to be Heard." AFPAG and J4C immediately identified a need to bring this training to the local level and reach more foster parents. This year, with the support of J4C, Judge Hammond held 9 'Right to be Heard' trainings, reaching over 175 foster parents in more than 40 counties. The trainings are targeted during the academic school year, and childcare is often provided to enable foster parents to attend. Judge Hammond continues to schedule these trainings, targeting counties that reported problems in survey responses.

9. THE TITLE IV-E PROJECT

J4C established the Title IV-E Project to explore the judiciary's role in improving federal reimbursement in Georgia. Lead Judge Britt Hammond interviewed his colleagues to determine who, in each jurisdiction, is responsible for drafting the orders (the orders are often drafted by the agency attorney). Judge Hammond met with DFCS, and an agreement was reached so that any orders deemed non-compliant by the federal government would be shared by DFCS with Judge Hammond. Judge Hammond then contacts each judge to discuss the court order and identify barriers to IV-E compliance. This provides a much needed feedback loop to the field. In addition to these duties, Lead Judge Hammond participated in the 2009 Title IV-E audit, where he received oral confirmation that the orders showed substantial improvement.

MAJOR ACTIVITIES

COURT IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE (CII)

The CII is modeled after the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges' Model Courts Program. Judges from fourteen locations across the state voluntarily joined

CII PARTICIPATING LOCATIONS

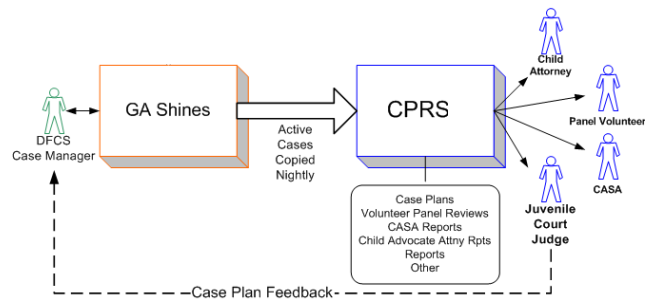
Appalachian Circuit
 Atlanta Judicial Circuit
 Bartow County
 Clayton County
 Chatham County
 Cobb County
 Douglas County
 Eastern Judicial Circuit
 Hall County
 Newton County
 Paulding County
 Stone Mountain Judicial Circuit
 Troup County
 Western Judicial Circuit

the CII to improve how courts handle child abuse and neglect cases. CII courts gather to share practices, documents and ideas with their peers who are devoting time and energy to doing the best job possible in the always challenging field of child welfare. The semi-annual meetings of CII courts provide a forum for vigorous discussion and shared learning. Each participating court reports on their own improvement efforts with regards to a best practice framework and the Measures for

Courts data measures are provided to each region.

COURT PROCESS REPORTING SYSTEM

The Court Process Reporting System (CPRS) is a secure, web based system that provides child-specific case plan information to juvenile court stakeholders. CPRS interfaces with SHINES, and downloads updated case plan information on a nightly basis.



Throughout 2009, J4C increased access to the data and provided training on the use of SHINES and CPRS2 to various stakeholders. Additionally, J4C continued a partnership with the CJCJ and Georgia CASA to generate pre-populated, standardized reports in CPRS. Using funds from the CIP data grant, J4C continues to provide equipment to juvenile court stakeholders to ensure timely access to CPRS and improve outcomes for children.

Traveling county by county, J4C has demoed CPRS for numerous local stakeholders and led a conversation on how to make the secure, web-based program work better for the user.

New developments were released during the year that further protect the sensitive information contained in CPRS2, make it possible to monitor changes to a child's case plan since the last time a user visited, store private notes for later review, as well as many others.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Justice P. Harris Hines (Chair), Supreme Court of Georgia
- Dr. Normer Adams, Exec. Dir. GA Association of Homes and Services for Children
- Ms. Isabel Blanco, DFCS Deputy Director of Field Operations
- Ms. Kathleen Dumitrescu, Esq., Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation
- Mr. Robert Grayson, Esq., Cobb County, Special Assistant Attorney General
- Judge Kevin Guidry, Juvenile Court Piedmont Judicial Circuit
- Judge Jackson Harris, Superior Court Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit
- Mr. Duaine Hathaway, Exec. Dir. Georgia CASA
- Judge Michael Key, Juvenile Court Coweta Judicial Circuit
- Ms. Lisa Lariscy, Regional Director DFCS
- Judge Desiree Peagler, Juvenile Court Stone Mountain Judicial Circuit
- Judge Tom Rawlings, Director Office of the Child Advocate
- Judge Lawton Stephens, Superior Court Western Judicial Circuit
- Judge Velma Tilley, Juvenile Court Bartow County
- Judge Peggy Walker, Juvenile Court Douglas Judicial Circuit
- Mr. W. Terence Walsh, Esq., Alston & Bird LLP, Chair of the State Bar Committee on Children and the Courts

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