



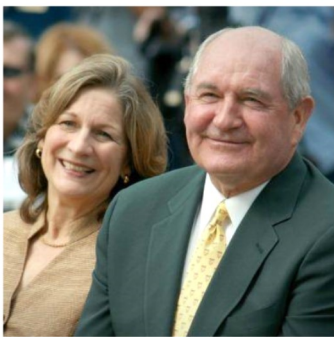
### Former First Lady Mary Perdue Shares Experience Fostering Youth

Interviewed by Jansen Head, OCA Deputy Director

We can learn a lot about kindness, generosity, and love from foster parents. I had the honor of speaking with Georgia's Former First Lady Mary Perdue who made such a significant and meaningful impact in educating local communities across the state about the foster care system and the call to help children involved in the process. Mrs. Perdue shared her family's experience in fostering newborns, the impact fostering made on her family, and the advice she would give to anyone who is willing and able to help children in foster care.

#### What guided your decision to be a foster parent?

My motivation was really a selfish motivation. I wanted to do this because I love newborns. When I found out that fostering newborns was a possibility, I spoke to my husband, Sonny, about it. His first question was, "Do you want to get up in the middle of the night and fix a bottle for a baby?" And I said, "Sure!" This



Former First Lady of Georgia Mary Perdue and her husband, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue.

See [PERDUE](#), Page 9

### A Reunification Month Message From Associate Commissioner Jerry Milner

As spotlighted and originally published by the [Children's Bureau Express](#)



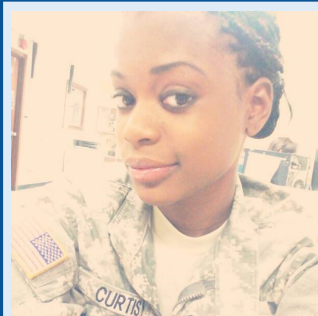
Jerry Milner, Associate Commissioner at the Children's Bureau

During this most unusual June, I urge all of us to reflect on just how unusual it is for a child to be separated from his or her parents and placed in the home of a well-intentioned stranger. There are times when this is a necessary event in the life of a child and his or her parents due to an articulated danger and no known relative or kinship caretaker is available. However, even under the best of circumstances, separation to foster care can be a scary and traumatic experience for a child and his or her parents alike. The fact is foster care is not a normal situation for children or parents. It is an emergency stopgap, intended in nearly all circumstances as a vehicle for reunification. It should not be long term and should not serve as a barrier between parents and children in the absence of documented safety concerns. As we outlined in our recent [Information Memorandum \(IM-20-06\)](#), foster care can and should be a support to families as opposed to a substitute for parents.

National Reunification Month signals an incredible opportunity for the child welfare system to commit to resource families and children's parents working together to provide children and youth with the critical love and support they need. It is an opportunity to See [REUNIFICATION](#), Page 5

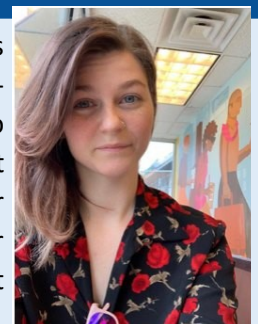
## >>> YOUTH VOICE <<<

### Hearing Directly From Youth—In Their Own Words



Palaesha Curtis

Have you ever racked your brain wondering why a youth is behaving a certain way or what they may not be telling you? EmpowerMENT's "Through Our Eyes" Podcast Series helps provide insight into these and other issues—from a young adult's perspective. Check out these two recent interviews—one with [Palaesha Curtis](#) and the other with [Marsie-Rose Cohen](#). They share about their experience in foster care, how and why they responded to certain situations, and what they have learned since that time.



Marsie-Rose Cohen



## Anti-Racism Resources

OCA stands against racism and continues to promote equity, inclusion, and diversity throughout the child welfare system. We certainly don't have all the answers and we know this systemic issue is not one that can be dismantled overnight. However, we would like to be a part of the solution as opposed to the problem. We know there are plenty of resources discussing racism and racial inequities to be found and encourage you to take advantage of them. We're sharing here a sampling of resources that we hope may be helpful. Please send us additional resources that you have found helpful.

["Let's Root Out Racism in Child Welfare Too"](#), an article written by Martin Guggenheim focused on ASFA published in The Chronicle of Social Change.

["A Collection of Key Race Equity and Inclusion Resources"](#) and additional [Equity and Inclusion Information and Resources](#) courtesy of the Annie E. Casey Foundation

["Talking to Children About Racism: The Time is Now"](#), Guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics

ACEs go beyond an individual's experiences. ["ACE, Place, Race, and Poverty: Building Hope for Children"](#) highlights the need to support community-building efforts.

Challenge yourself, as the Council of the ABA Section of Labor and Employment Law has, with the ["21-Day Racial Equity Habit-Building Challenge"](#)

["Not Sure How to Talk to Your Kids About Race? Here's How to Start"](#), A Compilation of Insights from Experts

["What Will It Take for The Child Welfare System to Become Anti-Racist?"](#), an article written by Jessica Pryce published in The Chronicle of Social Change

["Implicit Bias—How It Effects Us and How We Push Through"](#), a TedxTalk Delivered by Melanie Funchess

["14 Kid-Friendly Movies to Help Build a Conversation About Race and Racism"](#) and ["18 Children's Books About Race and Racism That Can Spark Conversation"](#)

["How Studying Privilege Systems Can Strengthen Compassion"](#), a TedxTalk Delivered by Peggy McIntosh

Test Your Implicit Biases through ["Project Implicit"](#)

["A Tale of Two Childhoods"](#), perspectives from two co-workers who now work with Prevent Child Abuse Georgia. This also includes additional resources.



## 2020 Legislative Session Update

*Courtesy of the Barton Child Law and Policy Center at Emory Law School*

After suspending on March 13, 2020, the Georgia General Assembly reconvened for the last 10 legislative days on Monday, June 15 and adjourned on Friday, June 26. Even with a quick end to the session, the General Assembly passed several bills of interest to child advocates and child welfare system stakeholders. Bills that are summarized below are now awaiting consideration by the Governor who has until August 5 to veto legislation.

- ▶ **HB 578**, sponsored by Rep. Katie Dempsey, amends O.C.G.A. § 49-2-14 to expand the Department of Human Services's access to conviction data related to individuals who work for the department. Currently, DHS can receive from law enforcement any conviction data relevant to a person who has been selected for employment in a position involving direct care, treatment, or custodial responsibilities. This bill expands access to conviction data in two ways:

First, this bill will allow the department to receive conviction data related to volunteers or interns in positions described above. Second, the bill will allow the department to receive data related to employees, volunteers, and interns in positions involving access to confidential systems or information.

- ▶ **HB 855**, sponsored by Rep. Marcus Wiedower, creates a new section, O.C.G.A. § 20-2-152.2 to require public schools, immediately upon the enrollment of a student in foster care, to determine whether exposure to trauma will have an adverse impact on the student's performance. The bill requires the State Board of Education, by August 1, 2021, to adopt rules and protocols for public schools to use in this determination. These rules must also provide that the impact of trauma must be considered when the school is determining whether a child in foster care is eligible for special education services.
- ▶ **HB 911**, sponsored by Rep. Ed Setzler, amends O.C.G.A. § 16-6-5.1 to create the new criminal offense of "improper sexual contact by a foster parent." A person commits the offense in the first degree when he or she, as a foster parent, knowingly engages in sexually explicit conduct with his or her current foster child. A person commits the offense of improper sexual contact by a foster parent in the second degree when he or she knowingly engages in sexual contact, excluding sexually explicit conduct, with his or her foster child. The bill includes relevant definitions to clarify that the criminal prohibition applies to foster parents operating under the supervision of a child-placing agency or the Department of Human Services. Existing law, which establishes the offense of improper sexual contact by employee or agent, defines "sexual contact" as "any contact involving the intimate parts of either person for the purpose of sexual gratification of either person." This new offense of improper sexual contact by a foster parent would trigger the same punishments as improper sexual contact by em-

See [LEGISLATION](#), Page 11

### Georgia Court Reopening Guide

Georgia's Judicial Council has provided guidance for reopening courts throughout the state. The guide can be found [here](#) and includes:

1. General Infection Control Measures
2. Provide Notice to the Public of Increased Health and Safety Measures
3. Provide Healthy and Safe Access to the Courtroom
4. Maintain a Healthy and Safe Courtroom
5. Healthy and Safe Court Employees
6. Healthy and Safe Jurors and Potential Jurors
7. Healthy and Safe Inmates and Detainees

### 'Executive Order on Strengthening the Child Welfare System for America's Children' Signed

On June 24, 2020, President Trump signed an executive order aimed towards strengthening the nation's child welfare system. It focuses on three key areas: improving partnerships; improving resources; and improving oversight.

Among other things, it:

- ⇒ Increases the availability of trauma-informed training
- ⇒ Enhances support for kinship care and youth exiting foster care
- ⇒ Ensures equality of treatment and access for all families consistent with the Multiethnic Placement Act
- ⇒ Improves processes to prevent unnecessary removals and secure permanency for children

Read the order in its entirety [here](#).





**2020 Judge Willie J. Lovett Scholarship  
Recipient Announced!**



*Chassidy Denise Moore, 2020 Recipient of the Judge Willie J. Lovett Scholarship*

**Chassidy Denise Moore** received this year's Judge Willie J. Lovett Jr. Scholarship. This scholarship is designed to honor Judge Lovett's work in the child welfare and juvenile system by supporting a young person currently or formerly in foster care.

Ms. Moore graduated in the top 5% of her class from Valdosta High School and plans to major in health care administration and pre-law when she starts college in the fall.

Read more [here](#).

**2020 Justice P. Harris Hines Award Winners Announced!**

This year's Justice P. Harris Hines Child Advocacy Award winners are Charles Williams, a case manager for Rockdale County DFCS, and Afiya F. Hinkson, a SAAG for Forsyth County.

These awards are named in honor of the late Justice Hines who was a strong advocate for children himself and are aimed at recognizing the dedication of case managers and attorneys for their exemplary work in the child welfare system.



*Afiya F. Hinkson, 2020 Child Advocate of the Year Award Recipient, Forsyth County SAAG*



*Charles Williams, 2020 Case Manager of the Year Award Recipient, Rockdale County DFCS*

Congratulations to both Charles and Afiya! Thank you for your hard work and dedication! Keep up the great work!

Read more [here](#). Watch a short video about Charles [here](#) and Afiya [here](#).

**237 High School and GED Graduates!**

**CELEBRATION**

*"Congratulations to all 2020 grads and our Fulton County Grads!"*  
Judge Juliette Scales

**Nsoro Awarded a \$10,000 Scholarship!**

*"I was born the year of 9/11 attack graduated the year of covid."*  
COE Participant

***This year's Celebration of Excellence Ceremony, conducted virtually, recognized the accomplishments of 249 young people currently or previously in foster care. Congratulations all around!***

*"EMPOWER WHO? EMPOWER YOU!!! :) :)"*  
Sarah Bess Hudson

**12 College Graduates!**

**OF EXCELLENCE**

*"My eyes are sweating!"*  
Shaun Johnson

**118 Accepted into College or Committed to**



**Reunification, Cont'd...** *use the compassion and skills of resource families across the country to encourage and promote safe reunification, where possible, and to remain engaged with children and parents postreunification as ongoing supports for reunified families.*

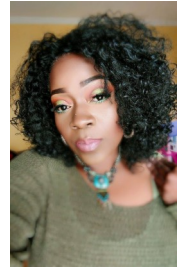
*We also honor fathers this month and know fathers continue to be an undervalued and sometimes unconsidered resource in the lives of children. Let us renew our commitment to seeing fathers as the source of strength and resilience they can be and the roles they and paternal family members can play in helping families stay together or get back together sooner.*

*I have been in the field long enough and met with dedicated social workers, providers, and attorneys across the country several times over to know there is no shortage of passion and commitment to help. It is time to be resolute and united in our charge to strengthen families so that they may remain together safely. And yes, where separation has occurred, we should celebrate reunification. That celebrations of families are occurring across the country—from Unification Day in New Jersey to Reunification Day in a county court in Iowa—give me hope, and hope is a powerful thing.*

*We can and should be a system that proactively seeks to strengthen, support, and celebrate families at all times.*

## **Recognizing Reunification Journeys and Heroes During Reunification Month**

**In honor of National Reunification Month**, the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) celebrates Maya Wright. Wright serves as Permanency Case Manager for Ben Hill and Irwin county. She is one of several Reunification Heroes being honored this month by Georgia DFCS. Wright demonstrates compassion, perseverance and resolve in her efforts to keep families together. Wright began her work at DFCS as a CPS investigator, and later moved to permanency after securing a bachelors degree in Criminal Justice.



*Maya Wright*

Maya works to ensure that families in Ben Hill and Irwin have all the services needed to successfully welcome children back into homes that are safer and more equipped to care for them. While caseloads are high, Wright is driven by her desire to be the kind of case manager she would want for her own family, were they ever to need one. On her toughest days, Wright remains committed to the families and children she supports.

For many months, she was one of only two case managers working with more than 100 children in care and did so with diligence, consistency, and positivity. During this period, Maya helped several families achieve permanency, and supported others' transition to the adoption unit. Even when challenges present themselves, Wright maintains a positive attitude—focusing on solutions, not problems. She's innovative, intuitive and supportive. Wright shows initiative by proactively identifying, and removing potential roadblocks so that families receive services they need when they need them.

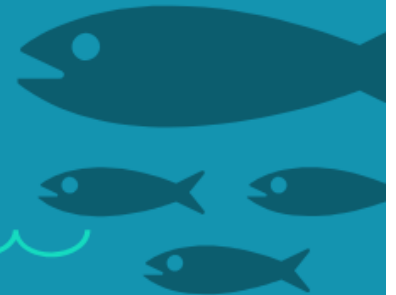
Although Wright enjoys a great rapport within her community, she calls for more support. She wants the local government officials to remember that we're all working towards the common goal of building better, more productive communities. She understands the role a strong, united and well-resourced community plays in supporting vulnerable children. Wright is committed to ensuring that her work, and that of her team, continue to create positive outcomes for children and families. Wright is an essential part of DFCS's workforce and we thank her for her efforts.

### **ABA Recognizes Georgia's Efforts to Promote Family Reunification**

**Reunification with parents** is the primary and preferred permanency goal in the child welfare system. The child welfare system recognizes that children have a right to be raised in their families of origin if they can be safe in that environment, and designed a system to support that value. As a first in Georgia, Samantha Walker serves as the DFCS Reunification Manager who is tasked with providing statewide guidance on reunification and leading the quality of reunification efforts throughout the state. Read more about this important role for reunifications in Georgia [here](#). In addition to state efforts, foster parents serve as one of the most important resources to help children reunify with their families. The ABA gathered and published a [Family Tip Sheet to Support Reunification](#) that contains tips and themes shared by families supporting this primary goal.



JUST KEEP SWIMMING...



**Child welfare professionals are susceptible to** burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress. Compassion fatigue refers to the physical and mental exhaustion and emotional withdrawal experienced over an extended period of time by those in the helping professions. It can lead to apathy or indifference toward the trauma and suffering of others. It can strike anyone at any time, even to the most caring and dedicated nurses, social workers, attorneys, medical professionals, and other professionals in helping practices. It has been shown that when we are suffering from compassion fatigue, we work more rather than less. What suffers is our health, our relationship with others, our personal lives, and eventually our clients.

Here are some self-care tips to prevent compassion fatigue and to help yourself to “keep swimming” but also taking breaks along the way to breathe:

- ✓ **Take inventory— what’s on your plate?**
- ✓ **Start a self-care idea collection**
- ✓ **Find time for yourself every day—rebalance your workload**
- ✓ **Delegate—learn to ask for help at home and at work**
- ✓ **Have a transition from work to home**
- ✓ **Learn to say no (or yes) more often**
- ✓ **Assess your trauma inputs**
- ✓ **Learn more about compassion fatigue — check out some resources [here](#) and [here](#).**

...BUT REMEMBER TO BREATHE.



### Keep Safe Online

With an increase in telework and distant learning, it is important to remain diligent in safety awareness when using the internet to learn, work, and communicate. Below are some highlighted tips, and you can click [here](#) to learn more:

- ⇒ Know your friends, contacts, and followers.
- ⇒ Review your account and internet browser settings.
- ⇒ Be mindful of third parties and connected apps that may access your social media profile.
- ⇒ Report inappropriate message or images to CyberTipline.org

### Reinstating Parental Rights

The Cold Case Project is an effort supported by the Office of the Child Advocate, the Administrative Office of the Courts, and the Division of Family and Children Services focused on removing legal barriers to permanency.

The project was recently involved in a situation that led to a mother's rights to her son being reinstated. With a lot of support and ongoing therapy, this appears to be the right outcome for this family.

Want to learn more about reinstatement of parental rights? Check out [this presentation](#) originally developed in 2011. Refer to O.C.G.A. § 15-11-323 and DFCS Policy 17.11 for further details.

### Happy Birthday, Reasonable Efforts!

40 years ago this month, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 was enacted. In part, it requires the child welfare system to make reasonable efforts to avoid unnecessary removal of children from their homes and reasonable efforts to achieve permanency for children in foster care. Want to know more about "Reasonable Efforts"? Check out ["Reasonable Efforts: A Judicial Perspective"](#), written [by Judge Leonard Edwards](#).



It's that time of the year when children are out and about, running, playing, and enjoying the outdoors. With the mix of summer break and facility closures due to COVID-19, you will likely see even more children playing outside. Please remember to slow down and watch for children.





Great job!

📷: Murray County DFCS



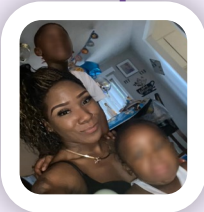
Congratulations to the Walters Family in DFCS Region 5!

📷: [ABA Spotlight](#)



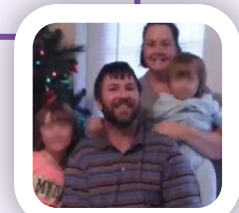
Congratulations to the Frogg Family! As supportive foster parents, they are recognized as Reunification Heroes!

📷: Catoosa County DFCS



Marvelous!

📷: Clayton County DFCS



Amazing!

📷: Cobb County DFCS

Every day—especially in June—we recognize and applaud the village it takes to support and reunify families. Thank you to every parent, family member, social worker, foster parent, service provider, attorney, judge, and community member for leading the way to reunite children with their families!

## Celebrating the Reunification of Families!

### Linked Resources to Champion Reunification:

[Making Reunification Possible for Older Youth](#)

[Utilizing Foster Care as a Support for Families](#)

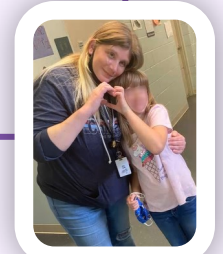
[Equipping Foster Parents to Actively Support Reunification](#)

[Partnering with Birth Parents to Promote Reunification](#)



Wonderful!

📷: Cobb County DFCS



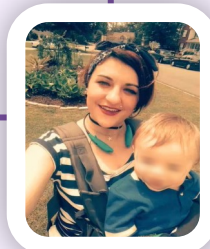
Job well done!

📷: Clayton County DFCS



Congratulations to DFCS Case Manager, Katie Baker, for being recognized as a Reunification Hero!

📷: Walker County DFCS



Way to go!

📷: Gwinnett County DFCS



Congratulations to DFCS Case Manager, Teawana Tyus, for being recognized as a Reunification Hero!

📷: Haralson County DFCS





**PERDUE, CONT'D...**

was at a time in our family's life where my nest was getting empty, and I had no grandchildren at the time. I felt like I could help the system by fostering a newborn and loving the baby like my own. We fostered through Covenant Care where I could help place the newborn in a loving home knowing that the newborn was wanted even before birth. The newborns we fostered were waiting to be adopted in a matter of days to weeks or months.

**How did you feel on the first day?**

In my experience, we went through all the training required by Covenant Care and it took about six months to get everything set. Then it was like a waiting game until we got a call. The first time we got a baby, they called one morning and said, "We have a newborn who needs fostering - can you take him?" And I said, "Yes! We

can foster him!" I think he was about two days old at that time. The reason Covenant Care has fosters for newborns before adoption is because of the waiting period which I believe was about ten days at that time. I expected that I would have that baby for about ten days then he would be adopted. I actually had him for a month. Sometimes, things don't line up within a certain time frame but it was all okay. I was on cloud nine!

I feel like maybe my experience is different than others who foster youth older and more mature than the newborns. Though, I do think that the first day of fostering can be a little bit scary in a way. You almost feel like asking yourself, "Can I really do this? I know I've had this training. I know what is supposed to happen." But you're dealing with children and they don't necessarily behave in a certain way as you may expect or want them to. You may have a baby and can't quite figure out the formula. You have to take the babies to their check-ups and everything else. So I think the first day can be daunting but for me, I was just like, "Yay! Hooray!" It was a little sleepless that first night and the next few nights, but it was all okay.

**How did the experience of fostering impact your family?**

They loved it. Fostering for us was the best thing in the world. It's definitely a unique time in a child's life. Our youngest was a junior in high school and the impact it had on our family

was tremendous. Each of our children, though they were older, were able to understand in some regard the care and attention a newborn takes. Fostering for us was just so positive. I tell everyone, "Yes, do it!" But then again, I feel like it's a calling. I firmly believe there is no such thing as an unwanted child. We just don't always know who is waiting to love that child. Every child is wanted by someone.

The last time we fostered a newborn was shortly before Sonny was elected Governor. Our daughter now fosters through Covenant Care like we did. She has three younger children who are able to help. She actually has an infant right now that she is caring for.

**If you could share one of many unforgettable memories while fostering, what would that be?**

I used to tell this story, and I would always get choked up when I told it. Our youngest son was a junior in high school. I had already gotten the baby during the day. As our son came home one afternoon, I walked out onto the porch with this newborn. Our youngest son is bigger than his daddy and has always been a big teddy bear. I looked at him while I held this baby and said, "Dan! Look at what we've got!" And he said, "Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness!" Dan dropped his book bag, took that baby to sit back on the recliner, and they both fell asleep. That was the most precious thing to see: Our son at age sixteen or



*As First Lady, Mrs. Perdue traveled throughout the state to promote the needs of children in foster care and to support foster parents and front line workers caring for the children.*



## **PERDUE, CONT'D...**

seventeen just take that little one and love on him immediately.

### **What advice would you give to someone who is thinking about becoming a foster parent?**

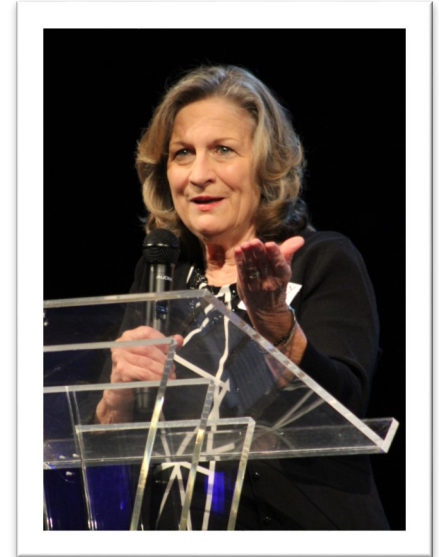
It's like that starfish story. It makes a difference when you help one. It's important we don't lose focus and we don't get disheartened because we can't do everything for every child and meet every need. Unfortunately, we live in a world where things don't always happen the way they should. But it doesn't mean we shouldn't try. Here's the deal – you'll never please everyone. It doesn't matter what you do – you won't please everybody in your life. So you do what you know is the right thing to do at the time and do the best you can for as many as you can. We may not be able to do the perfect job with every child, but it doesn't mean you shouldn't try with all of them.

The caseworkers have a tough job working in a system where they may see or hear terrible things – like trauma and neglect – that do weigh on them. It's not something you can ignore. This is what I tell people asking if they should foster or work with the foster care system. I feel like it's important for people to see foster parents and child welfare workers have the passion for what they do. That's how we spread the word that this is a worthwhile commitment.

### **Why did you feel that raising awareness about foster care needed to be a priority for the state?**

When Sonny was elected Governor, I felt like we were in a time when foster care had a big dark cloud over it. I think the general public was very unaware of what foster care was and what it entails. What people knew about foster care, they gleaned from reading the newspaper which reported tragedies and bad things that happened in the foster care system. Sometimes when we are ignorant of things, we are fearful of them. When we don't know anything about what is going on, but then we see something bad happened in the newspaper, we tend to see the entire system in a negative way. But that was at a time before light was shed on the foster care system. In Sonny's first term, there was a big shift nationwide in foster care and in what people thought of foster care. That was a time when people were waking up on what this work is about. It's about raising awareness on what everyone needs to do and doing what's best for the children.

With our personal experience, we began to shed light on what foster parents really do and how our communities can be involved. It was a platform that I didn't expect to have, but I was glad to have it. I didn't know that I would have an opportunity to make a difference in anything really. But I couldn't have done anything without the help from a lot of good people



*Mrs. Perdue continues to be an advocate for children in care and encourages communities to help meet their needs. Photo Credit: Tifton Gazette for DFCS reunification event in 2019.*

who knew what needed to be done. I was the public face, but there were so many people along the way that did a vast majority of the work for the success of our children's campaign. We had a lot of wonderful people working with us. The people in the trenches – the case workers – were hungry to have someone who would focus on concerns related to their work and to simply hear a thank you. They do a hard job every single day, and it was important for me to make sure they knew they were appreciated.

Honestly, I would speak to any group that would have me. I would talk to anyone at lunch and learns, civic clubs, church groups...really anyone to raise awareness. One of the things I would always say was – and I think it's still true today – the way for government



**LEGISLATION, Cont'd...** ployee or agent:

For the offense in the first degree, the person shall be punished with 1-25 years in prison, a fine of no more than \$100,000, or both;

For the offense in the first degree when the victim is under 16, the person shall be punished with 25-50 years in prison, a fine of no more than \$100,000, or both;

For the offense in the second degree, the person shall be punished as for a misdemeanor of a high and aggravated nature;

For the offense in the second degree when the child victim is under 16, the person shall be punished with 5-25 years in prison, a fine of no more than \$25,000, or both.

For a subsequent conviction of the offense in the second degree, the person shall be punished with 1-5 years in prison.

- ▶ **HB 912**, sponsored by Rep. Bert Reeves, on behalf of Governor Brian Kemp, creates a new code section, O.C.G.A. § 49-5-8.1, to allow foster parents to hire a babysitter to care for their foster child for up to 72 consecutive hours, no more than twice a month. The legislation requires the foster parent to provide the babysitter with information about the child's needs, conditions, and medications, and emergency contact information. As passed, HB 912 amends several additional code sections incorporated into the bill from Senate Bill 335 and House Bill 971, including:

O.C.G.A. § 15-11-64 to require juvenile court clerks to collect data on "crossover children," those children who have been alleged or adjudicated as children in need of services or as delinquent and who have also been alleged or adjudicated to be dependent;

O.C.G.A. § 15-11-110 to establish that dependency hearings with statutory time limits and termination of parental rights hearings must take priority in the resolution of attorney conflicts;

O.C.G.A. § 15-11-340 to require a DFCS case manager to review the eligibility determination of a child in extended care youth services every 12 months instead of every 60 days;

O.C.G.A. § 49-5-8 to authorize DHS to contract with private entities to provide services;

O.C.G.A. § 49-5-8 to authorize DHS to tailor training for foster parents based on their experience and the needs of the child under their care and to provide such training online.

- ▶ **HB 993**, sponsored by Rep. Katie Dempsey, creates a new code section, O.C.G.A. § 31-10-9.2 to require the state registrar to provide DFCS with copies of or information from certificates filed with the state registrar, including birth and death certificates, when DFCS notifies the registrar that the Division has received a report of child abuse or neglect. The bill further requires the Department of Public Health to establish policies for the transmittal of records and requires DPH and DFCS to enter into a HIPAA-compliant agreement to effectuate the legislation. The bill also repeals Article 8 of Chapter 5 of Title 49 to eliminate the child abuse registry in Georgia and to strike all references to the registry throughout the Code.



*Tom Rawlings, DFCS Director, explains HB 993 to the Senate Judiciary Committee*

- ▶ **SB 439**, sponsored by Sen. Matt Brass, amends several code sections relating to parties and caregivers' right to notice and to be heard during dependency proceedings, including:

O.C.G.A. § 15-11-109 and O.C.G.A. § 15-11-300 to require juvenile courts, at each hearing or review and at TPR hearings, to make specific, written findings of fact regarding whether a caregiver was given notice of the proceeding and whether the caregiver expressed an interest in being heard during the proceeding. If the caregiver is present, the court must include specific information regarding the caregiver's views concerning the child's well-being in its written findings;

O.C.G.A. § 15-11-215 to allow notice of placement change to be provided via email if the individual receiving the notice agrees and to require the Council of Juvenile Court Judges to establish an electronic method for people receiving such notice to object to the placement change. The court must consider such objections at the hearing to review a child's permanency plan or case plan;

O.C.G.A. § 15-11-324, adding a new section to require the court to consider the testimony provided by a caregiver when making its post-TPR disposition, if the caregiver held physical custody of the child for at least 12 months and if the caregiver has expressed a desire and willingness to adopt the child.





## COVID-19 Economic Impact Payments: FAQs for Child Welfare Attorneys



The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, also known as the CARES Act, is a federal statute intended to help mitigate the significant economic consequences of the COVID-19 epidemic. Signed into law on March 27, 2020, the Act provides financial relief to individuals, organizations and businesses. The National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC) published a FAQ sheet that summarizes NACC's current understanding of how the CARES Act (and related legislation) may impact youth and families in the child welfare system. It aims to provide child welfare practitioners with information that may be relevant to their clients and to raise awareness regarding eligibility for these payments. Click [here](#) to access NACC's FAQ sheet.

## Tip Sheet: Advocacy and Child's Attorney-Client Relationships During COVID-19

In the uncertain times of the COVID-19 pandemic, many aspects of life have dramatically changed — schools, court hearings, social events. What has not changed, however, are the critical and urgent needs of youth involved in the child welfare system. Many attorneys, and particularly those who represent young people, may be struggling with questions regarding their obligations in a moment of social distancing and widespread anxiety. Youth involved in the child welfare system need and deserve robust advocacy in this time period. The underlying needs of youth — the what — remains the same; it is the method of advocacy and service delivery — the how — that may need to be adjusted. Click [here](#) to access NACC's tip sheet.



## Keeping Yourself and Your Kids Safe and Health in the Pandemic: Tips for Judges, Legal Professionals, and Court Personnel



Helping the kids that we serve stay safe and healthy can be a challenge under ordinary circumstances, but now with the health hazards of COVID-19, the various guidance around what is safe, and the stress associated with social distancing or not being able to socially distance, the challenge may feel insurmountable. The calming presence and steadying influence that you provide to youth, their families, and your co-workers is the single most powerful antidote to the fears, frustrations, confusion, and grief caused by these uncertain times that can escalate into a meltdown or crisis. To have that crucial positive influence, it's essential that you "put on your oxygen mask first" by monitoring how you are handling the stressors that we are all facing. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) published a fact sheet that offers helpful questions to think about it and provides basic steps to help youth navigate through their stress during the pandemic. Click [here](#) to access NCTSN's tip sheet.



**Hotline Help: Connecting Your Needs to Resources**

*A Highlight of Many Free Resources Available to Assist You*

**GA Crisis & Access Line  
1-800-715-4225**

GCAL is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year to help you or someone you care for in a crisis.

**1-855-GA-CHILD  
(1-855-422-4453)**

Report concerns or suspected child abuse.

**CRISIS TEXT LINE**

Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a Crisis Counselor. Free support is available 24/7.

**GA COVID-19  
Emotional Support Line  
1-866-399-8938**

The Georgia COVID-19 Emotional Support Line provides 24/7 free and confidential assistance to callers needing emotional support or resource information as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Emotional Support Line is staffed by volunteers, including mental health professionals and others who have received training in crisis counseling.

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
1-800-273-8255**

The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.

**National Domestic Violence Hotline  
1-800-799-7233**

Highly trained expert advocates are available 24/7 to talk confidentially with anyone in the U.S. experiencing domestic violence, seeking resources or information, or questioning unhealthy aspects of their relationship.

**CARES Warm Line  
1-844-326-5400**

Call or text the CARES Warm Line for substance abuse challenges every day of the year from 8:30AM - 11:00PM.

**Peer2Peer Warm Line  
1-888-945-1414**

The Warm Line provides Georgians the opportunity to receive peer support over the phone 24 hours a day.

**SAMHSA's National Helpline  
1-800-662-HELP (4357)**

Free, confidential, and available 24/7/365, this service from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) can help you find treatment facilities, support groups, and community-based organizations in your area.

**Events: Available Now and Upcoming!**



- ✓ J4C Webinar on GAL Advocacy in Dependency Cases. Access webinar [here](#). Use access passcode: **2Z@8+\$51**.
- ✓ J4C and Barton Center Webinar on Restraining Juveniles in the Courtroom—Developing Protocols Pursuant to UJCR 20. Access webinar [here](#). Use access passcode: **2o@7#6g6**. Materials available [here](#).
- ✓ J4C Webinar on Advocacy in a Judicial Emergency. Access webinar [here](#). Click [here](#) for presentation slides. Use access passcode: **5s\*x+VJ2**.
- ✓ July 8: Virtual Training on Recognizing and Managing Secondary Traumatic Stress provided by GSU's Child Welfare Training Collaborative. More info [here](#).
- ✓ July 14th: Virtual Training on Trauma 101: Understanding the Impact of Trauma on Children provided by GSU's Child Welfare Training Collaborative. More info [here](#).
- ✓ July 16: Language as a Missing Link Webinar, offered by The Deal Center. More info [here](#).
- ✓ August 24-28: 43rd National Child Welfare Law Virtual Conference. More info [here](#).
- ✓ October 5-8: Kempe Center's Inaugural International Virtual Conference. More info [here](#).



**PERDUE, CONT'D...**

to go astray or any government agency to falter is for the public to close their eyes to what's happening. For government to do its best work, the public has to open its eyes and shed light on what is happening. I think we have relegated what a family is supposed to do and we have turned it to the government because it's painful to think of a child not being cared for at home, or being neglected, or being abused. If we close our eyes to it, that's where we have the worst outcomes. If we open our eyes and ask what we can do in this situation, that's when we have good outcomes.

There are children in foster care in every single county of the state. One of the things I focused on was getting churches involved. This is their mandate. We can get community support for the families and help them stay together so you don't have disruption. If we can keep disruptions to a mini-

mum, then I think we are better off.

Throughout this journey, there were people who sort of thought about fostering or adopting who would not or have not thought about it otherwise. And that's what I'm grateful for. I was able to put that idea in people's mind who may not have otherwise thought about it. And I think that's important.



*Former Governor Sonny Perdue's official portrait is the first in Georgia to include both a Governor and First Lady, as requested by Governor Perdue to show "what we accomplished, we accomplished as a team."*

Those who have endured adverse child experiences don't always realize the impact it has on them or others—and what it can mean for their future. They also may not realize others have had similar experiences—and what freeing yourself from those traumas can do. Approaching our work through a trauma-informed lens helps improve outcomes for children and families. Take a few minutes to watch [this very powerful video called "Step Inside the Circle"](#).

**Interested in becoming a foster or adoptive parent? Learn more [here](#).**



Know a child who likes to draw? J.K. Rowling has written a book called "The Ickabog" and she needs illustrations for it! Share [this contest](#) with children ages 7-12!



*Our office will be closed to observe this state holiday.*





## BE A SUMMIT SPONSOR/EXHIBITOR!

The Georgia Office of the Child Advocate, Supreme Court of Georgia's Committee on Justice for Children, the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, and Georgia Court Appointed Special Advocates are pleased to host the 4th Annual Summit: Georgia's Child Welfare Conference on **November 18-20, 2020** at **The Hotel at Avalon**. The Summit is an exciting opportunity for child welfare professionals throughout the state to share best practices and continue the advancement of child welfare practice in Georgia. Attendees have included policy advocates, judges, attorneys, guardians ad litem, court appointed special advocates, judicial staff, providers, and several other professionals who serve an important role in caring and supporting the children and families throughout the state.

As you begin allocating your annual sponsorship budgets, please be aware of the many opportunities available at the 2020 Summit. Each sponsorship offers a variety of benefits, visibility, and a return on your investment. Only child welfare service providers and partners may purchase a conference exhibit table. Exhibitors/Sponsors are prohibited from selling products or taking orders for future sales.

**With a significant increase in participation, there is a limited number of exhibit tables available for the 2020 Summit.** We hope you will join us to greet over 600 attendees at #TheSummit for another successful conference. Please contact AK Consulting Group to register as a sponsor and/or exhibitor by calling 850-523-4200 or emailing [judy@akconsultinggroup.org](mailto:judy@akconsultinggroup.org).

*Georgia Office of the Child Advocate*  
**Rachel Davidson, Director**  
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*For general inquiries, assistance, or to file a complaint, please contact us by phone at (404) 656-4200 or on our website at <https://oca.georgia.gov/webform/request-oca-assistance-or-investigation>*

*To submit an article, photo, or event for the newsletter, please contact Deputy Director Jansen Head at [jhead@oca.ga.gov](mailto:jhead@oca.ga.gov).*

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YouTube: "Georgia OCA"