



Celebrating National Foster Care Month

In celebrating **National Foster Care Month**, the child welfare community has taken extra time to acknowledge and celebrate foster parents, family members, volunteers, mentors, policymakers, child welfare professionals, and other members of the community who help children and youth in foster care find permanent homes and connections. The theme this year is "Foster Care as Support to Families, Not a Substitute for Parents." Strengthening families and focusing on their well-being is the key to building strong communities. Developing partnerships between local agencies, community organizations, and individuals within a family's network is key to building a supportive foundation that supports family reunification and preservation. To learn about becoming a foster parent or supporting a foster parent, call 1-877-210-KIDS or visit www.fostergeorgia.com.

As part of the celebration, the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) held its 4th Annual Foster Caregivers of the Year Luncheon and Awards Banquet on May 20, 2019 in Atlanta.

See **CELEBRATE**, Page 5



A Dream Come True!

While working towards helping a young man in foster care pursue permanency, the Cold Case Project was able to help support his well-being and self esteem when a permanency roundtable resulted in one of his dreams coming true. A huge thank you goes out to DFCS SAAG Linda Taylor and Senator Matt Brass for setting up an outing to a Braves game, where this young man was able to meet his hero, Freddie Freeman!

His placement was also able to help make sure he got back into ROTC - something that he was hoping for. He is now back in and moving up the ranks!

Although his face is blurred in the picture for confidentiality purposes, rest assured that the smile on his face is priceless! Thank you to all involved for helping that smile make it to his face!



Supreme Court of Georgia's Committee on Justice for Children (J4C)

The Supreme Court of Georgia's Committee on Justice for Children is focused on supporting efforts to improve juvenile court proceedings. During the committee's meeting this month, OCA Director and J4C committee member Rachel Davidson shared updates on OCA, including goals for promoting authentic youth engagement. Amongst other topics, the committee also discussed the Cold Case Project, the Family First Prevention Services Act, kinship care, and legislative updates.



OCA Director Rachel Davidson sharing OCA updates with the J4C committee.

The unedited voices
of young people who have been in care:

Youth Voice

"A Piece Of My Puzzle"

By Shimaine Quimbley

My name is Shimaine Quimbley and I have been in care since the age of 8. A piece of my puzzle is joy and balance, how do I balance it and Why am I always full of joy despite how a day went?

Balance to me is finding the equal standard of happiness and being aware of what makes you smile. My time in care was a joyful but a painful journey, a path of who knows but could easily be defined by a smile or hug. The age of 17 I found my last puzzle piece to make me not only feel normal but start me on a path See **VOICE**, Page 7



Participating in Mental Health Awareness Month

Children's Mental Health Awareness Day at the Capitol

Children's Mental Health Awareness Day at the Capitol was held on May 9, 2019. OCA staff joined over 500 attendees at the event to bring awareness of how our future relies on the well-being of our children, especially their mental health.



DBHDD Commissioner, Judy Fitzgerald, updating attendees on the achievements to fund and support mental health services for our children.

At the Georgia Railroad Freight Depot, various speakers explained Georgia's System of Care which is an organizational framework designed for the delivery of behavioral health services and support networks. The event also included an informational fair where behavioral health providers shared community resources and supports. The event was sponsored and supported by the Georgia Parent Support Network, Inc., Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, NAMI Georgia, and Voices for Georgia's Children.

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24th Annual Rosalynn Carter Georgia Mental Health Forum

Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter delivered the welcoming remarks for the 24th Annual Rosalynn Carter Georgia Mental Health Forum at The Carter Center held on May 10, 2019. The forum began with a conversation regarding the 2010 settlement agreement between the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and the State of Georgia.



*Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter
Photo Credit to The Carter Center*

Susan Walker Goico (Director of Disability Integration Project) gave an overview of the terms of the agreement and explained how the settlement came about. The settlement agreement addresses compliance regarding services provided to individuals with developmental disabilities and individuals with mental illness. Since then, an independent review selected by DOJ and the state to conduct factual investigations to determine compliance with the settlement. Although progress has been made in many areas, the state has opportunities to make further progress in providing assistance and support to those with developmental disabilities and/or mental illnesses. As discussed by DBHDD Commissioner Judy Fitzgerald, part of that progress is Governor Brian Kemp's pledge to provide an additional \$8.4 million to the Apex program, which is a program started in 2015 by DBHDD that pays for mental health providers to be available in schools.

Following the updates on the settlement agreement, the first panel focused on perspectives on school-based behavioral health. One of the panelists, Dr. Garry McGiboney (Georgia Department of Education), provided data on student behavioral health. He presented that "14 percent of children with behavioral health issues receive mostly Ds and Fs on school work." He also addressed misconceptions about student behavioral issues, such as stating in clarity that "not all student behavioral issues are

See [CARTER](#), Page 9



2019 Emory Summer Child Advocacy Program



By Jansen Head
OCA Deputy Director

As a new member of the child advocacy community, I joined new staff members and students in the ESCAP training during the week of May 20-23 at Emory University School of Law. As each day of training progressed, ESCAP helped build a foundation of knowledge that allowed me and my ESCAP colleagues to engage in issue spotting and in a demonstration of a 72-hour preliminary protective hearing with the Honorable Temika Murry (DeKalb County Juvenile Court Judge), Laurie-Ann Fallon (Special Assistant Attorney General), Diana Rugh Johnson (serving in the role of Parent Attorney), and Margaret Riley Schweizer (Fulton County Office of the Child Advocate).

I was impressed with the experts in the field who educated us on a variety of topics, such as the juvenile court process for a dependency case, a DFCS overview of a child dependency case, and medical perspectives on child abuse and neglect. I gained a wealth of knowledge covering many areas of child law; below are two snippets based on information we received from Tiffany Sawyer on Stewards of Children Program on Child Sexual Abuse and from the Honorable Peggy Walker (Douglas County Juvenile Court Judge) on substance use and child welfare. After receiving this intensive training, I am even more prepared, confident, and motivated to engage in important discussions and achieve outcomes that will make a positive impact on the children and families in our state.

See [ESCAP](#), Page 6



OCA Director Rachel Davidson presenting on ethics of child representation.



Public Policy Panel: Michelle Barclay (AOC), Polly McKinney (Voices for Georgia's Children), State Representative Mary Margaret Oliver (House District 82)

Highlights from Darkness to Light's Stewards of Children

(Presented by Tiffany Sawyer)

Child sexual abuse is any sexual act between an adult and a minor, or between two minors, when one exerts power over the other. As a society, we often lack the ability to recognize child sexual abuse. In this training, I learned about how children who are or have been sexually abused may feel or see themselves without us even knowing:

- ▶ Blame themselves for the abuse.
- ▶ Fear even healthy affection.
- ▶ Feel that others don't really know them.
- ▶ Hate themselves.
- ▶ Feel powerless or hopeless or both.
- ▶ Experience memories, pictures, smells, and sounds that are re-traumatizing.
- ▶ Feel fearful even during times that are "safe".
- ▶ Lose hope and trust in other people.
- ▶ Fear being close to others, even in friendships.
- ▶ Feel they are not worthy of being loved.

Highlights from "Substance Use and Child Welfare"

(Presented by Douglas County Juvenile Court Judge Peggy Walker)

In Georgia, **substance use** is the number one problem faced by law enforcement, child protective services, and the courts. Substance use places children at risk of harm including the following:

- ▶ Cognitive delays, language deficiencies and delays, poor visual scanning and motor skills, and working memory difficulties (i.e. they give up easily and do not learn incidentally).
- ▶ Danger from exposure to chemicals or drugs including ingestion.
- ▶ Inadequate food, clothing, shelter, supervision, and/or medical care.
- ▶ Frequent absences and tardiness, no school work completed at home, no school supplies, no support of school or school work, no involvement in school conferences, programs or activities, learning disabilities, retention, and/or frequent moves.
- ▶ Criminal acts to further the parent's trade (i.e. theft, shoplifting).



SCHOOL'S OUT: SUMMER RESOURCES TO KEEP CHILDREN SAFE, WELL FED, AND SUPPORTED

For healthy growth and reading success, all children and their families need year-round access to educational and supportive services. Many public and private entities across the state have created an online toolkit with resources for summer reading, learning, safety, and meals. Many thanks to the public and private communities, including the Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, Georgia Public Library Service, and Georgia Public Broadcasting. Youth and their families can access this toolkit by visiting georgiasummer.org.



GEORGIASUMMER.ORG

**BECAUSE KIDS STILL
NEED TO EAT AND LEARN
WHEN SCHOOL'S OUT**



Along with keeping children well fed and supported, remember to keep them safe and #LookAgain next time you have a child in the car! For the sixth consecutive year, several state agencies are calling for families and caregivers of children to have heightened awareness of the dangers of leaving children unattended in vehicles.

In support of this important challenge, Governor Brian P. Kemp issued a proclamation and named Friday, May 24, 2019, as "Look Again Day" in Georgia. To support others to #LookAgain, keep your eyes and ears open in the community. If you see a child left alone in a vehicle, call 911 immediately. Let's keep our kids safe from the summer heat!

LOOK AGAIN
GA • USA



**NEVER LEAVE A CHILD
ALONE IN A VEHICLE**

WWW.DECAL.GA.GOV



"My CASA Helped Me"

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) are trained volunteers who provide compassionate, individualized attention that will help each child in foster care find a safe and permanent home. In Athens-Clarke County, the county DFCS office and CASA coordinators are getting the message out on how momentum toward permanency can occur sooner and more efficiently when we all work together and know how to do so. A returning case manager in that county office returned in his role as such and wished he realized how much CASA could have helped him on his cases the first time he was in his role as case manager. The county DFCS director, Dawn Criss, shared that story with their CASA coordinators, Emily Dant and Tasha Nicholson. Being true to their

See [CASA](#), Page 7

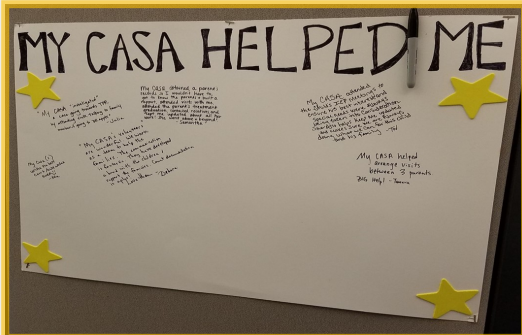


Photo courtesy of Athens-Clarke DFCS office. This poster continues to display appreciation for their CASAs.

CELEBRATE cont'd...



Honorees and other attendees were welcomed by Candis Jones who serves as GARYSE/Chafee Program Director for DFCS. Following the invocation, DFCS Director Tom Rawlings gave the leadership address and introduced Paul Blough, President of the Adoption and Foster Parent Association of Georgia. Before the honorary awards were presented, Willie Moore Jr. gave an inspirational message to encourage the honorees and guests in their continuous efforts to support children and families in Georgia.

Afterwards, DFCS recognized twenty-three honorees including the following:

- * **Helen Kincaid, Murray Co.**
- * **Jose and Paula Bachman, Union Co.**
- * **Cassie Laminack, Haralson Co.**
- * **Daniel & Jennifer Nolder, Coweta Co.**
- * **Robert Daggett, Clarke Co.**
- * **Daniel & Laura Wright, Jones Co.**
- * **Thelma Ivey, Warren Co.**
- * **Maleny Marquez, Muscogee Co.**
- * **Michael & Barbara McBroom, Jeff Davis Co.**
- * **Timothy & Paula Harbin, Colquitt Co.**
- * **Jim & Erma Barnett, Tift Co.**
- * **Carolyn Tabor, Camden Co.**
- * **Gracie Kennard, Gwinnett Co.**
- * **Stephen & Cynthia Wagner, Fulton Co.**

OCA congratulates all honorees, as well as all other foster caregivers for their continuous support and the great impact they have and continue to make for our children and families!



DFCS Director
Tom Rawlings



Pres. Paul Blough,
Adoption & Foster
Parent Assoc. of GA



Willie Moore, Jr.
Featured Speaker

Upcoming Events:

- ✓ June 1-4: National CASA/GAL Conference, Hyatt Regency Atlanta. More info [here](#).
- ✓ June 3: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Overview Webinar. More info [here](#).
- ✓ June 3 and 17: Understanding substance Use Disorders Webinar. More info [here](#).
- ✓ June 8: North District Listening Tour for Young Adults, Edward's Park, Dalton. More info [here](#).
- ✓ June 15: Caregiver Support Group Workshop (to discuss healthcare challenges for youth with intellectual or developmental disabilities). More info [here](#).
- ✓ June 22: Annual Celebration of Excellence, Crowne Plaza Atlanta Perimeter.
- ✓ June 24: Appropriate Utilization of Psychotropic Medications and the Georgia Families 360° Program Webinar. More info [here](#).
- ✓ June 28: Deadline to submit a response to the Call for Workshop Proposals for the Summit scheduled for November 13-15. More info [here](#).
- ✓ Free courses on child trauma and brain development through the Child Welfare Training Collaborative, multiple and ongoing opportunities statewide. More info [here](#).

*Mark your
calendar!*



Spotlight

ESCAP, cont'd... *Get to know two ESCAP interns who are entering the child advocacy community for the summer!*



Oluremi Abiodun
Florida State University
College of Law

Oluremi Abiodun is a student with the Florida State University College of Law where she recently completed her second of four years in a joint-degree JD/Masters in Social Work program. This summer, she will be working in Fulton County Juvenile Court on a research project for Judge Bradley J. Boyd regarding children's constitutional rights, especially in cases where parental rights are being terminated. This will include reviewing current GA Court of Appeals cases where a TPR was overturned and developing arguments about why the TPR should stand if it were to be argued at the GA Supreme Court.

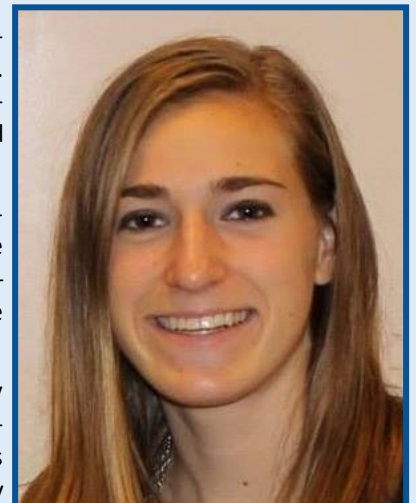
Oluremi is from New Orleans, LA, so she is a die-hard Saints fan and Mardi Gras is her favorite holiday. To her, it's better than Christmas and her birthday. However, she explained that her experiences in New Orleans as a middle schooler during Hurricane Katrina were the first time she saw and experienced inequity. These experiences also promote why she does this work.

The ESCAP training motivated Oluremi to prepare for her internship by allowing her to see the issue of child welfare from so many different perspectives. She was able to interact with attorneys, judges, social workers, nurses, doctors, children who had been in care, and DFCS workers. She is most looking forward to learning from the staff at juvenile court. She hopes to gain exposure on how to litigate these cases and the interactions between attorneys, clients, and the court system with the hopes of gaining more clarity on where she sees herself in this work upon graduation in 2021.

Lauren Paul is a rising second year Master of Social Work student at the University of Georgia where she is pursuing a certificate in Non-Profit Theory and Management. Prior to her master's program, Lauren received her B.S. in Human and Organizational Development from Vanderbilt University. Lauren's favorite forms of self-care include running and spending time with her 10-year old rescue cat.

Lauren is grateful to have received the training provided by the Emory Summer Child Advocacy Program, which she feels has equipped her with a comprehensive knowledge of the policies that guide child welfare practice in the state. The training broadened Lauren's perspectives on the most recent shifts in child welfare and opportunities for social workers like her to engage in more preventative work.

She is excited to put this knowledge to work interning at the DeKalb County Child Advocacy Center where she will be researching mental health and medication management as it relates to advocating for the best interests of children in the foster care system. Lauren is excited to become a part of the community of Georgia's child advocates who diligently work to improve the lives of children and families across the state.



Lauren Paul
University of Georgia



Council of Juvenile Court Judges Spring Seminar (CJCJ)

The Georgia Council of Juvenile Court Judges held its spring seminar in St. Simons Island on May 6-8, 2019. OCA Director Rachel Davidson and Deputy Director Jansen Head had the pleasure of joining juvenile court judges from across the state to learn and discuss new state and federal laws that will impact child welfare in the state, including the Family First Prevention Services Act.



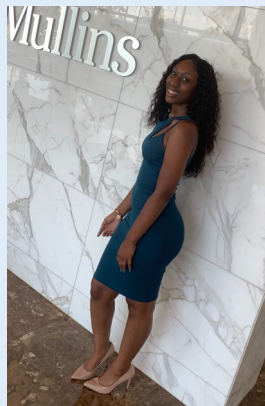
Judge Philip Spivey with Judge Juliette Wilshire Scales.

During this time, Chief Juvenile Court Judge of Fulton County, Juliette Scales, was sworn in as the new President of CJCJ! Congratulations, Judge Scales! And job well done, Judge Spivey!



Melissa Carter (Emory Law) and Chris Hempfling (DFCS) giving an overview of recent state and federal laws.

VOICE cont'd... to be completely successful. Founding EmpowerMent in Region 8 also known as Columbus, Ga was the beginning of true leadership for me. I took that and really ran with it for the first time not knowing the outcome but taking the risk. I found my balance when I graduated high school and wanted to still be involved so I trusted my gut and guidance by supports and kept going. Reaching your potential under pressure but continuing to push is joy within finding the balance. My balance is peace and maintaining structure within the rim of having a sustainable life.



Shimaine Quimbley, on the night she received a 2019 Shining Star Award from the Multi-Agency Alliance for Children (MAAC)

CASA cont'd...

willingness and eagerness to help the county DFCS team, they began brainstorming ways to get that message out to other case managers and CASAs. They came up with a poster titled "My CASA Helped Me" and displayed it outside the room where the county office held its monthly permanency staffings, which CASA is invited to. This poster has been instrumental in educating DFCS and CASA on the countless ways CASA plays a huge role in the county's cases. Below are some of the ways that CASA has helped case managers in Athens-Clarke! Way to go, team!

"My CASA(s) write the best court/case notes ever!"

"My CASA helped arrange visits between 3 parents. BIG help!"



"My CASA volunteers are wonderful! We work as a team to help the families. The communication is fantastic. They have developed a bond with the children and support the families. Court documentation is a plus! Love them."

"My CASA obtained a parent's records so I wouldn't have to, got to know the parents and built a rapport, attended visits with me, attended the parent's treatment graduation, contacted relatives, and kept me updated about all her work! She went above and beyond!"

Congratulations, LaKisha Pitts, MSW!

Please join OCA in congratulating LaKisha Pitts in her recent graduation from Georgia State University with a masters degree in social work! Ms. Pitts served on the OCA team as an intern during her last year of study.

To all recent graduates achieving their masters degree in social work, OCA wishes you all the best in your endeavors and looks forward to seeing the difference you all will make in the communities across state for our children and families!





Bringing Awareness to Sex Trafficking

“The UnHoly Tour”

By Shantelle Whitehead, OCA Investigator

I recently participated in “The UnHoly Tour”, which seeks to raise awareness of the issues of sex trafficking by having participants board a commercial tour bus and drive through trafficking-prone areas of Metro Atlanta, while hearing from experts in the field. On this particular tour, about 30 teenage girls from the Carver High school S.T.E.A.M. Academy participated. In addition to myself, other professionals representing non-government & government agencies, law enforcement and nonprofit spoke with the students about personal, work-related and educational experiences pertaining to trafficking.

Stories of truth, inspiration and empowerment were shared with the students. Equally, the students on this tour were very engaged and inquisitive - they asked lots of questions about risk factors and warning signs. Some of the key risk factors for the students are rooted in elements they are unable to control or change, such as their community. They also include pre-existing issues of the sex market (most of the neighborhoods we toured are notorious for prostitution-related activity and crime).

However, being aware of such risk factors and receiving other relevant information, including educational resources and tools was very empowering for all of the participants as they walked away with a better understanding of how to protect themselves and their peers from traffickers!



OCA Investigator Shantelle Whitehead (fourth from the right) with other participants on “The Unholy Tour”.

Warning Signs of Trafficking

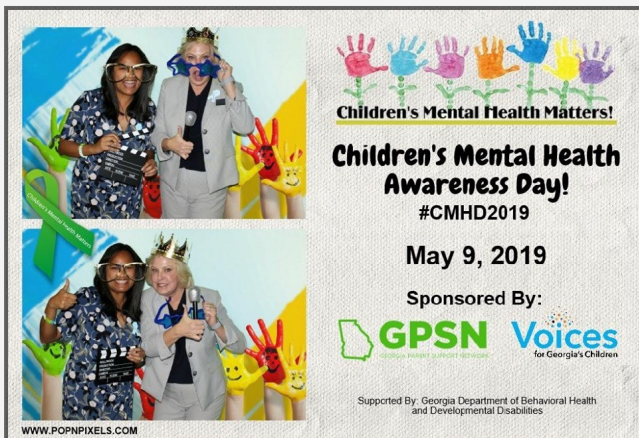
- ▶ The youth frequently travels with an older male or person who is not their guardian.
- ▶ The youth shows signs of physical trauma such as unexplained bruises, black eye, cuts or other marks.
- ▶ The youth shows signs of emotional trauma, including increased fear, anxiety, depression, tension, and/or nervousness.
- ▶ The youth is labeled as a chronic runaway.
- ▶ The youth has multiple delinquent charges.
- ▶ The youth has/is currently homeless.
- ▶ The youth has special marked tattoos/branding on his/her body (that he/she may be unwilling to explain).
- ▶ The youth uses substances on a regular basis.
- ▶ The youth is increasingly absent from school or missing from home, with no explanation of his/her whereabouts.
- ▶ The youth has started accumulating new clothes, shoes, jewelry and a new cell phone that he/she can't account for.
- ▶ The youth has an increase in income without explanation.
- ▶ The youth is very secretive about his/her whereabouts.
- ▶ The youth is chatting online with people his/her parents or friends have never met.
- ▶ The youth has possession of prepaid cards and or hotel keys or receipts.
- ▶ The youth has suddenly changed his/her appearance such as dressing more provocatively.
- ▶ The youth has been charged or has a previous record of prostitution.
- ▶ The youth has an explicitly sexual online profile found on internet community sites, internet classified ads, and/or social media sites.
- ▶ The youth has no identification or is not in control of his/her identification documents.
- ▶ The youth gives conflicting personal information or stories to law enforcement.
- ▶ The youth has an unstable home environment.

Source: www.gacares.org



AWARENESS, cont'd...

In addition to providing information about mental health, the event also involved activities to engage attendees in some fun and empowerment. As pictured below, our OCA staff and a featured youth speaker were excited to join in on the fun to promote children's mental health awareness. Later in the Capitol, youth leaders shared an empowering performance to express their solidarity and support for mental health awareness of the children in Georgia. As pictured below, various youth groups joined forces to celebrate youth empowerment to overcome the stigma that is often associated with mental health diagnoses and services.



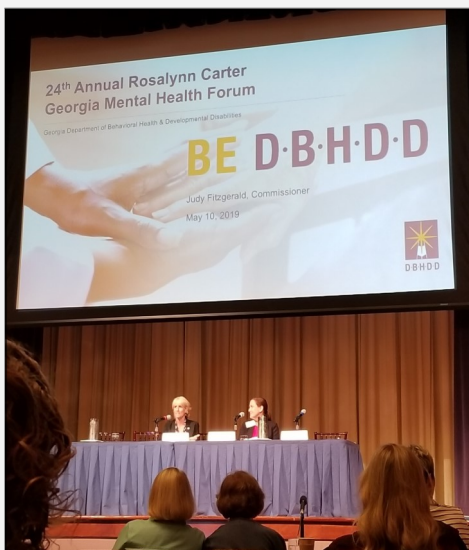
OCA Deputy Director Jansen Head and Investigator Beth Smith.



Various youth groups and supporting networks at the Capitol.

CARTER, cont'd...

due to mental health issues.” In redirecting the misconceptions to truth and support, Dr. McGiboney gave an overview of the movement for improvement, including suicide prevention training, PBIS (a proactive systems approach for changing school climate to be more positive, supportive, safe, and secured), and “Power Up for 30”. The next panel focused on how the Families First Prevention Services Act could affect Georgia. The panelists discussed how the federal legislation provides an opportunity for the state to receive federal funds for services intended to prevent children from entering foster care. The forum also hosted a panel focused on how the state is providing behavioral health services for older adults. Panelists focused on mental health care gaps for the growing older adult population in the state and potential solutions to address them.



DBHDD Commissioner Judy Fitzgerald and Susan Goico (Atlanta Legal Aid Society)



Melissa Carter (Emory Law), DFCS Director Tom Rawlings, and Michael Dailey (Casey Family Programs)



Wendy Eugene (RESPECT Institute), DHS Commissioner Robyn Crittenden, Brian Bruggeman (Three Rivers), and Cindy Levi (Avita CEO)



Save the Date!



November 13-15, 2019 • The Hotel at Avalon

The Georgia Office of the Child Advocate, Supreme Court of Georgia's Committee on Justice for Children, and the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services are pleased to announce the Call for Workshop Proposals for ***The Summit: Georgia's Child Welfare Conference*** to be held **November 13-15, 2019** at the **Alpharetta Conference Center at The Hotel at Avalon**.

You are invited to join other child welfare professionals at the third annual Summit, a statewide, multi-disciplinary conference for sharing best practices, and collaborating across professions. The agenda is taking shape for an extraordinary program for all child welfare professionals – case managers, lawyers, judges, policy makers, Court Appointed Special Advocates, stakeholders and anyone interested in improving our system of serving Georgia's abused and neglected children.

If you are interested in being considered as a potential presenter during The Summit, please complete the Call for Workshop Proposals form and click "Submit." **The deadline is Friday, June 28, 2019.** If you have questions, please contact AK Consulting Group at 850-523-4200. To access and submit the form, click [here](#).

*Georgia Office of the Child Advocate
for the Protection of Children*
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For general inquiries, assistance, or to file a complaint:

- Phone: (404) 656-4200
- Internet: <https://oca.georgia.gov/webform/request-oca-assistance-or-investigation>

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