

# ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS



## Juvenile Division of the Courts Lunch & Learn

Presented By: The Juvenile Division Team

February 27, 2020



## Meet the Juvenile Division Team



**Jennifer Craun**- Juvenile Justice Division Director

**Stasia McDonald**- Attorney *ad litem* Program Director

**Janet Bledsoe**- Attorney *ad litem* Program Assistant Director

**Lauren Geier**- Arkansas CASA Director

**Jera Houghtaling**- Court Improvement Program Coordinator

**Faye Shepherd**- Juvenile Justice Specialist

**Derek Henderson**- Commission on Children, Youth & Families Administrator

**Moshelle Helms**- Juvenile Division Data Analyst

**Lana Taylor**- Juvenile Division Executive Assistant



## Juvenile Division

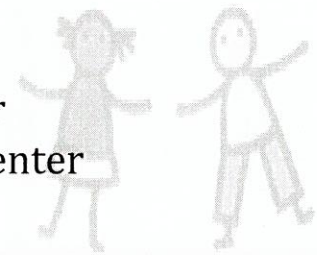
### About us

- The Juvenile Division administers programs for the Juvenile Courts across Arkansas and provides services for the juvenile judges such as juvenile specific judicial education and juvenile officer certification training.
- The Juvenile Division trains attorneys who provide quality legal representation for children and families involved in dependency-neglect cases, provides continuing legal education (CLE) opportunities for attorneys, and works with CASA programs across the state to train volunteers who advocate for children in foster care .

### Mission

The Juvenile Division strives to:

- **Encourage** judicial best practices;
- **Provide** the Juvenile Division of Circuit Court with resources to better serve the children and families who appear before the court;
- **Ensure** that the well-being of children, youth and families is a top priority within the Arkansas judicial system;
- **Provide** leadership in bringing diverse groups together to better serve children and families that enter our court system.



# *Attorney ad litem* Program

A series of light gray silhouettes of children in various playful poses, including running, crawling, and jumping, arranged in a line across the middle of the slide.

## About the Attorney ad litem Program

**The Arkansas General Assembly established the Division of Dependency-Neglect (DN) Representation within the Administrative Office of the Courts in 1997 to implement and oversee a program to ensure that all children in dependency-neglect proceedings were provided representation.**

- *Supreme Court issued a Per Curiam Order, Administrative Order 15 in 1999*
- *Revised per Arkansas Supreme Court Administrative Order No. 15.1 in September 2001*
  - *34 full-time AALs; 41 contract AALs*



## Juvenile Division

## More to know

- **Attorneys ad litem are appointed for *each child* in a Dependency-Neglect court proceeding;**
  - **Best interest**
  - **Communicate wishes**
- **Dependency-Neglect cases involve children who are alleged to have been abused or neglected by a caregiver;**
  - **Child abuse hotline**
  - **DCFS/CACD investigation**
- **Federal Law; DCFS policy; Arkansas Law**
  - **Dynamics of abuse and neglect**
  - **Trauma**
  - **Education**
  - **Mental health**
  - **Disability**





## AAL 2019 Stats

**Based on Open Case Totals\* for 2019- there were 4,735 active cases and 9,542 children.**

*\*Cases that were opened in 2019, and prior to- but were still active.*

**Full time AALs averaged per month:  
20.83 hearings and 14.88 meetings,  
resulting in;**

- 11.86 hearing hours
- 10.54 meeting hours
  
- 47 Client contacts
- 278.43 Stakeholder contacts

**170.99 hours TOTAL TIME**

**Contract AALs averaged per month:  
8.53 hearings and 4.64 meetings,  
resulting in;**

- 4.598 hearing hours
- 3.14 meeting hours
  
- 14.65 Client contacts
- 67.54 Stakeholder contacts

**50.12 hours TOTAL TIME**

# *Court Appointed Special Advocates Program*





## Juvenile Division

### MISSION

- *National CASA Association*  
**-to support and promote court appointed volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children.**
- *Arkansas State CASA Association*  
**-to provide technical assistance, grant funds and support to local CASA programs, in order that they may recruit and train qualified adult volunteers to speak out in court for the best interests of abused and neglected children.**
- *Local CASA Program*  
**-to train qualified adult volunteers to speak out in court for the best interests of abused and neglected children, in an effort to move those children toward safe, permanent homes.**

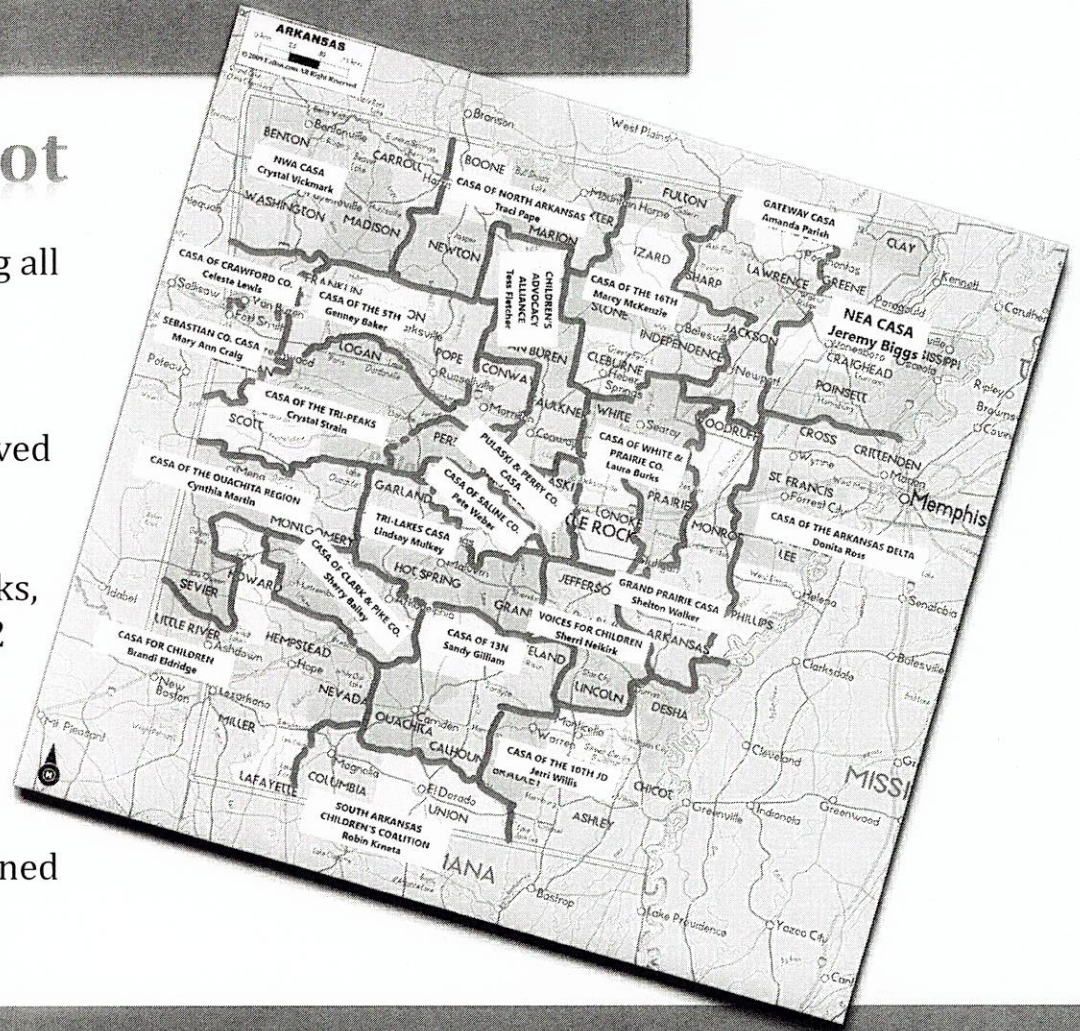
CASA





# CASA Statistical Snapshot

- 23 Local CASA Programs within Arkansas serving all 28 Judicial Districts and all 75 counties.
- From July 2019 - December 2020; 1,598 Trained Volunteer Advocates served 2,912 children involved in dependency-neglect court.
- Volunteer advocates must pass background checks, participate in an entrance interview, complete 32 hours of in person training facilitated by trained staff, and attend both staffing and court reviews before being sworn in as a CASA Volunteer.
- Volunteer Advocates work alongside trauma-trained CASA program staff to report information to the judge on behalf of the child(ren) they serve.





## Current Strategic Growth

- In 2019, Arkansas CASA developed 9 subject-area workgroups to evaluate our adherence to the National CASA core model and improve training throughout the system.
- In 2020, Arkansas CASA is creating a Master Training network to ensure CASA staff are being afforded the highest quality level of training before they facilitate the curriculum within their local programs.
- Writing and implementing standard training curriculum for local programs to use with their Board of Directors to focus on ethical program reporting, fundraising, and program oversight.
- Working with National CASA and Arkansas Stakeholders to develop improved communication around the work of an advocate within the Families First legislation.



# *Court Improvement Program*



## *Court Improvement Program*

### VISION

- Safety, Permanency, Well-Being
- Child and Family Voice
- High Quality Legal Representation





## About *CIP*

- 5 year Cycle and 5 year Strategic Plan
- 3 Federal CIP Grants;
  - Basic
  - Data & Technology
  - Training

Collaboration with DCFS

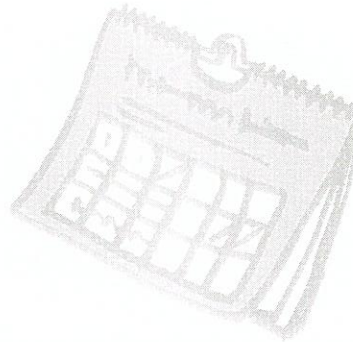
- CFSR Program Improvement Plan





## *Upcoming*

- **State Team Planning Meeting in Washington, DC**
- **Children in the Courts: Embassy Suites Little Rock; May 12-14, 2020**



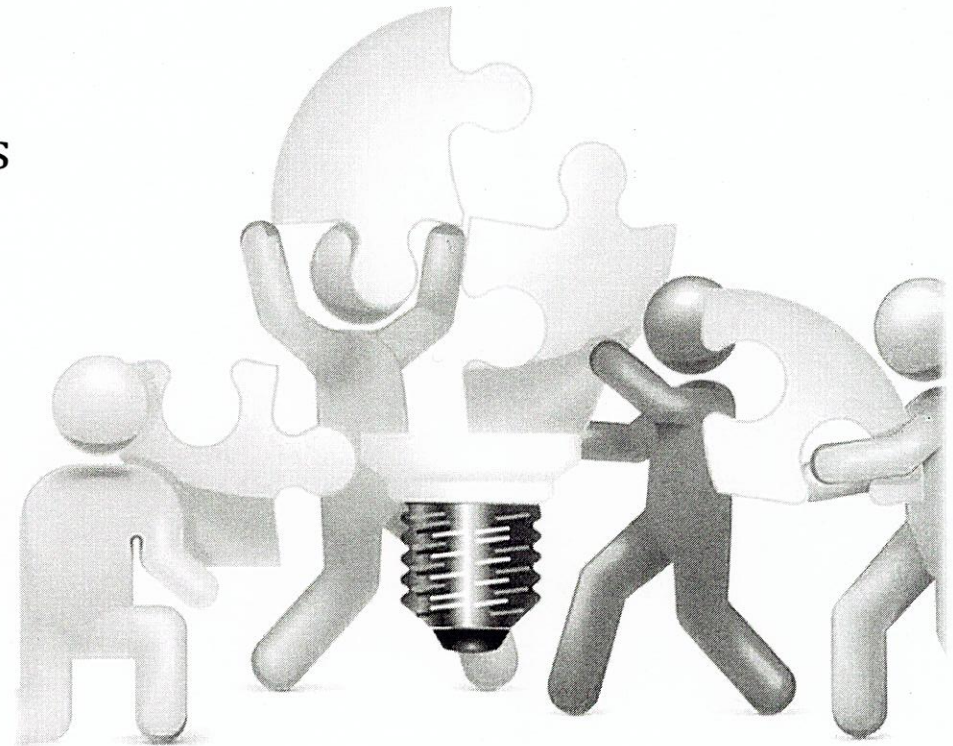
# *Juvenile Justice Program*





## *About Juvenile Justice*

- Train & Certify New Juvenile Officers Statewide
- Provide Assistance to Juvenile Courts, Judges, & Officers
- Work with DYS, Service Providers, and Other Stakeholders toward Juvenile Justice Reform & Best Practices





## *New Juvenile Officer Training*

- Approximately 40 trainees per year.
- Training consists of 13 Core Skills & Competencies.
- Currently offered 1X Year.
- On-Line Learning will allow Officers to begin their training as soon as they are hired.
- Will also offer Specialized Skills Training and Continuing Education through the LMS.

### **Beginning in 2019, the new Juvenile Officers were:**

- Issued an Oath by an Arkansas Supreme Court Justice pertaining to their duties and ethics.
- Provided a tour by Marty Sullivan, AOC Director.
- Given Study Guides and sat for a Certification Exam.

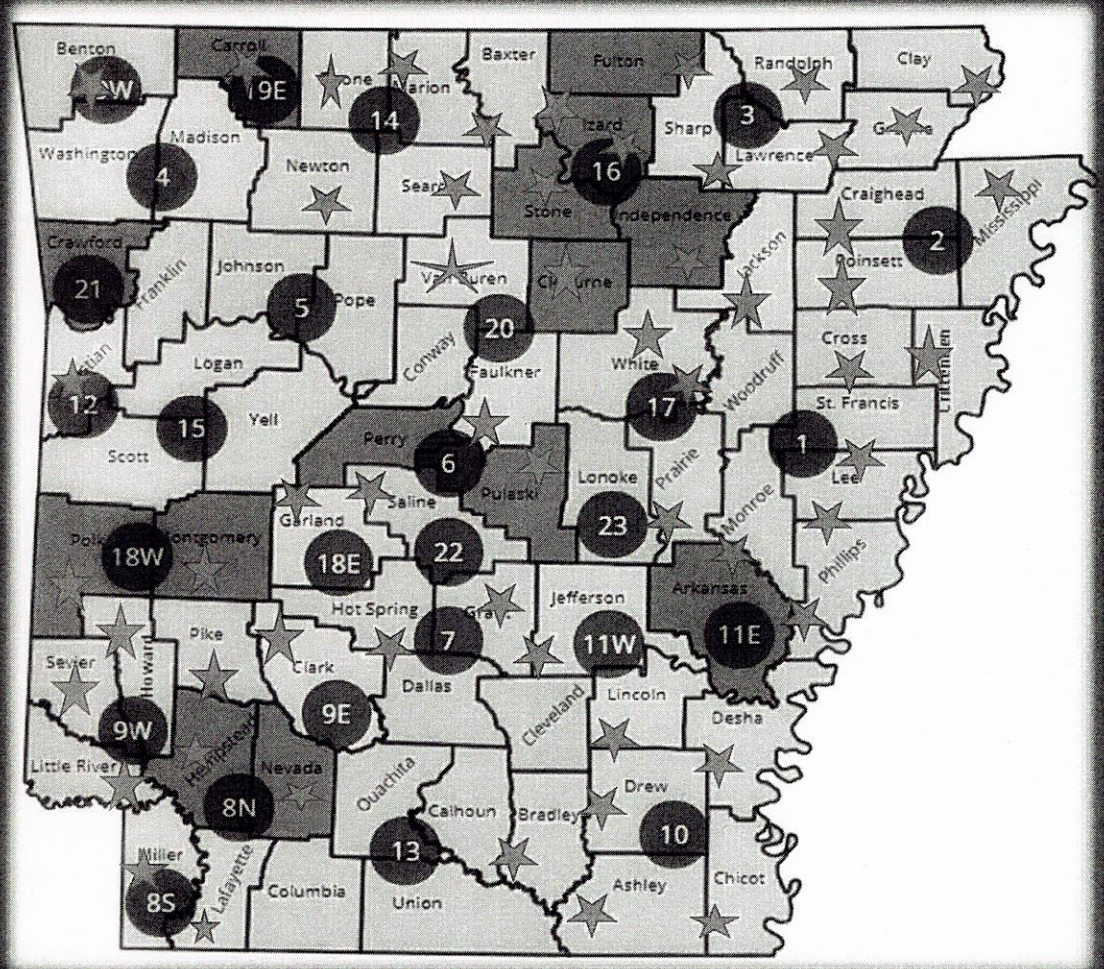


## *Act 189*

- Requires all Juvenile Officers be trained on the behavioral health screenings & risk/needs assessment selected by the AOC.
- This **has** to be completed by 6.30.20 and has kept the juvenile division and other divisions BUSY!
- We're getting there!

# Where Are We?

## Juvenile Division

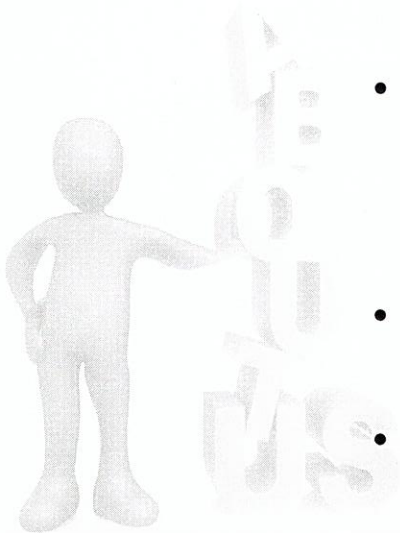


# *Commission on Children, Youth and Families*



## The Commission on Children, Youth and Families

- The Supreme Court created a permanent Commission in 2011.
- The stated goal of the Commission is “to study and recommend improvements to state courts and state court practice for children, youth, and families who are involved in proceedings in Arkansas Courts.”
- This mainly encompasses the dependency-neglect and juvenile justice systems, but the Commission is interested in any area in which children have contact with the court system (i.e. child testimony).
- Justice Wood co-chaired the Commission starting in 2014, and has been the sole chair since 2015.
- Commission members include juvenile judges, the Juvenile Division Director, state legislators and DHS representatives.





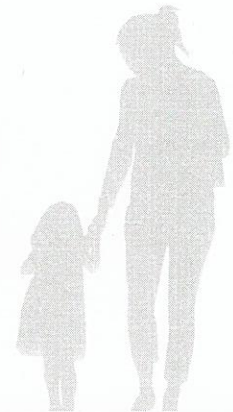
# Current Commission Members

- Justice Rhonda K. Wood- Arkansas Supreme Court\*
- Cindy Gillespie- Director, Department of Human Services\*
- Johnny Key- Commissioner of Education\*
- Rich Huddleston- Executive Director, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families\*
- Jennifer Craun- Arkansas Administrative Office of the Courts; Juvenile Justice Division Director\*
- Michael Crump- Director, Division of Youth Services\*
- David Meeks- Former Representative, Arkansas State Legislature
- Judge Earnest Brown
- Judge Troy Braswell
- Judge Teresa French
- Judge Barbara Halsey
- Representative Leanne Burch
- Sabrina Chin- Walmart
- Diana Smith- LCSW at UAMS
- Drew Shover- Chief Juvenile Officer, Benton County
- Tom Masseur- Executive Director, Disability Rights
- Madelyn Keith- Director of East Arkansas Youth Services
- Chastity Scifres- Pulaski County Attorney
- Carol Childs- Chief Juvenile Officer, Saline County
- Senator Missy Thomas Irvin



## Past and Present Work

- In 2014, the Commission chose to focus solely on juvenile justice reform.
- Today, the Commission is no longer solely focused on juvenile justice reform; two recent projects help highlight this shift:
  - The Commission established a special project committee led by Judge Brad Karren to create judicial resources related to child testimony. The committee has created bench cards judges can use to guide them on assessing child-witness competency, balancing the confrontation right with the need to protect victim-witnesses, and closing to courtroom to protect victim-witnesses.
  - The Commission is currently beginning a pilot program with two judges to use video-conferencing technology to allow youth in foster care outside of their home county to attend court hearings without having to miss school and travel great distances.





Thank You



Juvenile Division  
of the Courts

Contact the  
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501-410-1949