

PREVENTIVE
LEGAL
ADVOCACY &
PRE-PETITION
NATIONAL
COHORT




PLA Virtual Summit Agenda 2023

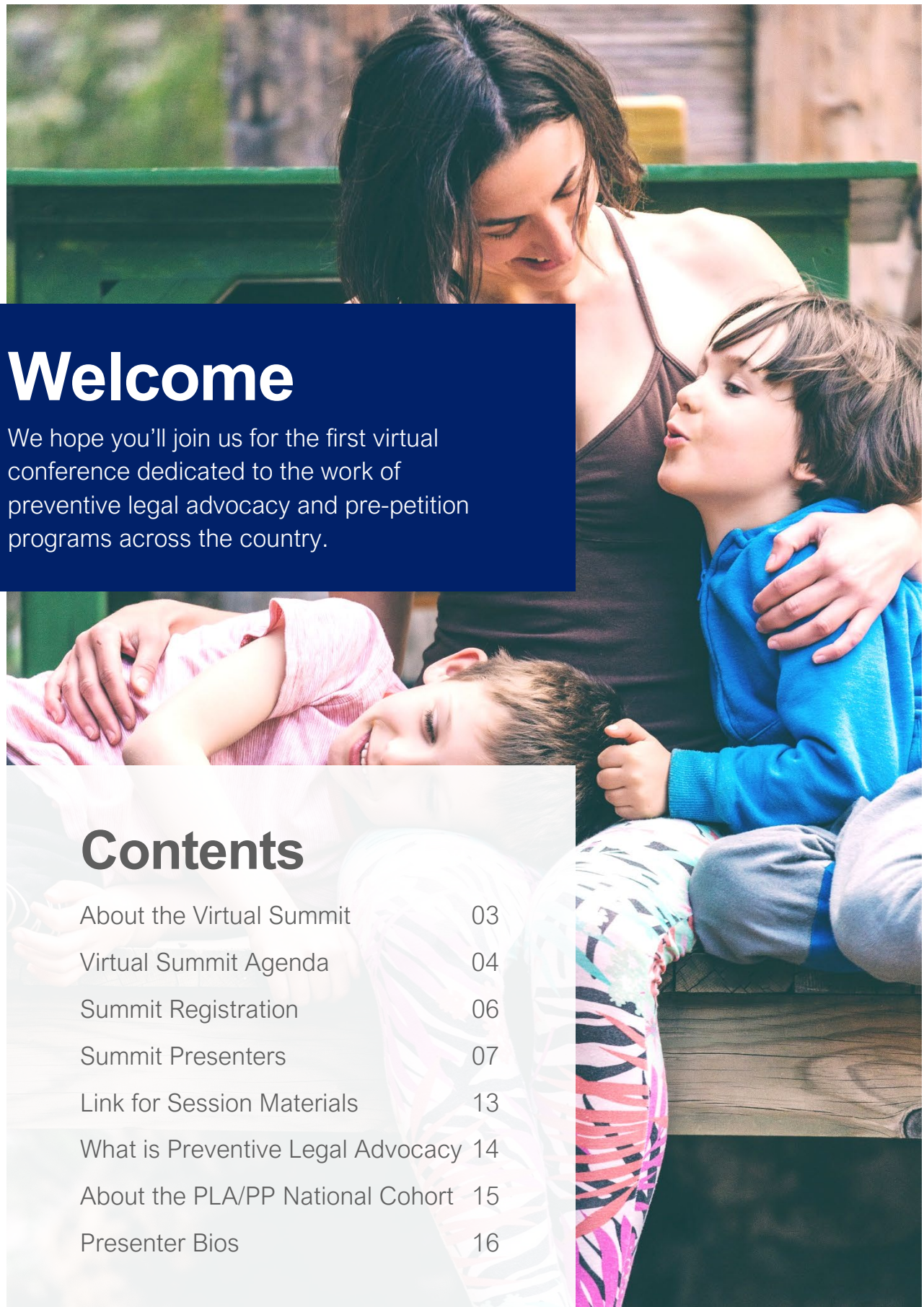
ONLINE
December 15th
2023: Full-day event,
drop-ins welcome

Free Virtual Summit Registration:
[Click Here to Register](#)

 etcook2@emory.edu

 (478) 251-6415

 www.placohort.com



Welcome

We hope you'll join us for the first virtual conference dedicated to the work of preventive legal advocacy and pre-petition programs across the country.

Contents

About the Virtual Summit	03
Virtual Summit Agenda	04
Summit Registration	06
Summit Presenters	07
Link for Session Materials	13
What is Preventive Legal Advocacy	14
About the PLA/PP National Cohort	15
Presenter Bios	16

About the Virtual Summit

The National Preventive Legal Advocacy Partnership was started in late 2020 with the support of Casey Family Programs and several dedicated experts in the field of early legal advocacy. Since that time, the National PLA Partnership has given rise to the Preventive Legal Advocacy & Pre-Petition National Cohort, which now brings together over 200 stakeholders and 54 unique PLA and PP programs to share information and resources about the fields of preventive legal advocacy and pre-petition representation. Over the last fifteen months, Cohort participants have been meeting together virtually to discuss the work and explore various topics related to preventive legal advocacy and pre-petition representation as well as best practices for program design and implementation.

With so much great work happening around the country, and with interest in new PLA and PP programs growing by the day, Cohort cohost, Vivek Sankaran, had the idea of creating a virtual summit to showcase some of the existing and emerging PLA and PP programs and publicly highlight the strides we're making in ongoing efforts to provide upstream civil legal representation, social services, and other resources to families at-risk of separation and child welfare system involvement.

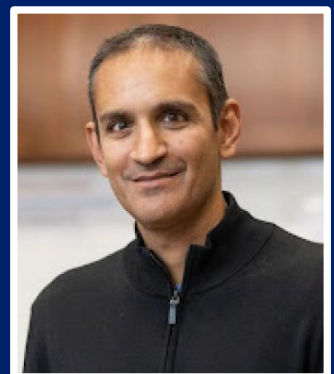
Each of the presenters featured at the PLA Virtual Summit has first-hand experience providing preventive legal advocacy and pre-petition representation or working directly with early legal advocacy programs and broader efforts to support these services. Summit presenters span the gamut of the multi-faceted world of preventive legal advocacy and each brings a unique set of skills and experiences as it relates to program design and implementation and the day-to-day practice of early legal advocacy.

Whether you're already part of an existing or emerging program or are simply interested in learning more about PLA and PP programs and their capacity to protect against the trauma of family separation and prevent entries into foster care, we hope you'll join us on December 15th for nine great sessions featuring leaders in the field of preventive legal advocacy and pre-petition representation. Attendees will be asked to pre-register for the event and are invited to drop in on sessions of interest throughout the day. We look forward to seeing you then!



Emilie T. Cook
Summit Cohost

Preventive Legal Advocacy Fellow
Barton Child Law & Policy Center
Emory University School of Law



Vivek Sankaran
Summit Cohost

Director, Child Advocacy Law Clinic
Child Welfare Appellate Clinic
University of Michigan School of Law

Virtual Summit Agenda

9:00 - 9:10 EST

Welcome & Introduction

Vivek Sankaran, Director, Child Advocacy Law Clinic, University of Michigan
Emilie T. Cook, Preventive Legal Advocacy Fellow, Barton Child Law & Policy Center

9:10 - 9:50 EST

Empowering Justice: The Opportunity for Law School Clinics in the Field of Preventive Legal Advocacy and Pre-Petition Representation

Cary Bloodworth, Director, FLASC, University of Wisconsin
Rebecca Greening, Lecturer & Clinical Instructor, Harvard Law School

10 min break

10:00 - 10:40 EST

Mitigating the Harms and Reaping the Benefits: The Importance of Effective Pre-Petition Advocacy in Navigating Hidden Foster Care

D'Laney Gielow, Senior Staff Attorney, Legal Aid Chicago
Melissa Staas, Supervisory Attorney, Legal Aid Chicago
Leah Yaris, Staff Attorney, Legal Aid Chicago

10 min break

10:50 - 11:30 EST

Investing in Families: Funding Preventive Legal Advocacy and Pre-Petition Programs

Jey Rajaraman, Associate Director of Litigation, Center on Children and the Law
Ronald Baze, General Counsel, Oklahoma Department of Human Services
Lauren Nichols, Director, Director, Pritzker Foster Care Initiative

10 min break

11:40 - 12:20 EST

From Dependency to Synergy: Building Community Referral Networks for PLA and Pre-Petition Programs

Jill Bauer, Staff Attorney, Legal Services of South Central Michigan
Jennifer Stoller, Staff Attorney, Youth Rights & Justice

Agenda Continued

12:30 - 1:10 EST

10 min break

Keys to Holistic Prevention Work: How Social Workers and Parent Partners Help Drive Families Towards Successful Outcomes

Pari Lucero, Administrator, Parent Helpline – LADL
Alondra DeSantiago, Social Worker, Dependency Advocacy Center
Gildardo Amador, Mentor Parent, Dependency Advocacy Center
Brian E. Jones, Staff Attorney, Dependency Advocacy Center

1:20 - 2:00 EST

10 min break

Driving Change: Legislative Efforts to Support Preventive Legal Advocacy and Pre-Petition Programs

Maral Karaccusian, Senior Children & Human Services Deputy, Supervisor Hahn
Jeff Wright, State Public Defender, Iowa
Talia AyAy, Vice President & Executive Director, F.I.R.S.T. Clinic

2:10 - 2:50 EST

10 min break

Empowering Families & Protecting Futures: Opportunities for Preventative Legal Advocacy in ICWA Cases

Sheldon Spotted-Elk, Senior Director, Judicial & National Engagement CFP
Lisa Woodard, Associate Attorney, Montana State Office of Public Defenders
Shannon Smith, Executive Director, ICWA Law Center

3:00 - 3:40 EST

10 min break

Cultivating Collaboration: How Agency Partnership Can Promote Preventive Legal Advocacy

Sarah Cook, Director of Policy & Legal Services, Dependency Advocacy Center
Maria Griglio, Directing Attorney FSAC, Children's Law Center

3:50 - 4:30 EST

From Data to Impact: Demonstrating the Power of Preventive Legal Advocacy through Data Collection and Program Evaluations

Dr. Stef Sloan, Professor and Research & Evaluation Consultant, University of Kansas
Dr. Alexandra Pimentel, Data Advocacy Manager, Casey Family Programs

4:30 - 4:45 EST

Closing Remarks

How to Register

Use this link to register for the Summit:

https://emory.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_VG17CA9Q-uSuz4AmUNbzw

- This is a free event. There is no cost to register. Once registered, you will receive an email and calendar invite for the conference. All sessions on 12/15 will use the same zoom link.



Summit Presenters



Cary Bloodworth
Director
Family Legal Advocacy and
Supports Clinic (FLASC)
University of Wisconsin
Session 1: Empowering Justice



Rebecca Greening
Lecturer & Clinical Instructor
Family Justice Clinical Seminar &
WilmerHale Legal Services
Center's Family Justice Clinic
Harvard Law School
Session 1: Empowering Justice



D'Laney Gielow
Senior Staff Attorney
Family Defense & Preservation Team
Legal Aid Chicago's Children &
Families Practice Group
Session 2: Mitigating the Harms



Leah Yaris
Staff Attorney
Family Defense & Preservation Team
Legal Aid Chicago's Children &
Families Practice Group
Session 2: Mitigating the Harms

Presenters Continued



Melissa Staas
Supervisory Attorney
Family Defense & Preservation Team
Legal Aid Chicago's Children &
Families Practice Group
Session 2: Mitigating the Harms



Jey Rajaraman
Associate Director of Litigation
Center on Children and the Law
American Bar Association
Session 3: Investing in Families



Ron Baze
General Counsel
Oklahoma Department of
Human Services
Session 3: Investing in Families



Lauren Nichols
Director
Pritzker Foster Care Initiative
Anthony and Jeanne Pritzker
Family Foundation
Session 3: Investing in Families

Presenters Continued



Jill Bauer
Staff Attorney
LSCCM Pre-Petition Program
Legal Services of South
Central Michigan
Session 4: From Dependency to Synergy



Jennifer Stoller
Staff Attorney
Family Defense Project (FDP)
Youth, Rights & Justice
Session 4: From Dependency to Synergy



Pari Lucero
Parent Partner II / Administrator
Parent Helpline
Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers
Session 5: Keys to Holistic Prevention



Brian E. Jones
Staff Attorney
First Call for Families
Dependency Advocacy Center
Session 5: Keys to Holistic Prevention

Presenters Continued



Alondra DeSantiago
Social Worker
Corridor Program
Dependency Advocacy Center
Session 5: Keys to Holistic Prevention



Gildardo Amador
Mentor Parent
First Call for Families
Dependency Advocacy Center
Session 5: Keys to Holistic Prevention

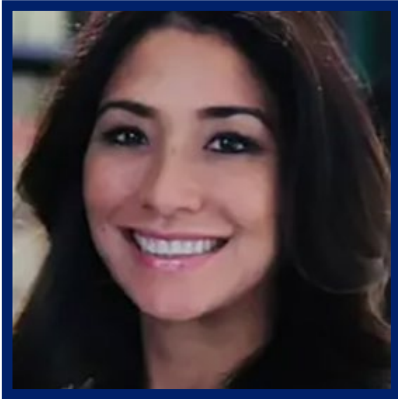


Maral Karaccusian
Senior Children and Human
Services Deputy
Supervisor Janice Hahn
LA County Board of Supervisors
Session 6: Driving Change



Jeff Wright
State Public Defender
Iowa
Session 6: Driving Change

Presenters Continued



Talia AyAy
Vice President & Executive Director
F.I.R.S.T. Clinic
Session 6: Driving Change



Sheldon Spotted-Elk
Senior Director
Judicial and National Engagement
Casey Family Programs
Session 7: Empowering Families



Lisa Woodard
Associate Attorney
Family Defense Bureau
Montana's State Office of Public
Defenders
Session 7: Empowering Families



Shannon Smith
Executive Director/Attorney
The ICWA Law Center
Session 7: Empowering Families

Presenters Continued



Sarah Cook
Director of Policy & Legal Services
Dependency Advocacy Center
Session 8: Cultivating Collaboration



Maria Griglio
Directing Attorney
Family Support & Advocacy Center
Children's Law Center
Session 8: Cultivating Collaboration



Dr. Stef Sloan
Professor and Research &
Evaluation Consultant
School of Social Welfare
University of Kansas
Session 9: From Data to Impact



Dr. Alexander Pimentel
Data Integrity Advisor
Data Advocacy Team
Casey Family Programs
Session 9: From Data to Impact

Session Materials

Scan the QR code below to access session materials after the event. Note that all sessions will be recorded and uploaded to the Resource Library on the Cohort website following the Virtual Summit. You may access these resources and more at placohort.org



What is preventive legal advocacy & pre-petition representation?

“ As child-welfare pre-petition and prevention programs, we are committed to fighting poverty and racial inequity, which are the most significant factors of child welfare involvement ”

- Katie Joh, Dependency Advocacy Clinic, California

Preventive legal advocacy (PLA) is part of the continuum of high quality legal advocacy designed to support child and family well-being. PLA refers to a wide range of proactive legal efforts aimed at safeguarding the rights and well-being of parents and families before they become entangled in the child welfare system.

Unlike traditional parent representation models that provide for legal representation only after a petition has been filed in court, PLA and PP programs seek to make legal services available to indigent families before there is a need for court intervention. PLA and PP programs are able to reach families early and reduce the need for foster care by staying rooted in the communities they seek to serve and targeting the underlying causes for system involvement.

Broadly speaking, PLA programs focus their efforts on educating families about their rights and providing legal representation to address destabilizing legal issues such as housing instability, domestic violence, lack of public assistance, educational concerns, immigration issues, and more.

Pre-petition representation (PP) is a type of preventive legal advocacy that focuses more narrowly on legal representation for parents facing CPS investigations and other acute situations that can quickly lead to family separation.



Preventive legal advocacy and pre-petition programs seek to empower families with the knowledge and resources necessary to maintain stable and nurturing environments for children. PLA and PP programs accomplish these goals by utilizing multi-disciplinary legal teams to provide holistic, client-centered representation. In doing so, these programs minimize the risk of involvement with child protective services and the trauma associated with entry into foster care.

Those who practice preventive legal advocacy and provide pre-petition representation believe that when families have the resources they need to thrive and the ability to receive natural support within their community, children are the ultimate beneficiaries, as they're able to remain safely with their families and communities. PLA and PP practitioners further acknowledge that poverty is far too often conflated with neglect. They understand that this fact, coupled with ongoing racial inequities, has led to pervasive racial disparity within the existing system. For this reason, much of the work of preventive legal advocacy is focused on addressing the material hardships and legal concerns that so often accompany poverty and racial inequities. ■

About the PLA/PP National Cohort

“ Sometimes the strangeness of proactive legal work in the area of family preservation feels daunting, and it is very helpful to me to know that others are doing it successfully and effectively. ”

– Kristen Foster, Family Advocacy and Support Team Clinic, Arizona



Preventive legal advocacy aims to protect children and families by promoting family stability, strengthening parent-child relationships, and preventing formal intervention by child protection agencies. Effective preventive legal advocacy requires collaboration with community organizations, policymakers, and stakeholders to address systemic issues like poverty, inadequate housing, and lack of access to healthcare services.

By addressing upstream civil legal issues, preventive legal advocacy programs keep families together, promote social determinants of health, and reduce unnecessary reports to the child protection hotline. These programs provide interdisciplinary, holistic legal representation, educate parents about their rights and responsibilities, and ensure access to financial supports and social services. By focusing on prevention, these programs support families in crisis and ensure safe and

nurturing environments to reduce the need for intrusive interventions by the child protection system.

The PLA/PP National Cohort brings existing and emerging early legal advocacy programs and stakeholders together to provide an invaluable opportunity for collaboration and knowledge exchange. Despite new widespread interest in these types of programs, preventive legal advocacy remains a relatively new field. By fostering a sense of community among program directors, staff, and community stakeholders, the cohort serves as a free space to explore best practices and share resources, ideas, and information to enhance program impact and further the field of early legal advocacy.

Interested in joining the Cohort? Please visit placohort.org to learn more and sign up for our listserv and monthly meetings.

Presenter Bios

Cary Bloodworth

Cary directs the Family Legal Advocacy and Supports Clinic (FLASC) at the University of Wisconsin Law School, where she works with both law students and social work students in providing legal and non-legal services to families at risk of formal involvement with the child welfare system. Law students provide one-on-one limited services to many and direct family law representation to a few clients during their time with the clinic, while social work students assist clients with non-legal needs, all with the goal of helping to stabilize the family.

Before joining the law school, Cary worked in the Wisconsin State Public Defender's appellate division, where she litigated appeals in criminal cases, termination of parental rights cases, juvenile cases, and mental health commitments. During her time there, she argued 2 cases before the Wisconsin Supreme Court. Cary also has prior family law experience, having practiced family law at Community Justice Inc., a non-profit law firm that provides reduced-fee legal representation to low-income families. She now serves on Community Justice Inc.'s board of directors.

Cary received her J.D. from the University of Wisconsin Law School, where she was a Law In Action Research Fellow and served on the executive board of the Wisconsin Law Review. After graduating, Cary clerked for the Honorable Lynn Adelman in the Eastern District of Wisconsin.

Rebecca Greening

Rebecca Greening was appointed as a lecturer on law at Harvard Law School in Fall 2023 to co-teach the Family Justice Clinical Seminar. Rebecca has been a Clinical Instructor at the WilmerHale Legal Services Center's Family Justice Clinic (formerly Family/DV Law Clinic) since September 2020.

From 2013 to 2020, Rebecca had a solo practice focusing on public defense for parents and children in the Juvenile Courts in Massachusetts. Her practice included representing parents and children in termination of parental rights cases, CHINS, and guardianship matters. Rebecca began her career as a public defender as a Staff Attorney in the Children and Family Law Division of the Committee for Public Counsel Services in the Boston and Lowell offices.

Rebecca holds a B.S. in Social Work from New York University (2007) and a J.D. from Northeastern University School of Law (2010). Born and raised in Jamaica Plain, a neighborhood of Boston, Rebecca now lives in the suburbs with her partner and two children, Mario and Estella.

D'Laney Gielow

D'Laney Gielow is a Senior Staff Attorney with Legal Aid Chicago's Children & Families Practice Group, where works as part of the Family Defense & Preservation team. D'Laney joined Legal Aid Chicago in 2020 as a Skadden Fellow with a project focused on enforcing the reasonable efforts requirement. After her fellowship, D'Laney stayed on as a staff attorney representing parents and caregivers in pre- and post-petition proceedings. She received her law degree from Yale Law School and her undergraduate degree from Northwestern University.

Melissa Staas

Melissa Staas is a Supervisory Attorney with Legal Aid Chicago's Children & Families Practice Group and has practiced law in the field of family defense for over 15 years. At Legal Aid Chicago, Melissa leads the work of the Family Defense and Preservation team, which provides representation for parents and caretakers during DCFS investigations, registry appeals of "indicated" findings, child protection court proceedings, and appellate advocacy. Melissa serves as a current Member of the American Bar Association's Commission on Homelessness and Poverty.

Leah Yaris

Leah Yaris is a Staff Attorney with Legal Aid Chicago's Children & Families Practice Group. She works on the Family Defense & Preservation team, providing parent and caregiver representation in DCFS investigations and indicated report appeals. She also practices on the Family Law team, providing representation in parentage, divorce, and protective order cases, oftentimes for clients with concurrent family defense issues. Leah received her law degree from Northwestern Pritzker School of Law and her undergraduate degree from Washington University in St. Louis.

Jey Rajaraman

Jey Rajaraman is the Associate Director of Litigation at the ABA Center on Children and the Law. Jey has over 18 years of experience and commitment to promoting access to justice for families and children. Most recently she served as a management consultant at the newly created Family Integrity and Justice Works (FIJW) at Public Knowledge. She was Chief Counsel of the Family Representation Project at Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ) and before that worked in the Office of the Public Defender.

Jey's entire career and much of her non-career life has been dedicated to eliminating justice gaps for families and children that live in poverty in New Jersey and across the nation. Throughout the years, she has litigated on behalf of parents and children in the child welfare field, established antiracism initiatives to reduce racial disparities in state systems while managing a multidisciplinary team of attorneys, social workers, and parent allies.

Ronald Baze

Ronald Baze has served as General Counsel for Oklahoma's Department of Human Services since August of 2013. He is admitted to practice law in both Texas and Oklahoma, including the Northern, Eastern, and Western Federal Districts of Oklahoma as well as the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals.

After an early career in television journalism, Ron graduated from the University of Texas Law School in 1998. Immediately after graduation, he served as a briefing attorney with the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. From there, he was hired as in-house counsel and administrator for a private Oklahoma home health care company. His private practice experience then spanned a number of years with a small firm in downtown Oklahoma City where his primary focus was employment law. Ron moved back into public sector law as an Assistant Attorney General in the Litigation Division of the Oklahoma Attorney General. His primary focus of practice was employment and civil rights related matters. He was subsequently assigned by the Attorney General to work under contract with the Department of Human Services as its General Counsel. Upon the conclusion of the contractual agreement, Ron was asked to remain with DHS. It was an offer he gladly accepted, and he has had the privilege of remaining there to the current day.

While serving as in-house counsel, Ron was the author of a home health case management handbook. Subsequently, as General Counsel for DHS, Ron was also primary author of a handbook on the practice and procedures involved in administrative hearing processes. He has presented CLE courses on topics ranging from discrimination and Open Records to data breach management and medical marijuana. He is also host of the departmental podcast series, DHS Legal Matters. Over the previous three years he served as a member of the Oklahoma Supreme Court's Family Representation Oversight Committee to promote and enhance high quality legal representation in deprived matters. Most recently, Ron received the Thomas J. Blazusiak award from the American Public Human Services Association for his contributions to the human services legal community.

Ron and his wife, Dawn, are in their 34th year of marriage. He is most proud of their two now-grown sons. The youngest is a manager with Amazon in Oklahoma City, and the oldest is in an emergency room residency at Kent Hospital in Rhode Island.

Ron has found relaxation for the past 30 years by playing the acoustic guitar. He is a former professional racquetball player; a sport which he still enjoys to this day and that takes him across the country playing in tournaments.

Lauren Nichols

Lauren Nichols is the Director of Anthony and Jeanne Pritzker Family Foundation/ Pritzker Foster Care Initiative a private family foundation investing in strengthening many of the unique institutions that define Los Angeles. The Foundation aims to enrich our community not just for the present, but for generations to come, with particular focus on child and family wellbeing, health, higher education, the environment and the arts. Before joining Anthony and Jeanne Pritzker Family Foundation, Lauren worked primarily in arts and culture organizations in Development. Lauren has worked for a number of diverse nonprofit organizations including: 18th Street Arts Center, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Arts Council for Long Beach, the Newport Harbor Nautical Museum, and the Orange County Community Foundation.

Lauren served as Mid City West Neighborhood Council Chair from 2021 – 2023. In recognition for her community work, the Empowerment Congress nominated her in 2017, as one of the '40 under 40' in LA County for civic engagement. Lauren also serves as the Secretary/Treasurer of Foster Care Counts a nonprofit dedicated to improving the lives of youth in foster care. She is a founding member of the Foster Nation Young Leaders Collective. Lauren has also been an active member of the Advisory Board for Emerging Arts Leaders Los Angeles (now part of Arts for LA). She holds a BA in History/French from Tulane University and a MA in Arts Management from Claremont Graduate University.

Jill Bauer

Attorney Jill Bauer represented parents in Child Welfare cases in Flint, Michigan for a decade. She now works in a pre-petition program in Ypsilanti/Ann Arbor, Michigan at Legal Services of South Central Michigan where she handles a variety of cases, with a focus on housing retention and family law. She also provides support during CPS investigations and disseminates information about parents' rights. Jill is also the author of, "The Nine Lives of John Aslin," the true story of an indigenous man who served 39 years in prison for a non-violent crime.

Jennifer Stoller

Jennifer Stoller has been a staff attorney at Youth Rights & Justice for 10 years, representing parents and children in dependency cases. While maintaining a trial-level case load, Jennifer has spent nearly 2 years building YJR's preventative legal advocacy program, Family Defense Project. Through the Family Defense Project (FDP), Jennifer works with Multnomah County parents whose children are at risk of entering the foster care system. By addressing clients' legal and resource needs, FDP works to empower families, protect children, and prevent foster care placement. Jennifer previously worked at Legal Aid Services of Oregon and The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland.

Pari Lucero

Pari Lucero is a Parent Partner and the Parent Helpline Administrator at Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers in LA County where she uses her lived experience to support parents at risk for child welfare system involvement. Pari is a passionate advocate who believes that the best way to protect children is to help their parents obtain the stability and resources necessary to keep their children safe. Pari is a regular contributor to the Preventive Legal Advocacy National Cohort where she has lead discussions on the important role parent partners play in holistic advocacy and interdisciplinary legal teams.

Brian E. Jones

Brian E. Jones brings his expertise from working with the Family Defense Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services from 2018 to 2021. Currently at Dependency Advocacy Center, Brian is a part of the First Call for Families prevention program, where he advises parents during child welfare investigations and voluntary cases while providing essential training to community members and service providers. Brian values DAC's holistic, interdisciplinary approach to client representation, making it a unique and fulfilling place to work.

Alondra DeSantiago

As a Corridor Social Worker at Dependency Advocacy Center, Alondra brings her expertise to support families navigating complex systems, such as the Criminal Justice and Dependency systems. With a Bachelor's in Social Work from San Jose State University (2017) and a Master's in Social Work (2021), she is dedicated to helping families access community resources and develop self-sufficiency skills during challenging times. Alondra's commitment lies in providing unwavering support during their most vulnerable moments, embodying hope and a fresh start that DAC stands for. Outside of her work, she enjoys quality family time, exploring National Parks, and savoring new culinary experiences.

Gildardo (Gilbert) Amador

As a parent that has successfully navigated the child welfare system, Gildardo utilizes his first hand knowledge and lived experience to advocate, support, and empower parents within the system as a Dependency Advocacy Center mentor parent with the First Call for Families prevention program. Gildardo provides invaluable insight, supportive advice, and emotional encouragement to those striving to reunify and assists in developing the tools to help parents and prevent system involvement. Gildardo has been a part of DAC for one year and is very passionate about the work that he does in supporting and assisting the families of Santa Clara county.

Maral Karaccusian

Maral (she/her) is a public servant who is deeply committed to the advancement of progressive policies that defend and increase opportunities for children, older adults, and current and former foster youth. She serves as the Senior Children and Human Services Deputy for Supervisor Janice Hahn, where she focuses on developing and implementing policies for early care and education, child welfare, social services, domestic violence, issues pertaining to older adults, helping direct mental health resources to small community based agencies, and ultimately working to ensure that the County's safety net is reaching those who need it the most.

Maral holds a bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in political science from UCLA and a master's degree in social work from USC. At USC, she was a recipient of the Gladys M. Salit Award, recognizing students who demonstrate academic excellence, outstanding field work performance, and exceptional leadership and creativity. She most recently served on the Board of GALAS LGBTQ+ Armenian Society prior to joining the CNM Board.

Jeff Wright

Jeff Wright is the State Public Defender of Iowa. Prior to his appointment in 2019, Jeff served as Chair of the Iowa Board of Parole. In his role as State Public Defender, Jeff was instrumental in implementing Iowa's statewide preventive legal advocacy program. Jeff is a graduate of Morningside College (2000) with a degree in International Affairs, and Drake University Law School (2006). He was admitted to the Iowa Bar in 2006 and founded the Carr & Wright Law Office. Jeff practiced primarily in the areas of Criminal, Juvenile and Family Law until his appointment as Chair of the Board of Parole and subsequent appointment as State Public Defender.

A significant portion of Jeff's practice was dedicated to assisting individuals through the legal process who had suffered trauma. He focused on understanding their needs, and treated them with compassion while protecting their constitutional rights. Jeff enjoys spending time with his wife and two children. In addition, he is actively involved in the community, volunteering for the Ankeny Chamber of Commerce, Little League Baseball, and serving on multiple volunteer committees benefiting youth and education.

Talia AyAy

Talia AyAy is the Vice President and Executive Director of the F.I.R.S.T. Clinic, a Washington state legal Clinic that provides holistic support to pregnant persons and parents of newborns at risk of CPS intervention and removal. Talia is a graduate of Seattle University School of Law and has been a parents' representation attorney since 2009. Talia's practice focuses mainly on representation of parents and children in dependency litigation, administrative law, and family law. She also has experience in tribal representation and has worked as a guardian ad litem. Talia is passionate about social justice and increasing equitable access to resources for her clients, their families, and the community at large.

Sheldon Spotted-Elk

Sheldon Spotted Elk works as the Senior Director of Judicial and National Engagement at Casey Family Programs. He has a background and presents regularly on tribal law, child welfare and the ICWA.

Sheldon is currently a judge on the Ute Indian Tribe Court of Appeals (Fort Duchesne, Utah) in a jurisdiction he once represented children in child welfare and juvenile delinquency matters. He has worked as an adjunct professor teaching a law school course on Family Law in Indian Country.

Sheldon is a graduate from University of New Mexico School of Law and received the Certificate in Federal Indian Law. He completed his undergraduate degree from University of Utah College of Social Work. And he and his two sons are members of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe.

Lisa Woodard

Lisa Woodward is an associate attorney with Montana's State Office of Public Defenders, Family Defense Bureau. As part of the Family Defense Bureau, Lisa provides representation for children, parents, and caregivers in child welfare cases in 9 counties throughout the central and northern regions of Montana. In 2023, Lisa participated in drafting and lobbying efforts for Montana's new ICWA legislation. Lisa now utilizes this new law in conjunction with preventative legal advocacy and pre-petition strategies to quickly reunite families, and has successfully secured early dismissals in several of her recent ICWA cases. Lisa recently won the 2023 Family Defense Unit Attorney of the Year award for her work in this area. Before joining the Office of Public Defenders, Lisa was a Bergstrom Fellow at the Child Advocacy Law Clinic at the University of Michigan School of Law, and graduated from the Alexander Blewett III School of Law in Montana with a special certification in Indian Law.

Shannon Smith

Shannon Smith has served as Executive Director of the ICWA Law Center since July 1, 2004. Shannon has been with the ICWA Law Center since 2000 and has over 20 years of experience working in the field of Indian child welfare. Shannon has provided direct legal representation to hundreds of families impacted by the child protection system in state and tribal courts. Shannon has provided ICWA training to local and national audiences.

Shannon is a graduate of the University of Minnesota Law School class of 1999; Shannon graduated with honors and earned the MJF Volunteer of the Year Award in 1999. Prior to joining the ICWA Law Center, Shannon clerked for the Honorable Robert A. Blaeser of the Hennepin County Juvenile Court. Faculty and Planning Team

Shannon is highly regarded as a leader in the field of Indian child welfare and has served on several committees impacting the interests of Indian children, their families, and their tribes, including the Supreme Court Juvenile Protection Rules Committee, the Legal Service Advisory Council Emerging Leaders and the Minnesota Tribal/State Agreement drafting committee

Sarah Cook

Sarah Cook is the Director of Policy and Legal Services for Dependency Advocacy Center in California. She has 15 years of experience in family and criminal defense work, along with dual degrees in law and social work from Washington University in St. Louis, and an undergraduate degree from Duke University. Sarah is certified as a Child Welfare Law Specialist. She began her journey in family defense as a staff attorney at Dependency Advocacy Center (DAC) in San Jose, California. She managed DAC's first preventative legal services program, Corridor, and now serves as the Director of Policy and Legal Services.

Maria Griglio

Maria Griglio is the Directing Attorney for the Children's Law Center's (CLC) Family Support and Advocacy Center (FSAC), a pre-filing prevention program that serves former CLC clients who are parents and whose children are at risk of child welfare involvement. Ms. Griglio began her career in child welfare in 1990 as a children's social worker in Detroit, Michigan. After attending and graduating from law school, she began working for CLC (at that time Dependency Court Legal Services) in 1995 and spent ten years providing legal representation to both parents and children.

In 2005, Ms. Griglio transitioned to a position in the Dependency Division of the Los Angeles County Counsel's office. During her seventeen years with the County Counsel's office, Ms. Griglio spent five years as in-house counsel for DCFS and provided legal advice on all legal issues related to Dependency law. She also represented DCFS in juvenile justice, family law, criminal law and administrative hearings and conducted numerous trainings on subjects including warrants, restraining orders, juvenile justice hearings, new dependency case law, substance abuse, domestic violence, paternity, the Child Abuse Central Index and Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act and the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC).

Ms. Griglio is a NACC Certified Child Welfare Law Specialist, a former Board member and Board President for the Children's Advocacy Center of Covina and in February of 2021, she was honored by the American Bar Association as the "Fearless Children's Lawyer of the Month" for her outstanding advocacy on behalf of CSEC.

Dr. Stef Sloan

Dr. Stef Sloan (they/them) is a professor at the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare and a research and evaluation consultant. Dr. Sloan specializes in preventative legal service evaluation, engagement of lived expertise, and participatory evaluation methods. Their work also focuses on models of child representation, engaging knowledge in child development and family systems, promoting family protective factors, using upstream child maltreatment prevention, and identifying access to justice barriers for diverse families. Dr. Sloan has served as Principal Investigator for numerous legal service evaluation projects and family law research studies and has designed and implemented federal and state-funded evaluation studies. Dr. Sloan's approach is fueled by their own lived expertise in the child welfare system, the use of mixed-methods participatory evaluation practices, and the goal of building upon research evidence to support access to high-quality representation and preventative legal services.

Dr. Alexandra Pimentel

Dr. Alexandra Pimentel is a Data Integrity Advisor on the Casey Family Programs Data Advocacy team. Her work focuses on building capacity in the field of child welfare to use data to drive prioritization and decision-making. She has supported numerous projects and programs in the development of measurable outcomes, design of data trackers, and creation of analytical reports, on a range of projects supported by Casey Family Programs, including legal advocacy programs. Previously, Dr. Pimentel was a survey statistician for the U.S. Census Bureau. She holds a PhD in sociology from Kansas State University.

Virtual Summit Co-hosts

Emilie T. Cook

Emilie Cook is the Preventive Legal Advocacy Fellow at Emory University School of Law's Barton Child Law & Policy Center. With the support of the Barton Center and Casey Family Programs, Emilie leads the Preventive Legal Advocacy and Pre-Petition National Cohort and works with multi-disciplinary teams across the country to promote and support preventive legal advocacy programs that engage in the provision of high quality legal advocacy and upstream support services to address the effects of poverty, systemic racism, and other forms of discrimination and oppression that harm families and lead to unnecessary child welfare system involvement.

Before joining the Barton Center in 2022, Emilie spent seven years representing parents and children in dependency proceedings in rural Georgia, and served as circuit guardian ad litem for the Ocmulgee Juvenile Court and Ocmulgee Family Drug Treatment Court Panels. Emilie is a passionate proponent of preventive legal advocacy and its capacity to improve outcomes for children and families.

Vivek Sankaran

Vivek Sankaran directs both the Child Advocacy Law Clinic and the Child Welfare Appellate Clinic at Michigan Law through which law students represent children and parents in trial and appellate proceedings. He has written numerous articles focused on improving the child welfare system and has litigated cases before the Michigan Supreme Court. In addition, he conducts state and national trainings and works on child welfare initiatives with various national groups, including the American Bar Association, Casey Family Programs, and the National Center for State Courts.

After graduating from Michigan Law in 2001, Sankaran received a Skadden Fellowship to represent children at The Children's Law Center in Washington, DC, where he remained until 2005, when he joined the Law School faculty.

In 2009, Sankaran founded the Detroit Center for Family Advocacy, the first organization in the country to provide multidisciplinary legal assistance to families to prevent the unnecessary entry of children into foster care. In 2011, he was named Michigan's Parent Attorney of the Year. Most recently, Sankaran co-edited both the first national book for family defense lawyers and the third edition of Child Welfare Law and Practice, a widely recognized resource used by child welfare lawyers across the country.