

**LOS ANGELES DEPENDENCY LAWYERS, INC.
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July 18, 2012

Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye
250 McAllister Street
San Francisco, CA 94102

RE: SEC Report

Dear Chief Justice Cantil-Sakauye:

I am the Executive Director of Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers, a non-profit organization created as a result of the findings in studies conducted by the Center for Families, Children and the Courts. We were created in 2006 and placed in the DRAFT program because the AOC rightly concluded that parents and families in Los Angeles County were not receiving effective representation in the juvenile dependency courts. We believe representation for parents and their families has significantly improved as a result of the active involvement of the AOC, and in particular the CFCC.

Although we have a highly enlightened bench in Los Angeles County regarding the Juvenile Dependency System it was clear, prior to including parent representation in the DRAFT program, that the administration of juvenile dependency representation in Los Angeles was not working, Parent advocacy was second rate and the parent's perspective was not considered or included. As a result families suffered. Since our inclusion in the DRAFT program, child reunification has increased to unprecedented rates in Los Angeles. The resulting positive impact to children and families is difficult to measure, except we know that children raised in their own homes are immeasurably better for them than being raised in a foster home. The consequential savings to the state can be measured. The cost of a child being placed in a foster home versus being returned to a parent's home can be measured.

Without the leadership of the CFCC this would not be happening. We have been assisted and advised, every step along the way, by the CFCC staff, from the planning of our organization through its operation today. We have been able to be part of the CFCC program that provides training and research to dependency lawyers. Our voice is listened to by those in the CFCC so that better representation for parents can occur.

Inclusion in the DRAFT program, run by CFCC, has led court appointed dependency counsel, not only in Los Angeles but in all DRAFT counties, to have independence from local funding and the attending control. It has allowed the local courts to concentrate on their core responsibility resulting in a more efficient system which has brought about much better results for families and children. I have been doing juvenile dependency cases in Los Angeles County since 1974. In my opinion the creation of the DRAFT program and the inclusion of Los Angeles in it has resulted in very significant benefits to families and children. We became an independent system partner in the Los Angeles Dependency Court as we have been administered by the CFCC and its staff who specialize in juvenile dependency legal issues. The CFCC knows dependency; that is what it does. California families who have the unfortunate opportunity to experience juvenile dependency court have indirectly benefitted from the CFCC.

Juvenile dependency representation has been brought out of the dark ages as a result of the CFCC and the DRAFT program but it has not yet reached a satisfactory point. I believe to do so will require a strong, well-funded budget for the CFCC and its DRAFT program. I believe the DRAFT and other important CFCC programs should not be cut, defunded, or reduced in funding. Nor do I believe juvenile dependency court appointed representation should be reduced in funding. Funding for court appointed dependency counsel is woefully inadequate, especially when compared to court appointed counsel in criminal matters, petitioner's attorneys in dependency matters and other governmental public interest lawyer's offices throughout California. This weakens court appointed representation for dependency clients, and adequate funding of the DRAFT program should be made a priority.

The CFCC is needed to continue to address the systemic problems facing the California dependency courts and especially court appointed dependency counsel. I strongly disagree with the recommendation that CFCC not be a stand-alone division (Recommendation No. 7-3). Expertise in this judicial area is greatly needed.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Krekorian
Executive Director