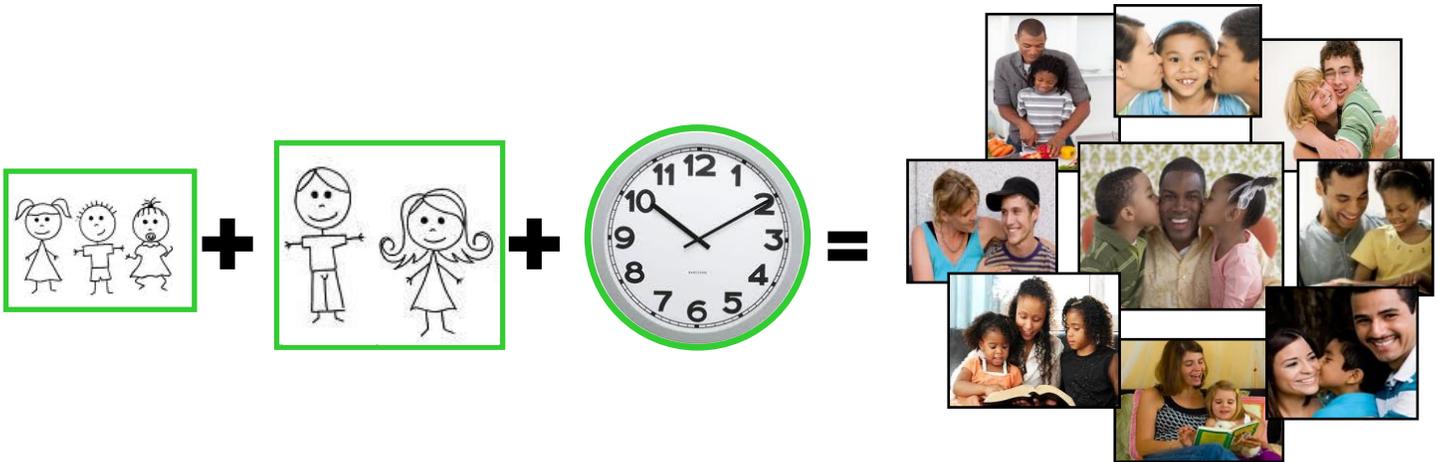
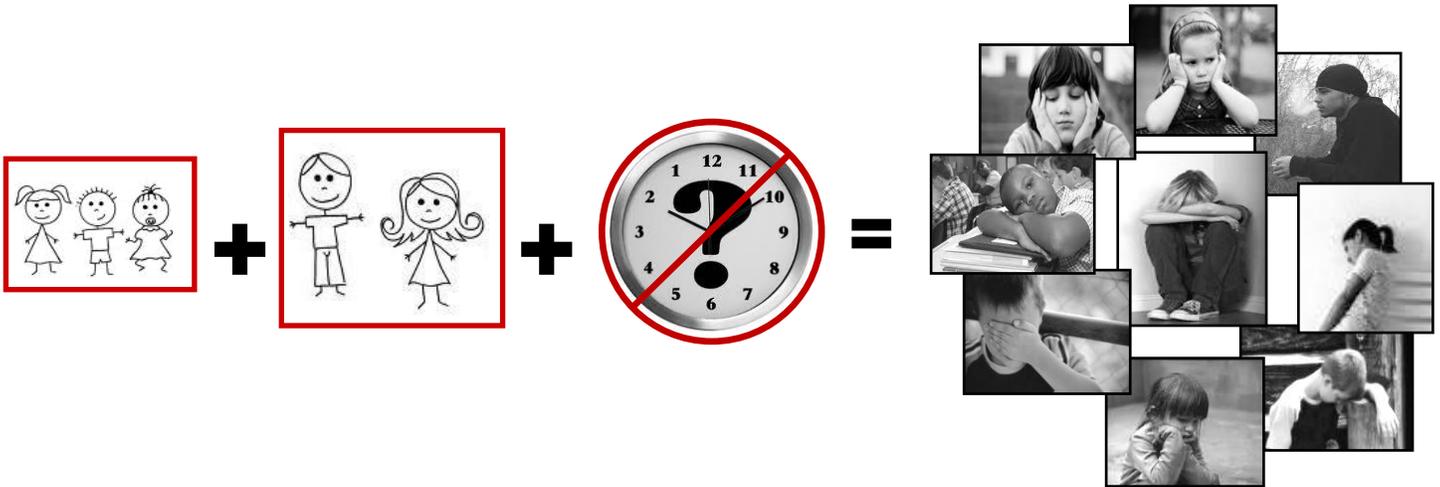


Michigan Foster Care Review Board **2011 ANNUAL REPORT**

PARENT-CHILD VISITATION



**Michigan Supreme Court**

State Court Administrative Office

Michigan Hall of Justice

P.O. Box 30052

Lansing, Michigan 48909

Phone (517) 373-0128

Chad C. Schmucker
State Court Administrator

MEMORANDUM

TO: Governor Rick Snyder
Lt. Governor Brian N. Calley
Honorable Members of the Michigan Legislature

FROM: Chad C. Schmucker, State Court Administrator 

DATE: May 14, 2012

SUBJECT: 2011 Foster Care Review Board Annual Report

It is my pleasure to present the 2011 Annual Report of the Foster Care Review Board. This report, submitted to you pursuant to 1997 PA 170, § 9, provides an overview of the review board's functions and program activity details from this past year. Included are data, trend summaries, and observations gleaned by the board during 2011 from the review of cases involving over 1,100 children in foster care.

These reviews were conducted by 192 dedicated and well-trained citizen volunteers. The information obtained from case reviews provides an objective, third-party evaluation of the care that Michigan's foster care system provides to abused and neglected children.

This year's report and recommendations address significant issues related to parent-child visitation and its impact on child well-being and timely reunification for children in foster care.

I hope this report will prove valuable to all involved parties as we work together to ensure the best possible outcomes for the children and families served by our state foster care system.

Please feel free to contact Jim Novell, Program Manager for the Foster Care Review Board, at (313) 972-3288 with any questions you may have regarding this report.

/jn

FCRB MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Foster Care Review Board is to utilize citizen volunteers to review and evaluate permanency planning processes and outcomes for children and families in the Michigan foster care system. Based on the data collected through case review, the Foster Care Review Board advocates for systemic improvements in areas of child safety, timely permanency, and family and child well-being.



The Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) provides independent third-party review of cases in the state child foster care system. The FCRB also hears appeals by foster parents who believe that children are being unnecessarily removed from their care. Established by the Michigan Legislature in 1984, the Foster Care Review Boards Act, MCL 722.131-140, helps ensure that children are safe and well cared for while in the state foster care system, and that their cases are being moved toward permanency in a timely and efficient manner.

The FCRB provides this support by reviewing randomly selected individual foster care cases from each county and providing case-specific recommendations to the family division of the local circuit court, to local offices of the Department of Human Services (DHS), and to contracted agencies. The review process also serves to identify systemic barriers to safety, timely permanency, and child well-being, and to monitor Michigan's compliance with important federal funding requirements.

The FCRB review boards are comprised of citizen volunteers from a variety of professions and backgrounds. FCRB program staff recruit, screen, and train the citizen volunteers on key aspects of the child welfare and foster care systems, including court policy and rules, federal funding requirements, DHS policy, and state statutes regarding child protection.

Citizen review remains a cost-efficient and effective means of assisting the courts, DHS, the Legislature, and other interested parties by providing an objective perspective on the foster care case management process. Citizen volunteers donated over 10,000 hours of their time to case review this past year. Their capacity and willingness to significantly increase that number is limited only by available staff support.¹

This annual report is our opportunity to detail the efforts of the FCRB during the past year and to share with Michigan's policymakers some of the systemic issues that our citizen volunteers have identified while reviewing foster care cases throughout the state.

¹ FCRB staffing levels were reduced due to budget constraints in 2007, and further reduced for the same reasons in 2009. To date, these staffing levels have yet to be restored.



FCRB VISION STATEMENT

The Foster Care Review Board will be viewed and valued by the courts, the Department of Human Services, private child-placing agencies, the Legislature, and the citizens of Michigan as a major source of credible data on the performance of the child welfare system. Additionally, citizens of the state will use the data to shape public policy and promote awareness regarding the child foster care system.

ANNUAL REPORT REQUIREMENTS

Michigan law, MCL 722.139, requires the State Court Administrative Office to publish an annual report of the FCRB program, to include all of the following information:

- An evaluative summary, with applicable quantitative data, of the activities and functioning of each local review board.
- An evaluative summary, with applicable quantitative data, of the activities and functioning of the aggregate of all local review boards.
- An identification of problems that impede the timely placement of children in permanent placements, and recommendations for improving the timely placement of children in permanent placements.
- The statistics and findings regarding its reviews of permanent wards, and identification of any barriers to permanency.

2011 FCRB PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

1. **What percentage of foster parent appeals are investigated within seven days, as required by MCL 712A.13b(3)?**
 - 2010: 86 percent
 - **2011: 90 percent** (2011 goal: 92 percent)
 - 2012 goal: 92 percent
 -
2. **What percentage of cases were reviewed by local boards consecutively every six months, as required by MCL 722.137(1)(b)?**
 - 2010: 56 percent
 - **2011: data unavailable** (2011 goal: 70 percent)
 - 2012 goal: 70 percent
 -
3. **What percentage of cases were distributed to interested parties within 30 days of the review, or prior to the next court hearing, as required by MCL 722.137(1)(b)?**
 - 2010: 80 percent
 - **2011: 71 percent*** (2011 goal: 90 percent)
 - 2012 goal: 90 percent

* Reports from January to March, 2012, indicate 90 percent compliance.

LOCAL FCRB ACTIVITY: FOSTER PARENT APPEALS

When DHS removes a child from a foster home, Michigan law allows the foster parent to appeal the decision. The law requires the local foster care review board to hear the appeal within seven days and report its findings and recommendations to the court or DHS. If the review board **agrees** with the foster parents and determines that the removal was **not** in the child's best interests, the matter is then heard by the court, or reviewed by the Michigan Children's Institute (MCI) superintendent if the child is an MCI ward.

In 2011, the Foster Care Review Board program received **114** intake calls from foster parents who inquired about appealing a removal decision. Local review boards conducted **75** appeal hearings, agreeing with the foster parents **29** times (39 percent) and with the agencies **46** times (61 percent).

2011 APPEAL DATA				
	2011	2010	2009	2008
Appeals Held: Cases/Wards	130			
Appeals Held: Hearings	75	125	101	82
Appeal Hearings-Held Timely	68			
Appeal Hearings-Untimely	7			
Appeal Intakes	114	142	126	121
Ineligible for Appeal	28	17	25	39
Hearings Canceled	11			

LOCAL FCRB ACTIVITY: FOSTER CASE REVIEW



In addition to reviewing foster parent appeals, Michigan law requires local FCRBs to review foster child placement plans to ensure the plans meet the families needs and statutory requirements. The local boards select cases for review, gather case file documents, and follow the case to its completion. The boards provide a case report to DHS and the court at each court hearing.

The chart on the following two pages identifies the reviews completed by county in 2011.

2011 FOSTER CARE CASE REVIEW DATA

County	Total Review Hearings*	Children/Cases Reviewed	Sibling Groups Reviewed	Total Appeal Hearings Held*	Total Appeal Hearings-Children/Cases
ALCONA	2	1	1		
ALGER	3	3	2		
ALLEGAN	8	8	3		
ALPENA	9	9	4	1	3
ANTRIM	3	2	1	1	1
ARENAC	6	6	4		2
BARAGA	4	4	2		
BARRY	2	2	2		
BAY	6	6	4	1	1
BENZIE	4	3	3		
BERRIEN	43	34	18	3	4
BRANCH	11	10	6	1	1
CALHOUN	27	20	13	7	9
CASS	11	7	5	1	1
CHARLEVOIX	4	2	2	1	2
CHEBOYGAN	11	11	4		
CHIPPEWA	3	3	3		
CLARE	2	2	2		
CLINTON	3	3	3		
CRAWFORD	5	5	2		
DELTA	2	2	2		
DICKINSON	2	2	2		
EATON	4	4	2		
EMMET	11	11	4		
GENESEE	64	38	16	2	5
GLADWIN	4	4	2		
GOGEBIC	9	9	4		
GRAND TRAVERSE	5	5	3		
GRATIOT	8	4	2		
HILLSDALE	10	7	3		
HOUGHTON	5	5	2		
HURON	3	3	3	1	2
INGHAM	64	54	24	6	18
IONIA	12	11	5		
IOSCO	6	6	3	2	2
IRON	3	3	1		
ISABELLA	12	7	7	2	2
JACKSON	60	36	15		
KALAMAZOO	41	32	13	2	4
KALKASKA	8	7	4		
KENT	48	38	26	3	8
LAKE	5	5	4		
LAPEER	14	12	7		
LEELANAU	3	3	1		
LENAWEE	12	7	4		
LIVINGSTON	10	9	4	1	1
LUCE	3	3	2		
MACKINAC	2	2	2		
MACOMB	46	33	18	3	4

County	Total Review Hearings*	Children/Cases Reviewed	Sibling Groups Reviewed	Total Appeal Hearings Held*	Total Appeal Hearings-Children/Cases
MANISTEE	5	4	2		
MARQUETTE	7	7	5	2	2
MASON	2	2	2		
MECOSTA	3	3	2		
MENOMINEE	2	2	2		
MIDLAND	4	4	3		
MISSAUKEE	1	1	1		
MONROE	25	19	5		
MONTCALM	5	4	2	1	2
MONTMORENCY	3	3	2		
MUSKEGON	52	43	22	3	5
NEWAYGO	14	12	6		
OAKLAND	39	26	13	2	4
OCEANA	2	2	2		
OGEMAW	8	5	5		
OSCEOLA	2	2	1		
OSCODA	5	5	2		
OTSEGO	5	5	4		
OTTAWA	15	15	8	1	3
ROSCOMMON	4	4	2		
SAGINAW	31	28	20		
SANILAC	12	7	5		
SHIAWASSEE	6	6	4		
ST CLAIR	14	14	8	3	6
ST JOSEPH	9	9	5	2	3
TUSCOLA	11	11	5	2	2
VAN BUREN	19	16	9		
WASHTENAW	42	27	12		
WAYNE	399	299	141	18	33
WEXFORD	4	4	3		
TOTAL REVIEWS	1,393	1092	572	73	130



The chart below presents the number of cases closed to permanency this past year, along with the permanency outcome, the average days and months in care, and the average number of placements the child had prior to achievement of the permanency goal.

PERMANENCY OUTCOMES - CLOSED CASES					
Permanency Outcome	Total	Percent of Total	Average Days in Care	Average Months in Care	Average Number of Placements
Adoption	162	41.8 %	835	27.5	7.2
APPLA*	14	3.6 %	1858	61.1	7.2
APPLA (E)**	27	7.0 %	2249	74	8.3
AWOLP***	1	.3 %	n/a	n/a	n/a
Fit & Willing Relative	7	1.8 %	807	26.5	2.9
Guardianship	44	11.3 %	2064	67.9	5.0
Reunification	70	18 %	1888	62.1	3.3
Other	63	16.2 %	2317	76.2	8.4
Totals	388	100 %	1717	56.5	6.0

* APPLA - Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement

** APPLA(E) - Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement-Emancipation

*** AWOLP - Absent Without Legal Permission

The chart below identifies the most common barriers to timely achievement of each permanency outcome and the applicable number of cases for each, as identified in the course of our reviews.

BARRIERS TO PERMANENCY - CLOSED CASES		
Category/Definition		No. of Cases
Reunification		
	Parents unwilling to participate in or utilize services offered	77
	Parents utilizing but not benefitting from services offered	73
	Parents lack sufficient income to care for themselves and children	42
	Parenting time is not sufficient to support reunification	26
	Affordable/suitable housing not available	24
Adoption		
	Administrative delays	112
	Ward behavior	52
	Lack of appropriate adoptive home	45
	Competing parties for adoption	26
	Parental appeal at termination	21
Guardianship		
	None	-
Placement With Fit and Willing Relative		
	None	-
Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)		
	Ward behavior	59
	Ward does not have adequate independent living skills	43
	Ward does not have identified connection to responsible adult	21

Additional data is available at the Michigan Courts website: <http://courts.michigan.gov/scao/services/fcrb/fcrb.htm>

2011 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Annual Child Welfare Awards

These awards are presented at our annual conference to formally recognize outstanding work by child welfare professionals. Awards were added this year for outstanding foster parent and parent attorney. The 2011 winners are listed below:



*Back row: Judge Leslie Kim Smith, Donna Hansel, Vivek Sankaran, Karen Bontrager, Maura D. Corrigan
Front row: Cindy and Don Prince and family*

Foster Parents of the Year

Don and Cindy Prince, Directors, Joni and Friends, Grand Traverse

Foster Care Caseworker of the Year

Karen Bontrager, MI Dept. of Human Services, Luce County

Parent Attorney of the Year

Vivek Sankaran, University of Michigan Law School

Lawyer-Guardian Ad Litem of the Year

Donna L. Hansel, Attorney at Law, Cheboygan

Jurist of the Year

Judge Leslie Kim Smith, 3rd Judicial Circuit Court, Wayne County

*Nomination forms for the 2012 awards will be available beginning in June at
<http://courts.michigan.gov/scao/services/fcrb/fcrb.htm>.*

Annual Conference

The 2011 FCRB Annual Training Conference was held in Southfield, with all first-day sessions conducted collaboratively with the State Court Administrative Office's Court Improvement Program. The conference, titled "**Achieving Placement Stability for Children in Foster Care,**" addressed the essential need children have for a stable home and consistent caregiver once they enter into the foster care system, the impact of placement moves on children's development and well-being, and national and state efforts to achieve a "first placement, only placement" goal for all children.

The conference also addressed the impact of moving children from one foster home to another and the affect this has on foster parent recruitment and retention. The highlight of the conference was a panel presentation by youth involved in the Seita Scholars Program at Western Michigan University; panelists discussed how they were affected by placement moves when they were in foster care and shared recommendations they had to address this problem.

BARRIERS TO PERMANENCY

The 2011 Annual Report of the Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) focuses on parent-child visitation as an essential component for ensuring child well-being and achieving timely permanency for children served by Michigan's foster care system. It is essential because research has shown that frequent, well planned, purposeful, and progressive visitation between children in out-of-home placement and their parents can shorten the children's stay in foster care; increase the likelihood that safe and permanent reunification will occur; ease the grief, loss, and confusion children experience as a result of separating from their families; and improve children's well-being while in care.

Findings presented in the 2010 final report on Michigan's federal Child and Family Services Review, as well as observations and findings noted in individual case reviews by the FCRB, indicate that Michigan must significantly improve its efforts to help parents stay connected with their children after the children enter foster care. The improvements should include increasing the quality and frequency of parenting time and encouraging, or even ordering, the regular involvement of parents in important aspects of their children's lives, such as school meetings and activities, medical and therapy appointments, etc.



In cases reviewed by the board this past year where the permanency plan was reunification, surprisingly few parents reported being involved in their children's lives outside of face-to-face visits. Supervised parenting time was typically only one or two hours per week, even in cases where the children had been in care for over a year with a plan of reunification.

In addition, review boards rarely saw parent-child visitation plans that provided measureable objectives related to improving or maintaining the parent-child relationship or plans with timelines and requirements for increased parenting time and parental involvement. Research has demonstrated these are essential components of a functional visitation plan.

An effective, ethical, and compassionate foster care system must do more than protect children from further abuse and neglect. It must also help them to heal and recover from such experiences. To that end, the system must provide safe opportunities for children to stay connected with their parents in a manner that reduces the significant trauma of placement in the foster care system, and fully afford parents substantive opportunities to safely nurture and parent their children.

We hope that the information, observations, and recommendations in this year's report will help Michigan create such a system.

PARENT-CHILD VISITATION

The federal Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) assess each state's performance in achieving positive outcomes for children and families in its child welfare system. The 2009 CFSR found that Michigan was not in conformity with **Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships**

and connections is preserved for children. The report, published in March 2010, identified two primary areas as needing improvement: **Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care** and **Item 16: Relationship of child with parents.** The findings reflect minimal involvement of the parent in the child's life while in foster care, as well as the lack of diligent efforts by the state to maintain the parent-child bond after the child entered care. One reviewer noted that Michigan appeared to terminate parental *responsibilities* before actually terminating parental *rights*, referring to the lack of involvement parents have with their children once in foster care.

The report also identified Michigan's continuing substandard performance in achieving the permanency goal of reunification of children with their parents in a timely manner.

The correlation between parent-child visitation and timeliness and frequency of reunification is stressed throughout the literature. Laura Roemer, a researcher at the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning at Hunter College, writes:

Visiting between parents and their children in foster care is generally considered to be the most important factor contributing toward timely family reunification, a major feature of permanency planning for children in foster care. Hess & Proch (1992) referred to family visiting as the 'heart of reunification.' The practice allows the social worker involved to assess the parent-child relationship as well as the level of readiness for reunification. It also provides opportunity to promote the importance of child safety and emotional well-being (Kessler & Green, 1999; Wright, 2001).

State and federal statutes make family reunification the preferred permanency goal unless egregious conditions exist. Within the context of child welfare, family reunification refers to the process of safely and permanently returning children from foster care to their own parent or parents. Reunification is a key underlying tenet of state and federal child welfare policy, which holds that it is in a child's best interests to be raised by their parents whenever possible.

Reunification is preferred for three primary reasons. The first is that the idea of children being raised by their parents is inherently natural and deeply rooted in American law and tradition. Numerous federal court decisions have recognized that parents have the fundamental right to direct the care, custody, and control of their children, and that, unless proven otherwise, parents will strive to act in their children's best interests.



The second reason is that successful reunification helps ensure a successful future for a child. Children suffer significant adverse emotional and developmental consequences when separated from their parents for long periods of time, and especially when family ties are permanently broken. That trauma limits their ability to adapt as they grow older and attempt to become responsible, contributing members of society.

The third reason is that reunification helps to conserve the increasingly limited resources of our child welfare system. All other permanency goals require continued expenditures of state and federal resources until foster children reach age 21.

In addition to improving the timeliness and frequency of successful reunification, the vast majority of studies indicate that while a child is in care, parental involvement in the child's life, marked by regular, frequent, planned, and purposeful parent-child visitation, preferably in the child's home or the home of a relative, is essential to maintaining or promoting healthy attachment and reducing the traumatic effects of the separation for both the child and the parent. All of these outcomes should be, without qualification, essential goals of a healthy child welfare system.

The literature is unequivocal in its conclusion that every reasonable effort must be made to protect, promote, and improve the vulnerable connections that children in out-of-home placements have with their families. It is particularly important to establish a secure and healthy connection between children and their parents, who should be the most significant caretakers in their lives. This is seen by many as second in importance only to child safety.

In 2010, the New Jersey Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) released two reports: "Protecting and Promoting Meaningful Connections: The Importance of Quality Family Time in Parent-Child Visitation" and "Protecting and Healing Fragile Connections: Improving the Quality of Family Visits for Children in Foster Care." Each documented the critical importance of frequent and regular parental involvement in a child's life when the child is in an out-of-home placement. Using focus groups and reviews of related literature and research, the OCA determined that improvements in parent-child visitation can result in significant improvements in the overall quality of the child welfare system, including reduced stays in foster care, improvements in child safety and well-being, more efficient utilization of scarce resources, and the increased likelihood of a successful and permanent reunification.

Thus, parent-child visitation should not be seen as a perfunctory case management activity that is given minimal time and resources, as presently appears to be practice in Michigan. Instead, it must be seen as *essential* to fulfilling our responsibility of ensuring safety, well-being, and timely permanency for all children who come into foster care.

The literature outlines a number of factors related to achieving the benefits noted above. It overwhelmingly endorses visitation and parental involvement within a planned, purposeful, and progressive intervention, guided by a formal, written parent-child visitation plan that directs all aspects of the parents' involvement in their children's lives while in foster care. The plan should be informed by a competent assessment of the parents' specific parenting needs and strengths, as well as the children's developmental and safety needs. It must be written in a manner that allows the caseworker to *objectively* evaluate the parent-child relationship and the parents' progress in learning to properly interact with their children.

Visitation plans *must* promote parent-child attachment. The plan must: (1) offer sufficient time and opportunity for parents of newborns to begin to establish a healthy bond with their child, (2) provide for the maintenance and support of an existing bond and attachment between a parent and child, and (3) allow for the healing of a damaged or troubled relationship where there is a fragile or tenuous emotional bond of the parent to the child.



The American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care reports:

“For young children, weekly or sporadic visits stretch the bounds of a young child’s sense of time and do not allow for a psychologically meaningful relationship with estranged biological parents. For parent-child visits to be beneficial, they should be frequent and long enough to enhance the parent-child relationship.”

The plan should be developed jointly by the parents and caseworker and should identify specific measurable or observable objectives that the parent must achieve in order to increase visits and ultimately have the child returned to the parent’s home. It should maximize opportunities for parents to function in a parenting role, to learn and practice new parenting skills and attitudes, and to have real life opportunities to do so.

With infants and younger children, the visitation plan should provide adequate time and opportunities for the birth parent to directly and successfully care for the child. The plan should provide parents with structured opportunities for skill development and successful interactions with their children, leading to increased confidence in their ability to become successful, loving parents.

Although visitation will typically start off as supervised, the plan should support transition to unsupervised visitation as quickly as possible. Supervised visitation should last only as long as necessary to ensure the safety of the child or help parents develop needed parenting skills. It should be planned around meaningful parental activities, such as changing diapers and feeding infants or, with older children, helping with homework. The plan should always be designed to maximize parental success and positive interactions with the child, and it should clearly state what the supervising agency will do to facilitate that success.

The literature cautions that poorly designed or poorly implemented parent-child visitation plans are likely to frustrate the parents, set them up for failure, and have a detrimental effect on their children. Caseworkers must carefully and clearly document the parents’ progress (or lack of progress) during visits, placing emphasis on the objectives of the visitation plan and the parents’ progress in achieving them, particularly in relation to the parents’ overall capacity to care for the child. This documentation provides clear evidence for the court to support the agency’s recommendations regarding parenting time and ultimately their recommendations for reunification or termination of parental rights.

The Role of the Court

Jurists presiding over cases involving children in foster care, and attorneys representing children and the parents of children in foster care, play a critical role in ensuring that parents and children have frequent and meaningful visitation. To encourage improved visitation practices, Judge Leonard P. Edwards, a former president of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, suggests jurists take a leadership role in facilitating this. Steps jurists can take include:

- Judicial oversight of the child's initial placement decision to ensure that it supports frequent and meaningful visitation.
- Ensure that a visitation plan is clearly articulated in the case services plan and then supported by a clear and enforceable court order.
- Ensure that visitation issues and progress are addressed at each review of the case.
- Encourage and participate in cross-systems training for all participants in the juvenile dependency court to address child development principles and strategies that will improve the quality and quantity of visitation.
- Educate the community and advocate for resources to support frequent and meaningful visitation.

Judge Edwards also notes that the court's obligation to make "reasonable efforts" findings will require jurists to decide whether the parent has been afforded frequent and meaningful visitation.

Judge Edwards advised that the court's ability to make timely determinations regarding parents' commitment and capacity to safely and responsibly parent their children can be facilitated by requiring a high level of parental involvement in a child's life early in the case. This is noted by others as particularly important with parents who are ambivalent regarding their commitment to the care of their children when that commitment conflicts with their substance abuse or other self-indulgent lifestyle choices. Many times the system addresses such ambivalence by removing or limiting parental responsibilities and involvement, rather than requiring and supporting parents' involvement in their children's lives and fulfillment of their parental responsibilities.

Attorneys for both the parent and the child need to become knowledgeable and informed advocates for their clients, especially pertaining to child development needs and visitation as they relate to parental rights, child best interests, and reasonable efforts to achieve timely permanency when reunification is the goal.

A number of studies have found that agencies often justify limiting visitation opportunities by citing either a lack of resources for providing the necessary supervision and parental support or the agency's or court's belief that parents must "earn" additional time with their children. The literature, however, consistently affirms that parental visitation or involvement with the children should *never* be used to motivate compliance with other aspects of the treatment plan, and that the only limiting consideration should be the safety and well-being of the children.

This issue was also addressed by Judge Edwards, who wrote:

"Removing children from their parents is not about punishing the child or the parent for abusive or neglectful behaviors. The criminal law is written to address punishment for bad actions. The child protection system is about protecting children, supporting parents' growth, and, if possible, reunifying children with their parents. It is also about serving the best interests of children. In this context, visitation is a critical element, one that is often overlooked by members of the child protection system."



Judge Edwards notes in this article that a state agency's plea of insufficient resources should not excuse limiting parent-child visitation. He suggests, for example, that the court and agency creatively utilize a myriad of community and family resources to supervise visitation when supervision is required. He also encourages parental participation in school functions and meetings, religious ceremonies, therapy and medical appointments, and extracurricular activities such as sports and school plays.

Parenting Skills Training

Parenting skills training is a significant aspect of planned and purposeful parent-child visitation. The literature confirms what we already know: sending parents off to attend generic, didactic parenting classes without specific goals and objectives based on an individualized assessment or supportive opportunities to implement what they learn is counterintuitive, counterproductive, and a waste of scarce resources. Most of the literature notes that these classes are not always focused on the parents' needs or their child's age and development. More interactive and parent/child specific approaches are needed. Supervised parenting time should include a coaching or mentoring component, not just a person who observes what parents may do right or wrong.



Additional Key Elements

Two additional key elements necessary for promoting improvements in parent-child visitation are identified in the literature: (1) the relationship between the caseworker and the parents and (2) the involvement of foster parents.

Factors identified as important to the caseworker's ability to establish a relationship with the parents that is conducive to reunification include:

- An ability to facilitate open, honest communication with the parents and feel real empathy for both the parents and children, who have been traumatically but necessarily separated, typically at crucial times in a child's development.
- Willingness to request and utilize input and feedback from the parent, the children (if age appropriate), and the family in developing the case services plan and, specifically, the visitation plan. As noted earlier in this report, present visitation plans appear to be directives from the worker, rather than an agreed upon plan to support parent-child reunification.
- Providing supportive instruction and reinforcement to parents during supervised activities and interactions with the children.

Foster parent involvement that promotes frequent and meaningful visitation includes:

- The foster parents' willingness to establish a supportive relationship with the parents and willingness to supervise visitation.
- The capacity of the foster parents to coach and mentor the parents.
- The agencies' willingness to recruit, train, support, and utilize foster parents for this purpose.



Present Policy and Practice in Michigan

Present DHS policy appears to encourage and support frequent, planned, and purposeful visitation; however, in cases reviewed by the FCRB, actual practice in the field does not reflect that DHS policy. All too often, the FCRB boards review cases where agencies actually violate stated DHS policy.

For example, DHS policy requires that parenting time must be offered within the first week of placement and at least weekly thereafter. If the child is an infant, age 0-2, parenting time should be more frequent. However, review boards frequently review cases where parenting time for children ages 0-2 is only one hour per week.

DHS policy requires a written plan for progressively increasing parenting time for children who have the goal of reunification. It states that the requirements for the expansion of parenting time *must* be documented in the parent-agency agreement so parents understand which actions and behaviors are necessary for increasing their parenting time. FCRB review boards rarely see such plans in actual case files.

Parents frequently inform us that they do not know what they must do to have parenting time increased or to proceed to unsupervised visitations. Caseworkers typically describe some subjective criteria, rather than clear objectives related to improving parenting skills and parent-child interactions. This may be the consequence of Michigan not having a standardized parenting assessment tool with which to assess *specific* parenting skills and needs and develop *specific* observable and measurable objectives to meet those needs.

In Michigan, parenting skills are assessed on a global basis in the “Family Assessment of Needs and Strengths” (FANS), a document that commonly cites “parenting skill development” as a need, but rarely offers specifics as to why it is listed as a need and what specific skills need to be developed.

The Parent Agency Treatment Plan-Services Agreement document should be developed collaboratively with the parents and then signed by the parents, thereby indicating their involvement in the development of the plan and their agreement with the assessed needs and objectives. Rarely do review boards find a signed agreement in the case file, and parents continue to report that they were not involved in the development of the plan. The visitation plan section of the agreement typically contains directives stating what a parent will or will not do, but lacks any clear objectives with which to evaluate the parents’ progress.

The FCRB often sees cases where the agency and court have used increased parent-child visitation as a means of motivating compliance with other aspects of the treatment plan, even when there are no related safety issues. For example, a court may reduce parenting time because of a dirty drug screen, despite the parents always acting appropriately during supervised visitation time with their children.

One of the most significant concerns the FCRB has regarding parents’ lack of involvement in their children’s lives while in foster care is related to a section in the current DHS Service Plan titled, “Likely Harm to Child(ren) if Separated From, or Returned to the Parent, Guardian or Custodian.” We often see

a fairly standardized or generic entry in this section identifying likely harm, such as: “The deterioration of the parent-child bond” or “lack of development of the parent-child bond.” **Sometimes, the report actually states that there has been a deterioration of the parent-child relationship as a result of the child being in care.** This is a serious risk and consequence that should be addressed as specifically as possible in the case plan. However, the reviewed case plans almost never state with specificity how this risk will be reduced or how the disruption/deterioration will be addressed; nor is any progress in doing so documented.

Summary and Conclusions

Over the past several years, Michigan has made significant and meaningful improvements to its child welfare system. While these are positive steps, much work remains. Quality parent-child visitation is an area that continues to require focused attention and practice changes because it is considered by many national child welfare and child development experts as critical to overall improvement in a state’s child welfare system and its care of vulnerable children and families.



Research has shown that frequent, well planned, and purposeful parent-child visitation is essential to child safety and well-being while in foster care. Frequent, well planned visitation helps to maintain the parents’ connections to the children, reduces the children’s sense of loss or abandonment, improves the children’s overall sense of well-being, and increases the parents’ investment in meeting their children’s needs. It is considered the “heart of reunification” by many national child welfare experts, helping to reduce the time children are in care and helping to ensure that families remain together permanently after reunification.

Although present DHS policy appears to encourage and support frequent and purposeful visitation, actual practices often do not. Parent-child visitation appears to be more a perfunctory activity, rather than a well planned and purposeful intervention considered significant to the process of reunification and ensuring child well-being. Visitation is used all too often to motivate parental compliance with other aspects of the treatment plan, rather than for its intended purposes, which are to help children and their parents stay connected while the children are in foster care, mitigate the trauma of placement, and meet the developmental needs of the children. Research clearly indicates that failure to maintain this connection actually damages the parent-child relationship and has long-term implications, particularly for infants and younger children, affecting their ability to form healthy attachments and relationships.

Michigan has plans and projects in place to begin to address the visitation issue. In response to the findings of the 2009 federal Child and Family Services Review, DHS and the State Court Administrative Office’s Court Improvement Program have partnered to establish the Parent-Child Visitation Task Force comprised of state and local court personnel, child welfare professionals, and child welfare advocates and experts. This task force will establish a strategic plan for providing our most vulnerable children and families with the support and services necessary to ensure that we can keep parents involved and connected with their children in foster care and provide them the very best opportunity for a successful reunification.

In addition, DHS is in the process of developing and implementing a statewide case practice model called MiTeam. If implemented correctly, MiTeam will increase parent-child engagement and provide for improved parent-child visitation through the involvement of foster parents, relatives, and other natural helpers in the process.

Michigan was recently awarded a Model Court grant through the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. Livingston County received that grant and is in the process of implementing and evaluating a number of promising strategies to improve parent-child visitation practices.



2011 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We recommend that the Department of Human Services, the State Court Administrative Office, and local courts consider and implement the recommendations that will be published by the Parent-Child Visitation Task Force.
2. We recommend that any potential legislative action required for the implementation of those recommendations be pursued through the state Permanency Options Workgroup.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

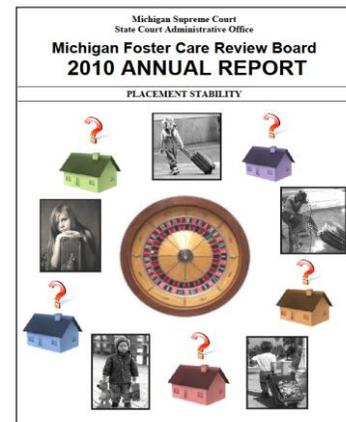
- Chen, Ronald K., "Protecting and Promoting Meaningful Connections: The Importance of Quality Family Time in Parent-Child Visitation," New Jersey Office of the Child Advocate, January 14, 2010.
- Edwards, Hon. Leonard P., "Judicial Oversight of Parental Visitation in Family Reunification Cases," Judicial and Family Court Journal, spring 2003.
- Iowa Department of Human Services Practice Bulletin, "Family Interaction as a Pathway to Permanency," October 2009.
- Minnesota Department of Human Services, Child Safety and Permanency Division, "Child and Family Visitation: A Practice Guide to Support Lasting Reunification and Preserving Family Connections for Children in Foster Care," January 2009.
- New Jersey Office of the Child Advocate, Protecting and Healing Fragile Connections: Improving the Quality of Family Visits for Children in Foster Care, June 30, 2010.
- Partners for Our Children, "Family Visitation in Child Welfare: Helping Children Cope with Separation While in Foster Care," A collaborative effort of the University of Washington School of Social Work and Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, April 2011.
- Roemer, Laura, "Information Packet: Visiting with Family in Foster Care," National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning at the Hunter College School of Social Work, April 2008.
- Smariga, Margaret, "Visitation with Infants and Toddlers in Foster Care: What Judges and Attorneys Need to Know," Practice and Policy Brief, American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, July 2007.
- University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, School of Social Work, Jordon Institute for Families, "Parent Child Visits: Managing the Challenges, Reaping the Rewards," *Fostering Perspectives*, Vol. 15, No. 1, November 2010.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, "Final Report: Michigan Child and Family Services Review," March 2010.
- Weintraub, Amber, "Information Packet: Parent-Child Visiting," National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning at the Hunter College School of Social Work, April 2008.
- Wentz, Rose, "Visits: Planned Purposeful and Progressive," National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning at the Hunter College School of Social Work, November 2010.

PROGRESS UPDATE:
2010 ANNUAL REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Foster Care Review Board's 2010 Annual Report contained the recommendations addressed and updated below. That report is available at the Michigan Courts website:

http://courts.michigan.gov/scao//resources/publications/reports/fcrb/fcrb_ar10.pdf.

1. The FCRB recommended that the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) Director appoint a "blue ribbon" panel of experts to develop a strategic plan for ensuring the recruitment and retention of high-quality and well-qualified foster parents for children served by Michigan's foster care system.



ACTION: In April 2011, the Michigan DHS established the **Statewide Strategic Adoptive/Foster Parent Retention and Recruitment Committee**, a coalition comprised of public and private providers and stakeholders, including foster and adoptive parents. The primary purpose of this work group is to enhance collaboration among all stakeholders regarding foster and adoptive home recruitment and retention, as well as promote inclusion of foster, adoptive, and kinship parents in efforts to improve retention statewide. Throughout the past year, the committee has been actively working with the faith-based community on recruitment issues and is in the process of developing a retention/recruitment toolkit to assist agencies in improving their recruitment and retention efforts. The FCRB is represented on this committee.

- - -

2. The FCRB recommended amending or enforcing DHS policies to require that case service plans clearly address the following items:
 - An assessment of the present placement for each child; specifically, how well it meets a child's special needs. This should include an objective assessment of the foster parents' needs for support, services, and training.
 - A specific plan detailing how the agency will support the success of the placement and the child's safety and well-being in the placement.

ACTION: DHS has advised that present policy and service plan format require these items and there will be increased training and supervisory oversight to ensure compliance with this policy.

- - -

3. The FCRB recommended that the DHS implement policies that require the establishment of foster parent support groups and foster parent liaisons for each DHS county office and private contracted agency.

ACTION: DHS has advised that they are requiring local field offices and private agencies they contract with to ensure that there are local foster parent support groups. They are partnering with the Michigan Association for Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Parents (MAFAK) to develop statewide support groups for foster, adoptive, and kinship parents.

- - -

4. The FCRB recommended that the DHS establish an independent entity to conduct exit surveys or interviews with foster parents to learn specifically why they are leaving the system and what support and services may have enabled them to continue.

ACTION: DHS has advised that they presently do this within the department. Their Permanency Division and communications group are in the process of examining the feasibility and logistics of having an independent agency conduct closed-home surveys.

- - -

5. The FCRB recommended that the Michigan Legislature pass a foster Parent Bill of Rights that guarantees appropriate training, support, compensation, and inclusion in all relevant aspects of any case involving a child placed in their home. We recommended that the contents of this bill be negotiated among DHS, representatives of private child placement agencies, and a representative body of foster parents, such as the Michigan Association for Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Parents (MAFAK).

ACTION: The Legislature reportedly is in the process of drafting this bill, which is expected to be introduced in the House of Representatives before the summer of 2012. Reportedly, all affected parties have had input.

- - -

6. The FCRB recommended that the DHS facilitate the development of a single foster parent coalition or association to collaborate with statewide and local efforts to improve the services and support provided to foster, relative, and adoptive parents in their care of our state's most vulnerable children.

ACTION: Michigan Department of Human Services Director, Maura Corrigan, has scheduled a meeting in May 2012 to address this with the two primary foster parent support associations, MAFAK and Families on the Move, in addition to other interested stakeholders. (The meeting had not yet taken place at the time of publication of this report.)

2011 FOSTER CARE REVIEW BOARD MEMBERS

(Representative of active FCRB members as of December 31, 2011)

Alcona County	Hillsdale County	Luce County	Oscoda County	Wayne County (cont.)
Carline Bendig	Martha Crow	Ronald Ford	Janice Booher	Tonie Dance
Tamara Quick	Diane Langan	Macomb County	Ottawa County	Lynda DeFrain
Alger County	Huron County	Edna Chang	Dennis Schaaf	Marvin Dick
Rose Wilbur	Jon Fruytier	Elayne Gray	Roscommon	Katrina Dixon
Allegan County	Janice Holz	Angie Greenslade	Jeanette Wiebenga	George Eason
Diane Marshall-Morgan	Ingham County	Eugene Groesbeck	Saginaw County	Michael Eberth
Chris Seidel	Charles Foster	Jack Pittman	Barbara Hill	Doncella Floyd-Jones
Vivien Vandenberg	Michael Kessler	Rosemary Sear	Vivian Keys Brown	Brenda Godfrey
Antrim County	Julie Loveless	Helen Springer	Shirley Norman	Remberto Gomez-Baez
Susan Manturuk-Gielda	Kristina Marshall	Lynda Steele	Willie Owens	Mary Hammons
Barry County	Cheryl Mask-Nealy	Manistee County	Sanilac County	Warren Harrison
Ronald Heilman	Laura Peiffer	Marilee Johnson	Linda Bombard	Felisha Hatcher-Taylor
Carol Stanton	Rhonda Van Hurley-Wilson	Marquette County	Shiawassee County	Jonas Hill, Sr.
Benzie County	Stephanie Williams	Cara Korhonen	Jorja Ackels	Loretta Horton
Rebecca Garland	Iosco County	Glenn Wing	Jacob Drenovsky	Kathie House
Lynda Jamison	Alan Gould	Mecosta County	Lynn Nee	David L. Hunt
Berrien County	Renee Keller	Jill Gernert	St. Clair County	Darryl V. Hunter
Joan Smith	Iron County	Sally Workman	Brendon Aspenson	Joy Inniss-Johnson
Mary Spessard	Bobbie Bonetti	Midland County	Robert Goldenbogen	Yvette Jenkins
Bridgette Williams	Jackson County	Colin Buell	St. Joseph County	Rod Johnson
Branch County	Edwina Divins	Stephen Ignatowski	Kenneth Orlich	Ethel Knight
Michael Ronzone	Pamela Fitzgerald	James Kubiak	Betty Taylor	Mary Lemanek
Lucinda Wakeman	Jonathan Hale	Michael Love	Tuscola County	Darryl Lewis
Jerry Yoder	Selena Harris	Roy Myatt	Gary Holik	Gary Curtis Madden
Calhoun County	Diana Liechty	Monroe County	LeRoy Osborne	Judy Mock
Arlen Facey	Susan Sharkey	Frederick Corser, Jr.	Van Buren County	Ronald Moore
Kathryn Hemenway	Harold White	Thomas Perry	Jennifer Carpio-Zeller	Jacqueline Moss-Williams
Cass County	Kalamazoo County	Montmorency County	Meryl Greene	Daphne Nedd
Jill Ernest	Linda Dunn	Mary Jo Guest	Jan Jones	Don Novak
James Rutten	Joy Light	Muskegon County	Washtenaw	Elizabeth Oliver
Charlevoix County	Sally Putney	William Garrigan	Cathy Ann Haynes	Anitta Orr
Mary Lee Campbell	Mary Roberts	Willie German	Marion Hoey	Rita Ross-Price
Clare County	Helayne Smith	Edward Holovka	Sonja Felton	Wain Saeger
Donald Murray	Shirley Topp	Patricia Roof	Lisa Ruby	Nancy Silveri
Emmet County	Kalkaska County	Carolyn Smith-Gerdes	Gayle Stewart	Janine Sladewski
Kenda Deschermeier	Carri Latta	Melba White Newsome	Wayne County	Rita Smythe
Jean Frentz	Kent County	Newaygo County	Patrick Arella	Willie Stanley
Genesee County	Jan Fotsch-Foxen	Larry Feikema	Nancy Arnold	Ellen Stephens
Agnes Greene	Daniel Groce	Oakland County	Angela Asteriou	Irene Stringer
Patrice Martin	Vernon Laninga	Barbara Allen	Brooke Brantley-Gilbert	Carol Terpak
Kimberly Mears-Thomas	Jacqueline Rudolph	Carol Borich	Ben Biddle	Robert Thomas
Lauretta Montini	Lake County	Cassandra Chandler	Beatrice Bikali	Theresa Thomas
Toyonna Robbins	Frances P. Arquette	Clara Dawkins	Brenda Boyd	Sara Tyranski
Gordon Sherman	Lapeer County	Janet Evans-Covington	Willie Cambell	Cassandra Wells
Dawana Taylor	Kathryn Bruer	Charles Ludwig	Denise Carr	Pamela Wilson-Travis
Stephanie Young	Livingston County	Kay Norton	Janice Cowan	Claudia Yates
Gogebic County	Gabrielle Hancock	Betty Roland	Paula Cunningham	Wexford County
--	Cynthia Salfate		Johnette Connors	Virginia Mackey
Grand Traverse County				
Diana Zapalski				

2011 ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

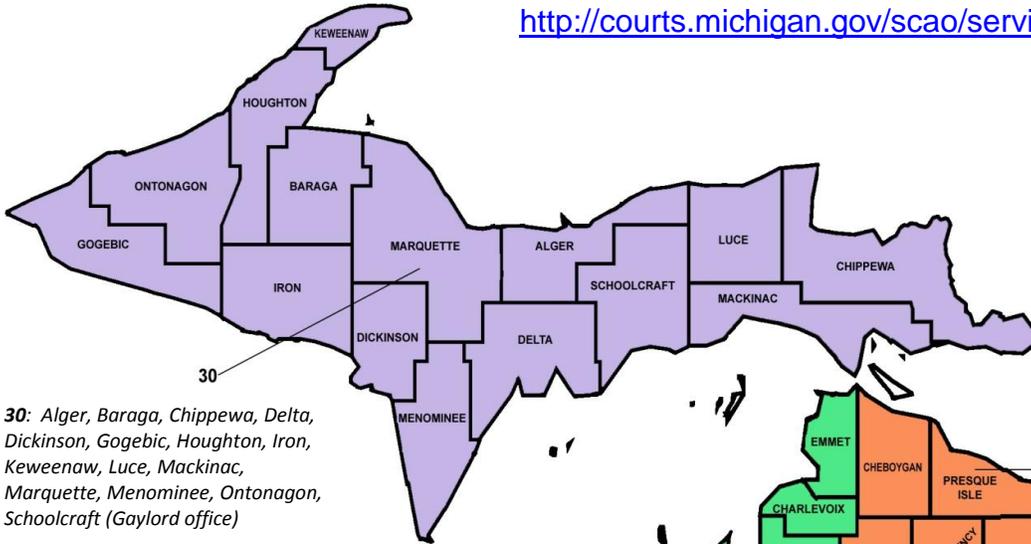
The FCRB Advisory Committee is established pursuant to MCL 722.133(m). It is a collaborative body of representatives from each local board, as well as professionals and advocates from the child welfare community. The information and conclusions presented in this annual report, along with any related recommendations, are the product of the Advisory Committee's collaborative effort and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Michigan Supreme Court or the State Court Administrative Office, under whose auspices this program is conducted.

Name	Title/Board	Organization	Name	Title/Board	Organization
Barbara Allen	Board # 11	FCRB	Felisha Hatcher-Taylor	Board #5	FCRB
Michael Anderegg	Chief Judge	Marquette County Probate Court	Terri Henrizi	Education Coordinator	Assoc. for Children's Mental Health
Nancy Arnold	Board #6	FCRB	Jonas Hill, Sr.	Board #3	FCRB
Brenda Baker-Mbacke' **	Program Representative	FCRB	Edward Holovka	Board #23	FCRB
Stacie Bladen	Director, Office of Family Advocate	Department of Human Services	Kelly Howard	Director, Child Welfare Services	State Court Administrative Office
Candee Bobalek	Legislative Chair, PRIDE Trainer	MAFAK	Marilee Johnson	Board #27	FCRB
Linda Bombard	Board #14	FCRB	Vernon Laninga	Board #21	FCRB
Jeanette Bridges **	Program Representative	FCRB	Christie Lypka	Executive Director	CASA of Michigan
Jennifer Carpio-Zeller	Board # 24	FCRB	Courtney Maher	Seita Scholar	Western Michigan University
Paula Cunningham	Board #4	FCRB	Rubina Mustafa	Staff Attorney	Detroit Center for Family Advocacy
Clara Dawkins	Board #7	FCRB	Roy Myatt	Board #26	FCRB
Kenda Deschermeier	Board #28	FCRB	Shirley Norman	Board #19	FCRB
Marvin Dick **	Board #1	FCRB	Jim Novell **	Program Manager	FCRB
Jacob Drenovsky	Board #18	FCRB	Jack Pittman	Board #12	FCRB
George Eason	Board #5	FCRB	Kellie Robb **	Program Representative	FCRB
Michael Eberth **	Board # 9	FCRB	Nancy Rostoni	Foster Care Manager	Department of Human Services
Ryan Fewins-Bliss	Board President	CASA of Michigan	Lisa Ruby	Board #15	FCRB
Ronald Ford **	Board #30	FCRB	Verlie Ruffin	Director	Office of the Children's
Charles Foster	Board #16	FCRB	Helayne Smith	Board # 22	FCRB
Jeanne Fowler	Child Advocate	Big Family of Michigan	Leslie Kim Smith	Circuit Judge	3rd Circuit Court, Family Div.
Alan Gould	Board #29	FCRB	Joan Smith	Board #25	FCRB
Elayne Gray	Board # 12	FCRB	Janet Snyder	Executive Director	MI Federation for Children & Families
Jonathan Hale **	Board # 17	FCRB	Carol Stanton	Board #18	FCRB
Marcia Haney	Bylaws Chair, PRIDE Trainer	MAFAK	Suzanne Stiles-Burke	Director, Child Welfare Bureau	Department of Human Services
Warren Harrison	Board # 8	FCRB	Lucinda Wakeman **	Board # 20	FCRB

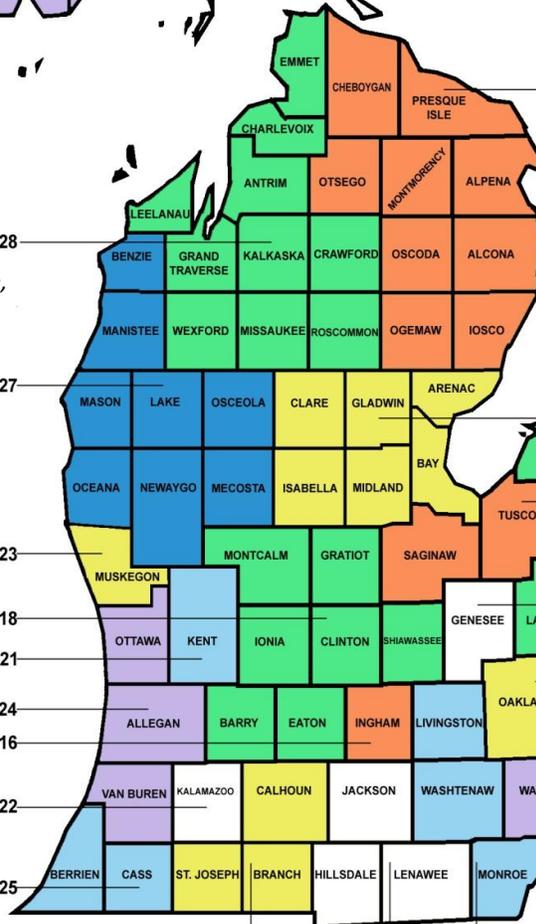
** Executive Committee member

MICHIGAN'S FOSTER CARE REVIEW BOARDS

<http://courts.michigan.gov/scao/services/fcrb/fcrb.htm>



30: Alger, Baraga, Chippewa, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron, Keweenaw, Luce, Mackinac, Marquette, Menominee, Ontonagon, Schoolcraft (Gaylord office)



28: Antrim, Charlevoix, Crawford, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Missaukee, Roscommon, Wexford (Gaylord office)

27: Benzie, Lake, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola (Gaylord office)

23: Muskegon (Gaylord office)

18: Barry, Clinton, Eaton, Gratiot, Ionia, Montcalm, Shiawassee (Gaylord office)

21: Kent (Detroit office)

24: Allegan, Ottawa, Van Buren (Gaylord office)

16: Ingham (Detroit)

22: Kalamazoo (Detroit office)

25: Berrien, Cass (Detroit office)

29: Alcona, Alpena, Cheboygan, Iosco, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Otsego, Presque Isle (Gaylord office)

26: Arenac, Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Isabella, Midland (Gaylord office)

19: Saginaw, Tuscola (Gaylord office)

14: Huron, Lapeer, St. Clair, Sanilac (Detroit office)

13: Genesee (Detroit office)

11: Oakland (Detroit office)

12: Macomb (Detroit office)

20: Branch, Calhoun, St. Joseph (Detroit office)

17: Hillsdale, Jackson, Lenawee (Detroit office)

15: Livingston, Monroe, Washtenaw (Detroit office)

1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9: Wayne (Detroit office)

Detroit Office

3034 W. Grand Blvd., Ste. 8-400
 Detroit, MI 48202
 (P) 313-972-3280 (Fax) 313-972-3289

Program Manager: Jim Novell
 Assistant: Kathy Falconello
FalconelloK@courts.mi.gov

Brenda Baker-Mbacke', Program Rep
 Assistant: Jacqui Poindexter
PoindexterJ@courts.mi.gov

Jeanette Bridges, Program Rep
 Assistant: Earlester Monroe
MonroeE@courts.mi.gov

Appeals:

Phone: 1-888-866-6566
 Info:
<http://courts.michigan.gov/scao/services/fcrb/98-01AppealPolicy.pdf>

Gaylord Office

P.O. Box 9
 Gaylord, MI 49734-0009
 (P) 989-732-0494 (Fax) 989-731-4538

Kellie Robb, Program Rep
 Assistant: Amanda Kucharek
KucharekA@courts.mi.gov