



## MICHIGAN COURTS NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Foster Care Review Board to Present Child Welfare Awards for Exceptional Work Benefitting Foster Children**

LANSING, MI, October 31, 2014 – The Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) has announced the recipients of its 2014 Child Welfare Awards, which recognize exceptional services to children and families in the state’s child welfare system. Michigan Supreme Court Justice Mary Beth Kelly and Michigan Department of Human Services Director Maura D. Corrigan will present the awards during a lunchtime ceremony at the Marriott Hotel in Troy on November 6, 2014.

FCRB Program Manager Jim Novell explained that the awards “are presented annually to recognize exceptional work on behalf of abused and neglected children and their families.”

Christina Pudvan of the Michigan Department of Human Services, Otsego County, was named **Foster Care Worker of the Year**. Nominated by DHS coworker Amy Croff and volunteer members of Foster Care Review Board #29, Ms. Pudvan is described as a “stellar example of sincerity, sensitivity, service and humility,” qualities that have helped her excel in her role of caring for children and families. In addition to her strong family engagement skills and devotion to improving the lives of children in our foster care system, she was applauded for her advocacy efforts on the Otsego County Child Welfare Board to improve the overall well being of all children in the community.

The **Lawyer-Guardian Ad Litem of the Year Award** will be presented to attorney Fred Gruber, of the Michigan Children’s Law Center in Wayne County, Michigan. Mr. Gruber was nominated by Darla Kelly, from the Ennis Center for Children, and Troy Tipton, a Michigan Children’s Law Center associate. He was nominated for his diligent efforts in assuring that his child clients’ best interests are represented before the court and that they have the services and support they need while in the foster care system. He is active in the community in organizing and hosting events focused on recruiting foster and adoptive parents, and Mr. Gruber was appointed as a Child Advocate to the Governor’s Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect in 2013.

**Members of the Overmyer/Ahola Family** of Marquette were named **Foster Parents of the Year**. Judge Cheryl L. Hill and Juvenile Court Director and Attorney Referee Margaret Olesnavage, both of the Marquette County Circuit Court, nominated Don Overmyer and his wife, Jana Ahola, as well as second generation family members Tim and Marti Overmyer, Tom and Dawn Marie Andrews, and Josh and Trisha Emery. The family legacy began in 1983 when Don and his deceased wife, Violet, were licensed as foster parents, and continues with Don and Jana, as well as the younger Overmyers and their spouses, who have lovingly cared for over 300 foster children combined, bettering their lives and offering them homes, sometimes long after they have left foster care.

The **Parent Attorney of the Year** will be presented to Paula A. Aylward of Allegiant Legal Services in Marshall, Michigan. Ms. Aylward was nominated by fellow attorney Stuart Shafer of Lansing and recognized for her impeccable reputation for professionalism and demand for perfection in her practice. She is a strong advocate for parents impacted by the child welfare system and performs significant pro bono work in family law, particularly in the area of helping parents and foster parents obtain expunction from Michigan's Central Registry for Child Abuse and Neglect. Ms. Aylward also provides services to veterans and animal rights groups, and once worked with the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights.

Judge Timothy Connors, who serves in the Family Division of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Circuit Court, Washtenaw County, will be honored with the **Jurist of the Year Award**. He was nominated by Judge Allie Greenleaf Maldonado, Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, who noted Judge Connors' outstanding and tireless work to ensure cases involving Indian children were being handled appropriately in order to achieve timely permanency and protection for the children involved. Judge Connors works tirelessly to achieve compliance with the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), not only in his own court, but statewide and nationally. He helped draft and strongly advocated for the passage of the Michigan Indian Family Preservation Act of 2012 (MIFPA), which strengthens and clarifies provisions of the ICWA within Michigan law.

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*The FCRB, which was created by the Michigan legislature in 1981, serves as a statewide system of third-party review of the foster care system. The program is administered by the State Court Administrative Office, the administrative agency of the Michigan Supreme Court. Citizen volunteers serve on the FCRB's 30 local review boards throughout the state. Local boards review randomly chosen child abuse and neglect cases; the boards assess how these cases are being handled by courts, the Department of Human Services, and private child welfare agencies.*

*For more information about the FCRB, and for information about volunteering, visit <http://courts.mi.gov/Administration/SCAO/OfficesPrograms/fcrbp/Pages/default.aspx>.*

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