

Children's
Advocacy
Institute

2024
Annual
Report

2024 CAI Annual Report



This annual report covers the activities of the Children's Advocacy Institute (CAI) between January 1, 2024 and December 31, 2024.

CAI is part of the nonprofit University of San Diego School of Law. Contributions to CAI are tax-deductible to the extent the law allows.

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History and Purpose

In 1989, Professor Robert C. Fellmeth founded the Children’s Advocacy Institute (CAI) as part of the Center for Public Interest Law at the University of San Diego (USD) School of Law. In 2021, the Center for Public Interest Law was re-named the Consumer Protection Policy Center (CPPC), and CPPC, CAI, and the Energy Policy Initiatives Center (EPIC) are now all part of the Centers for Public Interest Law (CPIL).

Staffed by experienced attorneys and advocates, and assisted by USD law students, CAI works to improve the status and well-being of children and youth. CAI engages in the academic and clinical training of law students in child advocacy, conducts research into child related issues, and provides public education about the status of children and of the performance of the state to advance their interests. CAI also engages in direct advocacy before courts, agencies, and legislatures to seek leveraged results for the benefit of children and youth. All of these functions are carried out from its offices in San Diego, Sacramento, and Washington, D.C. **CAI is the only child advocacy group operating at a law school, in a state capital, and in our nation’s capital.** That presence has grown in importance as organized interests, with a focus on relatively narrow and short-term self-benefit, increasingly dominate public policy.

CAI is advised by the **Council for Children**, a panel of distinguished community, state, and national leaders who share a vision to improve the quality of life for children. CAI functions under the aegis of the University of San Diego, its Board of Trustees and management, and its School of Law.



CAI’s academic program is funded by USD and includes the first faculty chair endowment established at the USD School of Law. In 1990, philanthropists Sol and Helen Price funded the **Price Chair in Public Interest Law**; the first and current holder of the Price Chair is Professor Robert C. Fellmeth, who serves as CAI’s Executive Director. The chair endowment and USD funds committed pursuant to that agreement finance the course and clinic academic programs of both CPPC and CAI.

In 2014, the USD School of Law was pleased to establish the **Fellmeth-Peterson Faculty Chair in Child Rights**, which will assure the continuation of CAI as an educational part of USD and, hopefully, as a state, national—and perhaps someday, international—advocate for children. The chair is named in honor of Robert B. Fellmeth (father of CAI Executive Director Robert C. Fellmeth) and Paul Peterson, a longstanding supporter and inspiration for CAI from its beginning over 35 years ago. Nationally renowned child advocate (and CAI alumna) Jessica Heldman holds the Chair, serving as Fellmeth-Peterson Associate Professor in Child Rights.

Although its academic component has dedicated funding sources, **CAI must raise 100% of the funding to support its advocacy program each year, and does so from external sources such as gifts, grants, attorneys’ fees, cy pres awards, etc.**

Executive Director's Message

In 2024, the Children's Advocacy Institute (CAI) continued its activities as part of the Centers for Public Interest Law (CPIL), along with the Consumer Protection Policy Center (CPPC) and the Energy Policy Initiative Center (EPIC). Through our academic program, we have taught over 2,000 law students over the last 45 years. Those students are a special legacy we treasure, with the Juvenile Court Presiding Judge and leading Family Court judges in San Diego and Las Vegas among our graduates — in addition to countless others who pursued careers in public interest law and public service, and those who lend their legal skills to supporting vulnerable populations through pro bono work, and about whom we are so proud. And in addition to our academic programs, our research and advocacy components uniquely focus on using the law to leverage change in our three substantive areas.

CAI's most recent work is presented in this 2024 Annual Report, which highlights many of our major campaigns and programs. One such project that continued to gain momentum at an unprecedented pace involves our efforts to end the outrageous embezzlement of millions of dollars in federal benefits (e.g., Social Security SSI (disability) payments and survivor benefits) belonging to some children in foster care. These children warrant special attention and protection because we have made them *our* children — literally. Their legal parent is a state court judge, and every major decision about their lives and prospects rests with us. And we are not doing right by them.

After leaving foster care, these young people have tenuous prospects for adulthood. Our nation's median age of self-sufficiency is 26, not 18 or even 21. Young adults with no foster care history benefit greatly from parental and familial support and guidance during their transitional years. However, former foster youth typically lack such safety nets. And their fate in terms of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, et al. is a national scandal and shame.

A particularly vulnerable segment of youth in foster care — those with qualifying disabilities and/or those who have lost one or more of their parents — are eligible for the federal benefits mentioned above. These funds are entirely separate and apart from those provided by the state and federal government for their care. If properly managed on their behalf, such as in a trust or special account, these benefits could help these young people bridge the transitional gap and allow them to achieve stability, safety, and well-being. They would have the means to rent an apartment, get reliable transportation that would help them get and keep a job, pursue higher education, and/or obtain a computer and other modern necessities.



In what we consider to be a shameful practice taking place for several decades now, most state or county foster care agencies have been identifying foster youth eligible for such benefits and then applying to the Social Security Administration to serve as their representative payee. A necessary role where minor beneficiaries are involved, the representative payee is entrusted to receive, manage, use, or conserve the beneficiaries' funds in the child's best interest. But what do these agencies do when appointed to receive these benefits? They steal the funds and use them to reimburse themselves for the cost of foster care. In other words, *they make these children pay for their own care*. The funds never reach the children for whom they are legally intended. And most of these youth don't even know what's going on behind their backs because most jurisdictions don't require the agencies to notify the children, their parents, their attorneys, the Juvenile Court — or anybody who might intervene and try to get a different representative payee appointed.

I know this recount sounds unlikely, but it is the truth. But thanks to the work of CAI, led by our National Policy Director Amy Harfeld, some jurisdictions now prohibit or curtail this practice, and at this writing twenty states are considering pending legislative reforms that would do the same. CAI is also addressing this issue at the federal level, urging Congress and the relevant administrative agencies to clarify and enforce current law. And there's much more to this campaign of ours. Jessica Heldman, Fellmeth-Peterson Associate Professor in Child Rights, is leading a San Diego-based lawsuit challenging this practice, and Melanie Delgado, Senior Staff Attorney, led work on a 50-state report card, released in 2024, illustrating to what extent each state's laws and policies allow or prohibit such takings. Here in California, CAI's Ed Howard helped put a bill on the Governor's desk to curtail this practice with regard to survivor benefits, and that measure was enacted in 2024. However, some of you might recall that Governor Newsom regrettably vetoed a comprehensive reform bill in 2023; to be sure, there is no justification for embezzling millions of dollars each year from foster children, so our work in California to address this issue will continue.

Turning the corner to 2025, it is painfully obvious that our work is as vital as ever, and as difficult as ever. To close out my message, I would like to present a short op-ed I wrote that was published in *The Fulcrum* on June 12, 2024; it identifies eight needed steps to save democracy — and our future.

Democracies in decline rarely come to an abrupt end. They usually unravel — slowly and subtly — over a period of time; the rot slowly reveals itself until the endgame becomes obvious. Threats to democracy are now out in the open and very real, but there are some steps we can take to help preserve governance by informed people who are concerned about our children and the Earth we leave behind.

1. Reverse *Citizens United* and *Noerr-Pennington*. The Supreme Court's erroneous 2010 decision in *Citizens United* has led to extreme campaign finance corruption through "dark money" financing of political campaigns. Collusive associations can form entities exempt from campaign contribution limitations and effective disclosure of financing sources. This holding fuses individual citizens and corporate entities into comparable status. Earth to court: Corporate officers have a fiduciary duty to protect the corporation's capital and maximize its profit — an orientation radically disparate from the citizens of a democracy with concern for their children and the future.



Adding to this seminal corruption is the *Noerr-Pennington* decision that confers First Amendment privilege to combinations of corporations normally required not to collude for marketplace efficacy. But that collusion now results in trade associations for every imaginable profit interest — collusively lobbying and directing the Citizens United largesse into unprecedented election corruption. It has spawned a lobbying regime that effectively controls virtually every alleged regulatory agency, actually representing the takeover of government by organized and corruptive special interests.

2. Limit the Electoral College to assure presidential election by the majority of the nation. We have a Senate that already manifests the important role of state sovereignty. Further, the recent Supreme Court ruling that renders moot much of the nation’s Voting Rights Act violates basic judicial competency. Gerrymandering needs to be stopped, which could be somewhat accomplished by eliminating the Electoral College.

3. Tackle global warming. This is, as Al Gore presciently put it, “an inconvenient truth.” The evidence is not in *bona fide* dispute. We are well into making our long-term future unviable. The dismissal of curative action is furthered by those who profit from the imposition of carbon and other imbalances — a source of influence much stimulated by the dark money corruption of our democracy noted above.

4. Reduce the federal deficit. Republicans have traditionally adhered to a sensible policy of carrying only a modest future deficit that will eventually be imposed on our grandchildren or theirs. This debt, now reaching a record \$34 trillion, is an extreme danger to the future of all of us. It represents an obligation to repay our creditors (led by Japan and China). But what four-year administration arranged the single highest increase in that debt? That of Donald Trump, a Republican — adding \$8.2 trillion mostly through tax cuts for the wealthy.

5. Preserve free speech. Communication is how we learn, but it is in jeopardy. The internet and artificial intelligence increasingly allow disinformation to dominate what is seen or heard. Free speech is a fundamental right, but those of us who hear or see a message also have essential rights. The audience should be able to choose who it reads or hears, and know something about the expertise and bias of the source. Requiring messengers to disclose their identities — no screening, no restrictions, no sanctions — will allow actual free speech to function. If we can persuade one platform to require this disclosure, others will follow suit from competitive pressure.

6. Say “no” to socialism. State ownership of the means of production and the absence of private gain and free markets is disastrous wherever it occurs. Capitalism needs some controls and fair competition assurance — without the abuses of monopoly, price fixing, product irreparable harm and other forms of corruption. But the basic structure of private accomplishment for the public good is simply necessary for effective market performance.



7. Address overpopulation. Our nation’s diversity and humanitarian traditions are based on the acceptance of refugees fleeing other countries, but there are advantageous limits on that influx. We can allow 1.5 million new citizens from outside our county each year — that amounts to half of 1 percent. But there is an underlying issue of excessive world population. How ironic it is that “right to life” adherents would prohibit all abortions and view every fertilized egg as a child when we now have 8.1 billion humans alive in this world, more than triple since 1950.

What would be the result of a world where we had presumptive contraception, and egg fertilization did not happen without prior intent by two adults who take a basic course in parenting, and perhaps post a bond for education expenses? Why don’t we think about options other than the misapplication of religious dogma presaging the end of humankind?

8. Avoid “packism,” the most pernicious human flaw. Our greatest debilitation by far, is our formation into groupings — by religion, sexual preference, race or ethnicity, political leanings, tribal or nation/state affiliations. Then, we use these affiliations to inflict suffering or death upon “the other.” Whether it’s Vladimir Putin’s Russia invading Ukraine, Hamas attacking Israelis, Israel blasting Palestinians, or the Chinese genocide against Turkic Muslim communities, it is the single most evil feature of human beings, historically and presently.

These eight areas of needed reform will determine the fate of those who follow us.

Professor Robert C. Fellmeth

Price Professor of Public Interest Law, University of San Diego School of Law

Executive Director, Children’s Advocacy Institute



Editor's Note: As you undoubtedly know, Bob Fellmeth is the founder, Executive Director, and heart and soul of the University of San Diego School of Law's Centers for Public Interest Law (CPIL) — which include his Consumer Protection Policy Center, Children's Advocacy Institute, and Energy Policy Initiatives Center. For decades, Bob has been a cornerstone of not only CPIL, but the consumer and child advocacy movements across the nation.

Bob has shared his wealth of knowledge and experience with others, and has also displayed a level of dedication and passion that inspires us all. Through his leadership, innovation, and unwavering commitment, Bob has played a key role in shaping the success of countless landmark projects and initiatives, leaving a lasting impact on the communities he works on behalf of, and on those fortunate enough to work alongside him.

After dedicating his entire career to public interest law, teaching and mentoring hundreds of law students, and achieving countless policy victories for consumers, children, and future generations, Bob will be retiring in 2025. Sadly, this will be his last Executive Director's Message.

On Feb. 2, 2025, some of Bob's many friends, family, colleagues, alumni, and admirers gathered to celebrate his amazing career and thank him for so meaningfully impacting their lives and the lives of countless others. While we will miss the expertise, guidance, and tenacity he brings to the public interest movement, we are excited for Bob as he embarks on the next chapter of his life. We are grateful for everything he has done, and though his presence will be greatly missed, we wish him the best as he enjoys new adventures — knowing that his legacy will continue to inspire us for many years to come.

To view videos from the event and other tributes to Bob Fellmeth, please visit <https://www.sandiego.edu/cai/about/> and scroll down to "Our Founder."



USD School of Law Dean Robert Schapiro, Prof. Bob Fellmeth, Julie D'Angelo Fellmeth '83 (JD), Nancy D'Angelo



Dr. Brian Fellmeth, Scott Fellmeth, Julie D'Angelo Fellmeth '83 (JD), Nancy D'Angelo



Gary Redenbacher, Owen Smith, Hon. Leon Kaplan, Dr. Gary Richwald



John Thelan '74 (JD), Prof. Bob Fellmeth



Joe Kaatz '11 (JD), Prof. Bob Fellmeth, Marcus Friedman '21 (JD)



The Hon. Susan Finlay Marrinan '72 (JD), The Hon. Sharon Kalemkiarian '89 (JD)



Julie D'Angelo Fellmeth '83 (JD), Prof. Bob Fellmeth, The Hon. Alexander Calero '04 (JD)



Tom Papageorge, Prof. Bob Fellmeth, Harvey Rosenfield



Scott Anders, Rob Kelter '87 (JD)



The Hon. Peter Deddeh '82 (JD), Prof. Bob Fellmeth, Julie D'Angelo Fellmeth '83 (JD), The Hon. Ronald Frazier '82 (JD)



USD School of Law Dean Robert Schapiro, Robert Price, Allison Price



The Hon. Mari Parlade '02 (JD), Prof. Bob Fellmeth



Carolyn Griesemer, Karen Prosek '05 (JD)



Prof. Jessica Heldman '04 (JD), Katie Gonzalez '98 (BA), Bob Fellmeth, Ed Howard, Amy Harfeld, Melanie Delgado '05 (JD), Christina Riehl '01 (JD)



Julie D'Angelo Fellmeth '83 (JD), Prof. Bob Fellmeth, Cooper D'Angelo Cox '45 (JD) (we hope)

Academic Program Highlights

General Overview. One of CAI’s primary responsibilities is to educate the next generation of child advocates. The USD School of Law is honored to have been endowed with the Fellmeth-Peterson Faculty Chair in Child Rights, which will assure the continuation of CAI as an educational part of USD and as an effective advocate for children. The chair is named in honor of Robert B. Fellmeth (father of CAI Executive Director Robert C. Fellmeth) and Paul Peterson, a longstanding supporter and inspiration for CAI from its beginning over 30 years ago. CAI is honored to have USD School of Law and CAI alumna Jessica Heldman serve as the Fellmeth-Peterson Associate Professor in Child Rights.

CAI’s teaching of Child Rights and Remedies has been a fixture of the USD School of Law for over three decades. The treatise for the course is also called *Child Rights and Remedies*, co-written by Prof. Fellmeth and Prof. Heldman (who now teaches the course each Fall). Now in its 4th edition, the text is being considered for possible adoption and use by dozens of professors at law schools across the nation.

Child Rights and Remedies is taught by Prof. Heldman as a traditional lecture and discussion course, utilizing role play to help students develop their critical thinking skills. The course is supplemented by CAI’s Child Advocacy Clinic, which provides three unique experiential opportunities for our law students. Our Dependency and Youth Justice Practicums allow law students to serve as counsel in Juvenile Court proceedings under the supervision of practicing attorneys. Students obtain certification from the State Bar through its Practical Training of Law Students program, allowing them to do the work of a practicing attorney — introduce evidence, perform direct and cross examination of witnesses, draft and argue motions, and much more. We also offer a Policy Clinic in which law students work with CAI staff on various real-world policy advocacy projects, including legislative and regulatory advocacy, litigation, and researching and drafting reports.

Because of the interest in and importance of CAI’s classes and clinics, the USD School of Law has designated “Child Rights” as a concentration that can be placed on the law school graduation diploma if students take a minimum number of units in our academic program and related offerings. An increasing number of law students are applying to the Law School seeking this concentration. Since 2019, 21 USD Law students have graduated with this distinction, demonstrating their commitment to this educational focus.

An exciting new scholarship opportunity was made available in 2024 for CAI students pursuing the Child Rights Concentration. The Aspiration Scholarship Program funds graduate education in select fields that improve the quality of life in San Diego County. Impact Cubed, a 501(c)(3) public charity, manages the program. Three CAI-involved USD Law students — Hailey Chrysler, Lillian Wood, and Delanie Pence — received substantial financial awards to support their pursuit of a law degree with the intention of working in the field of child advocacy after graduation. The generous donors supporting this scholarship will again offer funding to CAI students in 2025.

Law students who graduated from our programs inspired us to create and expand our inspirational “Changemaker Wall.” Featured in our conference room, this display features numerous CAI graduates now working as child advocates in different respects. We anticipate this number will steadily grow over the next few years, as an increasing number of USD Law School applicants explicitly mention CAI as a reason for attending this school.



2024 Academic Highlights. In May 2024, CAI recognized six graduating law students for their exceptional work on behalf of children and youth. CAI presented the 2024 **James A. D'Angelo Outstanding Child Advocate Award** to Alyssa Daskas, Amanda Hawkins, Grady Jensen, Eden Levinson, Emily Powers, and Alexa Smith. These students participated in CAI's Child Advocacy Clinic and engaged in other child advocacy opportunities in which they protected and promoted the rights and interests of countless children and youth. These passionate, dynamic, and effective individuals will undoubtedly lead the next generation of child advocates.



Grady Jensen '24 (JD), Prof. Jessica Heldman '04 (JD), Emily Powers '24 (JD), Amanda Hawkins '24 (JD), Alexa Smith '24 (JD), Alyssa Daskas '24 (JD). Not pictured: Eden Levinson '24 (JD)

Also in May 2024, CAI presented the 2024 Joel and Denise Golden Merit Award in Child Advocacy to Byanca Hutchins. This award is presented annually to a second-year law student who has already started to use their developing legal skills to benefit system-involved children. Byanca's passion to serve and advocate for children began as an undergraduate, when she interned for a non-profit organization that served low-income children in or exiting the juvenile court system. While in law school, Byanca assisted CAI with policy research aimed at preserving the federal benefits of foster youth. She then interned at Disability Rights California in their Youth Legal Advocacy Unit, assisting low-income families in bringing Due Process Hearings against school districts that were failing to provide adequate resources for children with disabilities, and engaged in other advocacy on their behalf.

In Spring 2024, CAI welcomed 22 students to its Youth Law course, and in Fall 2024, CAI welcomed 20 students to its Child Rights & Remedies class. Over the course of the calendar year, 14 students participated in CAI's various clinical and related offerings. Highlights from this year's Policy Clinic include the publication of CAI's first Student Issue Brief, *Protecting Youth Access to Gender-Affirming Care: A Parental Rights Pathway*, authored by Grady Jensen '24. Policy Clinic student Julie Roland published an op-ed in the San Diego Union Tribune on political engagement of youth entitled *This is the Reason Why Some Young Voters Are Not Interested in Elections*.

Pre-Law Internships. During 2024, CAI provided Pre-Law Internships to undergraduate students who worked with CAI staff on several ongoing campaigns and projects. CAI offers these internships to upper-division undergraduates considering a legal education to introduce them to public interest careers they can pursue in the legal profession, and specifically to the child advocacy opportunities uniquely offered by USD School of Law.

Advocacy & Public Education Highlights

Protecting Federal Benefits for Foster Youth

Much of CAI's 2024 advocacy in support of transition-age foster youth focused on efforts to protect foster youths' federal benefits, such as Social Security Disability (SSI) and Survivor (OASDI) benefits, from diversion by state or county foster care agencies. Regrettably, although these benefits belong to the youth and are required to be spent or conserved pursuant to their best interests, agencies routinely use these funds to reimburse themselves for the youth's cost of foster care. Funds that could be used to provide critical resources or services to a disabled foster youth or conserved for their use during the difficult transition to self-sufficiency are being taken and used to pay a debt these children do not owe, while compromising their chances to have stability and become self-sufficient after leaving care.

During 2024, CAI significantly expanded its multifaceted national campaign to inform the public, policymakers, and advocates how to protect and promote the proper use of funds and assets belonging to youth in foster care, both on an individual basis and through systemic policy reform. Led by CAI's Amy Harfeld, this project is aimed at prohibiting foster care agencies from intercepting children's federal benefits and using them to reimburse themselves for the cost of foster care and ensuring the funds are used as intended — to pay for current unmet needs of the youth and/or be conserved to address their future needs. This effort involved several fronts and activities, including the following:

California Legislation. After the Governor's 2023 veto of CAI-cosponsored comprehensive legislation to prohibit this practice ([AB 1512 \(Bryan\)](#)), CAI and an impressive coalition of child advocacy organizations rejoined forces in 2024 to co-sponsor [AB 2906 \(Bryan\)](#). This more modest measure requires a county, when it serves as the representative payee for a foster youth receiving federal Social Security survivor benefits, to ensure that their benefits are not used to pay for, or to reimburse the county for, any costs of the child's care and supervision. The bill also requires counties to notify the child, their attorney, and parents or guardians if an application for survivors' benefits has been made on the child's behalf. AB 2906 was signed by the Governor on Sept. 26, 2024 (Chapter 623, Statutes of 2024).

Congressional Advocacy. Knowing that federal legislation could end this practice once and for all across the nation, CAI has been advocating for such action for almost two decades. In 2007, Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA) introduced the Foster Children Self-Support Act, in collaboration with then Congressman and later Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra, which would have, among other things, banned the use of federal benefits paid to representative payees on behalf of foster children to reimburse foster care maintenance payments by states. However, this bill was not enacted. Since then, Rep. Danny Davis (D-IL) has introduced similar legislation, the Protecting Foster Youth Resources to Promote Self-Sufficiency Act, in 2016, 2018, and 2022. These bills were not enacted, and CAI spent much of 2024 ensuring that a new iteration of this measure would be introduced. Due in significant part to CAI's efforts, on Dec. 18, 2024, Rep. Davis introduced [H.R.10478](#), the Protecting Foster Youth Resources Act. Among other things, the Act: would:



- ◆ prohibit agencies from taking a foster youth's assets or benefits for foster care costs;
- ◆ require agencies to screen foster youth for eligibility for Social Security or SSI benefits and apply for the benefits while in and prior to leaving care;
- ◆ require child welfare entities to notify the youth if age 14 or older and/or their attorney, guardian ad litem, parent, and relative with custody or guardianship that the state is the representative payee and benefit updates;
- ◆ mandate that the agency, along with the representative payee and the child, develop a plan to best meet the youth's current and future unmet needs;
- ◆ require agencies to enter into information-sharing agreements with the Social Security Administration related to serving as representative payee; and
- ◆ require agencies to provide an accounting of all assets of foster youth annually to youth in care and upon request to youth who were in care.

National Report Card. In April 2024, CAI released its 50-state report card, *Foster Care or Foster Con? Preserving the Federal Benefits of America's Most Vulnerable Children*, at a well-attended [virtual Congressional briefing](#). The report included extensive state-specific data and related information regarding the practice of foster care agencies intercepting and diverting federal benefits belonging to eligible foster youth. CAI's Melanie Delgado and Elisa Weichel, together with CAI consultant Emily Reinig '08 (JD) and several CAI law students, led efforts to analyze state information and draft this much needed report.

The report graded states based on answers to the following seven questions: (1) Does the state prohibit the agency from using the child's benefits to offset its obligation to pay for the child's foster care? (2) Does the state require the agency to notify the child, child's parents/legal guardian, and/or child's guardian ad litem (GAL)/attorney when the agency applies to become the child's federal benefits representative payee? (3) Does the state require the agency to screen all children for potential federal benefits eligibility within 60 days of entering care? (4) Does the state require the agency to re-screen all children for potential federal benefits eligibility on at least an annual basis? (5) Does the state require the agency to apply for federal benefits when a child is deemed potentially eligible? (6) Does the state require the agency to file an appeal on the child's behalf? (7) Does the state require the agency to share the SSA-required annual accounting on the use/conservation of the child's benefits with the child, child's parents/legal guardian, and/or child's guardian ad litem (GAL)/attorney?

The findings were stark, with few states faring well under this examination. Only two jurisdictions, Arizona and the District of Columbia, earned "A" grades, two states (Oregon and New Mexico) earned "B" grades, three states (Illinois, Maryland, and Washington) earned "C" grades, and the remaining 44 states received grades of "F."





The report also provided an overview of the problem and the consequences that it has on foster youth and their families; the relevant constitutional, federal, and state laws and regulations; the landscape, including federal and state reforms (pending, attempted, and/or enacted) to address various aspects of this issue; and a call to action, which included specific actions that should be taken by Congress, the Executive Branch, and state and local jurisdictions.

Collaboration with Lived Experience Advocates.

Since its inception, the Campaign to Preserve Foster Youth Benefits has reflected the voices and priorities of lived experience experts. We engage with a lived experience consultant to connect with youth who have had benefits taken from and who wish to advocate for others. This effort has revealed alarming and compelling narratives that help bring life to this issue for policymakers, the media, and the public. These lived experience advocates have played a critical role in shaping our priorities and advancing this effort by, for example, providing testimony in state capitals, presenting in webinars and trainings, participating or driving litigation, and engaging with both local and national media.

Education, Training, and Collaboration. CAI educates and trains stakeholder communities in California and across the country on best practices to preserve the bene-

fits of foster youth, as well as ways to advocate for the protection of their assets. We have collaborated with hundreds of organizations across the country to support policy reform. In addition, we have presented briefings and trainings in Congress, conferences of NACC and NCJFCJ, the National Child Abuse Coalition, The Transition Aged Coalition, the Child Welfare and Mental Health Services Coalition, the Partnership for America's Children, and others. We identified dozens of contacts around the country who are working to protect the assets of foster youth or are interested in doing so; this extensive list of contacts includes advocacy and direct service organizations, state and federal legislators and legislative staff, dependency attorneys, judicial officers, social workers, CASAs, disability advocates, and more. CAI provided education, training, and technical assistance to these stakeholders in over a dozen states in 2024. The need for such training and assistance will continue to grow as states advance and implement new laws.

Resources and Referrals. In response to a deluge of requests for information, legislative updates, and best practices from advocates, policymakers, media, and other stakeholder groups, CAI's Katie Gonzalez continued to develop our [comprehensive website](#) for this campaign. This site includes an overview of the issue; applicable federal law and policies; comprehensive media coverage; quotes from impacted youth; federal, state, and local reform efforts; practice and self-help tools; policy advocacy tools; and litigation and case planning information.

Public Education. CAI's National Policy Director Amy Harfeld is regarded as the leading authority on this issue; she and other members of our staff are constantly interacting with media from across the nation, having been interviewed and quoted by, and supplied background info to, several media outlets. Of special note was the April 2024 coverage by [CBS Sunday Morning](#), which featured Amy Harfeld, CAI Council for Children member Sarah Pauter, and four lived experience advocates with whom CAI works closely. CAI's report and related advocacy has continued to generate significant media attention at the national, state, and local levels, including coverage by the Associated Press, Newsweek, and The New York Times. In addition, CAI helped draft and place several op-eds in various key states where reform proposals are pending.

Executive Branch Advocacy. CAI continued to meet with White House officials requesting assistance and support in advancing administrative and legislative policy reform on this issue. CAI also engaged in direct administrative advocacy on this issue, particularly with two key federal agencies — the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). We persistently urged SSA and ACF to take meaningful administrative action to prohibit states from using foster children’s federal benefits in a manner contrary to their best interests, and comprehensive proposed rule and policy changes, with lived experience advisors leading many of our calls.

Among other things, CAI contributed [extensive comments](#) in response to the Nov. 1, 2024 Request for Information (RFI) jointly posted by SSA and ACF, seeking public input to inform the federal agencies how to support broader state and local efforts to improve the outcomes of children in the child welfare system who are eligible for federal benefits. The RFI posed several specific questions regarding agency screening and application for benefits on behalf of children in foster care and SSA benefit use and conservation.

In addition to responding to the specific questions set forth in the RFI, CAI provided much-needed context to the discussion by including an overview of CAI’s longstanding interest and engagement on these issues; an extensive background, including growing awareness and state legislative efforts and the need for clear and consistent federal guidance; and a detailed description of the RFI’s problematic omissions and selective summary of current laws and regulations.

For example, CAI objected to the RFI’s characterization that existing law allows child welfare agencies to use a child’s benefits to pay for their monthly foster care maintenance payments and are required to conserve federal benefits only after meeting all of the child’s current and foreseeable needs. While acknowledging that benefits may be used for maintenance and foreseeable needs in accordance with the beneficiary’s best interest, CAI noted that there is a vast difference in the benefit derived by a beneficiary depending on whether they live at home or in foster care. If a parent uses the benefits of a child living at home to provide stable housing, transportation, food, and services, that child derives a direct benefit from such use. However, if a child living in foster care has their benefits



taken to reimburse an agency for foster care costs, the child derives no benefit whatsoever from such use, as they are receiving the same foster care benefits that all other children in care receive — and nothing more.



CAI's comments were co-signed by the Juvenile Law Center, Northern Justice Project, Legal Counsel for Youth and Children, Policy Advocacy Clinic of UC Berkeley School of Law, William E. Morris Institute for Justice, Center for the Study of Social Policy, Cook County Public Guardian, and Civitas ChildLaw Center at Loyola University Chicago School of Law. In addition to submitting comments on behalf of itself and its co-signers, CAI also led a national effort to encourage lived experience experts, advocates, and policymakers to submit their own comments.

CAI's efforts during 2024 also resulted in a statement by then-SSA Commissioner Martin O'Malley to Rep. Danny Davis, as follows: "I am committed to taking action. First, as quickly as possible, I plan to solicit public input on how the federal and state governments can ensure a more reasonable conservation of SSA funds for these vulnerable children. We may ask for ideas via an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) or a Federal Register Notice (FRN). I am particularly interested in ideas that can be implemented quickly. Second, I am committed to working with your office, advocacy organizations, and the White House, in efforts to promote changes in state laws that better protect foster children. We are already seeing state action on this front, so it is certainly a viable path forward. Let's get to work."

Technical Assistance. CAI leads and supports efforts to propel action on this issue within California and nationwide, providing technical assistance to advocates and policymakers in dozens of states and cities. In addition to our work in California, CAI has contributed to efforts in over two dozen state and local jurisdictions. Additionally, CAI held a webinar in Dec. 2024 to explore the advancements, challenges, and lessons learned in ensuring foster youth retain their benefits. Featuring voices from both policy experts and a lived experience expert who shared their personal story about how this issue has impacted their life, the webinar provided a comprehensive look at the impact of advocacy on policy and the practical challenges of implementation, and provided advocates and policymakers with important information and tools they can use to improve law and policy in their jurisdictions.

Litigation. CAI is also attacking this issue through litigation. In 2024, CAI, along with pro bono co-counsel Shepard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton LLP, continued its litigation against San Diego County Child Welfare Services (CWS) on behalf of two former foster children who were entitled to \$25,000 in Social Security Survivor benefits after the death of their father. The lawsuit alleges that while serving as representative payee, CWS improperly used the children's benefits in a manner violating federal and state law, in violation of the County's fiduciary duties, and contrary to the children's best interests.

Protecting the Financial Futures of Foster Youth

Among the many afflictions suffered by foster children under the state's care is that they are far more likely to have their identities stolen than children raised by their parents. This is in part because so many adults have access to their personally identifiable information. With foster children already too likely to be homeless and living on the streets when they turn 18, a marred credit report makes it even harder for them to find jobs or rent apartments.

In 2024, CAI and Just in Time for Foster Youth co-sponsored [AB 2935 \(Maienschein\)](#), a first-in-the-nation law addressing identity theft among foster youth by mandating actions by credit reporting agencies based on the safe presumption that children should not have credit reports; if a foster child has one, it is because of fraud. The law requires that credit reporting bureaus automatically and permanently block the reporting of fraudulent information; furthermore, it streamlines the process of placing and removing security freezes to protect youth from further fraud. AB 2935 was signed by the Governor on Sept. 28, 2024 (Chapter 846, Statutes of 2024).

In addition, CAI's advocacy on this issue at the federal level resulted in an investigation and report by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) at the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) on ACF's shortcomings in meaningfully overseeing or enforcing the provisions of the Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act and the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act. These laws require states to conduct annual credit checks for children aged 14 or older in foster care and to help these children interpret and resolve any inaccuracies identified in credit reports. With a surge in reports of identity theft, CAI believes that credit checks and the resolution of credit reports may not be occurring as required by federal law.

OIG released its report in September 2024. Key highlights include the following:

- ◆ Over half of the children in foster care who should have received credit checks did not receive any credit checks in fiscal year 2021.

- ◆ Seventy-eight percent of the children did not receive credit checks with all three CRAs.
- ◆ Of children who received at least one credit check, credit reports existed for 4% of children, which could indicate potential identity theft.
- ◆ The children who had credit reports rarely received assistance in interpreting or resolving credit reports, as required.
- ◆ Eight states reported practices that fell short of federal requirements for conducting credit checks.
- ◆ States described challenges in their own capacity to interpret credit reports and to know what actions to take. They also described a range of difficulties in working with CRAs to run credit checks and obtain and resolve credit reports.

The OIG report also contains recommendations to ACF on how to work with states to better protect children in foster care from heightened risk of harm from identity theft.



Promoting Online Protections and Social Media Corporate Responsibility for Children

In 2024, CAI continued to lead efforts in California and nationally to promote online protections for kids and prevent social media platforms from knowingly damaging an entire generation of children mentally, emotionally, and physically. Suicides, child sex trafficking and abuse, bullying, death from drugs laced with fentanyl, eating disorders, etc., all recently spiked in unprecedented ways. The spike perfectly coincided with the sharp and dramatic rise in the use of social media by children. Everyone from the Surgeon General to President Biden, to GOP leaders, to research scientists, to medical professionals, to the Facebook whistleblower sharing disclosures from Facebook itself, all agree that social media practices that use neuroscience, and the use of AI to keep children's eyes online as long as possible to see as many ads as possible, are in significant part to blame.

In 2024, CAI strongly supported [SB 976 \(Skinner\)](#), sponsored by Attorney General (AG) Rob Bonta, addressing social media addiction. Like CAI's 2022 legislative effort, [AB 2408 \(Cunningham, Wicks\)](#), this measure targets platforms using neuroscience-based techniques to profit from making addicts of children. It requires certain social media platforms to provide default mechanisms that enable parental control



for certain features of the platform; requires platforms to annually report information related to the use of these features; limits enforcement to civil actions by the AG and requires the AG to adopt implementing regulations, including regulations regarding age assurance and parental consent, by January 1, 2027; and allows for exceptions to the regulations in order to protect minors. This bill was signed by the Governor on Sept. 20, 2024 (Chapter 321, Statutes of 2024).

Also in 2024, CAI successfully co-sponsored [SB 1504 \(Stern\)](#), a first-in-the-nation law forcing social media platforms to meaningfully respond to cyberbullying. Along with co-sponsors Jewish Children and Family Services and Common Sense Media, CAI led the effort to overhaul the previously feckless California Cyberbullying Act by requiring social media platforms to create a mechanism to report cyberbullying and requiring the platform to respond to reports on set timetables and either remove the content in question or explain why it is aligned with their platform's policies. It also allows parents and school administrators who report cyberbullying to bring a civil action to enforce the law. SB 1504 was signed by the Governor on Sept. 28, 2024 (Chapter 900, Statutes of 2024).

Together with Common Sense Media and the California District Attorneys Association, CAI co-sponsored [AB 1831 \(Berman\)](#), the Preventing AI-Enabled Child Exploitation Act, to ensure that obscene Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) created using artificial intelligence is criminally unlawful to produce, to possess, and to distribute. This bill was signed by the Governor on Sept. 29, 2024 (Chapter 926, Statutes of 2024).

Also during 2024, CAI put forth significant effort to publicize the Jan. 1, 2025 effective date of 2023's [AB 1394 \(Wicks\)](#), a first-in-the-nation law written and spearheaded by CAI that, like SB 1504, requires platforms to establish a mechanism for reporting CSAM and child sex trafficking and requires the removal of such content. It also clarifies that such platforms can be held civilly liable for facilitating sex trafficking, exposing the platforms to penalties of millions of dollars per child if they do so. To read more about the law and to see the truly morally repulsive way that Instagram used to address such content (providing a warning that search results "may contain images of child sexual abuse" but allowing users to "see results anyway"), see [CAI's recent memo](#) on the implementation of AB 1394.

More broadly and importantly, in courts and statehouses across the country, the tide has turned. The extensive press about these and other California bills, bills in other states, and continued brilliant investigative reporting, especially by *The Wall Street Journal*, have educated judges and legislators about how these platforms amorally elevate profits over the lives of children. As a result, state and federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, are with increasing frequency — even fury — questioning platforms’ efforts to escape liability for their actions and overturn reform laws.

All the evidence you need to know that the platforms are feeling the heat is Instagram’s newly announced policies which — if implemented — will represent a huge step forward in child protection. Among the announced features are age-based restrictions on child-harming content which, in court and in legislatures, Big Tech lobbyists for years have argued with vein-popping vehemence was technologically impossible.

When it comes to social media reform, things have changed for the better from when CAI decided to make this issue a priority in 2022 — but there is still much more to do.

For more information about CAI’s nationally groundbreaking work in this area, visit CAI’s [Ensuring Online Safety for Kids](#) web page.



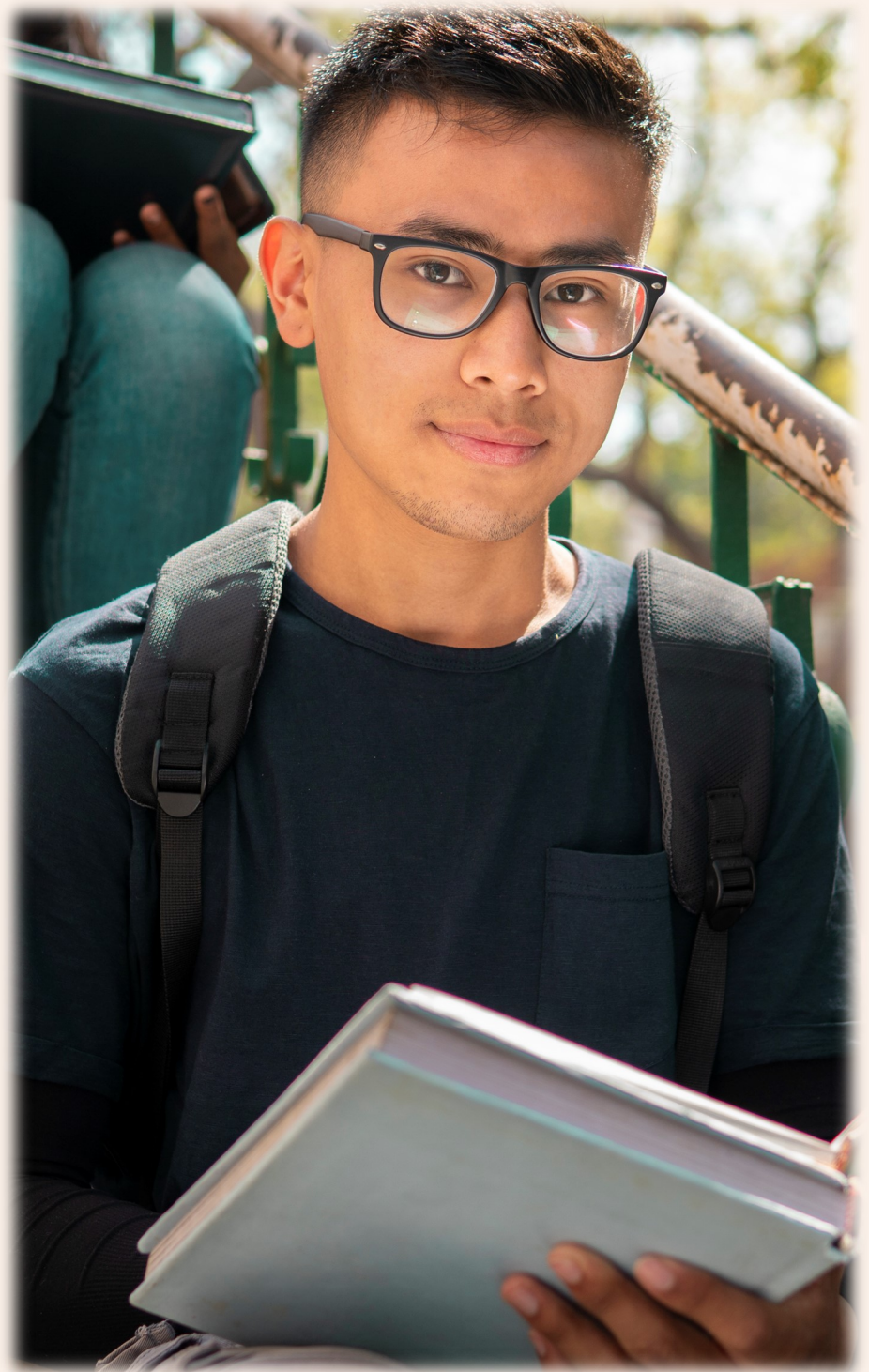
Protecting Postsecondary Student Consumers

CAI, together with the USD School of Law's Consumer Protection Policy Center and Veterans Legal Clinic (collectively referred to as the USD Team), has engaged in significant state and federal public education and policy reform efforts over the last decade to protect vulnerable student consumers — including foster system-involved youth and veterans — from unfair and predatory tactics by the private for-private postsecondary industry. Highlights of our 2024 efforts include the following:

Monitoring and Participating in CSAAVE's Implementation of 2022's [AB 1731 \(Davies\)](#). This CAI co-sponsored bill requires the California State Approving Agency for Veterans Education (CSAAVE) to gather specific information to determine whether an education business should be entrusted with a veteran's future and hard-won, one-time benefits (Ch. 380, Stat. of 2022). Specifically, the bill required CSAAVE, on or before January 1, 2024, to establish regulations requiring postsecondary educational institutions to provide specified information to CSAAVE as part of an application for approval or renewal.

Getting a law passed is one thing. Getting it implemented is another. Since 2022, CAI has led the USD team in lobbying CSAAVE to adopt the mandated regulations, drafting extensive comments responding to the agency's proposed regulations, and after CSAAVE modified its proposed regulatory package, again responding with extensive comments. In addition to laying out the substantial background and legislative intent underlying AB 1731 and providing various technical suggestions, CAI provided substantive comments to strengthen, clarify, and protect the regulations from potential legal challenges. The regulations that became final in 2024 included substantially all of CAI's suggestions. Indeed, the final regulations mirror, in most places verbatim, CAI's proposed language.

BPPE. CAI continued to monitor the Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education (BPPE), theoretically one of the strongest state-based regulatory entities given its statutory



authority. Among other things, CAI's Melanie Delgado continues to serve on the BPPE Advisory Committee as one of its three Consumer Advocate members; the Committee examines BPPE's oversight functions and operational policies, advises with respect to matters relating to private postsecondary education, and provides assistance as may be requested by the Bureau. Also, CAI's Ed Howard continued in his role as a trusted advisor to DCA leaders who oversee BPPE, especially on matters regarding the BPPE's funding — a critical facet of whether it can fulfill its function.

Ensuring Meaningful Services for Parents in Child Welfare Cases

Once a family is involved in the child welfare system, the decision of whether to return a child home is made by a judge in dependency court. Whether parents will be able to reunify with their children — or whether their parental rights will be terminated — hinges to a large degree on the parent’s compliance with a case plan that includes mandated parental services designed to address the issues placing children at risk of abuse or neglect.

CAI conducted groundbreaking research that revealed there is no factual basis for concluding that the millions of dollars we spend on services to help families reunify with their children actually help those families. As The Los Angeles Times revealed in its powerful exposé inspired by CAI’s research:

The state does not ensure that parent education programs [in dependency proceedings] meet any sort of standards, allows parents facing abuse allegations to take classes that experts have deemed low quality, and cannot provide research evidence for half the programs listed in a state-funded database meant to act as a key tool for local officials to ensure child safety.

Accordingly, CAI co-sponsored 2024’s [AB 3145 \(Bryan\)](#), the Foster Care Justice through Meaningful Help for Parents Act, a first-in-the-nation law requiring that family reunification services have a track record of helping families, have their outcomes tracked and publicly reported, and be designed to eradicate the situation that necessitated intervention. This bill was signed by the Governor on Sept. 29, 2024 (Chapter 976, Statutes of 2024).

Enhancing Family Finding Efforts for Foster Children

Following up to its December 2023 report, [No Family for the Holidays in Sacramento](#), an investigative report documenting how Sacramento County lags far behind almost all major California counties in placing foster children with family members, CAI sponsored 2024’s [AB 3217 \(Bryan\)](#), which would have required each county to annually review data comparing the statewide average rate of foster youth placed with relatives, for comparison with the county’s placement rate; required the county welfare director, if a county’s rate is less than the statewide average, to communicate with counties with the highest placement rates to compare best practices; and required, if a county has a rate of placing children with relatives below the statewide average, the board of supervisors to include the topic for discussion on the agenda of a board meeting. After passing out of the Assembly without a single “no” vote, and after being passed by the Senate Human Services Committee on a 5–0 vote, AB 3217 was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee’s suspense file, where it died without a public vote.



Exploring Child Maltreatment and Gun Violence: Intersections and Interventions

In 2024, with the support of Hope and Heal Fund (a project of New Venture Fund), CAI researched and produced [*“Pathways to Prevention: The Intersection of Child Maltreatment, Child Welfare, and Gun Violence,”*](#) a white paper that examines the issue of gun violence vis-à-vis child maltreatment and child welfare and explores abused and neglected children not only as victims of gun violence, but as a population that could benefit from interventions aimed at preventing perpetration as well. The report, authored by CAI’s Jessica Heldman and Melanie Delgado, with the assistance of law student researchers, concluded that child maltreatment is likely a risk factor for gun violence perpetrated against self and others.

Although the research exploring a direct connection between child maltreatment and gun violence is limited in quantity and scope, there is a well-established connection between child maltreatment and the risk of violent crime and suicidality. The additional research indicating that child maltreatment increases the risk of weapon-carrying and threats with guns suggests an increased likelihood of gun use among maltreated individuals. Finally, research specifically indicating that family-of-origin violence increases gun carrying in adolescence and intimate partner violence in adulthood — a circumstance that has a high rate of gun use—suggests a connection between maltreatment and later gun violence. Furthermore, involvement in the child welfare system may present an additional risk factor, although the research on this connection is even more limited and less conclusive. Nevertheless, existing research suggests that those who experience the child welfare system tend to experience increased negative outcomes.

Finally, the clear connection between child maltreatment and suicide and the clear connection between access to firearms and suicide indicate significant risk among maltreated youth who have access to firearms. Although some research indicates that attempts at suicide with firearms are less frequent among maltreated youth than other forms of attempted suicide, it is well-established that access to a firearm increases the risk of the most lethal form of suicide attempt.

These findings suggest that preventing maltreatment, addressing risk factors among maltreated youth in and outside of the child welfare system, and preventing access to firearms among maltreated youth may be effective in reducing the incidence of gun violence among those who have experienced child abuse, neglect, and family violence. However, it is vital to address these concerns without casting unwarranted suspicion on maltreated youth, the vast majority of whom navigate their challenges with resilience and do not engage in violent behaviors. The findings, research, and implications summarized below can provide a starting point for promoting positive outcomes for maltreated youth at risk.

In Dec. 2024, CAI staff joined Hope and Heal in presenting a webinar on the white paper. Among other things, Jessica and Melanie discussed key insights from CAI’s findings, explored their implications for prevention efforts, and engaged in a live Q&A session.

The image shows the cover of a white paper. At the top, it says 'Children's Advocacy Institute'. The title 'Pathways to Prevention: The Intersection of Child Maltreatment, Child Welfare, and Gun Violence' is prominently displayed in white text on a dark blue background. Below the title, there is a photograph of two hands, one larger and one smaller, clasped together. In the bottom right corner, the date 'April 2024' is written in blue. At the bottom of the cover, there are two logos: the Children's Advocacy Institute logo on the left and the University of San Diego School of Law logo on the right.

Stopping the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

Much of CAI's efforts to stop the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) during 2024 revolved around the implementation of 2023's AB 1394 (Wicks). As noted above, CAI put forth significant effort to publicize the Jan. 1, 2025 effective date of this first-in-the-nation law written and spearheaded by CAI that requires social media platforms to establish a mechanism for reporting Child Sexual Abuse Material and child sex trafficking and requires the removal of such content. It also clarifies that such platforms can be held civilly liable for facilitating sex trafficking, exposing the platforms to penalties of millions of dollars per child if they do so. To read more about the law and to see the truly morally repulsive way that Instagram used to address such content (providing a warning that search results "may contain images of child sexual abuse" but allowing users to "see results anyway") see [CAI's recent memo](#) on the implementation of AB 1394.

In conjunction with this effort, CAI's Melanie Delgado will be presenting to the California CSEC Action Team in early 2025 on the implementation of AB 1394. The presentation will provide advocates with an overview of this critical law and practical guidance on how to utilize the law's reporting mechanism. Attendees will receive step-by-step instructions and tools to help survivors document, report and follow through with critical steps in triggering potential civil liability of up to \$4 million per violation.

Also during 2024, Jessica Heldman's law review article entitled, *Specialty Courts for Sexually Exploited Children: What We Know and What is Possible*, was accepted for publication by the CHILDREN'S LEGAL RIGHTS JOURNAL. The article will be published in 2025.

Championing a Child's Right to Counsel

For decades, CAI has been a leader in the fight for counsel for children in dependency proceedings, and in 2024 continued to advance this core issue. Among other things, we have served as advisors and members of the Counsel for Kids campaign at the National Association of Counsel for Children. Because of such efforts, 2025 began with a flurry of legislation to improve legal service delivery and establish a child's right to counsel. Efforts to centralize legal services and move best-interest models to client-directed models of legal representation continue to trend in state legislatures, as evidenced below:

- ◆ Indiana introduced [House Bill 1485](#), which would require the appointment of legal counsel for children in foster care placed in private facilities or shelter care facilities. Also, a [research study on direct representation](#) of older youth by the University of Notre Dame's Lab for Economic Opportunities enters its second year; evaluating the impact of representation on children in six counties, this study will be key to policy reform.
- ◆ In Hawai'i, [House Bill 900](#) was introduced to establish a working group tasked with improving access to legal representation for youth in child protection proceedings. The group would consider pathways for implementation of the recommendations made by the Malama Ohana group of lived experience experts and community members.
- ◆ In California, [Assembly Bill 373](#) would remove statutory language that prevents children's counsel from representing nonminor dependent youth's expressed wishes when those wishes conflict with the safety or protection of the youth, thereby changing the model of representation to a client-directed model of representation.
- ◆ Iowa introduced [House File 373](#), which would require the appointment of client-directed counsel for all youth. Youth under age 10 must be appointed a GAL in addition to counsel, but GALs would not be required for youth over 10.
- ◆ The Missouri legislature is once again considering a proposal to require client-directed counsel for children. [Senate Bill 43](#) would require the appointment of client-directed legal counsel for children 14 and older who are subject to child protection court proceedings. Also pending is [Senate Bill 440](#), which would guarantee client-directed counsel for all youth in child protection court and make appointment of a GAL discretionary, and would require the state's supreme court to establish standards of practice for GALs and children's attorneys.
- ◆ In Arizona, [House Bill 2604](#) would establish the Child and Family Representation Program in the Administrative Office of the Courts to help ensure uniform high-quality legal representation for children and parents. The program would help enhance legal representation by recommending minimum training requirements, practice standards, case load maximums, fair compensation, strategies to oversee attorney performance and outcomes, and additional funding sources. This bill represents movement beyond a right to counsel itself to the assurance of the high-quality rigorous representation that all children deserve in such proceedings.

Leadership, Collaboration & Special Projects

Promoting the Replication of Successful Child-Related Legislation

In 2024, CAI continued to populate its online repository of model state statutes covering a wide variety of issue areas related to children (child welfare, juvenile justice, education, health, etc.). The [Child Advocacy Bill Exchange](#) website provides easy access to examples of important legislation for child advocates across the country. The website includes both the text of these provisions and the evidence supporting the laws, ideally providing the opportunity for national dissemination of policies that can be replicated in numerous state legislatures. This project was undertaken in conjunction with the Partnership for America's Children (PAC).

Collaboration and Leadership

CAI continued to participate in the governance of major national and regional organizations, including Public Citizen, First Star, the Maternal and Child Health Access Foundation, and the National Association of Counsel for Children, where CAI's Amy Harfeld currently serves on the Board and the Policy Committee. CAI's Jessica Heldman also serves as a member of the Advisory Board for the Innovation Center for Youth Justice at James Madison University and led the development of the Innovation Center's Research Network.

We continued to serve as active members of the National Child Abuse Coalition, the National Mental Health and Child Welfare Coalition, the Coalition for Juvenile Justice, the Child Tax Credit Coalition, the Families Over Facilities collaborative, the Transition Age Foster Youth National Coalition, and the California Coalition for the Safety of Children's Health, headed by CAI's former policy advocate Steve Barrow.

CAI also continues to work closely with the Partnership for America's Children (PAC), where CAI's Bob Fellmeth previously served on the Board, as counsel, and as Chair of its Policy Committee.

Honoring Outstanding Child-Related Journalism

The [Price Child Health and Welfare Journalism Awards](#), administered by CAI since 1992, recognize excellence in journalism—specifically, significant stories, series, or bodies of work that advance the understanding of, and enhance public discourse on, child health and well-being issues, including but not limited to health, health care reform, child nutrition, child safety, child poverty, child care, education, child abuse, foster care, former foster youth, juvenile justice, and children with special needs. In 2024, CAI announced the following recipients of the 2023–24 awards:

- ◆ First Place: [High Stakes, Silent Systems](#) by Michael Fitzgerald and Jeremy Loudonback of The Imprint, an investigation on sexual and reproductive health in foster care.
- ◆ Second Place: [Calling the Cops](#) by Thomas Peele, Daniel J. Willis, Mallika Seshadri, Emma Gallegos, Monica Velez and staff of EdSource, an unprecedented look at school policing practices.
- ◆ Honorable Mention: [Fighting for Kin](#) by Sara Tiano of The Imprint, documenting one woman's struggle to keep her family together.
- ◆ Honorable Mention: [Born of History](#) by Nancy Marie Spears of The Imprint, exploring a young person's journey through a tribal foster care system and into a life of advocacy.

- ◆ Honorable Mention: [Black teachers: How to recruit them and make them stay](#) by Diana Lambert of EdSource, exploring the declining number of Black teachers nationwide and recent efforts to recruit and retain teachers of color.
- ◆ Honorable Mention: [A Mother's Worst Nightmare](#) by Shoshana Walter, with data analysis by Melissa Lewis of The Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting, exploring the challenges faced by thousands of women put on anti-addiction medications, including investigations by child welfare agencies that have separated mothers from their newborns.

Convening California's Child Advocates

In 2024, CAI's Melanie Delgado convened and chaired three meetings of our [Children's Advocates Roundtable](#), allowing members to share their policy priorities for the year and featuring timely and helpful discussions on a variety of child- and youth-related topics. With limited exceptions, Roundtable meetings are recorded and made available for viewing on CAI's website. Topics featured at CAI's 2024 Roundtable meetings included the following:

The June 2024 Roundtable featured an immigration panel consisting of Neha Desai and Mishan Wroe of the National Center for Youth Law, Anne Kelsey of the Young Center for Immigration Children's Rights, and Jason Boyd and Cindy Liou of Kids in Need of Defense; a discussion of the 2024–25 California budget, by Laura Pryor and Monica Saucedo of the California Budget and Policy Center; a FURS discussion led by Amanda Miller McKinney of Children Now; and a discussion on approaches to alleviate chronic student absenteeism, led by Danielle Wondra of Children Now, Jordan Sosa and Makayla Huynh of Hop Skip Drive, and Samuel Speroni of the UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies and UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies.

The September 2024 Roundtable featured a discussion on gender-affirming care bans, led by Grady Jensen of the Children's Advocacy Institute and F3 Law, and a panel discussion on legal and legislative challenges for LGBTQ+ youth and discussion and protecting LGBTQ+ youth in a changing political landscape, with panelists Jen Chou of the Gender, Sexuality, and Reproductive Justice Program at ACLU NorCal, Kathie Moehlig of TransFamily Support Services, Gustavo Hurtado of Rainbow Pride Youth Alliance, Kamala Buchanan-Williams of the National Center for Youth Law, and Jessica Parral of the Los Angeles LGBTQ Center.

The December 2024 Roundtable featured a legislative recap on key 2023–2024 bills impacting children, presented by CAI's Ed Howard and Melanie Delgado, Jacob Fraker of the California Legislative LGBTQ Caucus, and Sara Bachez, Susanna Kniffen, and Nora Angeles of Children Now, and a discussion on safeguarding children's healthcare & LGBTQ+ rights and challenges and opportunities in 2025 and beyond, led by Faith Colburn of Health Advocacy and Craig Pulsipher of Equality California.



Funders

We thank those who make our work possible, and in particular, the late Sol and Helen Price; Robert and Allison Price and their family; the late Paul A. Peterson and his family; and Louise Horvitz. Their vision of what we should be remains our chartered course. We are also grateful to our Council for Children and our Dean and colleagues on the faculty of the USD School of Law, many of whom contribute to CAI.

We are also thankful for the generous grants, gifts, and other funding contributed or directed to CAI by the following individuals and organizations between January 1, 2024, and December 31, 2024, or in response to CAI's 2024 holiday solicitation. CAI is fortunate to have the personal backing of many highly respected individuals. Together, these funds support CAI's advocacy, outreach, and public education efforts at the local, state, and federal levels. Without them — *without you* — CAI would not be able to do what we do.

Donors to CAI

The following donors contributed to the work of CAI generally, to one of its specific campaigns, or to the Centers for Public Interest Law (which includes CAI).

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Donors to the Nancy D'Angelo and Jane Fellmeth Public Interest Advocacy Endowment

Starting in 2024, the following donors contributed to this new Endowment, which will support activities at both CAI and the Consumer Protection Policy Center (CPPC). Specifically, this Endowment will provide a lasting source of funding to support CAI and CPPC research, public education, impact litigation, and advocacy efforts at the state and federal levels.

Alan & Susan Brubaker *In honor of Prof. Robert C. Fellmeth's 45 years*

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While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, we apologize for any mistakes or omissions.

A final note about Sol and Helen Price, that we have repeated each year, and which we shall continue to repeat. Their passing will never diminish our duty to represent their ideals for child representation — we strive to be an important part of their legacy. All of us at CAI feel their presence, and what they would want us to do is our guiding lodestar.

Similarly, we are eternally grateful to the late Paul Peterson and his entire family. Like the Price family, the Peterson family has been a crucial part of our history, and their generosity has been instrumental in allowing us to protect and promote the interests of children and youth, now and into the future.

CAI Council for Children

CAI is guided by the Council for Children, an advisory body that meets periodically to review policy decisions and recommend action priorities. Its members are professionals and community leaders who share a vision to improve the quality of life for children in California. CAI is also honored that former Council members who served for many years remain a part of the Council as emeritus members. In 2024, the CAI Council for Children included the following members:

Council Members:

Bill Bentley *Child Advocate*

Anne E. Fragasso, Esq. *California Appellate Project, Staff Attorney*

John M. Goldenring, M.D., M.P.H., J.D. *Health Plan Medical Director, Pediatrician and Adolescent Medicine Specialist, and Retired Attorney At Law*

Carolyn Griesemer *Attorney, Child Advocate*

Hon. Leon Kaplan (Ret.) *Retired Judge, Los Angeles County Superior Court*

David M. Meyers *Solo Practitioner*

Thomas A. Papageorge, J.D. *Special Prosecutor, Economic Crimes Division, San Diego District Attorney's Office*

Sarah Pauter *Founder and CEO, Phenomenal Families*

Gary F. Redenbacher, J.D., *Council Chair Attorney At Law*

Gary Richwald, M.D., M.P.H., *Council Vice-Chair Medical & Public Health Director, Kulbersh Health Screening Services; Lecturer, Infectious Disease Epidemiology, USC Keck School of Medicine*

Gloria Perez Samson *Retired School Administrator*

Tracy L. Simmons *Associate Dean of Admissions and Student Affairs, Howard University School of Law*

John Thelan *Retired Senior Vice President, Costco Wholesale*

Emeritus Members:

Robert Black, M.D.[†]

Denise Moreno Ducheny *Attorney, Former State Senator*

Birt Harvey, M.D.[†]

Louise Horvitz, M.S.W., Psy.D. *Licensed clinical social worker, individual and family psychotherapist*

James B. McKenna[†]

Paul A. Peterson, J.D.[†]

Blair L. Sadler, J.D. *Past President and Chief Executive Officer, Children's Hospital and Health Center*

Ann Segal *Consultant*

Alan E. Shumacher, M.D., F.A.A.P. *Retired neonatologist; Past President of the Medical Board of California; President, Federation of State Medical Boards of the United States*

Owen Smith *Past President, Anzalone & Associates*

[†] Deceased



CAI Team

CAI Staff

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Senior Staff Attorney / Director of Transition Age Youth Projects

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Associate Director, Centers for Public Interest Law

Amy Harfeld

National Policy Director

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Fellmeth-Peterson Associate Professor in Child Rights

Ed Howard

Senior Counsel / Senior Policy Advocate

Ben Sims

Executive Assistant / Office Manager

Elisa Weichel

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2024 CAI Consultants

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CM Public Affairs

Fenton Strategies

Ziigwan Frazer

Sarah Pauter

Emily Reinig

Slowey McManus Communications

Stone Advocacy

CAI also benefits tremendously from the efforts of USD Law students, Pre-Law Interns, and volunteers who assist us with our research and advocacy.

And last, but certainly not least, CAI is grateful to have the guidance, assistance, and participation of several lived experience experts, advisors, and advocates — all of whom provide insights and expertise that significantly enhances our efforts to improve systems, research, policies, practices, and programs. These individuals inspire us to persevere in our work to protect the rights and interests of all children and youth.



Help CAI Help Kids

We greatly appreciate your continued support of CAI's work. Here are a few different ideas for how you can help us help kids:

- ◆ Make a tax-deductible donation to CAI online at law.sandiego.edu/caigift or for other donation options, contact us by phone or email (see below).
- ◆ Participate in meetings of the **Children's Advocates' Roundtable** and/or follow the Roundtable activities on Facebook.
- ◆ Volunteer to serve as an **Educational Rights Holder** for a San Diego County Juvenile Court-involved student.
- ◆ For attorneys involved in class actions that result in a **cy pres distribution**, identify CAI as a potential recipient.
- ◆ Join **Lawyers for Kids**, which gives attorneys, law students, and others in the legal community the opportunity to use their talents and resources as advocates to promote the health, safety, and well-being of children; assist CAI's policy advocacy program; and work with CAI staff on impact litigation or by offering expertise in drafting amicus curiae briefs.
- ◆ Purchase a **California Kids' Plate**, a special license plate featuring one of four special symbols: a star, a hand, a plus sign, or a heart. Proceeds support local and statewide programs to prevent child injury and abuse, as well as childcare health and safety programs.
- ◆ Review the list of CAI's legislative priorities currently pending at the state and federal levels (see www.caichildlaw.org) and express support to your elected officials.

For information on these opportunities and all of CAI's activities, please visit CAI's website at www.caichildlaw.org, email us at info@caichildlaw.org, call us at (619) 260-4806, or scan the QR code below.

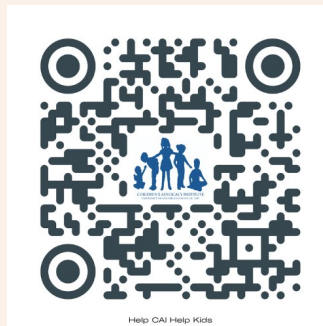




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*Thanks for everything, Bob.
We'll do our best
to make you proud.*



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