



C H I L D R E N ' S
ADVOCACY INSTITUTE

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



This annual report covers the activities of the Children's Advocacy Institute (CAI) between January 1, 2025 and December 31, 2025.

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 & 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 renamed 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 capi-**

tal, 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 includes the first faculty Chair endowment established at the USD School of Law. In 1990, San Diego philanthropists Sol and Helen Price funded the **Price Chair in Public Interest Law**. The first holder of the Price Chair was Professor Robert C. Fellmeth, who served as CAI's Executive Director until his retirement in 2025. The Chair endowment and USD funds committed pursuant to that agreement support the 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 former CAI Executive Director Robert C. Fellmeth), and the late Paul Peterson, a longstanding supporter and inspiration for CAI from its beginning over 30 years ago. Nationally renowned child advocate (and CAI alumna) Jessica Heldman holds the Chair, serving as Fellmeth-Peterson Associate Professor in Child Rights, as well as CAI Executive Director.

Although its academic component has dedicated funding sources, **CAI must raise 100% of the funding needed 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

"We envision a world in which the rights and needs of all children and youth are the highest priority among policymakers, government systems, and communities, demonstrated not merely by sympathetic word or sentimental gesture, but by effective deed."

— Professor Robert C. Fellmeth, CAI Founder and Former Executive Director

Twenty-five years ago, I walked into CAI as a first-year law student, eager to begin my journey as a child advocate. I peered into the office of Professor Robert Fellmeth, whose unmatched reputation both excited and intimidated me. From behind a mountain of books and papers, Professor Fellmeth appeared and waved me in to sit. I shared with him my passion and commitment to advocating for children, particularly those in the foster care system, whom I had been working with as a drama teacher for several years.

I knew I was speaking with a legend. What I did not yet know was that I was meeting the person who would become my greatest mentor, my future colleague and boss, and the person who would one day entrust me with carrying forward the work he began more than three decades ago.

I am deeply honored to step into the role of Executive Director of the Children's Advocacy Institute. It is a privilege I undertake with profound gratitude for Bob's visionary leadership. He founded CAI in 1989 and stewarded this organization into a nationally recognized force for children's rights. His unwavering commitment to children and his unparalleled effectiveness as an advocate built the extraordinary foundation upon which CAI's work will continue to grow.

At its core, CAI's work has always been grounded in the principle that society reveals its values by how it treats and invests in its children. For decades, CAI has shone a spotlight on the willingness of systems, leaders, and corporations to place ideology, politics, profit, or institutional interests above the needs of children. We believe that policymakers should not be judged by their slogans or campaign promises, but by whether they take meaningful and effective action to protect children's safety, health, education, and the future they will inherit.

CAI's work is particularly necessary today, as political discourse has increasingly shifted away from thoughtful debate and toward vicious personal attacks and performative outrage. Children bear the consequences of these distractions, being left vulnerable to poverty, homelessness, educational inequity, online exploitation, environmental harm, and failures within the foster care and juvenile justice systems. Leadership should not be about who can most effectively destroy their opponent, but about who is willing to invest most courageously in the next generation.



Unfortunately, such investment is lacking. In fact, the portion of the federal budget dedicated to children declined in 2025, continuing the reversal of investments made during the COVID-19 pandemic that cut the child poverty rate to historically low levels. History repeatedly shows that when governments retreat from investments in children and families, the consequences are immediate and lasting. Children experience greater hunger, untreated medical and mental health needs, educational disruption, family instability, and involvement with overburdened foster care and juvenile justice systems. Even as evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates the long-term social and economic benefits of investing in children early and consistently, the federal government often fails to do so.

For example, a key measure of our society's commitment to children is how it responds to the problem of child poverty. There are more than 11 million impoverished children in our nation, and almost half of them live in extreme poverty. Poverty in childhood can shape the course of a child's entire life. Yet, at a moment when families are already struggling under the weight of rising costs, the Trump Administration's enactment of H.R. 1 imposed historic cuts to Medicaid and SNAP (nutrition assistance), two foundational poverty reduction programs. At the same time, the Administration advanced tax cuts that disproportionately benefit the wealthy. This has significant consequences for children. Loss of healthcare coverage means loss of access to vital medications and treat-

ments, developmental screenings, vaccinations, and preventative care. It also means reduced access to behavioral health services at a time when mental health disorders among children are increasing and adolescent suicide rates are devastatingly high. Cuts to SNAP threaten to leave more children hungry both at home and at school, undermining children's health, growth, learning, and development during the most critical stages of their lives.

We are also witnessing increasing disregard for science, expertise, and evidence-based policymaking in areas directly affecting children's health and safety. Public agencies led by individuals lacking the qualifications, judgment, or commitment necessary to carry out their responsibilities fail to serve the interests of children and can produce devastating outcomes.

Particularly troubling is the growing willingness to inflict suffering on immigrant children. Children have been separated from parents, subjected to detention and chronic fear, denied basic dignity, and forced to navigate impossible uncertainty as immigration enforcement has become inhumane. Whatever one's views on immigration policy, children themselves are unquestionably innocent. As Justice William Brennan wrote in the Supreme Court opinion in *Plyler v. Doe*, "[l]egislation directing the onus of a parent's misconduct against his children does not comport with fundamental conceptions of justice." That moral and constitutional principle is under threat today.



At the same time, there have also been important moments of leadership that demonstrate what is possible when government takes its obligations to children seriously. Over the past year, federal officials have brought unprecedented scrutiny to the longstanding practice of states taking Social Security benefits from foster youth – an advocacy priority spearheaded by CAI for more than a decade. Children’s mental health and online safety have become a prime concern for several members of Congress despite the power and money behind the technology lobby. These issues have been championed by some of the most conservative policymakers in the federal government, reminding us that child well-being is not the purview of one party or another.

Case in point: California is one of the most politically liberal states in the nation, but it is a place of profound contradiction. Our state has led the nation in areas such as foster youth supports, child online safety, and ensuring health insurance for children. Yet, California was recently ranked in the bottom third of all states for child well-being. The cost of living continues to place enormous strain on families, and children disproportionately bear the consequences of that instability. More than a million children live in poverty in California. Schools are producing shameful educational outcomes for students. Too many children continue to experience housing instability, educational inequity, and untreated mental health needs in our state.

CAI’s goal has never been to promote an agenda aligned with any political party. Our agenda is to get the job done for children. In that spirit, 2025 has been a remarkable year. Two of CAI’s key campaigns have achieved landmark results that are changing the game for large numbers of children in our country.

One of these game-changing efforts is our national campaign to stop states from taking federal Social Security benefits belonging to foster youth. For decades, government systems quietly intercepted survivor and disability benefits intended for some of the country’s most vulnerable children and used those funds to reimburse themselves for the costs of providing foster care. As a result, children who had already lost parents, experienced abuse or neglect, or lived with serious disabilities reached adulthood without any of their own funds conserved for their futures.

CAI helped bring national attention to this longstanding injustice more than a decade ago and has consistently worked alongside youth advocates, impacted individuals, policymakers, and national partners to push for reform. This year brought extraordinary success, including unprecedented federal scrutiny of the practice and growing recognition from state legislators and governors that foster youth should not be required to subsidize systems meant to protect them. At its heart, this work is about ensuring that the foster care system, which steps into the role of a parent for vulnerable children, acts in the children’s best interests, not the system’s.

Our other game-changing campaign has been protecting children from online harms. Increasingly, children are growing up in digital environments deliberately engineered to maximize engagement, collect data, and capture attention at the cost of young people’s health and safety. We believe the digital world should be designed with children’s well-being in mind, not merely corporate profit. The industry’s relentless pursuit of profit has resulted in the development of products linked to addiction, exploitation, self-harm, and suicide among young people. Fighting this industry means facing enormously powerful and well-financed interests showing little to no regard for children and parents. CAI’s advocacy has helped expose the depth and scope of the industry’s malfeasance and supported the achievement of legislative reform and accountability in the courts as well as the court of public opinion.



These current campaigns reflect the same enduring challenge CAI has confronted for decades: whether our political and economic systems will value children enough to protect their long-term interests when doing so requires confronting entrenched power. I am extraordinarily fortunate to work with a team dedicated to holding these systems to account, working across San Diego, Sacramento, and Washington, D.C. We are supported by a remarkable community of advocates, students, alumni, funders, and partners. Every day, I see people who refuse to accept that children must remain politically invisible. I see our graduates entering this work with optimism and energy. I see former foster youth, youth leaders, and impacted communities reshaping systems through their own voices and experiences. And I see growing recognition that many of the greatest challenges facing our society cannot be solved without centering children and families.

Today, I write this message from behind my own mountain of papers and books, waving into my office the next generation of child advocates. Their passion gives me confidence that CAI's most important work still lies ahead.

Thank you for standing with us. Together, we will continue fighting for a society that treats children as our greatest collective responsibility and our most important legacy. It is Bob Fellmeth's legacy that inspires us to do so.



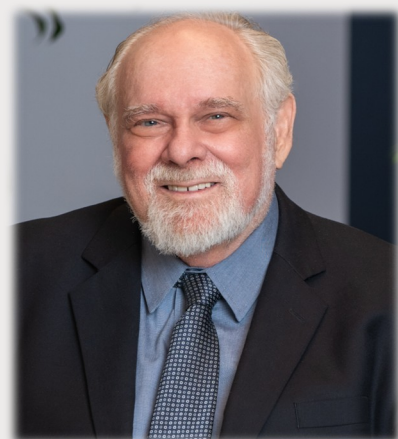
Jessica Heldman

Fellmeth-Peterson Associate Professor in Child Rights
Executive Director, Children's Advocacy Institute



Addendum: CAI's treasured Founder and long-time Executive Director Bob Fellmeth retired in 2025 after decades of tireless, passionate, and effective teaching and advocacy on behalf of children and youth. Before stepping down, Bob had the foresight to establish Nancy D'Angelo and Jane Fellmeth Public Interest Advocacy Endowment, to provide funding to support the research, public education, impact litigation, and advocacy components of both CAI and the Consumer Protection Policy Center.

In addition to the [heartfelt celebration of Bob's accomplishments held in February 2025](#), praise and acknowledgments of his countless contributions continued to flow in throughout the year. For example, in May 2025, Bob was honored with the Service to the Legal Community Award from the San Diego County Bar Association, in recognition of his outstanding long-term and significant contributions that further the goals of the legal profession and promote ethics, integrity, and professionalism in the practice of law through legal education, civics education, mentoring, and service. And in October 2025, Bob received the 2025 Florette Angel Memorial Child Advocacy Award, presented by the Partnership for America's Children. This award honors an executive director within the Partnership's national network who has demonstrated exemplary leadership and commitment to child advocacy. They could not have picked a more worthy recipient.



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 Founder and Former Executive Director Robert C. Fellmeth) and Paul Peterson, a longtime supporter and inspiration for CAI from its founding 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.

Child Rights and Remedies is the foundational course in child law, developed by Professor Fellmeth more than three decades ago and now taught by Professor Heldman. The course is taught as a traditional lecture and discussion course, covering a wide variety of legal topics related to children, and utilizing role-play to help students develop their critical thinking skills. The treatise for the course is also titled *Child Rights and Remedies*, co-written by Prof. Fellmeth and Prof. Heldman. The 5th edition of the text is in progress, with updates including legal developments in the areas of reproductive rights, civil liberties, child protection, and child health and safety. The 5th edition will also feature the new addition of a teaching manual.

Child Rights and Remedies is a prerequisite for 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 — interviewing clients, introducing evidence, performing direct and cross-examination of witnesses, drafting and arguing motions, and much more. CAI also offers a Child Advocacy Policy Clinic in which law students work with CAI staff on various real-world policy advocacy projects, including legislative and regulatory advocacy at the state and federal levels, impact litigation, research, and report drafting.

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, 25 USD Law students have graduated with this distinction, demonstrating their commitment to this educational focus.

An exciting new scholarship opportunity continued to be available in 2025 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. The Jewish Community Foundation San Diego manages the program. Several USD Law students have 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.



Law students who graduated from our programs inspired us to create and expand our inspirational “Changemaker Wall.” Featured in our conference room, this display showcases numerous CAI graduates who are 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.

2025 Academic Highlights. In May 2025, CAI recognized five graduating law students for their exceptional work on behalf of children and youth. CAI presented the 2025 James A. D’Angelo Outstanding Child Advocate Award to Hailey Chrysler, Ariana Hussing, Byanca Hutchens, Sophie Parker, and Julie Roland. These students participated in CAI’s Child Advocacy Clinic and engaged in other child advocacy opportunities, where they protected and promoted the rights and interests of children and youth. These dynamic and passionate students are well-positioned to define the future of the child advocacy field.

Also in May 2025, CAI presented the 2025 Joel and Denise Golden Merit Award in Child Advocacy to Alexander Wood. This award is presented annually to a second-year law student who has already begun using their developing legal skills to benefit system-involved children. Alexander’s experiences include working for the Riverside County District Attorney’s Office, advocating for victims of violent crimes — including children; participating in CAI’s Policy Clinic, developing a model law that would require states to record and publish fatalities and near-fatalities that are the result of child abuse and neglect; and writing a comment for the San Diego International Law Journal that explores the difficulties of prosecuting child sexual abuse in the United States, drawing distinctions from Australia which has undergone various law reforms to protect children. Following graduation, Alexander will be working as a post-bar law clerk with the Imperial County District Attorney’s Office, the first step in a career dedicated to prosecuting crimes against children.

In Spring 2025, CAI welcomed 26 students to its Youth Law course, and in Fall 2025, CAI welcomed 36 students to its Child Rights & Remedies class —

a historic high for both courses. Several of these students participated in CAI’s various clinical and related offerings over the course of the year. Students participating in CAI’s Policy Clinic engaged in various projects including assisting with drafting an amicus brief in a case related to foster family agencies; researching California law related to the structure and functioning of Juvenile Justice Commissions, reporting findings to the San Diego Juvenile Justice Commission, which is undergoing transition; researching the implementation of AB 740, a CAI-sponsored bill aimed at reducing the high rates of suspension among California foster youth; and, in partnership with the California Youth Connection (CYC), a statewide youth-led advocacy organization, creating fact sheets for youth advocates across the state focused on CYC’s policy priorities, which include housing, foster youth rights, and maintaining sibling connections.

To expand the opportunities available to CAI students, in December 2025, CAI successfully applied for a \$20,000 grant from the San Diego County Bar Foundation to expand its Dependency Practicum to include a new program — the LEGACY (Legal Advocacy for Children and Youth) Project — that provides legal assistance to San Diego’s homeless youth, based at the Storefront Emergency Youth Shelter.

Pre-Law Internships. During 2025, CAI provided Pre-Law Internships to several undergraduate students who worked with CAI staff on various 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. Projects included researching pending and enacted California legislation for inclusion in CAI’s 2025 *Children’s Legislative Report Card*; research into the status of and activities of California counties’ child death review teams; research relevant to our Campaign to Protect Foster Youth Federal Benefits; and identification of “model statutes” in jurisdictions across the nation for inclusion in CAI’s Child Advocacy Bill Exchange.

ADVOCACY & PUBLIC EDUCATION

A Defining Year in the Campaign to Protect Federal Benefits for Foster Youth

This year marked several significant turning points in CAI's national campaign to safeguard foster youth federal benefits, with advocates and policymakers advancing major victories at both the state and federal levels to ensure vulnerable young people can access and keep benefits they may be entitled to, such as Social Security Disability (SSI) and Survivor benefits. Because these benefits belong to the child beneficiaries, for more than a decade CAI has raised awareness of the routine practice of agencies using these benefits to reimburse themselves for the cost of foster care. This is done despite laws requiring the child's benefits to be spent or conserved pursuant to their best interests. These are 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. Instead, they 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.

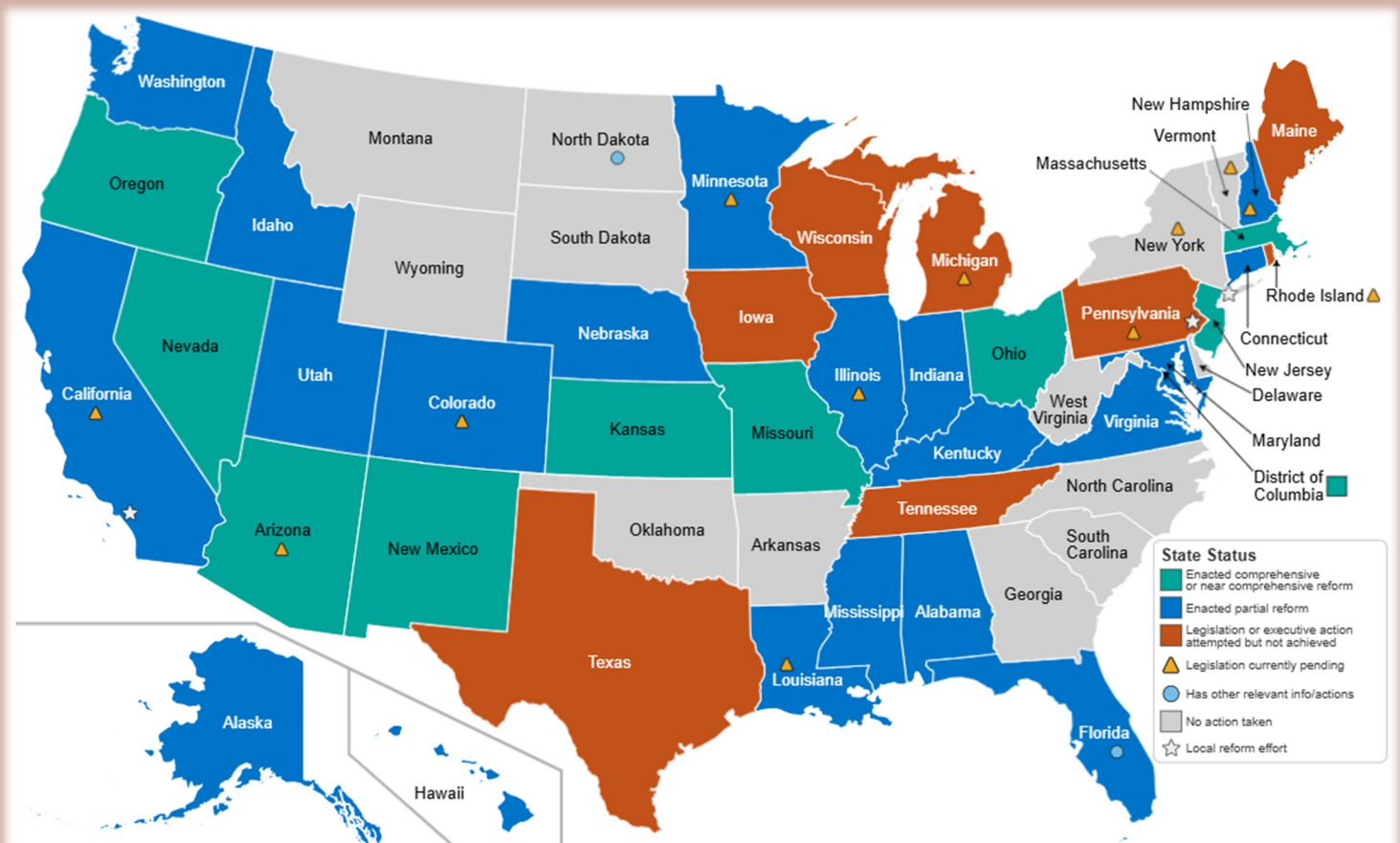
Under the leadership of Amy Harfeld, CAI National Policy Director, the initiative significantly broadened its reach and impact — educating key audiences and advancing policy solutions on the state and federal levels that ensure these funds are directed toward meeting young people's immediate needs and securing their future. This progress was significantly enhanced by the valuable contributions of CAI Senior Staff Attorney Melanie Delgado, who plays a key role in multiple facets of this campaign, as well as consultants Emily Reinig and Justin Kasieta, whose work included rigorous research (Emily), compelling lived-experience testimony (Justin), and direct engagement with state and federal policymakers (both). Highlights of CAI's 2025 advocacy on this campaign include the following:



Administration for Children and Families Letter. In one of the most significant turning points to date in this campaign, CAI’s sustained and ubiquitous advocacy on this issue caught the attention of Alex Adams while he was in the position as Director of the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. Just prior to his appointment as Assistant Secretary for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families (ACF), then-Director Adams issued a bulletin ordering the Idaho Department to stop using a child’s Social Security survivor benefits to pay for foster care maintenance costs, and to use a child’s funds for the child’s current, individual, and unmet needs and conserve remaining benefits for the child’s future needs. Then, after assuming his federal role at ACF, and after communicating several times with CAI’s Amy Harfeld about the status of this issue, Assistant Secretary Adams reached out to the governors of 39 states that do not protect survivor benefits, informing them that taking a foster child’s survivor benefits to offset agency expenses **“is contrary to the best interests of children, and we are working to put an end to this practice”** (emphasis added). To support governors who want to end this practice, Assistant Secretary Adams offered to share executive order templates and provide other technical assistance.

Although the Assistant Secretary’s efforts to date have focused solely on survivor benefits, his prompt and vocal commitment to this issue shows much appreciated progress toward CAI’s goal of protecting all federal benefits for all eligible foster children. Assistant Secretary Adams and others from ACF continue to stay in regular touch with Amy about this issue.

National Reform Tracker. Since the release of CAI’s 2024 national report on this issue, *Foster Care or Foster Con*, changes to state law and policy have been happening at such a rapid pace that CAI developed an [interactive map](#) so policymakers and advocates can easily view information about the latest reforms across the country. CAI updates this map immediately upon learning about new legislation, executive orders, and other relevant actions. As of this writing, 40 states and jurisdictions have taken various actions to preserve the federal Social Security benefits of foster youth, as follows:



- ◆ **Ten** states and jurisdictions have **enacted reforms conserving all social security benefits** of their foster youth, including [Arizona](#), [Kansas](#), [Massachusetts](#), [Missouri](#), [Nevada](#), [New Jersey](#), [New Mexico](#), [Ohio](#), [Oregon](#), and [Washington D.C.](#)
- ◆ **Twenty-three** states and jurisdictions have **enacted partial reforms**, including [Alabama](#), [Alaska](#), [California](#), [Colorado](#), [Connecticut](#), [Florida](#), [Hawaii](#), [Idaho](#), [Illinois](#), [Indiana](#), [Kentucky](#), [Louisiana](#), [Maryland](#), [Minnesota](#), [Mississippi](#), [Nebraska](#), [New Hampshire](#), [Utah](#), [Virginia](#) and [Washington](#), as well as [New York City](#), [Philadelphia](#), and [Los Angeles](#).
- ◆ **Ten** states have currently **pending** legislation including [Arizona](#), [California](#), [Colorado](#), [Illinois](#), [Michigan](#), [New Hampshire](#), [New York](#), [Pennsylvania](#), [Rhode Island](#), and [Vermont](#).
- ◆ **Twelve** states recently attempted legislation or executive action that was not enacted: [Alaska](#), [Hawaii](#), [Iowa](#), [Louisiana](#), [Maine](#), [Maryland](#), [Minnesota](#), [Oregon](#), [Tennessee](#), [Texas](#), [Virginia](#), and [Wisconsin](#).

Education, Training, Public Outreach, and Technical Assistance. CAI educates and trains stakeholder communities in California and across the country on best practices to preserve the benefits of foster youth, as well as ways to advocate for the protection of their assets. We have presented briefings and trainings in Congress, conferences of the National Association of Counsel for Children and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the National Child Abuse Coalition, the Transition Aged Youth Federal Coalition, the Child Welfare and Mental Health Services Coalition, the Partnership for America's Children, and others. We provide updates and information to a wide network 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. In 2025, CAI's public education presentations on this issue included training sessions for attorneys and judges in Iowa, as well as transition age youth caseworkers and advocates at the Daniel Memorial Institute Conference in Orlando, Florida.

CAI also leads and supports state efforts to propel reform on this issue, providing research, guidance, and technical assistance to advocates and policymakers across the nation. In addition to our work in California (see below), in 2025 CAI significantly contributed to efforts in several states, including:

- ◆ Colorado, which enacted [partial reform](#) in 2025;
- ◆ Massachusetts, which enacted [comprehensive reform](#) in 2025, after making a voluntary policy change at the agency level the year before;
- ◆ New Jersey, which enacted [comprehensive reform](#) in 2025;
- ◆ New York, which is still considering its [reform legislation](#);
- ◆ Pennsylvania, which is still considering its [reform legislation](#);
- ◆ Tennessee, which did not enact its [reform legislation](#);
- ◆ Virginia, which enacted [partial reform](#) in 2025; and
- ◆ Washington, which enacted [partial reform](#) in early 2026.



In its effort to keep this issue on the public's radar, CAI staff were featured in several news articles across the country in 2025, including:

- ◆ In April 2025, CAI's Amy Harfeld was featured on a segment of The Imprint's news podcast entitled, [How to Stop Stealing from Foster Youth](#), to talk about the history of this issue, what states are doing to reform, and why she is optimistic about federal action in the near future.
- ◆ Also in April 2025, CAI's Amy Harfeld was featured in [Spotlight PA](#) to provide background on this issue and reform efforts in Pennsylvania.
- ◆ In August 2025, CAI's Amy Harfeld was quoted in the [Idaho Capital Sun](#) on that state's efforts to curb the practice of taking foster youth federal benefits to offset the cost of their care.
- ◆ In September 2025, CAI's Amy Harfeld was quoted in the [Santa Fe New Mexican](#) on New Mexico's efforts to stop the practice of using foster children's federal benefits to offset the state's obligation to pay for foster care.
- ◆ In November 2025, CAI's Amy Harfeld was quoted in [The Imprint](#) on ACF Assistant Secretary Alex Adams' commitment to "actively and expeditiously" work to stop states from taking foster children's federal benefits to offset their obligation to pay for foster care.
- ◆ In December 2025, CAI's Amy Harfeld was featured in a [Wisconsin Examiner](#) article about states' use of foster children's survivor benefits to offset their obligation to pay for foster care and in an [Idaho Capital Sun](#) article about states efforts to stop taking benefits from foster youth.

California Social Security Benefits 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 the foster youths' 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. The Governor signed AB 2906 on Sept. 26, 2024 (Chapter 623, Statutes of 2024). During 2025, CAI worked alongside a coalition of California children's rights advocates to provide guidance and stakeholder input as CDSS developed the implementation guidance for AB 2906, resulting in the release of [ACL 25-27](#) in May 2025. CAI and coalition partners also collaborated to develop best practices to guide counties in the administration of foster youth's SSA benefits, both disability and survivors' benefits, to help ensure consistent and faithful implementation across the state.

Because AB 2906 only protects Social Security survivor benefits, CAI's work is not done in California. In 2025, CAI co-sponsored [AB 1080 \(Bryan\)](#), which, as introduced, would have extended AB 2906's protections to also include SSI benefits. Unfortunately, AB 1080 was not enacted in 2025 and was amended in early 2026 to no longer protect SSI benefits, but to instead include all benefits provided pursuant to Title II of the Social Security Act. As the measure was made a two-year bill, CAI will continue to advocate for its passage during 2026.

Although CAI's work has brought about some progress in California, we will continue to urge state policymakers and leaders to make California a leader by comprehensively protecting foster youth benefits for all beneficiaries and ensuring that no federal benefits are intercepted and used to offset the state's obligation to pay for foster care.

Expanded Congressional Advocacy. For nearly two decades, CAI has advocated for federal legislation to end the practice of agencies taking foster youth benefits nationwide—an approach that would solve the problem in one stroke. While multiple federal bills introduced since 2007—including efforts led by Reps. Pete Stark and Danny Davis—have not yet been enacted, they have built a strong foundation for the current push to ensure these benefits are preserved for the youth they are intended to support. To that end, in 2025, CAI was awarded a new grant from the Walter S. Johnson Foundation to expand its federal advocacy efforts. Working together with lived experience experts and professional advocates based in Washington, D.C. (who successfully advocated for comprehensive reform in Missouri), CAI will spend significant time and effort in 2026 advocating for federal legislation that:

- ◆ prohibits agencies from taking a foster youth's assets or benefits for reimbursement of foster care costs;
- ◆ requires 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;
- ◆ requires 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 provide benefit updates;
- ◆ mandates 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;
- ◆ requires agencies to enter into information-sharing agreements with the Social Security Administration related to serving as representative payee; and
- ◆ requires 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.





Lived Experience Expert Guidance. Since its inception, the Campaign to Preserve Foster Youth Benefits has reflected the voices and priorities of lived experience experts. In 2025, we engaged 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 bring this issue to life 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 at webinars and trainings, participating in or driving litigation, and engaging with both local and national media.

Litigation Activities. CAI is also attacking this issue through litigation. In 2025, CAI, along with pro bono co-counsel Sheppard, 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.

In October 2025, CAI joined an [amicus curiae letter brief](#) filed in the New Jersey Supreme Court in *New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency v. A.R. and P.W.*, arguing that requiring foster children who are eligible for federal benefits to pay for their own foster care results in disparate treatment of youth in care, discriminating against the most vulnerable children in New Jersey's foster care system and violating equal protection, while raising serious due process concerns by failing to provide notice and a meaningful opportunity to challenge the state's actions.

Well-Deserved Kudos for CAI's Campaign Director. In March 2025, CAI's own Amy Harfeld was recognized by the Support Center for Child Advocates as one of its 2025 Distinguished Advocates for Children. Every year, the Center nominates attorneys, policymakers, and other collaborators who exemplify what it means to advocate for youth in the child welfare system. Amy, along with Professor Dan Hatcher at the University of Baltimore Civil Advocacy Clinic, were honored for their work collaborating with the Center on protecting federal benefits for youth in foster care.



Laurie Ayler (L) of the Support Center for Child Advocates presents the 2025 Distinguished Advocates for Children Award to CAI's Amy Harfeld (R).

Nation-Leading Efforts to Keep Kids Safe Online and Hold Social Media Companies Accountable for Causing Harm

If a factory spewing pollution had caused the same unprecedented number of child deaths and mental health harms as social media, we long ago would have shut the factory down.

Talk to any teacher. Talk to any parent. Talk to the children.

There is now no doubt that social media has contributed to an unprecedented crisis in child mental health, including record child suicides, major depression, and eating disorders. Less famously, but at least as infamously, has been the repeatedly documented role of the platforms in knowingly facilitating child sex trafficking and the spread of pedophile child sex abuse material, abbreviated as CSAM.

What has happened before our eyes will forever live as maybe the most infamous example of knowingly immoral corporate behavior in world history.

Changing the World by Changing the Conversation. It is commonplace now for everyone when discussing social media to talk about “the algorithm” — but who, three years ago, knew anything about AI-written, social media content-delivery algorithms?

And that’s *exactly* how change happens, in the courts and in legislatures. Courts and legislatures are comprised of people, and they don’t know what they don’t know. Thus, taking a page from Public Interest Advocacy 101, CAI realized that to prevent judges from tossing out lawsuits on motions to dismiss based on erroneously taking the word of platforms about how their machines operate and to persuade elected officials to enact child-protective legislation, CAI had to educate everyone about how these platforms worked. If CAI had a multi-million dollar ad budget, we could have done it that way. Instead, CAI elected to engage in public education by introducing trailblazing legislation and then relentlessly, tirelessly, publicizing it.

But what should the bills do? Back in 2021, after three months of exhaustive research conducted in the immediate wake of Francis Haugen’s Facebook whistleblowing, CAI chose to commit significant resources to the fight to make social media safe for children and, for jurisprudential and political reasons, elected relentlessly to spotlight (i) the platforms purposefully addicting children to their offerings and (ii) their role in facilitating child sex trafficking and the spread of child sex abuse material.

CAI’s aim: no less than to change the way judges and elected officials view the role of the platforms as not just passive portholes for third-party content but actively and knowingly engaged in child harm. A review of the prodigious amount of press on [social media addiction](#) and [social media child sex trafficking and CSAM](#) shows the strategy is working. After just a few short years, and against some of the richest corporations and individuals the world has ever known, this effort is paying consistent dividends.



Just three years ago, it was common for trade associations to prevail in facial challenges brought under section 230 of the Communications Decency Act or the First Amendment to state social media reform laws, based on the associations' raw allegations about how their members' platforms operated. Likewise, platforms were just a short while ago routinely able to obtain dismissal of personal injury and other state claims under the same federal authorities based upon such raw allegations.

No more. While not uniform, the trend in case law is clear. As exemplified by recent jury verdicts and judicial decisions in lawsuits involving the biggest social media platforms, ranging from the U.S. Supreme Court to federal appellate courts to state trial courts, judges are converging on a set of rulings regarding section 230 and the First Amendment that foreshadow in the next few years (i) multibillion-dollar personal injury verdicts or settlements and (ii) the enactment of state laws that could foundationally alter platform business models and — at least facially — withstand a judicial challenge.



Preventing bamboozling isn't just important for getting the law right in contested cases regarding section 230 or the First Amendment. Preventing judges from being bamboozled means more cases get to discovery — unearthing even more horrifying, reform-impelling facts.

This, too, is working. Recent headlines exposed some of the truly ghastly, unimaginably immoral, insider facts of how platforms treat children — facts obtained through discovery that just three years ago would not likely have existed. For example, according to a deposition of Instagram's Head of Safety and Well-Being, Meta's policy was that a user "could incur 16 violations for prostitution and sexual solicitation, and upon the 17th violation, your account would be suspended." This means Meta allowed users more than fifteen opportunities to engage in child sex trafficking without consequence.

All of this is succinctly predicted in a December 2025 op-ed by CAI Founder and former Executive Director Bob Fellmeth, titled [Juries, Not Politicians, Will Soon Decide the Fate of Child-Harming Social Media Platforms](#). Among other things, Bob writes:

Soon, it won't be D.C. politicians lobbied by ex-colleagues, their egos stoked and campaign coffers filled by the world's wealthiest men, who will decide whether to hold platforms responsible for harming America's children.

Soon, it will be juries comprised of people like us who will decide. Regular people whose moral compasses are uncompromised by wanting the world's largest yacht or reelection. Their verdicts won't be the end of the story of how an entire generation of children agonizingly suffered at the hands of a tiny few whose limitless greed and vanity eclipses the sun. But, maybe, to paraphrase Churchill, their verdicts or the mega-settlements the prospect of regular people accountability will prompt, will be the turning point; the end of the beginning.

In other examples of CAI's efforts to change the conversation around online safety for children and youth,

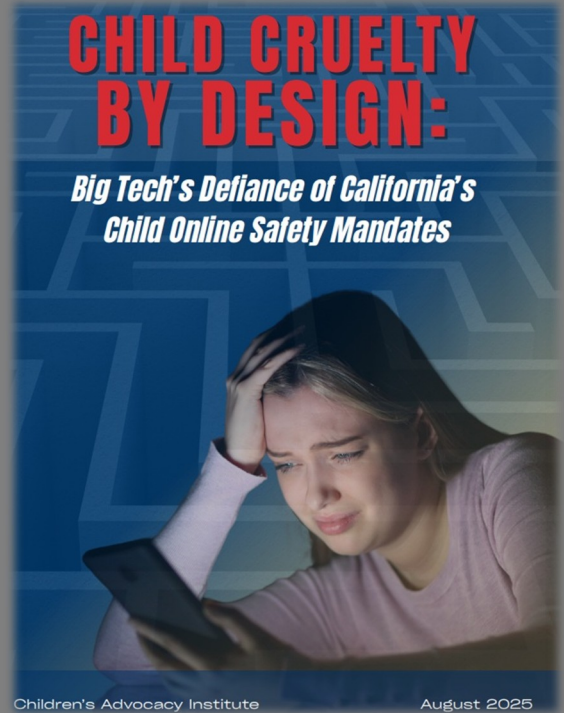
- ◆ In January 2025, Bob Fellmeth published a commentary in [CalMatters](#), titled "AI is already harming our children. Are California lawmakers going to do something?"
- ◆ In February 2025, Bob Fellmeth authored an op-ed published by The San Diego Union Tribune titled, "[AI-Powered 'Companions' for Kids are Profoundly Risky](#)." Among other points, the op-ed noted that making AI "available to children without first ensuring it is safe is not just grossly negligent—it is sociopathic" and concluded that "there is nothing more urgent on any lawmaker's to-do list than protecting our children from technologies that have the power to hurt them."
- ◆ Also in February 2025, CAI's Ed Howard was featured in a [press release](#) by State Senator Steve Padilla announcing the introduction of [SB 243](#), which will require program developers to implement critical safeguards to protect children and other impressionable users from the addictive, isolating, and influential aspects of artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots.
- ◆ In April 2025, CAI's Ed Howard was featured in an [NBC KCRA3](#) segment to discuss CAI's report documenting how Amazon is skirting California law.
- ◆ CAI's Melanie Delgado presented to the California CSEC Action Team in early 2025 on the implementation of AB 1394. The presentation provided advocates with an overview of this critical law and practical guidance on how to utilize the law's reporting mechanism. Attendees received step-by-step instructions and tools to help survivors document, report, and follow through on critical steps to trigger potential civil liability of up to \$4 million per violation.
- ◆ In June 2025, CAI's Jessica Heldman and Melandie Delgado published an op-ed in [The Fulcrum](#) on the attempt to ban AI regulation.
- ◆ In August 2025, CAI's Jessica Heldman and Ed Howard joined former Assemblymember Jordan Cunningham as panelists for a webinar titled *Addicted by Design: Protecting Youth from Social Media Harm*, which was streamed to a multinational audience.
- ◆ In August 2025, CAI's Jessica Heldman spoke to [KCRA3](#) about CAI's report revealing that platforms had failed to implement reporting mechanisms that meet even the most basic standards of accessibility, clarity, or support for survivors of child sex abuse.
- ◆ In September 2025, CAI's Ed Howard talked to [KCRA3](#) about SB 771, which would have held social media companies liable for promoting credible threats of real violence.
- ◆ In October 2025, CAI's Jessica Heldman was quoted in [The Washington Times](#) on Governor Gavin Newsom's veto of SB 771.
- ◆ In December 2025, CAI's Ed Howard was featured in a [Los Angeles Times](#) article about children's online safety.

Changing the Law. The first aim, obviously, is to pass trailblazing laws. California has done that. Over the past several years, and with the help of CAI, the state has achieved enactment of many significant laws including 2023's [AB 1394 \(Wicks and Flora\)](#) addressing sex trafficking; 2024's [SB 976 \(Skinner\)](#) addressing social media addiction; [SB 1504 \(Stern\)](#) addressing cyberbullying; [AB 1831 \(Berman\)](#) providing criminal liability for AI-generated child pornography; and 2025's landmark [AB 316 \(Krell\)](#) cementing AI user or developer tort liability for harms caused by AI.

In 2025, one of CAI's goals was to address social media platforms' ambitious efforts to defy the intent of AB 1394 and SB 1504, as well as Amazon's unsatisfactory compliance with 2018's [AB 2511 \(Chau\)](#), which prevented the online sale to children of products they may not lawfully purchase in person. To that end, CAI devoted significant time and resources in 2025 to researching and publishing two groundbreaking reports. The first report, [Amazon: Breaking the Law and Placing Children at Risk?](#), released in April 2025, examined Amazon's compliance with the requirements of California Civil Code §1798.99.1 ("The Parent's Accountability and Child Protection Act") enacted by AB 2511. The law aims to prevent children from buying products online that they may not lawfully buy in brick-and-mortar stores. The law was enacted after several investigative news reports documented how a minor was able to buy dangerous weapons on the marketplace. The examination found that

Amazon was not complying with §1798.99.1 and that for many products that are illegal to sell to minors — some of which are potentially dangerous to children — Amazon was not taking any of the required steps to ensure children could not buy certain products.

CAI's second report, released in August 2025, was [Child Cruelty by Design: Big Tech's Defiance of California's Child Online Safety Mandates](#). The report evaluated how major social media platforms have responded to California's AB 1394 and SB 1504 — two landmark laws aimed at protecting children from online sexual exploitation and cyberbullying. AB 1394 requires platforms to establish "reasonably accessible" mechanisms for reporting child sexual abuse material (CSAM), while SB 1504 mandates "prominent" pathways for reporting cyberbullying. CAI measured the compliance of Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and TikTok through hands-on testing of their in-app reporting systems on mobile devices. CAI's research found that, despite being granted an extra year to prepare for compliance, none of the platforms studied had implemented reporting mechanisms that met even the most basic standards of accessibility, clarity, or support for survivors. For example, reporting pathways are often hidden behind multiple menus, vague terminology, and unclear steps—requiring



5 to 7 clicks or more; platforms use euphemisms instead of more precise and understandable terms, creating confusion and deterring reporting; none of the reporting systems clearly inform users of their rights under California law or the platforms' obligations to respond; and young survivors must navigate confusing interfaces, contradictory instructions, and character-limited text fields while seeking help—experiences that compound trauma rather than alleviate it. The report concluded that the failures documented are not due to technological limitations or oversight. These corporations — some of the most profitable and technologically advanced in the world — have deliberately chosen profit over protection. Their actions, or inaction, defy the intent of the law and disrespect both the California Legislature and the vulnerable children these laws were designed to protect.

AMAZON: BREAKING THE LAW AND PLACING CHILDREN AT RISK?



The findings of these reports led to the 2025 introduction of [SB 659 \(Reyes\)](#) to address Amazon's non-compliance with AB 2511 and [AB 1137 \(Krell\)](#) to address defiance of AB 1394 and SB 1504. Big tech flexed its muscle to kill SB 659 in the dreaded Senate Appropriations, Star Chamber, secret "suspense" file, necessitating another and more ambitious bill in 2026. Squabbling among Assembly Democrats, unrelated to the bill's merits, caused the death of AB 1137, again, necessitating a more ambitious bill in 2026.

That said, CAI helped several key bills get to the Governor's desk in 2025 to protect children from media, including those resulting from the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). As noted above, CAI co-sponsored [AB 316 \(Krell\)](#) (Chapter 672, Statutes of 2025). This critical measure is operatively a single sentence:

In an action against a defendant who developed, modified, or used artificial intelligence that is alleged to have caused a harm to the plaintiff, it shall not be a defense, and the defendant may not assert, that the artificial intelligence autonomously caused the harm to the plaintiff.

In non-legalese, this clarifies that if AI is alleged to have harmed someone, the corporations that made or used the AI cannot escape responsibility by shifting blame to the autonomous actions of the machines that were designed to operate autonomously. If such defenses were allowed, injured Californians would have no recourse, and developers would not be motivated to be careful by the prospect of having to pay for the harm their inventions caused, which is the case with literally every other invented machine. The same is true for those who use machines. They, too, are motivated to be careful by the prospect of having to pay for the harm their misuse of machines causes. The same should be true of AI.

Other notable 2025 measures included:

- ◆ [AB 56 \(Bauer-Kahan\)](#) (Chapter 671, Statutes of 2025), which requires covered platforms to clearly display warning labels about the harms associated with social media when users, who are not reasonably determined to be adults, enter the platform and after extended use;
- ◆ [AB 656 \(Schiavo\)](#) (Chapter 464, Statutes of 2025), which requires social media platforms to provide a button that enables users to delete their accounts, making it easier for children to quit social media platforms by making the option easy to find and easy to implement;
- ◆ [AB 1043 \(Wicks\)](#) (Chapter 675, Statutes of 2025), which requires operating system providers to communicate certain information to developers, including age bracket information, and requires developers to request and treat age signals as the primary indicator of the user's age; and
- ◆ [SB 53 \(Weiner\)](#), the Transparency in Frontier AI Act, which requires large AI frontier model developers, as defined, to publish safety frameworks, disclose specified transparency reports, and report critical safety incidents to the Office of Emergency Services.
- ◆ [AB 1064 \(Bauer-Kahan\)](#), which would have prohibited making a companion chatbot available to children if it is foreseeably capable of specified harmful behaviors, including encouraging the child to engage in self-harm, suicidal ideation, or violence, or engaging in sexually explicit interactions with the child, was passed by the legislature but vetoed by Governor Gavin Newsom.

Also in 2025, CAI co-sponsored [SB 771 \(Stern\)](#) with groups including the American Association of University Women, Consumer Federation, and Simon Wiesenthal Center. Responding to the ever-more violent political context and Meta's dramatic retreat from content moderation offering Jewish, LGBTQ+, Muslim, women, immigrant, and Black Californians protection, SB 771 would simply have clarified that longstanding anti-terrorism and harassment laws already applicable to every Californian and every California business were applicable to social media platform operations and raised penalties on platforms for violating those laws. Ironically underscoring the need for the bill, SB 771 was "algorithmized" by both the far right and left, with social media posts seen by millions aggressively and ambitiously lying about the bill's intent and wording. At the eleventh hour, Governor Newsom vetoed the bill.

The fight to protect children online is far from over. California's 2026 legislative session provides more opportunity for the state, with support from CAI and its partners, to stop bad actors from acting with impunity at the expense of an entire generation of children.

AG Requests CAI to File Amicus Brief Defending Law Inspired by CAI's Social Media Addiction Efforts. As noted above, CAI was one of the leading supporters of [SB 976 \(Skinner\)](#) (Chapter 321, Statutes of 2024), the Protecting Our Kids from Social Media Addiction Act. The bill was inspired by CAI's first-in-the-nation bill on addiction, 2022's [AB 2408 \(Cunningham and Wicks\)](#), which was actually enacted in Utah. After a Big Tech trade association lost a facial challenge to SB 976, in November 2025 Google/YouTube, Meta, and TikTok each filed lawsuits and motions for preliminary injunction to enjoin SB 976 in the Northern District of California. The three plaintiffs claimed that the Act's parental consent provisions unconstitutionally restrict their right to deliver AI-curated content to children without parental involvement and violate a child's right to receive whatever content plaintiffs may elect to send them. In December 2025, the California Attorney General's Office asked if CAI would be interested in drafting and filing an amicus curiae brief in defense of SB 976. CAI enthusiastically agreed to do so, and in early 2026 drafted and submitted a brief on behalf of itself, as well as on behalf of Fairplay for Kids and the Organization for Social Media Safety.

CAI's brief argued that the plaintiffs' technologies are causing irrevocable mental health harm, including suicides of countless children, and creating a child health emergency and crisis, and noted, "if ever there was a case where the balance of equities and the public interest weighed against preliminarily enjoining a law, this case is it." CAI further described in detail how plaintiffs' constitutional claims are unlikely to prevail, noting that "no case cited or found has held that the First Amendment protects the ability of corporations to addict people, let alone children, to their products while communicating otherwise First Amendment-protected speech; a

necessary and novel aspect of Plaintiffs' First Amendment claims they do not confront." In response to plaintiffs' claims that they provide a variety of built-in protections and content reporting mechanisms, CAI pointed out that plaintiffs' own employees know that their so-called tools do not work and do not function as advertised; CAI further noted that these controls are difficult to find and burdensome to use. Further, CAI explained that the plaintiffs' content reporting mechanisms are difficult to locate and use confusing terminology, and that the platforms fail to respond to reports in a timely manner, if at all. In conclusion, CAI stated that "a balancing of equities and the public interest cannot embrace Plaintiffs' effort indefinitely to suspend the operation of narrowly targeted legislation enacted to benefit children when, science tells us, their mental health and their very lives are right now, *en masse*, imperiled by Plaintiffs' products."

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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

SAN JOSE DIVISION

TIKTOK, INC.

Plaintiff,

v.

RON BONTA, in his official capacity

as Attorney General of California,

Defendant.

META PLATFORMS, INC.

Plaintiff,

v.

RON BONTA, in his official capacity

as Attorney General of California,

Defendant.

CASE NO. 5:25-cv-09789-EJD

BRIEF OF CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY

INSTITUTE, FAIRPLAY FOR KIDS, AND

THE ORGANIZATION FOR SOCIAL

MEDIA SAFETY AS AMICI CURIAE IN

SUPPORT OF DEFENDANT

DATE: May 7, 2026

TIME: 9:00 A.M.

CRTRM: 4 (Fifth Floor)

JUDGE: Hon. Edward J. Davila

CASE NO. 5:25-cv-09792-EJD

BRIEF OF AMICI CURIAE

Case Nos. 5:25-cv-09795-EJD, 5:25-cv-09792-EJD, 5:25-cv-09792-EJD

Groundbreaking Reforms to Improve the Foster Care System

Even while waging its national campaign to protect foster youth federal benefits and fighting social media platforms, CAI has continued its longstanding efforts to improve the lives of California's foster children. CAI's unique emphasis is on holding the state and local governments charged with raising these children on our behalf accountable for outcomes and, where they fall short, enacting government-targeted reforms.

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.

However, in 2025 CAI and the California Youth Connection successfully co-sponsored [*AB 562 \(Solache and Bryan\)*](#) (Chapter 436, Statutes of 2025), which requires each county to annually check online to see how their family finding rates compare to the statewide average, and in counties that are below the statewide average in placing foster children with relatives, requires the county welfare director or their designee to communicate with the Center for Excellence in Family Finding, Engagement, and Support to identify best practices the county may adopt to improve its average rate of placing children with relatives. Counties shall communicate with the Center at least three additional times on a quarterly basis. Experts and the experiences in Sacramento and Los Angeles counties instruct that these simple steps, ensuring the issue is raised, will result in abused or neglected children, wherever they happen to live, having a better chance of living not just with a family, but their family. This will particularly benefit California's children and families of color. A regular conversation about what more can be done to promote placing traumatized children with their families is not too much to require. Youth deserve the dignity of belonging and are entitled to not just a placement, but also family, identity, and connection.

Supporting Non-Minor Dependents. In 2025, CAI became aware of a troubling issue impacting the ability of California youth participating in extended foster care (non-minor dependents, or NMDs) to access services and resources after relocating to a new county. A twelve-month residency requirement set forth in the Welfare & Institutions Code mandated that NMDs reside continuously in a new county for twelve months before being able to transfer jurisdiction of their case to the new county, arbitrarily causing significant delays in their ability to access vital services and housing.



To resolve this issue, CAI and Children's Legal Services of San Diego co-sponsored [AB 890 \(Lee\)](#) (Chapter 281, Statutes of 2025), which amends the law to allow NMDs to request a transfer of jurisdiction to the county in which they are now residing and gives dependency judges the discretion to order that transfer, notwithstanding the twelve-month residency requirement. Thus, AB 890 will enable timely case transfers to better serve NMDs' needs; streamline access to local services, housing, and support networks; reduce bureaucratic delays and improve service coordination between counties; and mitigate the risk of homelessness and promote positive outcomes for NMDs.

Also in 2025, CAI supported [SB 624 \(Caballero\)](#) (Chapter 230, Statutes of 2025), the Foster Outreach and Support for Tax Education Readiness Act, which requires the Department of Social Services to issue guidance to county welfare and juvenile probation departments with information to support best practices for NMDs to file state and federal income tax returns and access the foster youth tax credit.



Protecting the Financial Futures of Foster Youth. In addition to its work to protect federal benefits that belong to eligible youth in foster care (discussed above), CAI is addressing other issues that impose barriers to their path to self-sufficiency. Among other things, CAI's work in 2025 included efforts to:

- ◆ Ensure that meaningful and effective assistance is available, until age 26, for each young adult who aged out of foster care, to resolve identity theft and credit fraud that occurred while the youth was in care. Foster children 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. Clean credit is foundational to economic participation, and without it, former foster youth face immediate barriers to housing, employment, education financing, and access to basic utilities. While federal law requires all state child welfare agencies to ensure that youth in foster care who are 14 and older receive a free copy of their credit reports annually and get assistance in interpreting and resolving any inaccuracies on reports, that is not happening consistently. CAI is engaging in public education and advocacy to ensure that current and former foster youth receive meaningful information and assistance in addressing credit-related problems that can hinder their efforts to achieve stability and self-sufficiency.
- ◆ Ensure that youth exiting from foster care have access to the critical documentation and information they need as they work toward being self-sufficient. Although federal law requires child welfare agencies to provide foster youth with vital documents upon leaving care, this is also not happening consistently. Young people need these documents to access housing, education, employment, health care, and other services, and CAI is engaging in public education and advocacy to ensure that all state child welfare systems are complying with this requirement.
- ◆ Ensure that meaningful financial literacy and assistance are provided to youth in foster care and after aging out, much as a responsible parent would do to ensure stability and self-sufficiency for their children. Although federal and state laws mandate such training and education, compliance remains inconsistent and often inadequate.

Protecting FFA-Involved Foster Children. In 2024 successfully spearheaded opposition to a last-minute, gut-and-amend bill that would have imposed unprecedented limits on sexually abused foster children under the care of nonprofit foster family agencies (FFA) being able to obtain the same compensation as any other child. Building off of that, in 2025, CAI drafted and filed an appellate [*amicus curiae* brief](#) in support of plaintiffs in *C.F. v. Alternative Family Services*, which will determine whether a contracting private Foster Family Agency (FFA) can only be held liable for failing to screen prospective foster parents for their likelihood of sexually abusing the children under their care if an FFA somehow “actually knew” the prospective foster parent already had a predisposition to sexually abuse foster children.

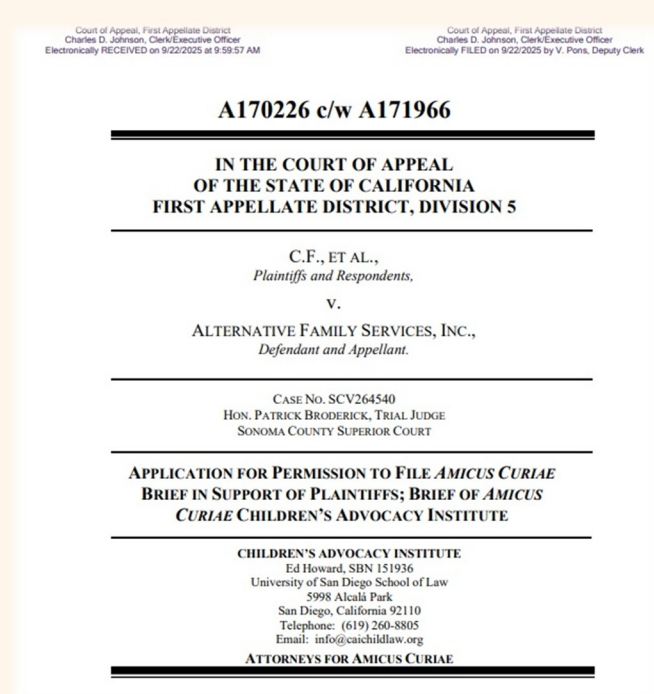
Vigorously arguing against the adoption of an “actual knowledge” standard that would, in the words of the brief, motivate FFA “indolence” in reviewing the backgrounds of prospective foster parents, CAI noted, among other things, that the actual knowledge foreseeability standard applied just to sexually abused FFA foster children would be catastrophic for and cruel to FFA foster children, denying them and only them compensation and increasing the risk they will be sexually abused. To prevent the sexual abuse of foster children from occurring in the first place, every person and organization in a “special relationship” with foster children that have a hand in selecting which adults will, in

the privacy of their homes, have access to these children, must as a matter of public policy be as motivated as possible to thoroughly and ambitiously screen such adults. Any policy that reduces that motivation increases the chances they will be sexually abused. Moreover, at stake in the case is whether FFA-placed children, if sexually abused, will receive the same compensation to pay for their mental health therapy, medications, health insurance, medical care, and support throughout their lives as would a non-FFA foster child identically abused.

At this writing, the appellate court has issued a tentative decision relying on CAI’s *amicus curiae* brief for several essential points. The court is expected to issue its opinion in mid-2026.

Protecting Postsecondary Student Consumers. CAI, together with the USD School of Law’s Consumer Protection Policy Center and Veterans Legal Clinic, 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. In 2025, CAI continued to monitor and track the oversight and implementation of federal and state provisions to protect student consumers from unfair and predatory practices by some private, for-profit postsecondary businesses. CAI also joined a letter urging lawmakers not to cut Pell Grants but instead invest in our nation’s workforce by fully funding the Pell Grant program and rejecting any proposed eligibility cuts.

At the state level, CAI continued to monitor the California Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education (BPPE), theoretically one of the strongest state-based regulatory entities given its statutory authority. During 2025, CAI’s Melanie Delgado continued 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 assists as 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.



LEADERSHIP, COLLABORATION, & SPECIAL PROJECTS

Promoting the Replication of Successful Child-Related Laws

In 2025, 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).

Child Advocacy Bill Exchange
A nationwide compilation of bills and statutes for child advocates interested in drafting impactful legislation.

- CHILD WELFARE
- CHILD HEALTH
- EARLY CARE
- K-12 EDUCATION
- CHILD TRAFFICKING (CSEC)
- CHILD SAFETY
- ECONOMIC WELL-BEING
- YOUTH JUSTICE
- RACIAL EQUITY AND JUSTICE
- IMMIGRATION

If you would like to suggest additional provisions, please email us at info@caichildlaw.org

Collaboration & 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).

Other collaborations that CAI participated in during 2025 include:

- ◆ Joining MomsRising's effort to support the Child Care for Working Families Act.
- ◆ Participating in the effort led by the Coalition on Human Needs, Campaign to Invest in America's Workforce, Coalition for Health Funding, and Committee for Education Funding to urge Congress to support families, communities, and local economies with a FY 2026 allocation for the Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee that will ensure key programs can meet vital needs.
- ◆ Signing on to the Children's Movement letter to Governor Newsom regarding proposed budget cuts.
- ◆ Signing on to a First Focus letter urging federal policymakers to prioritize children in the federal budget reconciliation.
- ◆ In conjunction with the National Network for Youth Homeless, signing on in support of the Children and Youth Act.
- ◆ Participating at the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) Congress in Vilnius, Lithuania, which brought together 800 researchers, advocates, practitioners, and policymakers from around the world, and CAI has since become an ISPCAN Country Partner.
- ◆ Joining Demand Progress's campaign to ask Congress to oppose adding a ban on state AI laws to a must-pass defense spending bill.
- ◆ Signing on to the Transition Aged Youth Federal Coalition's letter in support of the Protecting Health Care and Lowering Costs Act, which would repeal all the health care cuts in H.R. 1, including those to Medicaid, and would permanently extend the ACA premium tax credits.
- ◆ Signing on to a letter supporting the Minnesota Foster Youth Bill of Rights.



And finally, in addition to several reports discussed above, CAI's leadership on a variety of topics included the publication of the following during 2025:

- ◆ CAI's Jessica Heldman's law review article titled [*Specialty Courts for Sexually Exploited Children: What We Know and What is Possible*](#), was published by the CHILDREN'S LEGAL RIGHTS JOURNAL in early 2025.
- ◆ In Fall 2025, Professor Heldman presented at the Temple Law Review *Symposium on Youth Justice in a New Era*. Professor Heldman presented on the topic of state constitutional litigation on behalf of children and youth, as explored in her forthcoming article "*Raising the Floor: Advancing Youth Rights through State Constitutional Protections*."
- ◆ The American Immigration Lawyers Association Law Journal published "[*No Second Chance: The Inappropriate Use of Juvenile Delinquencies in Immigration Law Adjudications*](#)." Written by CAI's Jessica Heldman and co-authors Sarah Diaz, Lisa Jacobs, and Sierra Garcia, the article highlights how U.S. immigration authorities' reliance on juvenile delinquency records to deny benefits or deport young people is both legally and developmentally inappropriate.
- ◆ In 2025, CAI began a partnership with consultant Carolyn Griesemer, focusing on mapping the legal needs and barriers to meeting those needs in San Diego County. This partnership led to the publication of the report, *Legal Services as Prevention: Mapping Needs and Barriers for San Diego Families and Youth*. The report found that San Diego's shift toward upstream, prevention-focused family support has reduced court involvement but created a significant gap in access to legal services for families who no longer qualify for court-appointed counsel. It concludes that expanding coordinated, community-based legal services—especially in areas like housing, guardianship, domestic violence, and youth advocacy—is essential to stabilize families and prevent deeper system involvement. These findings and recommendations, although specific to San Diego County, reflect needs and gaps reported in other counties around the state.
- ◆ CAI released its [*2025 Children's Legislative Report Card*](#), featuring a Legislative Year in Review drafted by CAI Senior Counsel Ed Howard, and presenting legislators' votes on 40 bills addressing a wide range of issues, including foster care, dependency court, online protections for children, child poverty, immigrant youth, K–12 education, postsecondary education, nutrition, health and safety, youth justice, and family court.
- ◆ In a timely and much-needed display of leadership, in March 2025, CAI's Bob Fellmeth and Jessica Heldman, in conjunction with CAI Pro Bono Law Clerk Julie Roland, published an op-ed in *The Fulcrum* entitled, "[*Children are Collateral Damage of the Trump Agenda*](#)." Among other points, the trio wrote that:

We can — and should — continue to debate how to most efficiently and effectively spend taxpayer funds. But on some issues, we should all agree. Let's not battle over whether children deserve sufficient food. Let's not battle over whether children deserve health care. Let's not create chaos and punish those working to care for innocent and vulnerable children. There's not a single child that deserves to bear the burden of that. Children deserve policymakers who recognize that an investment in them is an investment in the future. This shouldn't be partisan because kids aren't partisan. They can't even vote. If anything, Democrats and Republicans should be competing over who can do more for kids in an attempt to win over future voters. An electoral mandate will never include the voices of children but it shouldn't matter. Centering children is a moral imperative, fiscally practical, and should transcend partisan politics.

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 2025, CAI announced the following recipients of the 2024–25 awards:



- ◆ First Place (tie): [Medicated in Foster Care: Who's Looking Out?](#) A review of all 50 states' policies and class-action lawsuits across the country revealed spotty enforcement of federal requirements that child welfare agencies monitor psychotropic prescriptions for foster youth. This review was reported by Michael Fitzgerald, Sarah Henry, Jeremy Loudenback, and Susanti Sarkar and published by The Imprint.
- ◆ First Place (tie): [Poisoned: Fentanyl's Child Victims](#). National investigative reporters spent more than two years poring over this journalism project, sorting through 100+ hours of videos and audio recordings and thousands of police, court, and other documents to tell a critical public health story about fentanyl's child victims. This series was reported by Lori Jane Gliha and Brittany Freeman and published by Scripps News.
- ◆ Honorable Mention: [Forgotten Children](#). As parental death has been rising in the U.S. due to COVID-19, the overdose epidemic, and gun violence, this four-part series explores the tragic and underreported problem of childhood grief and the efforts to address it. This series was reported by Michele Cohen Marill and published by MindSiteNews.
- ◆ Honorable Mention: [The System's Response to Drug Tests](#). This two-part investigation looks into the gap in logic that has emerged when it comes to the crossroads of child welfare and substance abuse. While there continues to be a growing acceptance in the medical community of medication-assisted treatment as a critical piece on the path to sobriety, there are still courts and child protection agencies that hold it against mothers trying to keep or reunite with their children. This investigation was reported by Sara Tiano and published by The Imprint.
- ◆ Honorable Mention: [Sold for Sex](#). How does a teenager fall prey to sex trafficking not once, but twice, and perhaps three times – all while under the legal protection of Oregon's foster care system? That's the question reporter Hillary Borrud set out to answer in her exhaustive investigation, "Sold for Sex," which exposed sweeping failures by state workers to keep the girl safe from the day she was born. This investigation was reported by Hillary Borrud and published by The Sunday Oregonian.
- ◆ Honorable Mention: Life Support. This four-part investigation examines how recent changes to reproductive rights laws in [Arkansas](#), [Kentucky](#), [Idaho](#), and [Texas](#) impact women and the children born to them. This investigation was reported by Annie Gowen, Danielle Paquette, Karin Brulliard, and Molly Hennessy-Fiske and published by The Washington Post.

Convening California's Child Advocates

Established by CAI in 1990, the [Children's Advocates Roundtable](#) is an affiliation of statewide and local children's policy organizations, representing over twenty issue disciplines (e.g., child abuse prevention, child care, education, poverty, housing, juvenile justice). The Roundtable is convened quarterly by CAI and is committed to providing a setting where advocates gather to share resources and information and strategize on behalf of children; an opportunity to educate each other about the variety of issues and legislation that affect children and youth — facilitating prioritization of issues and minimizing infighting over limited state resources historically budgeted for children's programs; an opportunity to collaborate on joint projects that promote the interests of children and families; and a setting to foster a children's political movement, committed to ensuring that every child in California is economically secure, get a good education, has access to health care, and lives in a safe environment.

In 2025, CAI's Melanie Delgado convened and chaired four meetings of our 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 lim-

ited exceptions, Roundtable meetings are recorded and made available for viewing on CAI's website.

Topics featured at CAI's 2025 Roundtable meetings included the following:

The February 2025 Roundtable featured discussions on supporting the mental health of children and youth, featuring Sohil Sud, Director, Children & Youth Behavioral Health Initiative, California Health & Human Services Agency and Mara Madrigal-Weiss, Executive Director, San Diego County Office of Education and Commissioner, Commission for Behavioral Health; social media and children's mental health, featuring John Mootz, Senior Policy and Research Manager, Children and Screens; foster care and juvenile justice mental health policy update, featuring Purva Bhattacharjee, Policy Advocate, TAY, California Alliance of Child and Family Services, Selena Liu-Raphael, Behavioral Health Policy Advocate, California Alliance of Child and Family Services, Rachel Velcoff Hults, Director, Mental Health National Center for Youth Law, and Jasmine Richardson-Rushin, Attorney, Justice and Equity National Center for youth Law; and how to support children affected by the Los Angeles wildfires, featuring Jasmine Young, Staff Attorney, National Health Law Program.





The May 2025 Roundtable featured discussions on child care and the implications of recent federal actions on child care policy in California, featuring Donna Sneeringer, Vice President & Chief Strategy Officer, Child Care Resource Center; recent actions targeting the Department of Education, especially moves to eliminate or weaken the agency and their implications for civil rights enforcement, funding, and oversight of K-12 and higher education, featuring Anne Hyslop, Director of Policy Development, Alliance for Excellent Education and Tristan Brown, Legislative Director, California Federation of Teachers; updates on college affordability and access in California, featuring Emmanuel Rodriguez, Senior Director of Policy and Advocacy, the Institute for College Access & Success, Marc Cabeliza, California State

Students Association, and Jennifer Nungaray, University of California Student Association; and updates on K-12 Education Equity in California, featuring Eve Banas, Advocacy and Training Lead at Sacramento LGBT Community Center and Tristan Brown, Legislative Director, California Federation of Teachers.

The September 2025 Roundtable featured discussions on HR 1 in Action: What the 'Big Beautiful Bill' Means for Children's Health in California, featuring Adriana Ramos-Yamamoto, Senior Policy Analyst, California Center for Budget and Policy, Alicia Emanuel, Director of the Eligibility and Enrollment Practice, National Health Law Program, and Dr. Marsha Spitzer, Chief of Pediatrics, Family Health Centers of San Diego; At the Intersection: Children's Healthcare and California's Immigration Communities, featuring Amanda Wallner, Executive Director, Health Access California; and CalAIM Renewal, featuring Katie Heidorn, Director of State Health Policy for the California Healthcare Foundation.

The November 2025 Roundtable featured presentations from the 2024-25 Price Child Health & Welfare Journalism Award winners, Jeremy Loudonback, Michael Fitzgerald, and Susanti Sarkar from The Imprint to discuss their series, *Medicated in Foster Care: Who's Looking Out?*, and Lori Jane Gliha and Brittany Freeman of Scripps News to discuss their series, *Poisoned: Fentanyl's Child Victims*. Also discussed were developments in child welfare budget and policy, featuring Natalie Audage, Senior Policy Associate, Children Now and Kristin Power, Vice President, Policy & Advocacy, Alliance for Children's Rights; education, featuring Kristin Power, Vice President, Policy & Advocacy, Alliance for Children's Rights; LGBTQ+ issues, featuring Eve Banas, Advocacy Coordinator, Sacramento LGBT Community Center; and digital safety, featuring Nora Angeles, Policy and Government Relations Associate, Children Now and CAI's Senior Staff Attorney Melanie Delgado.

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 charted 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, 2025, and December 31, 2025, or in response to CAI's 2025 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/Grantors to CAI

The following donors/grantors 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

The following donors contributed to the Nancy D'Angelo and Jane Fellmeth Public Interest Advocacy Endowment, which supports 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.

Tina & Anthony Calvert

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Molly T. Wescott *In honor of Bob & Julie Fellmeth*
Susan A. Yeck



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

A final note about Sol and Helen Price, which 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 2025, 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 *Executive Director, John Burton Advocates for Youth*

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

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CAI Staff

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Senior Staff Attorney / Director of Transition Age Youth Projects

Robert C. Fellmeth

Former Price Professor of Public Interest Law / CAI Executive Director (retired as of Aug 2025)

Katie González

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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 [Sandiego.edu/law/caigift](https://sandiego.edu/law/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
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